Urban League of
Greater Kansas City

FROM REDLINING TO CHALK LINES:

THE COSTS OF ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

2023 STATE OF BLACK KANSAS CITY

FROM REDLINING TO CHALK LINES:
THE COSTS OF ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

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Urban League of
Greater Kansas City

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2023 STATE OF BLACK KANSAS CITY

FROM REDLINING TO CHALK LINES
THE COSTS OF ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

Economic disparities play a pivotal role in perpetuating high rates of violent crime in inner cities. These disparities are often the result of historic systemic injustices, such as redlining, which have left a legacy of poverty and neglected infrastructure. The lack of opportunity and resources in these areas fuels a cycle of desperation and frustration, which in turn can manifest as crime and violence. Moreover, economic inequality also exacerbates social tensions, leading to gang formation and territorial disputes, further contributing to violence. Comprehending this intricate relationship between economic disparity and crime rates is crucial to implementing effective solutions for promoting social and economic justice.

Redlining, a discriminatory policy with roots in the 1930s, was a methodically engineered system to marginalize Black communities and isolate them from economic opportunities. At the heart of this

policy was a government-sponsored practice of grading neighborhoods based on their racial composition and denying services, most notably mortgage lending, to communities deemed "hazardous." These "hazardous" areas, often predominantly Black, were outlined in red ink on maps, hence the term "redlining." This reprehensible policy effectively blocked Black families from homeownership, a key source of intergenerational wealth, and confined them to under-resourced, over-crowded neighborhoods. Therefore, these areas suffered from chronic disinvestment, substandard infrastructure, and inadequate public services, setting the stage for the persistent economic disparities we witness today.

Additionally, the effects of these practices are felt in the form of racial disparities in mortgage lending, higher joblessness due to discrimination, and lack of access to livable-wage jobs. It is clear that addressing these economic disparities must be an integral part of any strategy for reducing high rates of crime in inner cities and promoting lasting social change.

The *2023 State of Black Kansas City* presents disheartening statistics on the economic disparities that persist between Black and White households in the region. According to the report, the median income of Black households was a mere 63.6% of their White counterparts in 2022. Furthermore, the median net worth of Black households in 2022 was a staggering 12.8% compared to that of White families. This inequity is further reflected in the poverty rate for Blacks, which is 98.6% higher than for White residents. In terms of homeownership, a key measure of wealth accumulation, the rate for Black families is only 53.5% compared to that of White households. These figures underscore the urgent need to address these economic disparities as part of a broader strategy to reduce crime rates and promote social justice.

An array of initiatives should be undertaken to reduce economic disparities between Black and White families. These strategies should include increased access to mortgages and small business loans, more equitable employment policies and policies that encourage homeownership in inner-city neighborhoods, and increasing availability of affordable housing for those most affected by economic disparities. Additionally, expanding job training and career development programs, investing in blight removal, and promoting economic development and job creation in the Third and Fifth Districts can create an environment that supports businesses and generates economic opportunities for the entire city. Only through these efforts can we move toward true social and economic justice.

It is vital to remember that reducing economic disparities and other root causes should be seen as a necessary part of addressing crime rates in Kansas City.

Regrettably, city leaders and law enforcement officials continue to overlook the correlation between economic disparities and high crime rates. Instead of addressing root causes, they seek remedy by increasing police funding and blaming the "community" for KCPD's inability to do its job efficiently and effectively—solving non-fatal and fatal violent crimes.

In fact, a recent state law has even mandated that the City of Kansas City allocate a staggering 25% of its operating budget to the Kansas City Police Department, despite its evident inability to solve violent crimes. With homicide rates on the rise and the KCPD's solve rate dismal at best, it's clear that simply throwing money at law enforcement is not the answer.

Contrary to popular belief, increasing police presence in high-crime communities doesn't necessarily equate to a reduction in crime rates. For example, a study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research revealed that a heightened police presence could potentially increase the likelihood of violent encounters instead of mitigating crime (Fryer, 2021). Furthermore, the Justice Department's report on the Ferguson Police Department showed that aggressive policing often exacerbated tensions and distrust within the community, fueling a cycle of violence (Department of Justice, 2015).

In Chicago, despite an increased police presence in high-crime neighborhoods, the city's homicide rate rose by 50% from 2019 to 2020 (Chicago Police Department, 2020). This suggests that the solution to violence and crime in economically disadvantaged communities isn't necessarily increased policing but rather addressing the root causes of crime, such as poverty, systemic racism, and economic disparity.

Investing in community resources such as education, affordable housing, mental health services, and job training programs can provide long-term, sustainable solutions. For instance, a study in New York found that the implementation of community outreach programs resulted in a 10% reduction in gun injuries in the areas served (Delgado et al., 2017). Viewing crime and violence in these communities through a social-economic lens rather than as a law enforcement issue is crucial.

Moreover, it is profoundly misguided to place blame on residents of high-crime communities for not aiding in crime resolution. This mindset veers away from the core issue at hand, the systemic economic injustice that fuels such crime rates. This mindset ignores the fractured relationship between the police and community due to racial profiling, discriminatory policing practices, blatant disregard for the humanity of Black people, and numerous excessive and deadly-force incidents perpetrated against unarmed Black men and women at the hands of KCPD officers. This mindset implies that Black people are inherently violent rather than considering the historical effects of slavery and centuries of egregious social and economic policies. The expectation that those victimized by these policies and living amidst these conditions ought to help alleviate them is not only unrealistic but shifts the responsibility away from those who are truly able to enact profound, systemic change.

It is essential to recognize the connection between poverty, racism, and crime so that we can move towards solutions such as targeted investment in economically disadvantaged communities. Without this recognition, people living in these areas will continue to suffer from

the consequences of systemic economic injustice and an inability to fully reach their potential and prosper.

Investing in racial justice initiatives such as job training and job placement programs, living wage campaigns, first-time homebuyer support, and access to mental health

It is vital to remember that reducing economic disparities and other root causes should be seen as a necessary part of addressing crime rates in Kansas City.

services is essential if we are to bridge the gap between economic disparity and crime rates in our cities. By taking a holistic approach that recognizes and invests in the social-economic issues underlying inner-city crime, communities can thrive and be empowered to create positive change.

Additionally, it is vital to address the root cause of racial disparities in economic opportunity on a larger scale by fighting for policy changes that reduce income inequality and promote economic mobility. To that end, we must work collectively to oppose laws that further exacerbate inequality and support legislation that creates equal opportunities for all individuals regardless of their race, gender, or socioeconomic class.

By tackling the root cause of racial and economic disparities and investing in communities in need, we can ensure that people of all races have access to equal opportunities for success and safety. This is how we move forward: by working together to end the cycle of poverty and violence inflicted on our inner cities by systemic economic injustice.

Ultimately, with a concerted effort to dismantle systemic racism and empower marginalized communities, we can create a better future for all. This is our chance to ensure that the next generation lives in an equitable world that upholds justice and fairness for everyone.

The legacy of redlining is pervasive, and the costs of economic injustice remain ever-present. The aftermath of this discriminatory policy has shaped America's inner cities today— from inadequate access to basic needs like education, healthcare, and housing to high rates of crime and violence due to a lack of systemic support. It is time for those in power to take responsibility for the economic injustices of the past and commit to creating a more equitable future for those living in communities that have been disproportionately impacted by them.

From redlining to chalk lines, now is the time for real change.

PAYING THE PRICE:
THE ONGOING IMPACT OF ECONOMIC INJUSTICE FROM REDLINES TO CHALK LINES

SHAWN D. ROCHESTER

Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government provided over $120 billion in federal homeowner subsidies to American households. This was an enormous investment (equivalent to $1 trillion today) which had a direct role in creating the American middle class and fostering the growth of suburban neighborhoods. While less than 2% of this money went to African-American families, 20 million White European immigrants and their descendants benefited heavily from these programs. This investment allowed White homeowners to build enormous wealth that could then be used to fund college educations and home improvements, start a business, or put toward an inheritance. Qualified Black borrowers were prevented from accessing these resources and were effectively barred from living in White communities that benefited from this unprecedented level of government support and home price appreciation. This process was called redlining. The irony is that tax dollars from Black households were used to subsidize this discrimination against them.

Following is an example of the phalanx of opposition that qualified Black buyers faced.

1) Federal Government—Through redlining, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) refused to provide financing in neighborhoods where Blacks live, to Blacks who wanted to buy homes in White neighborhoods, and to developers who did not maintain neighborhood stability via racial segregation.[1]

2) Business Sector—Andrew Wiese, in his 2004 book, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, noted that White financial institutions almost uniformly refused to lend money to African Americans to buy property outside "established Negro areas." According to Wiese, "White real-estate agents refused to be a part of transactions that permitted Blacks to move into White neighborhoods."

3) Residential Sector—White home builders refused to sell or rent homes to African-Americans and other minorities. "Between 1946 and 1960, over 350,000 homes were constructed with FHA financing in Northern California, of which fewer than 100 went to African-Americans."[2]

4) Private Individuals—Whites formed neighborhood associations in which homeowners signed race-restrictive covenants, which prohibited the sale or rental of property to "other than Caucasians."

The results of these actions were that between 1930 and 1960, less than 1%[3] of all mortgages in the nation were issued to Black Americans. "Overall, by 1972 nearly 11 million families had entered the ranks of homeownership with the assistance of the FHA and an additional 22 million families were able to make improvements to their homes."[4] And less than 2% of this discriminatory and segregationist-based financial support went to African Americans.

Between 1940 and 1970, 3.6 million[5] Black Americans fled the economic hardships of the South to cities in the North, where they were effectively barred by discrimination by government policy, private business, and neighborhood residents from acquiring property in well-resourced White neighborhoods and were forced into concentrated areas of poverty and economic deprivation. Because less than 1% of all mortgages across the nation went to African Americans, many Black homebuyers who wanted to pursue the American dream of homeownership often had no choice but to enter into predatory lending contracts called contract sales. In a contract sale, an appraisal was not needed to finance the transaction, so the property was often given extreme markups in price, sometimes up to twice the market value. Because it was a private contract, usury laws and interest ceilings did not apply, so sellers charged extremely high interest rates. To make matters worse, the terms of the contract sale allowed the seller to keep the deed, which prevented the buyer from earning any ownership interest in the home while he was making payments.

If a buyer missed a single payment, he would forfeit the entire down payment and all monthly payments made up to that point and lose the property. This practice was so extensive that one leading advocate from the 1950s estimated that 85%[6] of the properties purchased by African Americans in Chicago were sold via contract sales. Instead of participating in government programs that created trillions of dollars in wealth for fellow White citizens, Blacks were confined to high-poverty neighborhoods, excluded from buying property in high-appreciating White neighborhoods, and charged extremely inflated prices and predatory interest rates while trying to pursue the American Dream.

The highly discriminatory environment in the workforce and the virtual exclusion of Blacks from the equivalent of trillions of dollars of government subsidies had an enormously negative impact on the ability of Black Americans to accumulate wealth. By 1950, White Americans had accumulated 150 times[7] more capital than Black Americans, which made it easier for them to buy homes, start businesses, and fund college educations for their children. White Americans born between 1943 and 1951 would also go on to accumulate an average wealth of $1.2 million[8] by 2013, which is 11 times more wealth than Black Americans born in the same period. These government benefits went to the parents of the White baby boomer generation, who were then able to leave trillions of dollars of inheritance to the baby boomer generation, who will now leave over $30 trillion[9] of inheritance to their children over the next several decades ($4.2 trillion of which would have been an inheritance from Black baby boomer families to their children, if not for the overwhelming and near universal presence of anti-Black discrimination).

Despite the monumental efforts of the Civil Rights Movement, which created massive opportunities for Black Americans to (1) attend world-class universities, (2) pursue exciting and lucrative occupations and career paths, (3) start new businesses, and (4) gain access to capital and government contracts, studies have shown that there has been little change in the relative rank in the overall earnings distribution of Black and White men since 1940. In 1940, the median Black wage earner made less than 75%[10] of all White wage earners, while in 2009 the median Black wage earner made less than 73% of all White wage earners.

Gains from the Civil Rights Movement can easily be seen in the Black students who gained access to numerous predominantly White universities, went on to work for major companies, and attained important leadership roles throughout corporate America. This allowed Black men in the 90th percentile of Black wage earners to close some of the earnings gap with their White peers. In 1940, Black 90th-percentile wage earners made as much money as White 50th-percentile wage earners, but by 2014, Black 90th-percentile wage earners made as much as White 75th-percentile wage earners. While these 90th-percentile wage earners never achieved parity with their White peers, many of them were able to move out of economically depressed areas into communities with the resources and opportunities to prepare their children to succeed at the highest levels, despite facing significant discrimination. Their accomplishments were extraordinary given the pervasive effects of racial discrimination in the workplace, which researchers estimate cost about $94 billion to $123[11] billion in 1970 alone.

While Blacks in the 90th percentile did relatively well, Black men in the 75th percentile saw their earnings stagnate, and Black men at the 50th percentile saw their earnings decline by 32%. This decline was driven by a dramatic increase in the percentage of Black men of prime working age (24 to 55) with zero earnings (i.e., no income), which almost doubled from 17% in 1970 to 35%[12] in 2014. This dramatic increase was driven by:

1) Globalization—the movement of manufacturing jobs (especially low-skilled jobs) from U.S. inner cities to low-cost jurisdictions (i.e., low-wage countries) around the world. From 1940 to 1970, approximately 3.4 million African Americans left the South to escape violence and disenfranchisement and to secure manufacturing jobs in Northern cities. By 1970, 70%[13] of all African Americans working in metro areas had blue-collar jobs, and as the manufacturing jobs disappeared, so did the "secondary employment opportunities (e.g., those in stores, support services and banks),"[14] and millions of Black families fell into poverty.

2) An increased premium on high-skilled jobs requiring a college education or specialized training and a decreased value placed on low-wage jobs.

3) White Americans' reactions to the perceived advancement of Black Americans due to civil rights.

   a) Mass incarceration stemming from "tough on crime," "law and order," "the war on drugs," "mandatory minimum sentences," and other criminal justice policies that devastated the Black community.

   b) Reduced tax base and property values driven by continued "White flight" out of inner
      cities into surrounding suburbs with little to no Black presence.

4) The continued presence of anti-Black discrimination in the workplace.

Because Black Americans have been historically forced to occupy the lowest-wage, lowest-skilled positions in the workforce, they were disproportionately affected by the movement of low-wage jobs overseas. Even though Black American educational attainment increased rapidly between 1940 and 2010, it was not sufficient to offset the shift away from low-skilled jobs. In 1940, about 7% of Black Americans had completed high school, and by 2010 almost 90%[15] had completed high school. While this is impressive, the value of a high school education fell dramatically after the 1970s. This meant that Black Americans rapidly attained a degree that prepared them for low-skilled manufacturing jobs that were rapidly disappearing from inner cities. Therefore, the movement of jobs away from the inner cities and the limited employment opportunities remaining for low-skilled labor led to increased unemployment, economic withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and consequently, high crime rates in Black neighborhoods. In 1940, about 1.6% of Black Americans had completed college, and by 1970 that number had increased to about 5%.[16] The few Black Americans who were able to receive specialized training or attend colleges were able to capture some of the increased premium that was being placed on higher-skilled occupations.

However, desegregation and various race riots during the late 1960s, coupled with White American conscious and unconscious bias against Black Americans, led many Whites to fear an increase in crime and a decrease in property values as Black Americans gained more ability to move into neighborhoods from which they had been previously excluded. This made many Whites move out of inner cities and into suburban areas where there were fewer African Americans. As some Black Americans also began to move into suburban areas, White Americans moved even further out to the outer suburbs, where there were fewer Blacks. As White Americans left inner cities and inner suburbs, they took the wealth and capital with them, and this "White flight," combined with the job losses from globalization, further depressed property values and significantly reduced the tax base that many urban areas needed to fund public education and fire and safety departments. This reduction in tax base weakened public education in inner cities, where most Black Americans now lived.

The resulting lack of economic opportunities in Black neighborhoods increased the appeal of illegal drugs both as an escape for users and as a means of economic advancement for low-level sellers. The continued fear of Black Americans bringing crime to previously White neighborhoods also led to a rash of legislation that increased policing in Black neighborhoods, increased the length and severity of sentences for various crimes, and treated drug use and selling of drugs at the street level as a criminal justice issue instead of a healthcare and economic problem. There were devastating effects on Black men and a long-lasting impact on Black households: (a) The percent of incarcerated Black men increased from

2% in 1970 to 8% in 2014; (b) The percentage of out-of-work Black men increased from 8% in 1970 to 16% in 2014; (c) The percentage of Black men not working but looking for employment increased from 7% in 1970 to 11% in 2014.

The imposition of the Black Tax—an additional financial strain or heavy burden placed on Black Americans by people and institutions—resulted in a significant rise in the percentage of Black men in their prime working age (24 to 55) who earned no income. This percentage escalated from 17% in 1970 to 35% in 2014.

As of 2001, a staggering 2,166,000 African Americans had been incarcerated, representing 9.2% of the African-American population above 18 years old. Furthermore, the implications are striking: A projected 33% of Black men born in 2001 are expected to experience incarceration during their lifetimes. This not only robs them of the ability to vote but also hinders their chances of finding gainful employment due to the obstacles posed by background checks. Presently, African Americans make up nearly one million out of the total 2.3 million incarcerated individuals, incurring a substantial cost of $30.4 billion annually.

In addition, the toll on today's Black families is substantial, with a loss of $30 billion per year, while American society at large faces a staggering loss of $60 billion annually due to the incarceration of one million Black men. If these men were released from incarceration and were able to earn a wage of $15 per hour, their combined efforts would contribute an impressive $30 billion per year to their families' incomes. This would not only lift countless Black children out of poverty but also give a substantial boost to the economy. The $30 billion now allocated towards incarcerating one million Black men could instead cover the expenses of providing public college education and technical vocational training for all of these men, thereby offering them a path towards a better future.

In terms of the social cost, in 1970, nearly 70% of Black families were structured as married couples. However, the wave of mass incarceration that ensued resulted in the removal of numerous young Black men from their communities. By 1990, this trend had caused the percentage of Black households consisting of married couples to drop below 50%.

The culmination of centuries of the Black tax has also left not only a disproportionate share of low-paying jobs but also an unemployment rate that has been twice that of White Americans since 1960—almost 60 years. This means that as of 2010, if Blacks had the same employment rate as White Americans, an additional two million African Americans would have been employed, which amounts to almost $80 billion per year of lost income and benefits to the Black community or $3.3 trillion over the last six decades.

Instead of enjoying the economic benefits from the millions of jobs and trillions of dollars of wealth associated with parity in employment, homeownership, entrepreneurship, and educational investment, the ongoing Black Tax has led to a disproportionately high level of poverty in the Black community, which has in turn led to (among many other things) a

disproportionately high level of violence—especially gun violence—which has dramatically increased the homicide rate in the Black community. In 2020, Missouri had the highest Black homicide victimization rate in the nation for the seventh year in a row. Missouri's 2020 Black homicide victimization rate of 50.98 is more than twice the national Black homicide victimization rate, and nearly 16 times the national homicide victimization rate for White victims. Thus, the Black Tax and the anti-Black bias that drives it both connect and frame the devastating "redlines" of the past to the heartbreaking "chalk lines" of the present.[17]

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13 Tony L. Whitehead, "The Formation of the U.S. Racialized Urban Ghetto," The Cultural Systems Analysis Group (CuSAG) Special Problems Working Paper Series in Urban Anthropology, The University of Maryland, September 15, 2000, 8.

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Urban League of
Greater Kansas City

2022
EQUALITY INDEX

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

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BLACK/WHITE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In keeping with previous reports, the 2022 Black/White Equality Index provides an in-depth look into the persistent socioeconomic gaps between Blacks and Whites in Greater Kansas City. This year's edition, ***2023 State of Black Kansas City – From Redlining to Chalk Lines: The Costs of Economic Injustice***, delves into the interrelationship between egregious economic policies, disinvestment in communities of color, and violent crime in Kansas City's urban core. In addition to a compilation of thought-provoking essays, op-eds, and special reports, this publication amplifies the most salient findings from the 2022 Black/White and Hispanic/White Equality Indexes. First introduced in 2005 by the National Urban League (NUL), the indices serve as a way to capture empirical evidence of Black and Hispanic progress, or the lack thereof, in economics, education, health, social justice, and civic engagement since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Equality Indices measure how African Americans and Hispanics are doing in these areas on a 100-point scale. Whites are used as the benchmark (100 points), because historic systemic racism in America has created advantages for Whites that continue to persist in most of the outcomes measured.

The research team comprised of Principal Investigator Dr. Linwood Tauheed, Associate Professor of Economics, University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC); Lead Researcher Dr. Michael Kelsay, Department of Economics, UMKC; and Co-Researcher Nadege Ngomsi, Department of Economics, UMKC, conducted the Equality Index research following the same methodology as the NUL. Each category is weighted based on the importance the NUL applies to each as follows:

- **ECONOMICS: 30%**
- **HEALTH: 25%**
- **EDUCATION: 25%**
- **SOCIAL JUSTICE: 10%**
- **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: 10%**
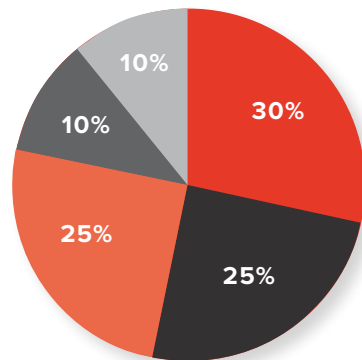
DATA COLLECTION AREA

The Kansas City Metropolitan Statistical Area (KCMSA) consists of 14 counties. According to the Census Bureau's 5-year Estimates for the year 2021, the total population was 2,185,034. Overall, 85% of the KCMSA population is concentrated in the five largest counties (Clay, Jackson, and Platte in Missouri, and Johnson and Wyandotte in Kansas). An even larger percentage of the Black, non-Hispanic population (94%) and the Hispanic population (92%) are concentrated in

these five counties. Virtually all the population growth in the MSA is due to growth in the Hispanic population.

Because the vast majority of minority populations live in the five most populous counties, data has been restricted to these counties in the calculation of both the Black Equality Index and the Hispanic Equality Index. In addition, since these counties have larger populations, the American Community Survey data about residents of these counties is more timely. Table 1 presents a tabulation of the Kansas City population by county and by racial/ethnic combinations. The shaded cells signify the populations that are included in the calculation of most of the equality indices, sub-indices, and components.

FIGURE 1: *Distribution of Black Population in 5-County Kansas City Region*
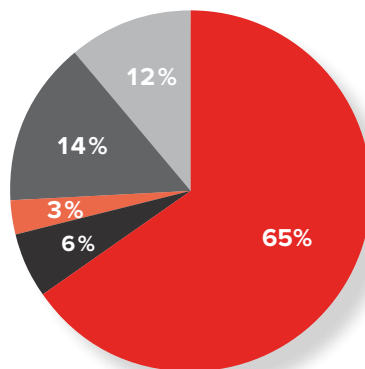
- **JACKSON (MO): 65%**
- **CLAY (MO): 6%**
- **PLATTE (MO): 3%**
- **WYANDOTTE (KS): 14%**
- **JOHNSON (KS): 12%**

TABLE 1: *2022 Kansas City Black and Hispanic Equaltiy Index and 2022 National Equality Indices*

COUNTY	WHITE NON-HISPANIC	BLACK NON-HISPANIC	HISPANIC	5-COUNTY AREA	OTHER*	ALL RACES/ETHNICITIES
JACKSON (MO)	431,411	161,236	60,846	653,493	35,061	688,554
CLAY (MO)	193,763	13,210	15,590	222,563	13,505	236,068
PLATTE (MO)	79,450	6,347	5,601	91,398	5,501	96,899
WYANDOTTE (KS)	67,848	37,030	45,791	150,669	12,558	163,227
JOHNSON (KS)	466,059	26,035	43,057	535,151	43,646	578,797
5-COUNTY AREA	**1,238,531**	**243,858**	**170,885**	**1,653,274**	**110,271**	**1,763,545**
OTHER 10 KCMSA COUNTIES**	310,939	13,053	14,337	338,329	12,555	350,884
15-COUNTY AREA	**1,549,470**	**256,911**	**185,222**	**1,991,603**	**122,826**	**2,114,429**

SOURCE: ACS 2017 5-YEAR ESTIMATES

**NOTE: In February 2013, the MSA changed from a 15-county area to 14 after Franklin County, KS was dropped. This table, however, includes the population estimate of Franklin County to compare directly with Table 1 of the "2015 Equality Index: State of Black Kansas City."

TO ACCESS THE COMPLETE 2022 BLACK/WHITE AND HISPANIC/WHITE EQUALITY INDEXES, SCAN THE QR CODE:

OR VISIT: https://www.ulkc.org/2023-state-of-black-kc

KEY FINDINGS

The 2022 Equality Index of Black Kansas City is 75.35%. This means that rather than having a whole pie (100%)—full equality with Whites in 2022—**Blacks are missing approximately 25% of the pie.**

BLACKS

75%

WHITES

100%
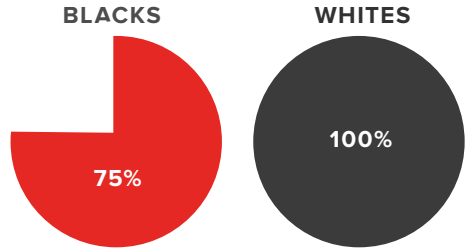
The 2022 Equality Index and five Sub-Indices are presented for the Black Kansas City population in Figure 2, based on information from the five most populous counties (Clay, Jackson, and Platte counties in Missouri, and Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas). The results from the Equality Index show that the performance of the Black population in Kansas City is struggling compared to the White population in the Kansas City Metro Region, except in the Sub-Index of Civic Engagement. Note that the bar for the White population is 100% for each index, with the White population in the region serving as the control to which the Black population is compared.

FIGURE 2: *The State of Black Kansas City: 2022 Equality Index and Sub-Indices*
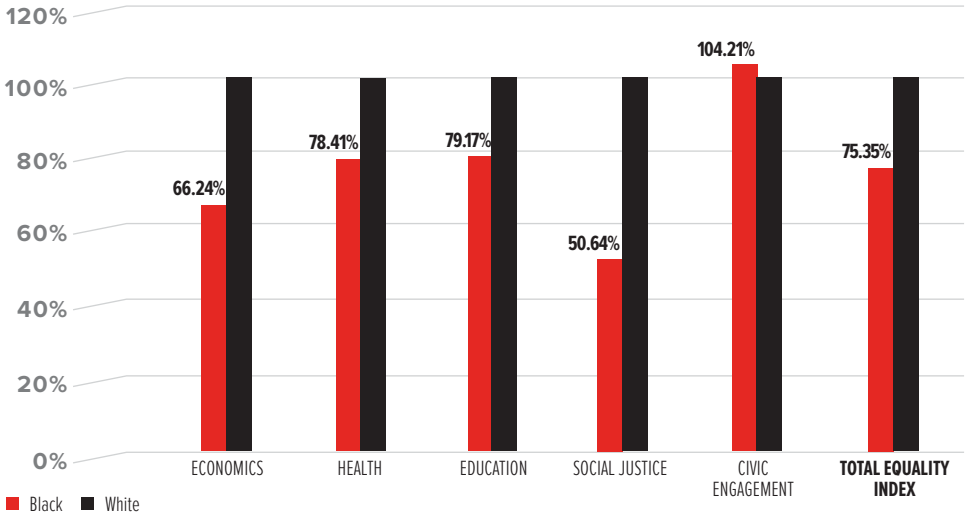
A comparison of the Equality Index of Black Kansas City for previous years with the 2022 Index illustrates that progress has been static in all categories, and progression has been slowest in Economics and Social Justice.

The value of the Economics Sub-Index has not changed substantively between 2006 and 2020. The Economics Sub-Index for Black Kansas City had remained relatively static from 2006 to 2015, fluctuating between 53% and 57%, but increased to 61% and 62%,

respectively, in 2019 and 2020. It is abundantly clear that the Economics Sub-Index for Black Kansas City showed no progress from 2006 to 2015. From 2015 to 2020, it increased from 57% to 62%, but still far below their White counterparts. It increased to 66% in 2022.

EQUALITY INDEX OF BLACK KANSAS CITY*

YEAR	2006	2007	2008	2010	2015	2019	2020	2022
BLACK/WHITE INDEX	**73%**	**75%**	**75%**	**74%**	**72%**	**73%**	**72%**	**75%**
ECONOMICS	54%	57%	58%	53%	57%	61%	62%	66%
HEALTH	80%	82%	83%	78%	77%	75%	76%	78%
EDUCATION	78%	79%	78%	85%**	78%	77%	75%	79%
SOCIAL JUSTICE	65%	62%	67%	58%	52%	55%	58%	51%
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	109%	114%	108%	109%	107%	109%	100%	104%

*Index percentages are rounded to the nearest value.

**The measurable increase in education in 2010 was due in large part to significant changes in weights of the sub-indices in education as determined by the National Urban League and Global Insights. If we had used the exact weights for the sub-indices in 2010 that were used in 2008, the education index would have increased from .782 to .799, an increase of only 2.1%.

ECONOMICS – 30%

Key findings in the Economic Sub-Index amplify the racial wealth gap between Black and Whites in Greater Kansas City. There are four key variables in the Economics Sub-Index that highlight the poor economic progress for Blacks. The slow economic progress for Blacks can be seen through the following measures: (1) Median Household Income, (2) Median Household Net Worth, (3) Poverty Rate, and (4) Rate of Home Ownership. Figure 4 displays a comparison between the Black and White populations of the five-county Kansas City area for these variables. Black median household income was only 63.6% compared to Whites in 2022.

FIGURE 3: *Contributing Factors to the Black Economics Sub-Index*

Black ■ White ■

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

BLACK
$49,720

WHITE
$78,182

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD NET WORTH

BLACK
$24,100

WHITE
$188,200

POVERTY RATE

BLACK
16.96%

WHITE
8.54%

RATE OF HOME OWNERSHIP

BLACK 40.15%   WHITE 75.05%

Median Net Worth of Black Households in 2022 was only 12.8% compared to their White counterparts. The Poverty Rate for Blacks was 98.6% more compared to their White counterparts. The home ownership rate of Blacks was only 53.5% compared to their White counterparts. The Kansas City real estate market has expanded substantially from 2018 to 2020. Yet Blacks have not been the beneficiary of a booming real estate market in the region. Black home ownership decreased 2.51% from 2020 to 2022.

Black home ownership rates had a net increase of only 2.29% between 2018 and 2022, while White home ownership rates had a net increase of 20.3%.

Median Income (25% of the Economics Sub-Index). There are three variables that are equally weighted in calculating the Median Income component of the Economics Sub-Index: Median Female Earnings, Median Male Earnings, and Median Household Income (see Figure 5). For Black men, the Median Earnings were 70% compared to their White counterparts, a decrease of 10% from 2015. For Black females, the Median Earnings were 93% compared to their White counterparts, an increase of 9% compared to their White counterparts. The Median Household Income was 63%. The overall value for the Median Income Index in the Economics Sub-Index was 70%.

Poverty (15% of the Economics Sub-Index). Figure 6 shows the 2022 poverty index was 49%. This Poverty Index brings the Economics Sub-Index down. Especially alarming is the index value of 64% for the number of Households in Poverty. This means that the percentage of Black households in poverty is almost two times as high as the percentage of White households in poverty.

FIGURE 5: *Black Median Income Component (25%)*

Median Female Earnings	93%
Median Male Earnings	70%
Median Household Income	63%
MEDIAN INCOME COMPONENT	70%
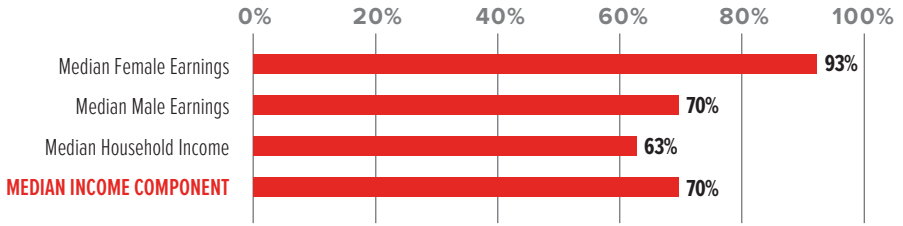
FIGURE 6: *Black Poverty Component (15%)*

Households in Poverty	64%
Households in Extreme Poverty (under 0.5)	51%
Households Slightly Below Poverty (0.5–0.99)	48%
Households Slightly Above Poverty (1–1.24)	70%
POVERTY COMPONENT	49%
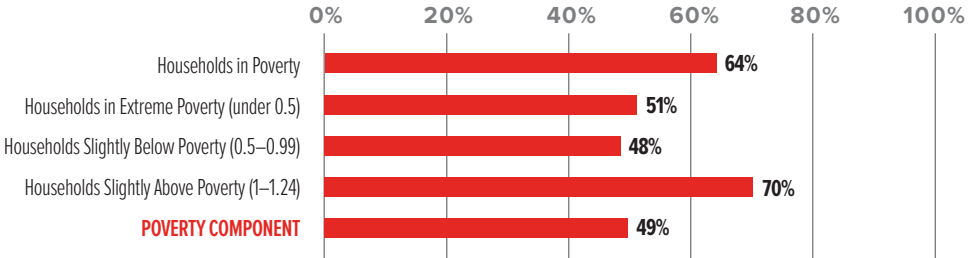
FIGURE 7: *Black Employment Issues Component (25%)*

Male Unemployment Rate	39%
Female Unemployment Rate	49%
Percent of Population 16+ Not in Workforce	59%
Labor Force Participation Rate	124%
Employment to Population Ratio	102%
EMPLOYMENT ISSUES COMPONENT	87%
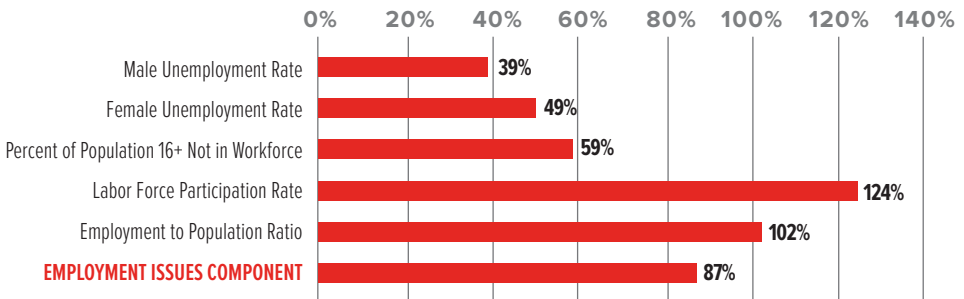
Employment Issues (20% of the Economics Sub-Index). Figure 7 summarizes the results for employment issues. There are substantial differences between the values for the different variables that enter the overall Employment Issues component index of 87% in 2022 compared to 72% in 2015. For both Black men and women, the Civilian Unemployment Rate for Blacks were substantially higher that the rate for Whites. However, the Labor Force Participation rate for Blacks increased from 96% in 2016 to 124% in 2022 compared to the Labor Force Participation rate for Whites. The Employment to Population component increased from 89% in 2015 to 114% in 2020, but decreased to 102% in 2022. Clearly, the major difference between employment issues of Whites and Blacks is the high unemployment rate for Blacks.

Housing and Wealth (34% of the Economics Sub-Index). The Housing and Wealth indicator is the largest contributor to the dismal performance in the Economics Sub-Index for Black residents of Kansas City (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: *Black Housing and Wealth Component (34%)*

Home Ownership Rate	54%
Percent of Housing Units Mortgaged	59%
Percent of Housing Units Owned Outright	30%
Percent of Housing Units Renter Occupied	42%
Mortgage Denial Rate	59%
Home Improvement Loan Denial Rate	51%
Percent of High Interest Loans Denied	40%
Median Household Net Worth	13%
HOUSING AND WEALTH COMPONENT	43%
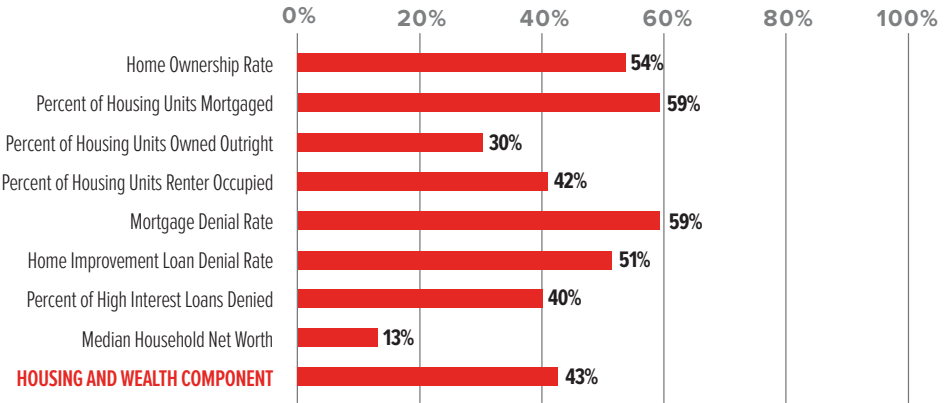
The Home Ownership Rate, in fact, decreased in 2022 from 58% between 2015 and 2020 to 54% in 2022. In addition, the Mortgage Denial Rate index was 59% and the Home Improvement Loan Denial Rate index was only 51%. This is far smaller than any other variable in the Economics Sub-Index. The primary reason for this value is that the main source of consumer wealth is a function of the value of one's home. The median Black household does not own a home (less than 50%) and, therefore, there is zero wealth from the home. Over 76% of White households own their home in the Kansas City region, and therefore, have wealth from the home in the form of home equity.

The Digital Divide (5% of the Economics Sub-Index). The Digital Divide Index is based on a single variable. The digital divide variable is the ratio of the percentage of individuals living in Black households with access to the Internet to the percentage of individuals in White households with access to the Internet. Because data for the Kansas City region were not available, we used the national value as a proxy. The national value of the Digital Divide Index was 87% in 2020 and 2022 compared to 81% in 2015. Given COVID-19 protocols over the past two years, the lack of broadband access for the Black community's children would severely impact this index as well other indices, such as the Education component.

Transportation (1% of the Economics Sub-Index). The three variables that enter the calculation of the Transportation element of the Economics Sub-Index are shown in Figure 9. Because of the view that use of public transportation for work is a negative transportation variable in the Economics Sub-Index and riding alone to work is a positive transportation variable, the index value of the Transportation component was 68% in 2020 and 2022 compared to 69% in 2015.

FIGURE 9: *Black Transportation Component (1%)*

Car Ownership Rate	89%
Transportation to Work Driving Alone	95%
Transportation to Work Using Public Transportation	22%
TRANSPORTATION COMPONENT	68%
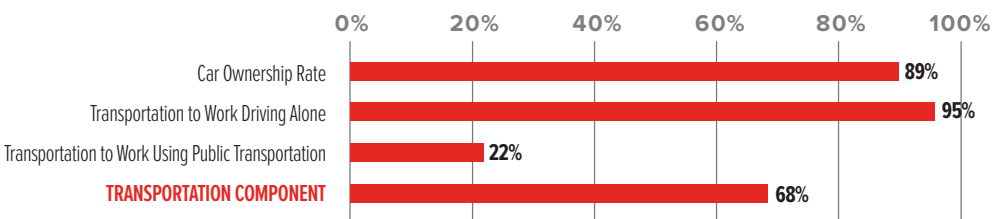
HEALTH — 25%

In the Kansas City region, the Health Sub-Index for the Black Equality Index for 2022 was 78.41% compared to 77.4% in 2015. Figure 10 displays the index values of the components of the 2022 Black Health Sub-Index. This represents a decrease in the Health Sub-Index for Blacks of 2.81%.

FIGURE 10: *Contributing Factors to the Black Health Sub-Index*
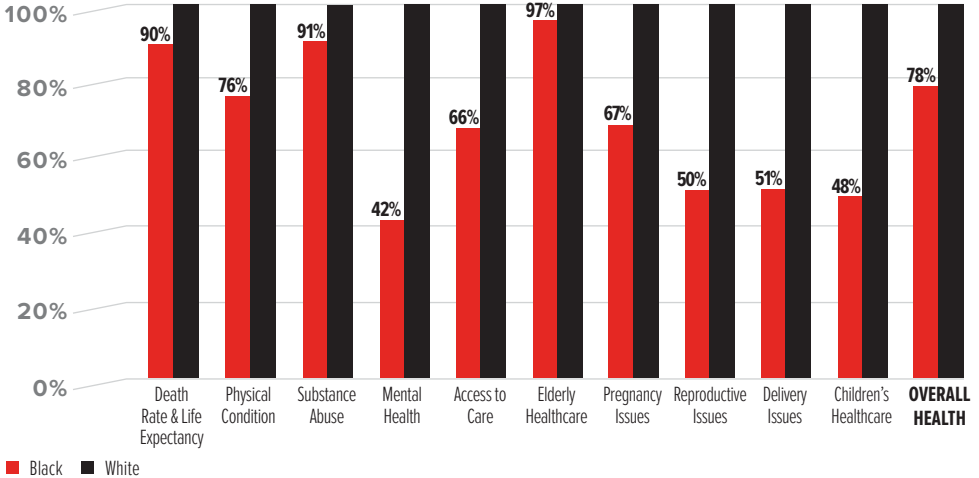
■ Black   ■ White

Before examining the components of the Health Sub-Index in detail, it is helpful to note four individual variables measured in the Health Sub-Index that contributed the most to the Health Sub-Index value: Age-Adjusted Death Rate, Life Expectancy at Birth, Percentage of Adults Who Are Overweight or Obese, and Fetal Deaths. Figure 11 displays the comparisons of Black and White populations in the five-county Kansas City area for these variables.

The Age-Adjusted Death Rate for Blacks had an index value in 2022 of 86%. This is an increase from the 2020 rate of 77%. The rate in 2015 was 86%. The Fetal Death Rate for Blacks per 1,000 increased to 7.67% per 1,000 in 2022 compared to 6.47% in 2020. The Fetal Death Rate for Whites increased to 4.21% per 1,000 in 2022 from 1.53% per 1,000 in 2020. The index value for the Fetal Death Rate for Blacks per 1,000 was 0.55% in 2022.

The Incidence of Obesity (BMI>=30) for Blacks compared to Whites had a 2020 index value of 81% compared to a 2019 index value of 68%. The index value was 71% in 2015.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted the Black community in Jackson County. According to the Kansas City, Missouri Health Department, the COVID-19 Crude Rate per 100,000 in Jackson County had an index value of 32% in 2022. The COVID-19 death rate per 1,000 in Eastern Jackson County had an index value of 80% in 2020, and the COVID-19 Case Rate per 1,000 had an index value of 82% in 2022.

FIGURE 11: *Key Variables of the Black Health Sub-Indexes*

AGE-ADJUSTED DEATH RATE

PER 100,000

BLACK 886 — WHITE 766

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH

YEARS

BLACK 75.4 — WHITE 78.34

FETAL DEATH RATE

PER 1,000

BLACK 7.67% — WHITE 4.21%

OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE ADULTS

BLACK 38% — WHITE 34%
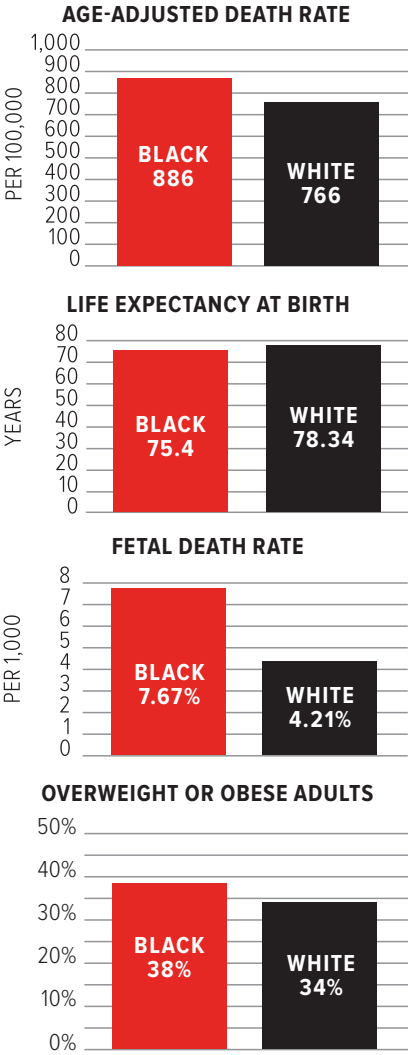
Access to Care (5% of Health Sub-Index). Figure 12 shows that the Access to Care variables contribute negatively to both the Health Sub-Index and the overall Equality Index for Black residents of Kansas City. The Quality of Health variables are derived from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The People Without Health Insurance variable had an index value of 61% in 2022 compared to only an index value of 46% in 2019 and 52% in 2015. The Access to Care Component was 66% in 2022 compared to an index value of 56% in 2019 and 59% in 2015. These improvements in the Access to Care Component numbers reflect increasing coverage under Obamacare.

Pregnancy Issues (4% of Health Sub-Index). Figure 13 shows that Pregnancy Issues also contributed negatively to the Health Sub-Index in the Kansas City Region. All of the seven indicator variables for Black Pregnancy Issues have index values below 78%. The Pregnancy Issue Component was 67% in 2022 compared to 64% in 2015. The index value for Prenatal Care in the First Trimester has implications for complications in pregnancy. This is reflected in the index value for Low Birth Weight Variable (2,500 g) of 69% in 2022 and the index value for Very Low Birth Weight (1,599 g) of 40% in 2022.

FIGURE 12: *Index Values for Black Access to Care Variables*

Fair or Poor Health	78%
People Without Health Insurance	61%
Adults 18–64 With Health Insurance	95%
Excellent Health	95%
ACCESS TO CARE COMPONENT	66%
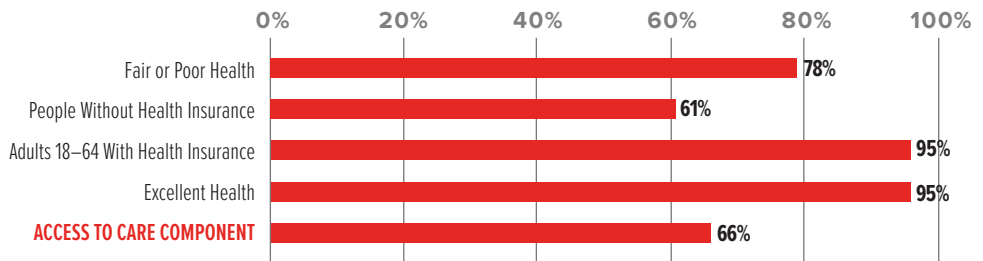
FIGURE 13: *Index Values for Black Pregnancy Issues Variables*

Prenatal Care Begins in First Trimester	77%
Inadequate Prenatal Care	57%
Percent of Live Births to Unmarried Mothers	68%
Fetal Deaths and Death in Early Infancy	59%
Low Birth Weight (<2500 g)	69%
Very Low Birth Weight (<1500 g)	40%
PREGNANCY ISSUES COMPONENT	67%
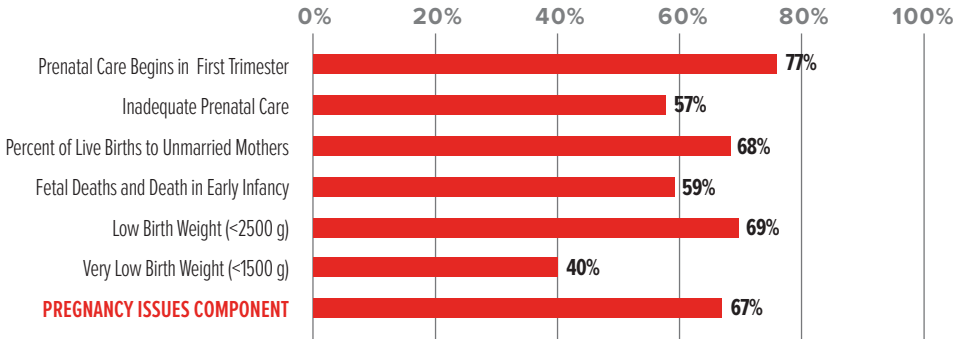
FIGURE 14: *Index Values for Black Delivery Issues Variables*

Infant Mortality	52%
Maternal Mortality	42%
DELIVERY ISSUES COMPONENT	51%
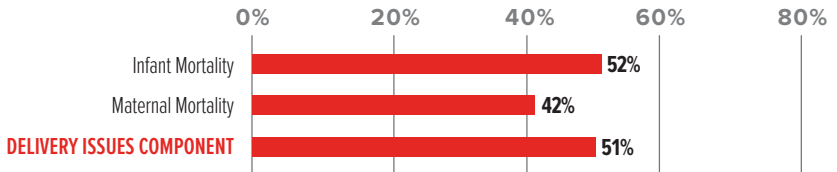
FIGURE 15: *Index Values for Black Children's Health Component Variables*

Receiving Food Stamps (Per 100)	50%
Missouri WIC Infant Participants	43%
Receiving TANF WIC Infant Program (Per 100)	32%
Prevalence of Obesity Among Adolescents (2–19)	68%
CHILDREN'S HEALTH COMPONENT	48%
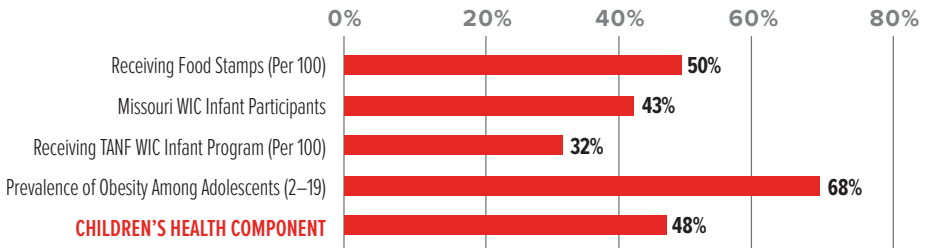
Reproductive Issues (1% of Health Sub-Index). The Reproductive Issues Component is represented by Abortions per 1,000. The index value for the Reproductive Issues component was 53% in 2020 compared to 47% in 2015, which indicates that abortions are approximately twice as frequent among the Black population as among the White population.

Delivery Issues (10% of the Health Sub-Index). Two variables contribute to the calculation of the Delivery Issues component of the Health Sub-Index. Infant Mortality and Maternal Mortality are weighted equally within this component.

Figure 14 shows that Delivery Issues contribute negatively to the Health Sub-Index and to the overall Equality Index. The index value of the Delivery Issues component increased to 51% in 2022 compared to 49% in 2019. The index value was 46% in 2015. Both infant and maternal mortality have indices below the Health Sub-Index and below the overall Equality Index.

Children's Health (10% of the Health Sub-Index). Five variables contribute to the calculation of the Children's Health component of the Health Sub-Index. Figure 15 shows that Children's

Health contributes negatively to the Health Sub-Index and to the overall Equality Index. The Children's Health index remained constant at 48% in 2022 compared to 60% in 2015. The index value for those Receiving Food Stamps per 100 maintained its constancy at 50% in 2022, and the index value for those receiving TANF WIC Infant Program per 100 was 32% in 2022.

EDUCATION – 25%

In June 2023, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is viewed as the nation's "report card" for educational progress, released new data, reporting that national test scores for 13-year-olds showed the single largest drop in math and reading in 50 years. The average math score equaled the numbers of 1990, and the average reading score equaled the numbers of 2004. Significant drops were observed for Black, multiracial, and White students, but the scores of Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians did not show a measurable difference.

The Education portion of the Equality Index has five components. Figure 16 displays how Blacks compared to Whites in these five areas.

In the Kansas City region, the Education Sub-Index for 2022 was 79.2% compared to 75.3% in 2020 and 77.5% in 2015. The increase in the Education Sub-Index from 2015 to 2022 means that the Black Education Index has increased an abysmal 0.24% annually in nine years. The 2022 index of 79.2% means that Blacks in Kansas City are still performing worse educationally than Whites in the Kansas City region. An examination of key contributing

FIGURE 16: *Contributing Factors to the Black Education Sub-Index*

Black   White

Urban League of **Greater Kansas City**
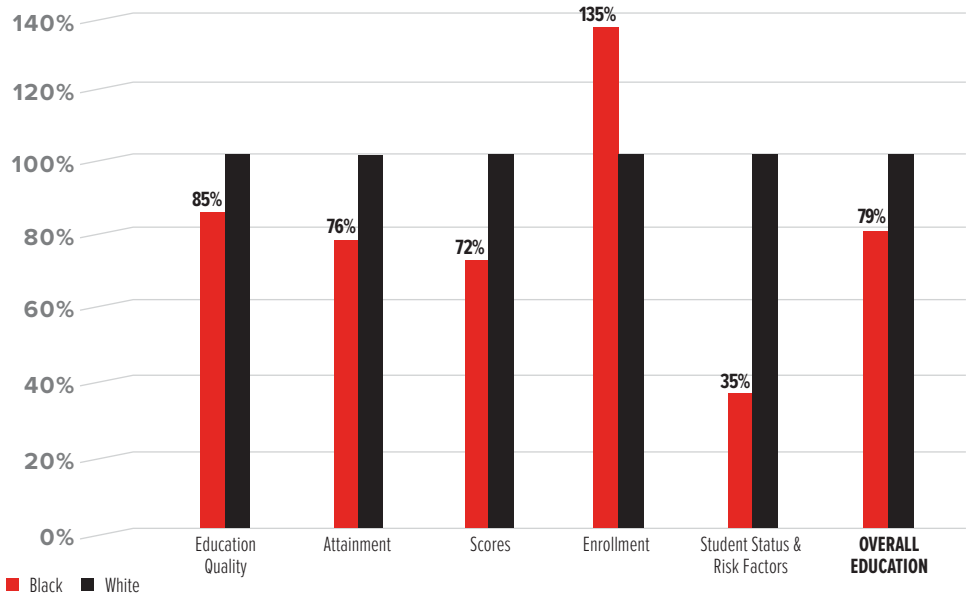
variables and the components of the Education Sub-Indices reveals why this is the case.

It is important to note the individual variables that had substantial weight within the Education area: Composite ACT Score, Math Grade 4 Effective Ability, Bachelor's Degree Attainment, Percentage of Adults (25 and Older) Who Are High School Graduates, and Percentage of Adults (25 and Older) with a Bachelor's Degree. Figure 17 shows these comparisons between the Black and White populations of the five-county Kansas City area.

ACT Composite scores for Blacks were about 29% less than scores for Whites. The Math Grade 4 Effective Ability was 22% for Whites and only 9% for Blacks. The percentage of High School Graduates was higher for Blacks than Whites (33% versus 21%). However, 68% more Whites than Blacks obtained a bachelor's degree (42% versus 25%).

Quality (25% of Education). There are two important components of the Education Quality Index: the Quality of Teaching and the Quality of Course Offerings. These data were gathered from the Missouri Comprehensive Data System and the Kansas Department of Education and were utilized according to the sampling design described above. The Education Quality component is summarized in Figure 18. The index value of the Education Quality component (85%) is higher than both the Education Sub-Index (79%) and the National Education Sub-Index (75%). The Education Quality Component positively influences the overall Education Sub-Index since 2015.

Attainment (30% of Education). To measure Attainment, we examined the Highest Educational Level of Individuals ages 25 and over. At the lower end of the educational spectrum, we calculated the percentage of the population aged 25 and over with Less than a Ninth Grade Education. At the upper end of the educational spectrum, we calculated

FIGURE 17: *Key Variables of the Black Education Sub-Indexes*

ACT COMPOSITE SCORE
BLACK 13.7
WHITE 19.4

MATH GRADE 4 EFFECTIVE ABILITY
BLACK 9.6%
WHITE 22.2%

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
(ADULTS 25 AND OLDER)
BLACK 33%
WHITE 21%

BACHELOR'S DEGREE
(ADULTS 25 AND OLDER)
BLACK 25%
WHITE 42%
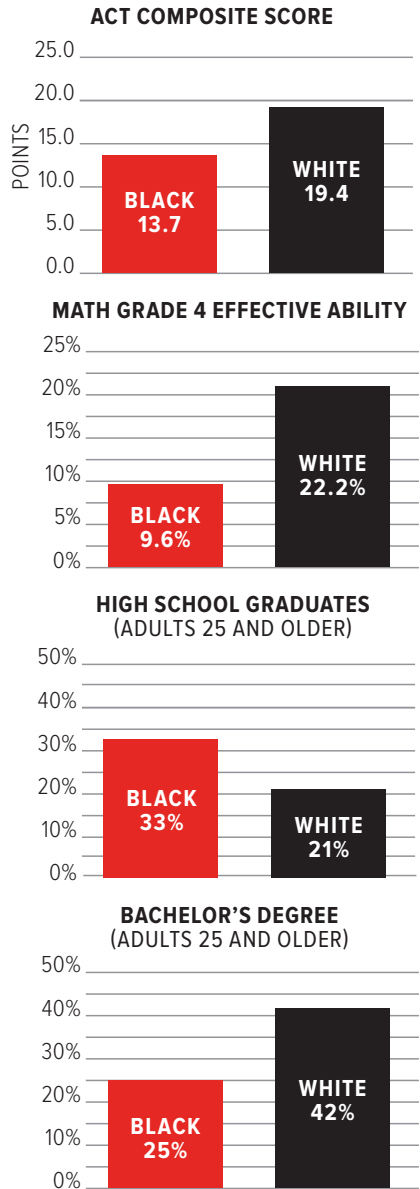
FIGURE 18: *Index Values for Black Education Quality Variables*

	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Teacher Quality					83%	
Course Quality				67%		
EDUCATION QUALITY COMPONENT					85%	
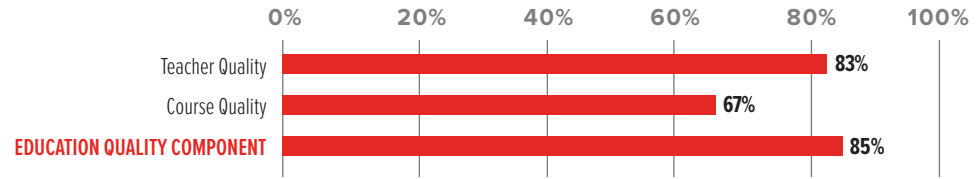
FIGURE 19: *Index Values for Black Education Attainment Variables*

	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%	120%
Less Than High School Diploma				56%			
High School Diploma						101%	
Some College or Associate's Degree							119%
Bachelor's Degree				69%			
High School Graduation Rate					79%		
EDUCATION ATTAINMENT COMPONENT					76%		
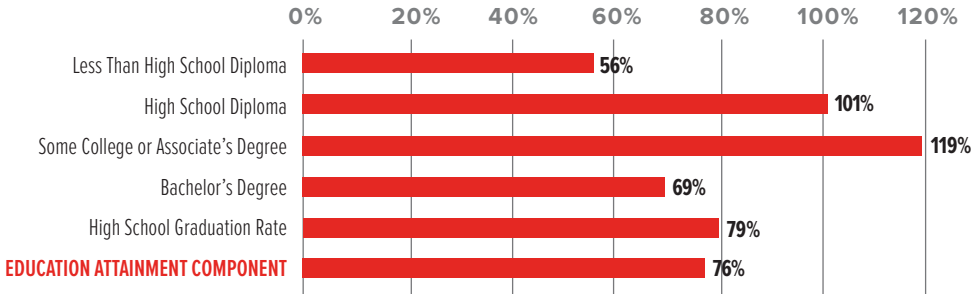
the percentages of the population aged 25 and over with a Bachelor's Degree, and with a Graduate or Professional Degree. The data for these variables are from the 2021 American Community Survey. Each index compares the attainment of the Black population over 25 to that of the White population over 25. We also calculated High School Graduation Rates. The data for these rates are from the respective State Departments of Education. Once again, these rates compare the Black population to the White population. The Education Attainment component is summarized in Figure 19.

The index for the first two categories is the ratio of the percentage of the Black population over 25 to that of the White population over 25. The index for the next five categories is the ratio of the percentage of the White population over 25 to that of the Black population over 25.

The index value of the Education Attainment component is 76%, which is less than the Education Sub-Index. Overall, this component contributes to less equality than there would be without this component. Whereas the index values for (1) a High School Diploma and (2) some College or an Associate's Degree have index values of 101% and 119%, respectively, the percentage of the Black population over 25 with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher is approximately two-thirds of the White population over 25 (69%).

Scores (25% of Education). For this component, Elementary Readiness was weighted at 10%, Elementary Test Scores were weighted at 40%, and High School Test Scores were weighted at 50%. Proficiency test scores at the elementary and secondary school level were the most readily available data. Data were not available in Clay County or Platte County, Missouri.

FIGURE 20: *Index Values for Black Education Scores Variables*
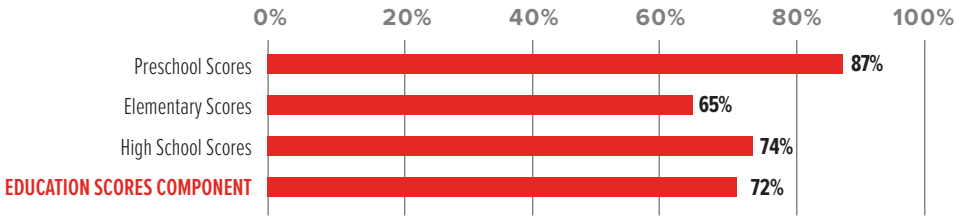
The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reports a Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP6) Achievement Level Report at the school level on a variety of subjects at a variety of grade levels. The MSIP6 program is Missouri's accountability system for reviewing and accrediting public school districts, outlining the expectations for student achievement with the ultimate goal of each student graduating ready for success in college and careers. The overall score is comprised of scores for each Local Education Agency (LEA) and school. The overall score includes scores for each of MSIP6 performance standards: (1) Academic Achievement, (2) Subgroup Achievement, (3) High School Readiness (K-8 Districts) or College and Career Readiness (K-12 Districts), (4) Attendance Rates, and (5) Graduation Rates (K-12 Districts). Information about this system can be found at this website: https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Visualizations.aspx?id=37.

The Education Scores component in 2022 was 72% compared to 59% in 2020 and 63% in 2019. In 2015 the Education Scores component was 56%. The Education Scores component of 72% portrays the inability of the region's educational system to educate Black children. Figure 20 summarizes the Education Scores component, which is slightly more than the Education Sub-Index of 71% in 2022 but less than the National Sub-Index for Education of 74.5% in 2022. The Elementary Scores index was 65% in 2022, and the High School Scores component index was 74% in 2022. These index values contribute to more inequality and highlight the disadvantages Blacks will have in the future in high schools, in colleges, and ultimately in the labor market.

Student Status and Risk Factors (10% of Education). The variables included in this category indicate students who have a high probability of leaving school, and thus do not obtain the reward of an education. The following variables, exhibited in Figure 21, were selected due to the correlation between the performance of children at school and conditions in their households: (1) High School Dropouts, (2) Children in Poverty, (3) Children under 6 with an Unemployed Parent, (4) Children 6–17 with an Unemployed Parent, and (5) Children 5–15 with a Disability.

The Student Status and Risk Factors component index value is an alarming 47%. Almost half of children in the Kansas City five-county area have some element of financial or learning distress, prohibiting at-risk children from benefiting from compulsory schooling and lagging

FIGURE 21: *Index Values for Black Student Status and Risk Factors Variables*
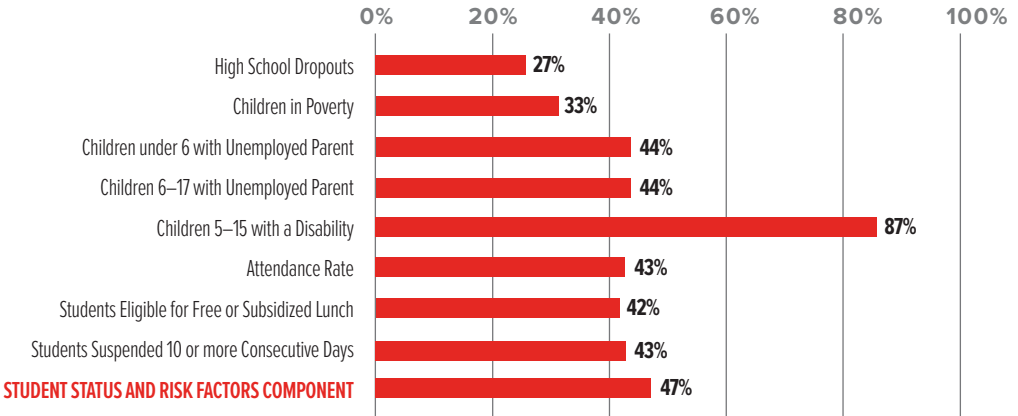
behind their classmates due to these risk factors. These risk factors contribute to the child's difficulty in transitioning into adulthood.

The index value for Attendance Rates is particularly alarming. The index value for High School Attendance Rates in 2022 was 28%. This dramatic decrease is driven by the substantial differentiation in attendance rates for Blacks and Whites in Jackson County. The index value for Children in Poverty was 33% in 2022. All other risk factors show a similar trend. These results should be particularly alarming to policymakers in the region.

SOCIAL JUSTICE – 10%

The Social Justice Sub-Index for the 2022 Black Equality Index was 56.6%. This index represents a decline in the 2022 index compared to the 2020 index, which was 57.6%. At the national level, the Social Justice Sub-Index for the 2022 Black Equality Index was 57.9%. In part, this lower sub-index value means that Blacks in the Kansas City region are faring markedly worse than Whites in the 2022 Kansas City region index and in the national index for Social Justice. Figure 22 presents the components of the Social Justice Sub-Index and their respective index values.

FIGURE 22: *Contributing Factors to the Black Social Justice Sub-Index*
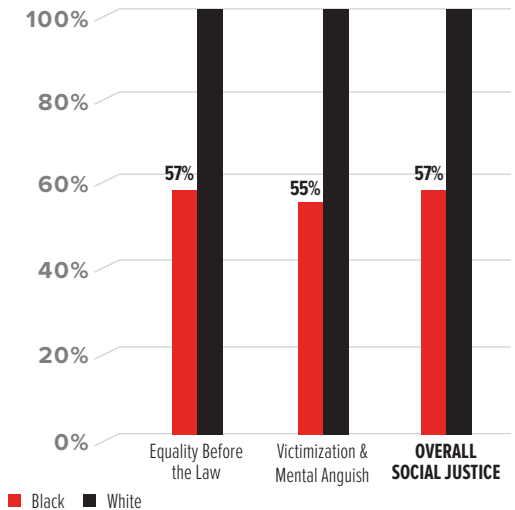
Two important variables carried the greatest weight in the calculation of the Black Social Justice Sub-Index. These variables are: Local Vehicle Stops in Proportion to the Population and Murder Victimization Rate, shown in Figure 23.

Local Vehicle Stops in Proportion to the Population for Blacks was 1.86% in 2022, compared to .85% for Whites. This documents that Blacks are stopped significantly more than Whites. The rate for Blacks was 2.18 times the rate for Whites, representing a worsening of this rate from 2020, when it was 1.5 times the rate for Whites. Other racial profiling statistics show a similar and disturbing trend. Differences that are even more dramatic are apparent in the Murder Victimization Rate, with 72% of victims from the Black population, compared to 20% of the victims from the White population. Thus, the Murder Victimization Rate for Blacks was 3.6 times the rate for Whites and illustrates a gravely serious condition in the Black community in the Kansas City Region.

FIGURE 23: *Key Variables of the Black Social Justice Sub-Indexes*

LOCAL VEHICLE STOPS IN PROPORTION TO THE POPULATION

BLACK 1.86%

WHITE 0.85%

MURDER VICTIMIZATION RATE IN PROPORTION TO THE POPULATION

BLACK 72%

WHITE 20%
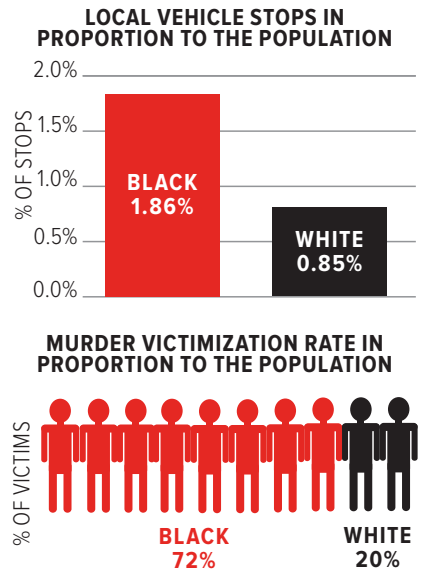
Equality Before the Law (70% of Social Justice). The largest category in the Social Justice Sub-Index addresses Equal Treatment Before the Law in our region. A value of 100% for the Equality Before the Law component index would mean that we live in an equitable region. Figure 24 summarizes the Equality Before the Law component, with an index value of 57%. Although this represents an improvement from the 2015 index value of 56%, the Kansas City Region is far from a colorblind region. This component is a significant contributor to inequality in the Kansas City Region.

Disturbing trends are revealed from the racial profiling statistics from the Missouri Highway Patrol. The Racial Profiling Search Rate had an index value of 75% in 2022. The Racial Profiling Traffic Stops had an index value of 51%, and Probable Cause/Search Authority had an index value of 53%. It is apparent from the statistics that Blacks are being disproportionately targeted in the region.

The Average Prison Sentence for All Offenses had an index value of 61% in 2022 compared to an index value of 74% in 2020. The Probation Sentence for Drug Offenders Per 100 had an index value of 35% in 2022. The Youth Incarceration Rate per 100,000 had an alarming index value of 20% in 2022. The Incarceration Rate for Drug Offenders (KS) had an index value of 33% in 2022. The Equality Before the Law had an index value of 57% in 2022

FIGURE 24: *Index Values for Black Equality Before the Law Component Variables*
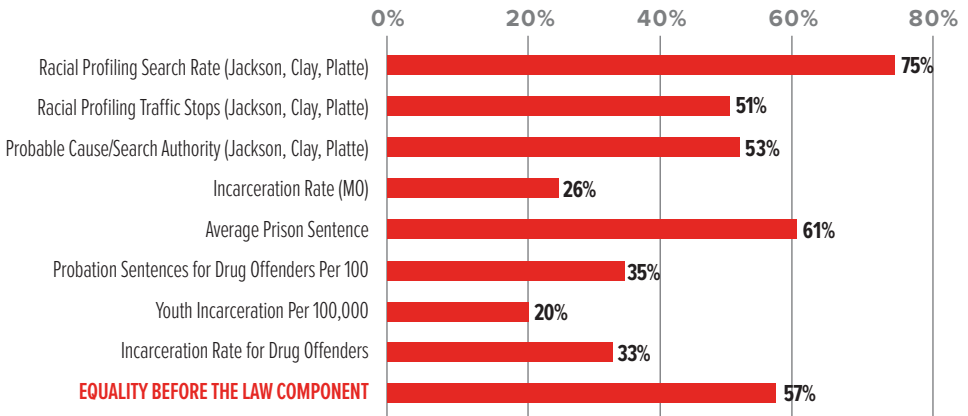
FIGURE 25: *Index Values for Black Victimization and Mental Anguish Component Variables*
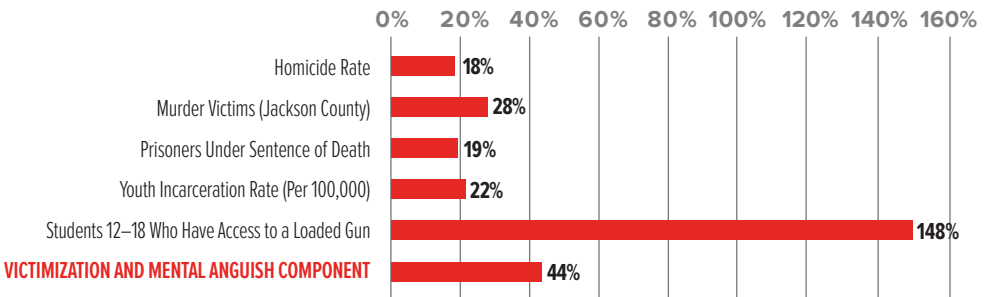
compared to an index value of 63% in 2020. All these variables in Equality Before the Law component illustrate the disparate treatment of Blacks in the criminal justice system.

Victimization and Mental Anguish (30% of Social Justice). Figure 25 summarizes the Victimization and Mental Anguish component of the Social Justice Sub-Index. The component index value was 44% in 2022; it was 44% in 2020 as well, indicating that this component contributes strongly to inequality before the law for Blacks in the region. The Homicide Rate index value in the region was 18% in 2022, which is 12 times as great among the Black population as it is among the White population. The Murder Victim index value in Jackson County was 28% in 2022. The Victimization & Mental Component had an overall index value of 44% in 2022. This component value in the Social Justice Component is the lowest value of all components in the overall Index.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – 10%

The Civic Engagement Sub-Index for the Black Equality Index for 2022 was 104.21% (rounded to 104% in Figure 26). This index value was 106.9% in 2015. At the national level, the Civic

FIGURE 26: *Contributing Factors to the Black Civic Engagement Sub-Index*
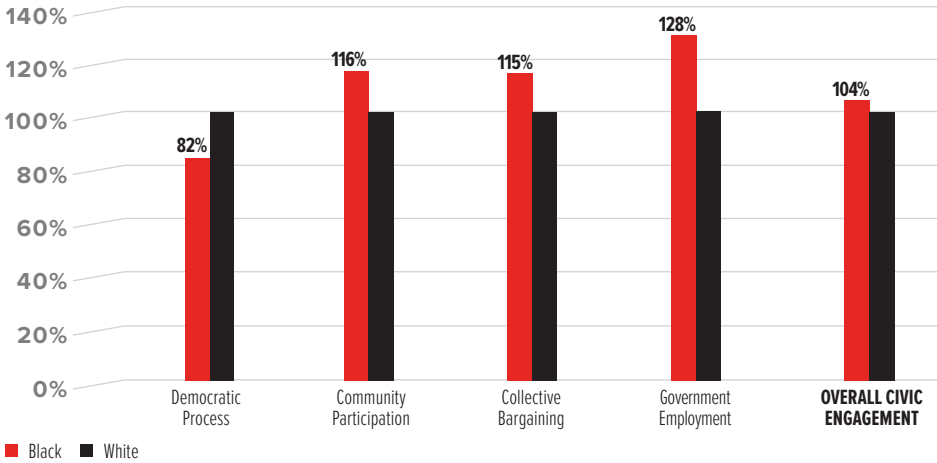
Engagement Sub-Index for the Black Equality Index for 2022 was 98.9% and was 99.7% in 2020. This index value illustrates that Blacks are more civically engaged than Whites in the region and nationally. The Civic Engagement Sub-Index and each of its components contribute to more equality for the Black population in the Kansas City region. Figure 26 summarizes the index values of the Sub-Index and each of its components.

Democratic Process (40% Civic Engagement). The index value for this component was 82% in 2022. This value suggests less equality in the overall experiences related to voter registration. In Missouri and Kansas, Blacks were less involved in the democratic process than Whites. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation data for Missouri, in 2022, 67% of Black U.S. citizens over 18 were registered to vote, compared to 77% of Whites. In Kansas, 71% of Black U.S. citizens over 18 were registered to vote, compared to a White voter registration percentage of 76%. Index values of registered voters were 93% in Missouri and 87% in Kansas.

Community Participation (30% of Civic Engagement). Two variables were used to calculate the index value for the Community Participation component: (1) Persons Who Are Veterans of the Armed Forces, 18 and Over, and (2) Private Not-For-Profit Wage and Salary Workers, 16 and Over.

The Community Participation component had an index value of 116% in 2022, suggesting that Blacks are more involved in community participation than Whites in the Kansas City Region. Across all counties in the five-county Kansas City region, more differences were seen in the status of being a Veteran of the Armed Forces.

Collective Bargaining (20% of Civic Engagement). Collective Bargaining is captured by the Percentage of Those Employed Who Are Union Members. The index value of 115% in 2022

was the same as 2020. The Unionism variable shows a significantly higher percentage of Blacks are in unions than Whites.

Government Employment (10% of Civic Engagement). There are two components in the Government Employment Sub-Indices: (1) Government Workers as a Percentage of the Employed Population over 16, and (2) Public Administration Employment as a Percentage of the Employed Population over 16.

Both the Government Workers variable and the Public Administration Employment variable contribute to the very high index value of 128% in 2022. This index value raises both the Civic Engagement Sub-Index and the Black Equality Index.

Two variables that serve as major indicators of Civic Engagement are the Percentage of U.S. Citizens 18 and Older Who are Registered to Vote and the Percentage of Workers 16 and Older Who Work in the Private Nonprofit Sector. Figure 27 displays the relative equality of registered voters (69% of Blacks and 76% of Whites) and the relative equality of participation in the workforce within the private nonprofit sector (9.6% of Blacks, compared to 8.7% of Whites).

FIGURE 27: *Key Variables of the Black Civic Engagement Sub-Index*

U.S. CITIZENS 18 AND OVER REGISTERED TO VOTE

BLACK 69%   VOTE   WHITE 76%

PRIVATE NONPROFIT WAGE/SALARY WORKERS 16 YEARS AND OLDER

BLACK 9.6%   WHITE 8.7%
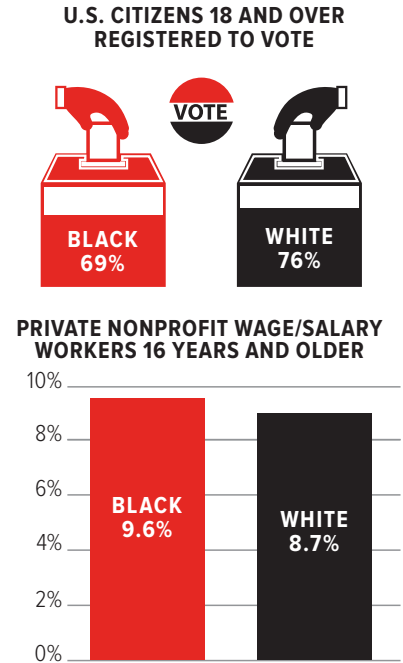
CONCLUSION

The Kansas City Black Equality Index of 75.35% reveals that much work must be done for Black populations to achieve equality and fare as well as White populations. The National Black Equality Index of 73.8% denotes the pervasiveness of this inequality across the United States. All five of the areas of inequality that were examined—Social Justice, Economics, Health, Education, and Civic Engagement—are intertwined with one another. Many of the individual data points are interconnected with the various sub-indices. Many times, a quantitative perspective does not recognize this interconnectedness. We know these relationships are true due to the lived experiences of Blacks, which the qualitative data tend to illustrate.

There are many examples of this interconnectedness among the sub-indices. For example, the mentality that leads to Blacks being stopped much more frequently as noted in the Social Justice sub-index is similar if not the same mentality that leads to Black students being

disciplined more frequently as noted in the Student Status and Risk Factors component, which is a component of the Education sub-index.

More disturbing trends are also revealed from the racial profiling statistics from the Missouri Highway Patrol. The Racial Profiling Search Rate has an index value of 75% in 2022. The Racial Profiling Traffic Stops has an index value of 51%, and Probable Cause/Search Authority has an index value of 53%. It is apparent from the statistics that Blacks are being disproportionately targeted in the region.

As the Education Quality component of the Education Sub-Index illustrates, Blacks have less access to a quality education. This is reflected in the Employment Issues component of the Economics Sub-Index. This component measures the skill set of Blacks relative to Whites. This affects the earning potential for Blacks, which in turn directly affects median income, home ownership, and other components of the Economics sub-index. In addition, the educational attainment component that measures the dropout rate is also connected to the Economics Sub-Index, as high school dropouts will earn far less than those who graduate from high school.

The Health Index provides evidence of racial norming, especially when looking at the mortality rate of Black women during pregnancy.

In 2022, the Economics, Health and Education Indices increased marginally from the 2020 report. The Economics Sub-Index increased 4% (62% to 66%), Health increased 2% (76% to 78%) and Education increased from 75% in 2020 to 79% in 2022. The Social Justice Sub-Index took a 7% downturn from 2020, averaging only 51% in 2022. Overall, the State of Black Kansas City in 2022 remained stagnant in comparison to the recorded indices of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City dating back to 2006.

Clearly, there is much work to be done to improve outcomes for Blacks in the Kansas City Region. Concerted, collaborative efforts will be needed to address the multiplicity and complexity of the issues. Continued assessment is necessary to determine whether strategies to improve equality are making a meaningful difference.

TO ACCESS THE COMPLETE 2022 BLACK/WHITE AND HISPANIC/WHITE EQUALITY INDEXES, SCAN THE QR CODE:

OR VISIT: https://www.ulkc.org/2023-state-of-black-kc

HISPANIC/WHITE

KEY FINDINGS

The 2022 Equality Index of Hispanic Kansas City is 77.5%. This means that rather than having a whole pie (100%)—full equality with Whites in 2022—**Hispanics are missing approximately 22% of the pie.**

HISPANICS

78%

WHITES

100%

As shown in Figure 1, the relative state of the Hispanic population in Kansas City is much lower than the state of the non-Hispanic White population, except for the Health Sub-Index. Note that the bar for the non-Hispanic White population is 100% for each index, with the non-Hispanic White outcome serving as the control to which the Hispanic condition is compared.
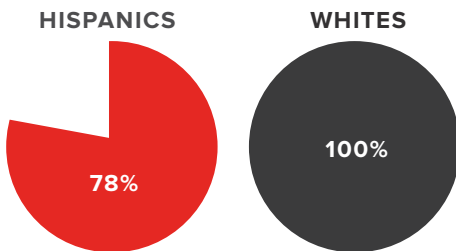
FIGURE 1: *The State of Hispanic Kansas City: 2022 Equality Index and Sub-Indices*

	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic White
ECONOMICS	64.97%	100%
HEALTH	102.99%	100%
EDUCATION	70.59%	100%
SOCIAL JUSTICE	70.64%	100%
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	75.30%	100%
TOTAL EQUALITY INDEX	77.50%	100%
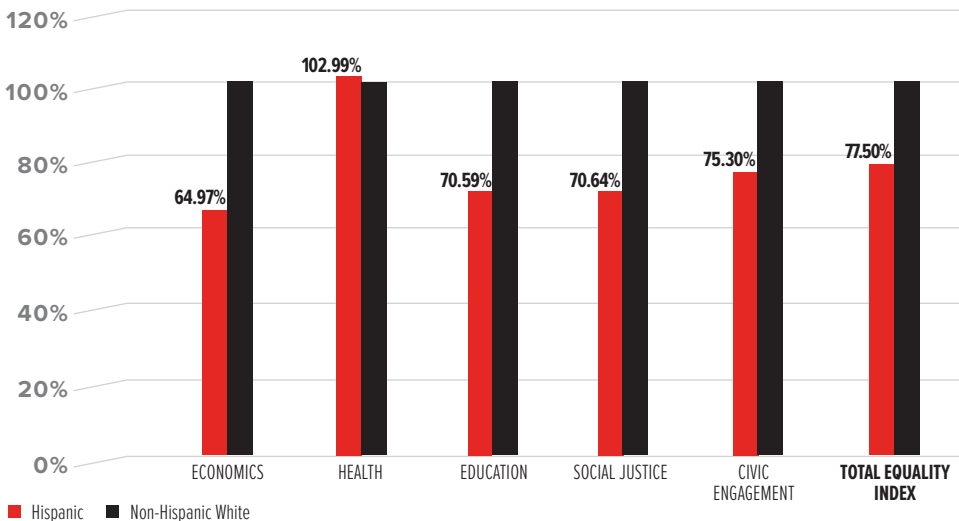
It is also important to adjust for the distribution of the Hispanic population by county. Most of the Hispanic population (87%) is in Jackson, Wyandotte, and Johnson counties (see the distribution of the Hispanic population in Figure 2). When calculating regional values, the county value is given the weight of the proportion of the Hispanic population in the county.

In the Kansas City region, the Economics Sub-Index of the Hispanic Equality Index for 2022 had a value of 64.97%. Though Hispanic economic participation is high, Figure 3 illustrates the fact that Hispanic economic conditions are worse than the economic conditions of non-Hispanic Whites across all contributing factors, particularly with regard to the Poverty and Housing & Wealth measures.

FIGURE 2: *Distribution of Hispanic Population in 5-County Kansas City Region*

● **JACKSON (MO): 35%**

● **CLAY (MO): 9%**

● **PLATTE (MO): 3%**

● **WYANDOTTE (KS): 27%**

● **JOHNSON (KS): 25%**
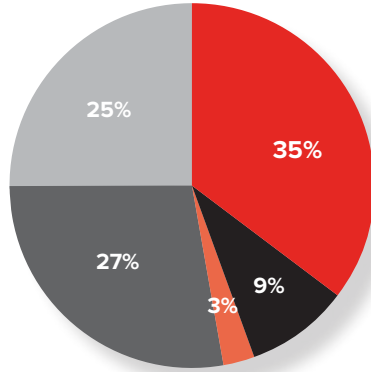
(Percentages do not equal 100 because of rounding.)

ECONOMICS – 30%

There are several key variables in the Economics Sub-Index that highlight the meager economic progress for Hispanics. Four key weights in the Economics Sub-Index highlight the poor performance of the Hispanic community. They are (1) Median Household Income, (2) Median Household Net Worth, (3) Poverty Rate, and (4) Rate of Home Ownership.

FIGURE 3: *Contributing Factors to the Hispanic Economics Sub-Index*
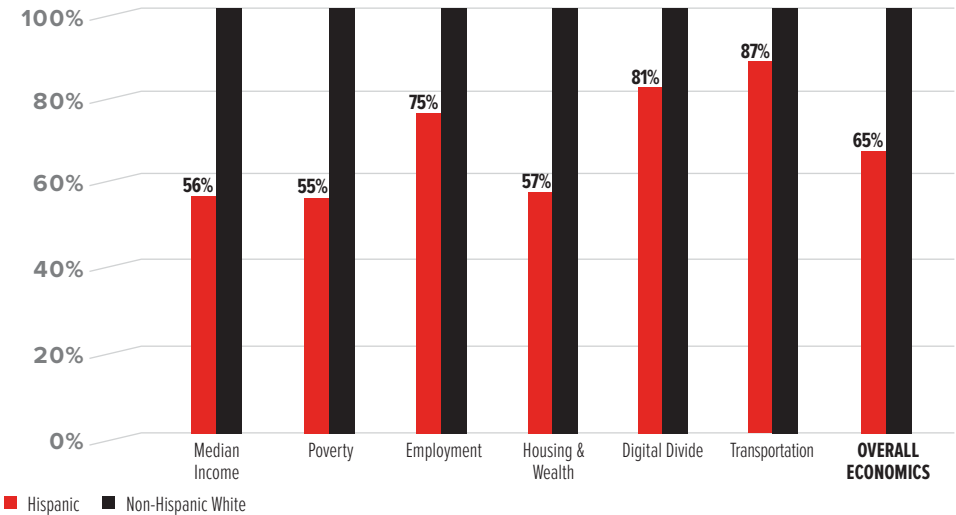
Figure 4 displays the comparisons between Hispanic and non-Hispanic White populations of the five-county Kansas City area for these variables. Hispanic Median Household Income in 2022 was 47% of that for non-Hispanic Whites, and Median Household Net Worth of Hispanics was 16.7% that of non-Hispanic Whites. In 2015, Median Household Income was 75% compared to their non-Hispanic White counterparts, a decrease of 7% between 2015 and 2022. The Poverty rate of Hispanics is nearly double the Poverty rate of non-Hispanic Whites.

FIGURE 4: *Key Variables of the Hispanic Economics Sub Index*

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

HISPANIC
$36,978

NON-HISPANIC
WHITE
$78,182

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD NET WORTH

HISPANIC
$31,463

NON-HISPANIC
WHITE
$188,200

POVERTY RATE

HISPANIC
14.24%

NON-HISPANIC
WHITE
8.54%

RATE OF HOME OWNERSHIP
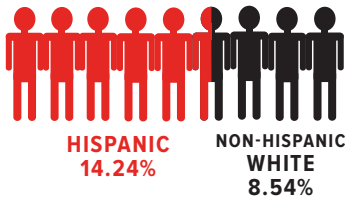
HISPANIC
53.93%

NON-HISPANIC
WHITE
75.05%
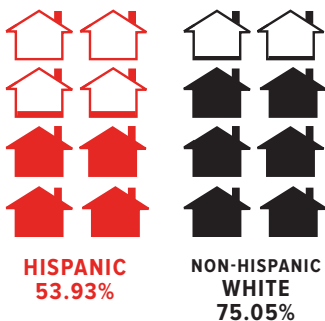
The index value of the Poverty component is 55% compared to 54% in the 2020 report. The Poverty component has the lowest index value of all six components of the Economics Sub-Index for Hispanics. The index value for Housing & Wealth improved from 2020's value of 44%. Hispanics may have gained ground in obtaining housing; financing housing proves difficult, as 59% of Hispanic households live in poverty.

Employment Issues (20% of the Economics Sub-Index). The overall Employment Issues Component is 74.69%. While both male and female unemployment rates are significantly high, females still lag behind men. Hispanic Labor Force Participation Rate is 124% higher than that of Whites. Many contributing factors such as poverty factors and low net worth figure into this high rate. Though Labor Force Participation is normally high for Hispanics, contributing factors also include undocumented employment.

Housing and Wealth (34% of the Economics Sub-Index). The Housing and Wealth component is the leading contributor to the dismal outcomes in the Economics Sub-Index for Hispanic residents in Kansas City. Home Ownership Rates have increased significantly for Hispanics to 74%.

Another important variable is the Median Net Worth of Hispanic households in Kansas City. The Median Net Worth variable has an index value of 19%. The index value for the Percentage of Housing Units Owned is only 53%. There is zero wealth from the home for the median Hispanic household. As a result, more non-Hispanic Whites have more wealth from Home Ownership than Hispanics. In addition, for Hispanics, the Mortgage Denial Rate index was 49%, and the Home Improvement Denial Rate index was 55%.

The Digital Divide (5% of the Economics Sub-Index). The Digital Divide Index is based on a single variable. The digital divide variable is the ratio of the percentage of individuals living in Hispanic households with access to the Internet to the percentage of individuals in non-Hispanic households with access to the Internet. Because data for the Kansas City region was not available, we used the national value as a proxy. The national value of the Digital Divide Index was 87% in 2022. This national value masks the true digital divide in the Kansas City Region as well as nationally.

Transportation (1% of the Economics Sub-Index). The three variables that enter the calculation of the Transportation element of the Economics Sub-Index are Car Ownership, Transportation to Work Driving Alone, and Transportation to Work Using Public Transportation. The index value of the Transportation component was 87% in 2022.

HEALTH – 25%

The Health Sub-Index of the Hispanic Equality Index for 2022 was 103%. The national value for the Hispanic Health Sub-Index was 104%. Though this was a decrease from 2020's number of 114%, Hispanic Health Sub-Index scores remain higher than other sub-Indices.

Figure 5 displays the rounded index values of the components of the 2022 Hispanic Health Sub-Index.

Before examining the components of the Health Sub-Index in detail, it is helpful to note four individual variables measured in the Health Sub-Index that contribute the most to the Health Sub-Index value: Age-Adjusted Death Rate, Life Expectancy at Birth, Percentage of Adults Who Are Overweight or Obese, and Fetal Death Rate.

FIGURE 5: *Contributing Factors to the Hispanic Health Sub-Index*

Hispanic   Non-Hispanic White
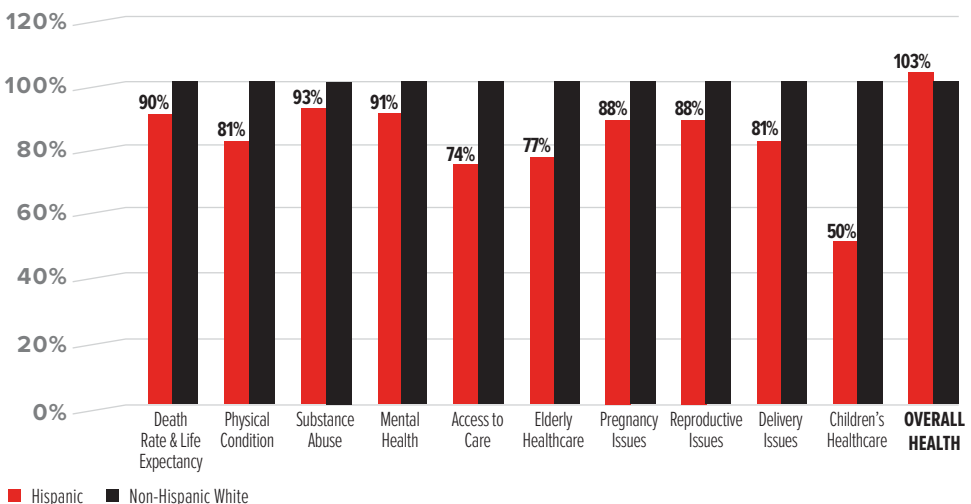
Figure 6 displays the comparisons of Hispanic and non-Hispanic White populations in the five-county Kansas City area for these variables. The Hispanic Death Rate is much better than the Death Rate for non-Hispanic Whites. The Death Rate for Whites is 81% of the Hispanic Death Rate.

FIGURE 6: *Key Variables of the Hispanic Health Sub-Index*
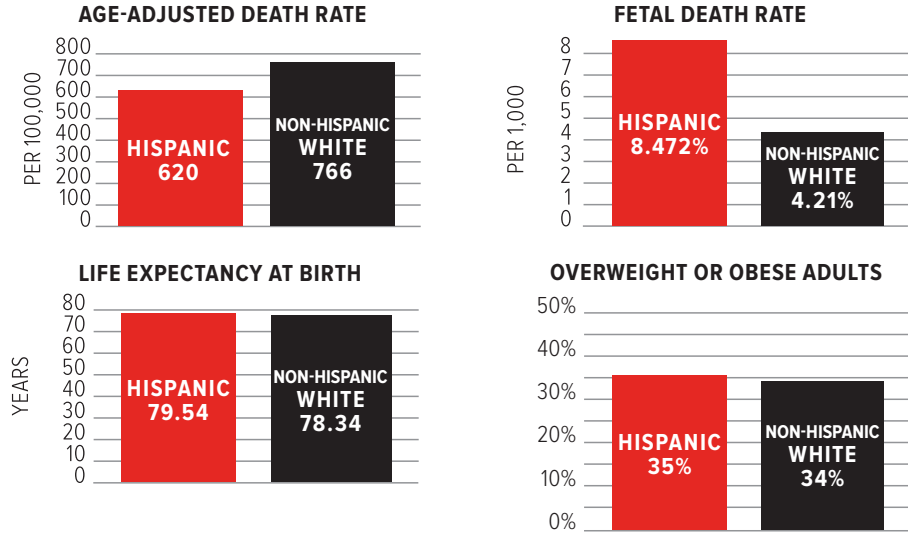
Hispanic Life Expectancy at Birth in 2020 was 84 years. In 2022, Life Expectancy dropped to 80 years. COVID-19 has contributed across races to a decreasing life expectancy. The decrease of Hispanic Life Expectancy is almost equal to that of Whites.

Fetal Death Rates are higher for Hispanic Women than for non-Hispanic White Women. The Poverty measures also contribute to the lack of resources available for Hispanic Women.

The index value of the Death Rates and Life Expectancy component for Hispanic residents of Kansas City was 90.16% in 2022 compared to 149% in 2020 and 125% in 2015. Still, Hispanic residents have better outcomes than non-Hispanic White residents of the five-county Kansas City region and statewide.

Physical Conditions (10% of the Health Sub-Index). Figure 7 shows that there is substantial variation in the values for these variables measured for Hispanics, relative to those measured for non-Hispanic Whites. The Incidence of HIV/AIDS among Hispanics had an index value of 68% in 2022, which can be interpreted that the incidence of HIV/AIDS was much higher in the Hispanic community compared to the non-Hispanic White community. The Incidence of Being Slightly Overweight had an index value of 106% in 2022, up from 92% in 2020. The index value for the Physical Condition component for Hispanic residents of Kansas City was 81% in 2022 compared to 74% in 2020, 80% in 2019, and 85% in 2015.

FIGURE 7: *Index Values for Hispanic Physical Conditions Variables*
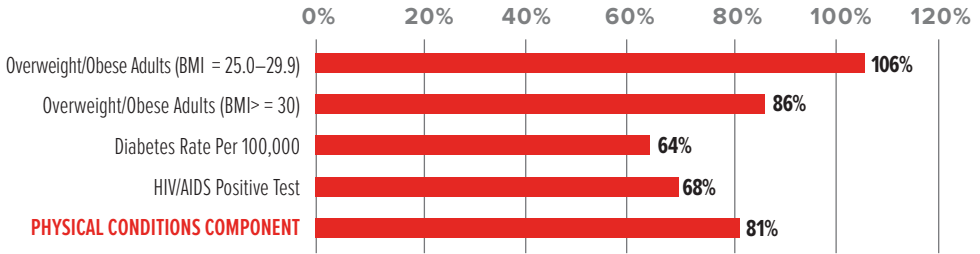
Access to Care (5% of Health Sub-Index). Figure 8 shows that the Access to Care variables contribute negatively to both the Health Sub-Index and the overall Equality Index for Hispanic residents of Kansas City. The Quality of Health variables are derived from the Risk Behavioral Surveillance System (RBSS) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The People Without Health Insurance variable decreased from 42% in 2020 to 36% in 2022.

The Access to Care component was 74% in 2022, an increase from 58% in 2020 and 56% in 2019.

The number of Hispanic respondents who reported Fair or Poor Health remained similar to 2020 findings. In 2022, 84% were reported to be in Fair or Poor Health. The index value was 83% in 2020 compared to 62% in 2019 and 81% in 2015.

FIGURE 8: *Index Values for Hispanic Access to Care Variables*
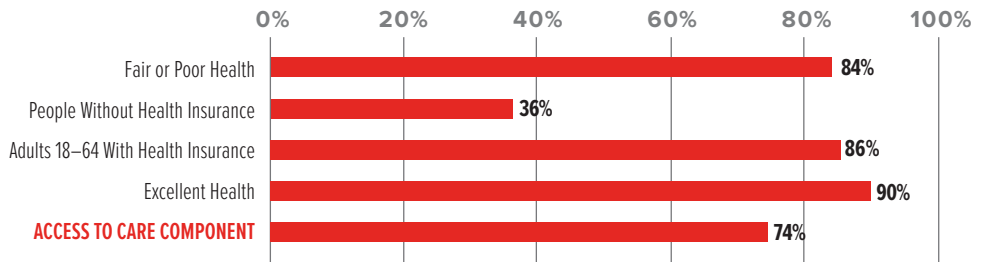
EDUCATION – 25%

The Education Sub-Index for 2022 had a value of 70.6%. This has decreased from the previous report that reported a value of 75.3%. The 2020 National Education Sub-Index for the Hispanic Equality Index was 73.3%.[1] The index means that Hispanic students are performing worse than non-Hispanic Whites in education in the Kansas City region and nationally (75% and 73.3%, respectively). Figure 9 presents a summary of the Education Sub-Index and its components, along with their respective index values.

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1   The National Urban League did not produce a 2022 report for The State of Hispanic America.

FIGURE 9: *Contributing Factors to the Hispanic Education Sub-Index*
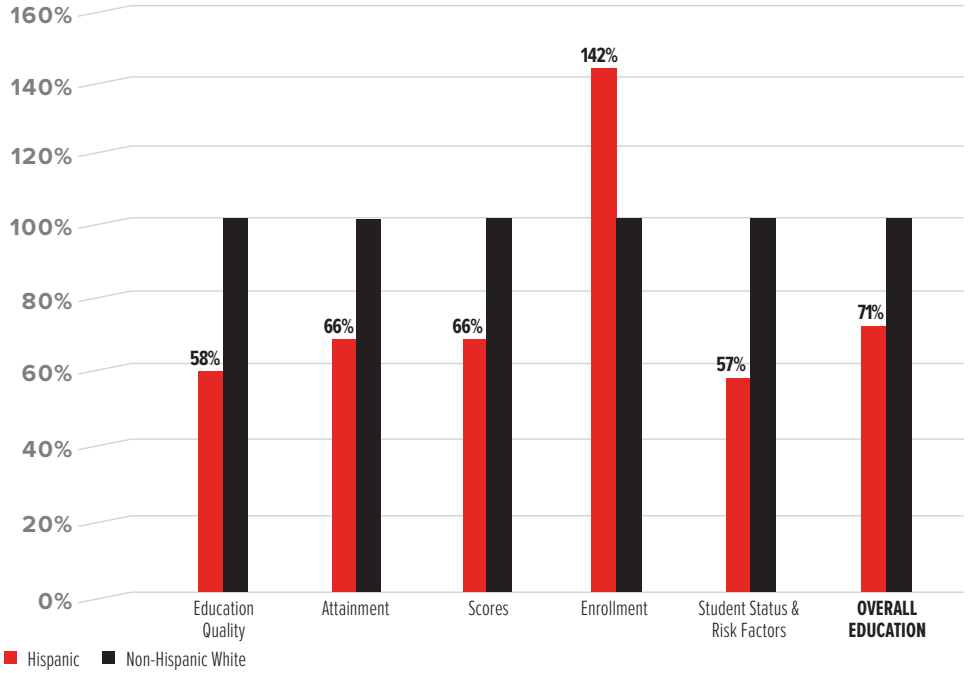
These individual variables had substantial weight within the Education area: ACT Composite Score, Math Grade 4 Effective Ability, Percentage of Adults (25 and Older) Who Are High School Graduates, and Percentage of Adults (25 and Older) with a Bachelor's Degree.
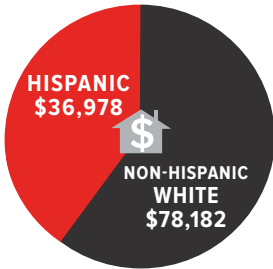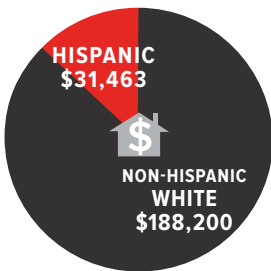
Figure 10 shows these comparisons between the Hispanic and non-Hispanic White populations of the five-county Kansas City area.

The index value of Composite ACT scores for Hispanic students had an index value of 67% compared to non-Hispanic White students (13.6 versus 20.2). The percentage of High School Graduates was higher for Hispanic students than non-Hispanic Whites (27% versus 23%). However, there were fewer Hispanic students who obtained a bachelor's degree than non-Hispanic Whites (42% vs. 16%). This represents a marked decrease from the 2020 report. Interestingly, both Black students and Hispanic students graduated high school at a higher rate, but both completed fewer bachelor's degrees than non-Hispanic White students, which results in lower lifetime earnings, as reflected in the Economics Sub-Index.

Education Quality (25% of Education). Figure 11 illustrates that the quality of education that Hispanic Americans and non-Hispanic White Americans receive is not equal. As a result, Hispanic students are at a disadvantage in high schools, in colleges, and in the labor market. There are two important indicators in the Education Quality component: Quality of Teaching and Quality of Course Offerings. The Quality of Teaching is 40% of the Education Quality component, and the Quality of Course Offerings that prepare students for future

FIGURE 10: *Key Variables of the Hispanic Education Sub-Indexes*

ACT COMPOSITE SCORE

HISPANIC 13.6

NON-HISPANIC WHITE 20.2

MATH GRADE 4 EFFECTIVE ABILITY

HISPANIC 9.2%

NON-HISPANIC WHITE 22.2%

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
(ADULTS 25 AND OLDER)

HISPANIC 27%

NON-HISPANIC WHITE 23%

BACHELOR'S DEGREE
(ADULTS 25 AND OLDER)

HISPANIC 16%

NON-HISPANIC WHITE 42%
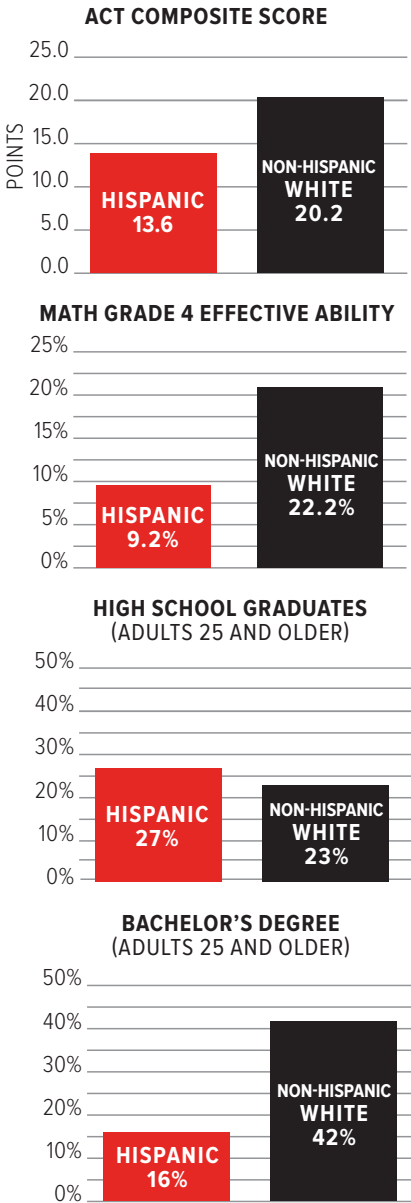
college work is 60% of the Education Quality component. The Education Quality component is summarized in Figure 11. The index value of the Education Quality component (58%) is lower than both the Education Sub-Index (71%) and the Hispanic Equality Index (78%). The Education Quality component negatively influences the overall Education Sub-Index.

Education Attainment (30% of Education). To measure Attainment, we examined the Highest Educational Level of Individuals Ages 25 and Over. The Education Attainment component is summarized in Figure 12.

The index value of the Education Attainment component was 66% in 2022 compared to 70% in 2020. The index value in 2022 is below the Education Sub-Index (71%) and below the Hispanic Equality Index (78%). Overall, this component contributes negatively to the Equality Index. The index values for (1) Less Than a High School Diploma and (2) Some College or an Associate's Degree had index values of 23% and 83%, respectively in 2022. The index value for Less Than High School Diploma in 2022 (23%) showed a worsening compared to 2020 (32%).

The Education Scores component is summarized in Figure 13. This figure paints a negative picture for the ability of the region's educational system to educate Hispanic children. The Education Scores component was 66% in 2022 compared to 71% in 2020.

School Enrollment (10% of Education). The School Enrollment component is summarized in Figure 14. The index value for this component was 154% in 2022 compared to 143% in 2020.

Student Status and Risk Factors (10% of Education). The variables included in this category indicate students who have a high probability of leaving school, and thus do not obtain the reward of an education. The variables exhibited in Figure 15 were selected due

FIGURE 11: *Index Values for Hispanic Education Quality Variables*
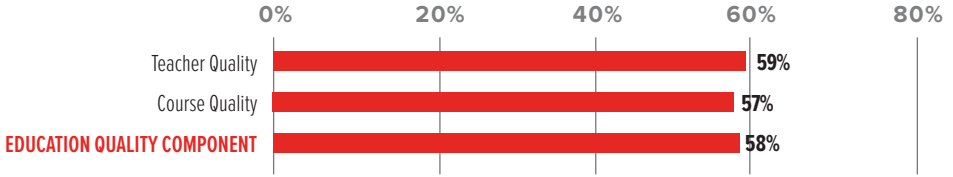
FIGURE 12: *Index Values for Hispanic Education Attainment Variables*
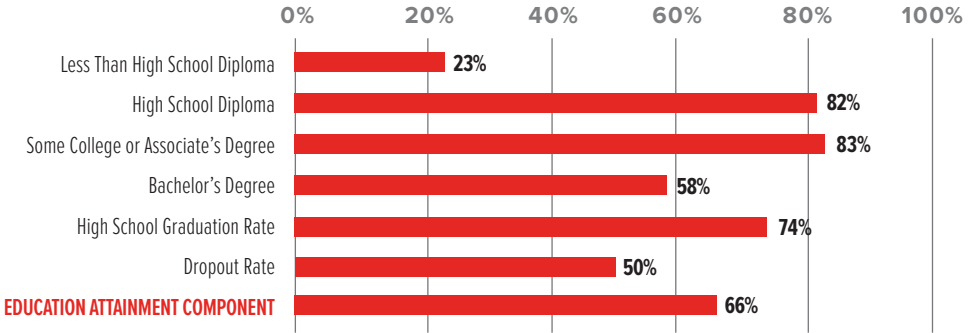
FIGURE 13: *Index Values for Hispanic Education Scores Variables*
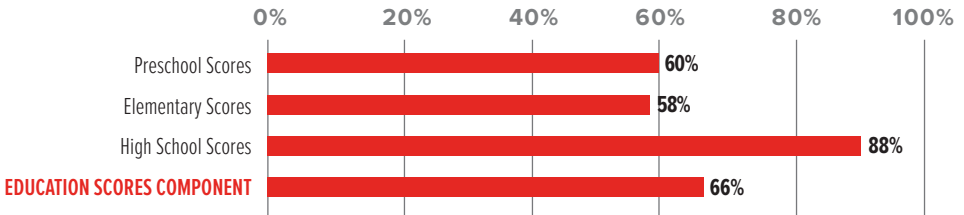
FIGURE 14: *Index Values for Hispanic School Enrollment Variables*
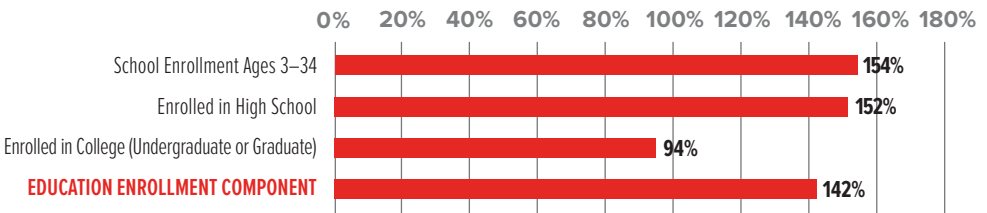
to the correlation between the performance of children at school and conditions in their households.

The Student Status and Risk Factors component index value was 37%. These children have some element of financial or learning distress, prohibiting at-risk children from benefiting from compulsory schooling and lagging behind their classmates due to these risk factors. These risk factors contribute to the child's difficulty in transitioning into adulthood.

FIGURE 15: *Index Values for Hispanic Student Status and Risk Factors Variables*
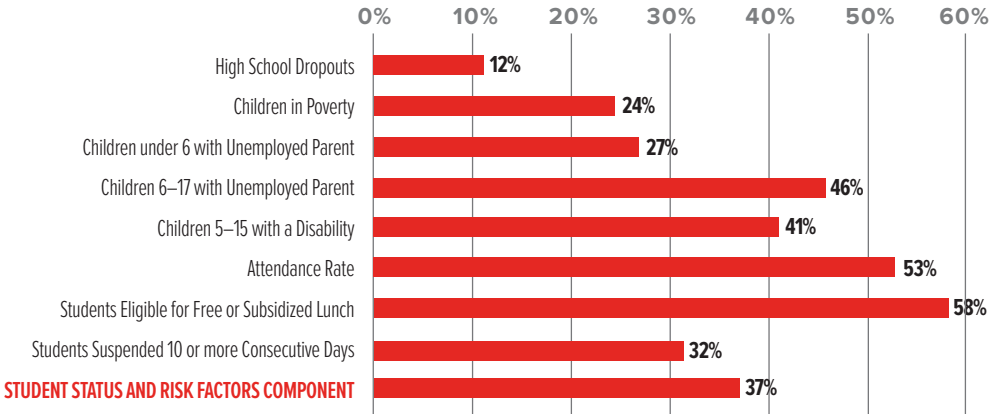
SOCIAL JUSTICE – 10%

The Social Justice Sub-Index for the Hispanic Equality Index was 70.6% in 2022, which is less than the index value of 77.2% in 2020 and less than the index values of 74.7% in 2019 and 70.3% in 2015. In part, this lower sub-index value means that Hispanics in the Kansas City region are faring markedly worse than non-Hispanic Whites.

Figure 16 presents the components of the Social Justice Sub-Index and their respective index values.

Equality Before the Law (70% of Social Justice). Figure 17 summarizes the Equality Before the Law component, with an index value of 59% in 2022 compared to an index value of 65% in 2020. This represents a deterioration of the index value from 2020. The Kansas City region is far from a region that is non-discriminatory based on race.

Victimization and Mental Anguish (30% of Social Justice). Figure 18 summarizes the Victimization and Mental Anguish

FIGURE 16: *Contributing Factors to the Hispanic Social Justice Sub-Index*

component, with an index value of 42% in 2022, indicating that this component contributes to inequality in the Hispanic community. With the exceedingly low value of 19%, the Prisoners Under Sentence of Death variable is by far the dominant index among these variables. In fact, this component has the greatest disparity of all components.
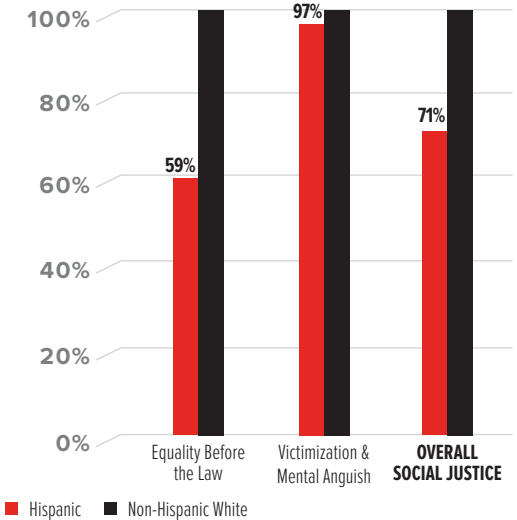
FIGURE 17: *Index Values for Hispanic Equality Before the Law Component Variables*

Racial Profiling (Jackson, Clay, Platte)	97%
Traffic Stops (Jackson, Clay, Platte)	40%
Probable Cause/Search Authority (Jackson, Clay, Platte)	105%
Incarceration Rate (MO)	41%
Prison Sentencing (KCMO)	90%
Offense Rate (KS)	55%
Probation Sentences (KS)	3%
Incarceration Rate (KS)	25%
EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW COMPONENT	59%
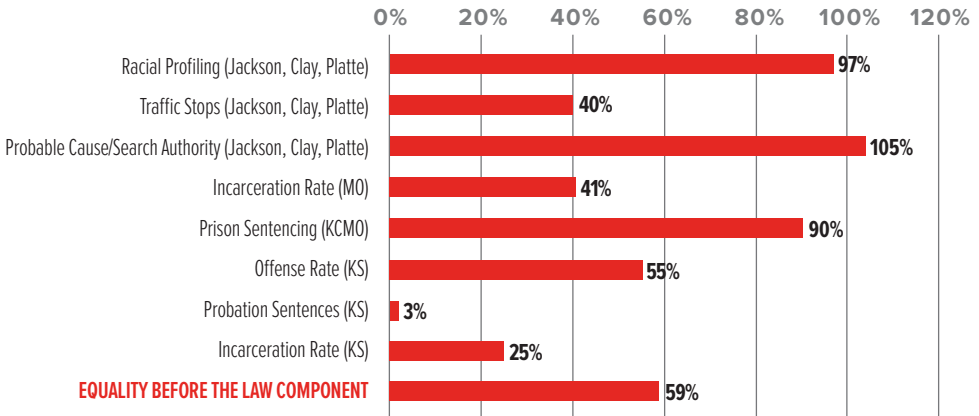
FIGURE 18: *Index Values for Hispanic Victimization and Mental Anguish Component Variables*

Homicide Rate	21%
Murder Victims (Jackson County)	26%
Prisoners Under Sentence of Death	19%
High School Students Carrying Weapon on School Property	110%
High School Students Carrying Weapon	118%
VICTIMIZATION AND MENTAL ANGUISH COMPONENT	42%
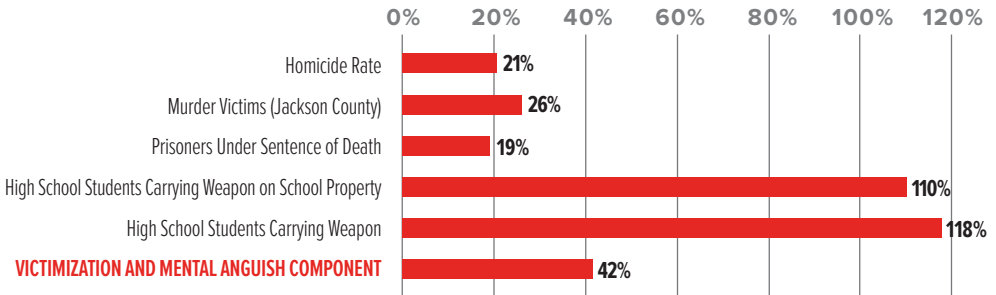
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – 10%

The Civic Engagement Sub-Index for the 2022 Hispanic Equality Index was 75.3% in 2022. This index value illustrates that Hispanics are less civically engaged than non-Hispanic Whites locally, as well as less civically engaged than their national counterparts.

Figure 19 summarizes the index values of the sub-index and each of its components and compares how Hispanics fare with non-Hispanic Whites in the five-county Kansas City region.

Democratic Process (40% of Civic Engagement). The Democratic process component is calculated from one variable: the Percentage of Registered Voters from the Population of U.S. Citizens 18 and Over. The index value for this component was 74%. In Missouri, for Hispanics the index score was 83%, while in Kansas it was 74%.

Community Participation (30% of Civic Engagement). The Community Participation component had an index value of 76% in 2022 compared to 69% in 2020 and 50% in 2015. Therefore, it contributes to inequality for Hispanics. Across all counties in the five-county Kansas City region, the greatest inequality was in being a Veteran of the Armed Forces, with non-Hispanic Whites being much more likely to hold this status.

FIGURE 19: *Contributing Factors to the Hispanic Civic Engagement Sub-Index*

Hispanic ■ Non-Hispanic White
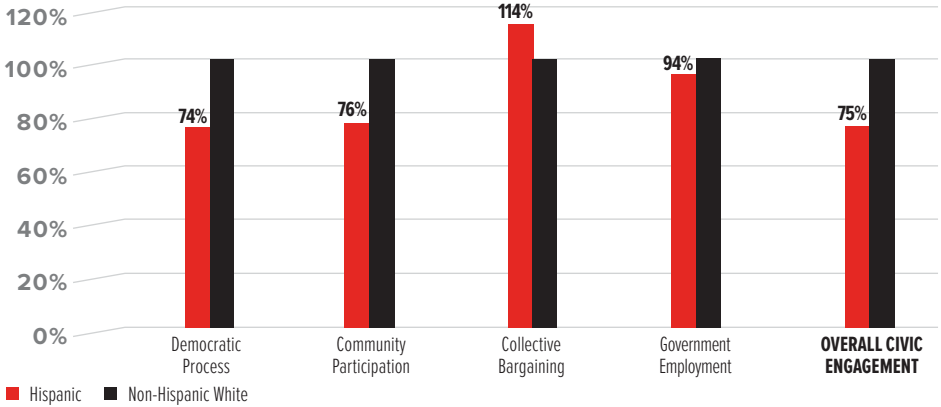
Collective Bargaining (20% of Civic Engagement). The index value was 88% in 2022 for the Unionism variable, which shows a slightly lower percentage of Hispanics than non-Hispanic Whites are in unions. The index value of 92.0% for the Union Representation variable shows that Hispanics are less concentrated in jobs that are represented by unions.

Government Employment (10% of Civic Engagement). The Government Employment component of the Civic Engagement Sub-Index had an index value of 94% in 2022.

Two variables that serve as major indicators of Civic Engagement are the Percentage of U.S. Citizens 18 and Over Registered Voters and the Percentage of Workers 16 and Older Who Work in the Private Nonprofit Sector.

Figure 20 displays the inequality in registered voters (60% of Hispanics and 76% of non-Hispanic Whites) and the equality of participation in the workforce within the private nonprofit sector at 8% for Hispanics and 9% for non-Hispanic Whites. The index values indicate that Hispanics are functioning as registered voters at about 79% of non-Hispanic Whites.

FIGURE 20: *Key Variables of the Hispanic Civic Engagement Sub-Index*

U.S. CITIZENS 18 AND OVER REGISTERED TO VOTE

VOTE

HISPANIC 60%

NON-HISPANIC WHITE 76%

PRIVATE NONPROFIT WAGE/SALARY WORKERS 16 YEARS AND OLDER

HISPANIC 8%

NON-HISPANIC WHITE 9%
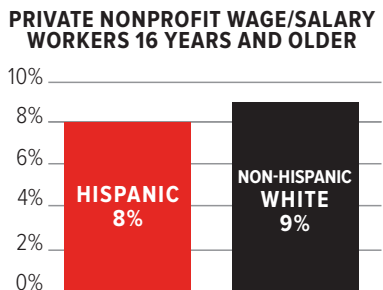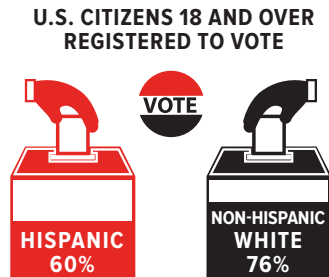
CONCLUSION

The 2022 Kansas City Hispanic Equality Index shows a decline from 83% in 2020 to 78% in 2022, signaling that more work is needed to level the playing field between Hispanic and non-Hispanic White populations. All five examined areas—Social Justice, Economics, Health, Education, and Civic Engagement—are interlinked. While some indices have seen improvement since 2015, except for Health, all remain below 80%.

Continued evaluation is crucial to ensure that interventions are effective in promoting equality. For instance, the propensity for Hispanics to be unfairly targeted, as indicated in the Social Justice Sub-Index, shares a mentality with the disproportionate disciplining of Hispanic students, part of the Education Sub-Index. The lower educational outcomes for Hispanics also reflect and affect their economic opportunities, creating a cycle that is difficult to break.

Therefore, multi-pronged, collaborative strategies are required to address the interconnected challenges facing the Hispanic community in Kansas City. These could range from educational programs to mentorship initiatives, each aimed at improving individual components of these sub-indices.

TO ACCESS THE COMPLETE 2022 BLACK/WHITE AND HISPANIC/WHITE EQUALITY INDEXES, SCAN THE QR CODE:

OR VISIT: https://www.ulkc.org/2023-state-of-black-kc

2023 STATE OF BLACK KANSAS CITY

FROM REDLINING TO CHALK LINES

THE COSTS OF ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

A SPECIAL COLLECTION

OF ARTICLES AND OP-EDS

ECONOMICS

IN PURSUIT OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE: PREPARATIONS FOR REPARATIONS

LINWOOD TAUHEED, PH.D.

INTRODUCTION

After more than two years of organizing and negotiating by members of a Kansas City Black community organization—the Kansas City Reparations Coalition—on January 12, 2023, the City of Kansas City, Missouri embarked on a journey also being taken by a growing number of cities and states across the country. On that date, Ordinance #220966 was passed by a 12 to 1 vote establishing a 13-member commission named the Mayor's Commission on Reparations (the Commission) "to study and make recommendations to the city on reparatory justice for past harm and discriminatory practices against Kansas City's Black community." On May 1, 2023, the Commission was sworn in.

The Commission is charged with investigating and documenting the harm done by the City of Kansas City to members of the Kansas City Black community over the decades since its incorporation in 1853. The Commission's charge is to investigate and document harms that can be traced either to the actions of the City of Kansas City—whether directly or indirectly—such as harm caused by the city itself, or due to the City of Kansas City's inaction in preventing harm caused by other public or private enterprises. This inaction represents a failure by the City of Kansas City to use its power and influence to fulfill its responsibility to protect Black citizens from harm.

The five areas of harm to be investigated and documented are: criminal justice, economics, education, health, and housing. While additional areas of harm could have been included, these five harm areas are consistent with areas chosen for reparations commission work in other cities and states.

Once these harms are investigated and documented, the commission's responsibility is to develop recommendations to deliver reparatory justice to Black community members for the harms done, repairing those harms, and ensuring that the harms are never repeated.

These five areas are not disconnected. They are in fact very much interconnected. This interconnection is what makes racism and discrimination systemic and cumulative in their harm. The harm done in one area spreads harm to other areas, and in the process multiplies the effects of the original harm. It is expected that in the reverse, reparatory justice in one area will have beneficial reparatory effects in other areas. The need for interconnected, systemic, and systematic reparatory justice is thus made more vital.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF HARMS

Since 2006, the Urban League's *State of Black Kansas City* (SOBKC) report has documented the disparities between the well-being of the Kansas City Black community and the Kansas City White community.

The SOBKC report gives us a high-level view of the well-being, and lack thereof, of the Black community and is an excellent starting point for further investigation and documentation. The components of disparity in Black/White well-being documented in the SOBKC report coincide well with the five harm areas to be investigated and documented by the Commission. The SOBKC report components include: Social (Criminal) Justice, Economics, Education, Health, and the Housing sub-component of the Economics component, as well as an additional component that is not one of the five harm areas—Civic Engagement. An overview of the 2022 data from the SOBKC report tells a story of the cumulative harm suffered by the Black community and its members over the nearly 180 years since the city's incorporation and before.

SOME KEY SUB-COMPONENTS OF BLACK COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

The component scores for the Black community are reported in percentages as a definitive way of comparing the well-being of the Black community to the well-being of the White community. Dividing Black community indicators of well-being by White community indicators of well-being gives a measure of the relative well-being of the Black community to the well-being of the White community as a percentage. Lower percentages represent lower relative Black community well-being.

Thus, the Economics component, at 66%, indicates that the economic well-being of the Black community is 66% of the economic well-being of the White community. The Health component at 78%, the Education component at 79%, the Social (Criminal) Justice component at 57%, and the Housing sub-component of the economic component at 53% tell the same story; that the well-being of the Black community is significantly below the well-being of the White community in these important areas.

A detailed look at a few of the sub-components of the above components gives further insight into the level of disparity in Black/White well-being.

SOCIAL (CRIMINAL) JUSTICE – A KEY SUB-COMPONENT

The Social (Criminal) Justice sub-component—Equality Under the Law—in 2022 is calculated at 57%, indicating Black community treatment in the criminal justice system is significantly biased against the Black community.

Factors used in constructing the Equality Under the Law sub-component are the Racial Profiling Search Rates, the Racial Profiling Traffic Stop Rates, Incarceration Rates, and Average Prison Sentencing. These factors are all significantly lower (in proportion to population) for the White community compared to the Black community.

ECONOMICS – SOME KEY SUB-COMPONENTS

In 2022 the Median Household Income (MHI) for Blacks in Kansas City was $49,720 compared to the MHI for Whites of $78,182. By comparison, the Black MHI is only 64% of the White MHI.

In 2022 the Median Household Net Worth (MHNW) for the Black community was $24,100 compared to the MHNW for the White community of $188,200. This is a MHNW gap of $164,100. By further comparison, the White community MHNW in 2022 is 7.8 times the MHNW of the Black community.

In 2022 the Poverty Rate (PR) for Blacks in Kansas City was 16.96% compared to a PR of 8.54% for Whites. The PR for Blacks is nearly two times the PR for Whites.

EDUCATION – SOME KEY SUB-COMPONENTS

The percentage of the Black community in 2022 who are college graduates (bachelor's degree or higher) was 25% compared to a percentage of 42% in the White community.

The 2022 Black community High School Graduation Rate was 79% of the 2022 White community High School Graduation Rate.

The Black community Teacher Quality Index (comparison of teacher's educational credentials in schools with majority Black enrollments) in 2022 was 89% of the level of White community Teacher Quality.

HOUSING – A KEY SUB-COMPONENT

The Home Ownership Rate (HOR) for Blacks in Kansas City in 2022 was 40% compared to a 75% HOR in Kansas City for Whites. By comparison, the Black Home Ownership rate in Kansas City in 2022 was approximately one-half of the HOR for Whites.

This is not a new disparity, and while the Black HOR had a net increase of 2% between 2018 and 2022, the White HOR had a net increase of 20% in the same period, widening the disparity.

HEALTH – SOME KEY SUB-COMPONENTS

Figure 1 gives an historical view of Black community well-being in Health relative to White community well-being in Health. The 2022 value of 78% indicates that Black community well-being in Health was only 78% that of White community well-being in Health. We also see that there has been a drop in Black community well-being in health from a value of 83% in 2008 (the year of the Great Recession), and there has yet to be a recovery back to that level.

Sub-components of the Health Index that contribute the most to Black/White disparity in Health are Age-Adjusted Death Rate, Life Expectancy at Birth, Percentage of Adults Who Are Overweight or Obese, and Fetal Deaths.

The 2022 Age-Adjusted Death Rate for the Black community was 16% higher than for the White community. Black community Life Expectancy at Birth in 2022 was only 75% of the

FIGURE 1: *Black Community Health Compared to White Community Health (2006–2022)*
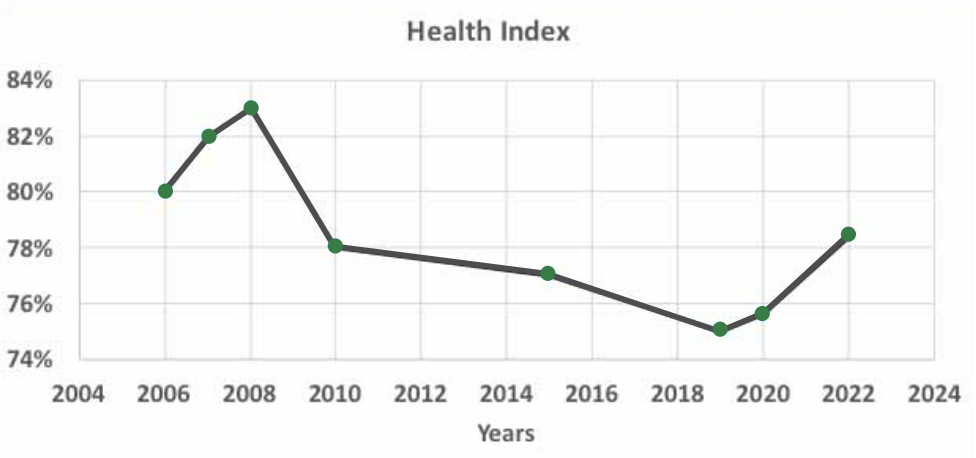
same measure for the White community. The Percentage of Adults Who Are Overweight or Obese in the Black community in 2022 was 23% higher than the same measure for the White community. Black community Fetal Deaths in 2022 were 82% higher than the same measure for the White community.

A "BRIGHT SPOT"

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – SOME KEY SUB-COMPONENTS
The one "bright spot" in the SOBKC report is in Black Civic Engagement, particularly in the sub-components of Community Participation (CP) and Collective Bargaining (CB). The Black community outperforms the White community in Community Participation by 16% and in Collective Bargaining by 15%.

I describe this as a "bright spot" because by outperforming the Kansas City White community in these sub-components, there is an indication of the Kansas City Black community's resilience in nearly two centuries of struggle pushing back against the negative forces that have caused the above-described disparities in Social (Criminal) Justice, Economics, Education, Health, and Housing. It is easy to conclude that without this level of Civic Engagement, the disparities would be greater.

COLLECTIVE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY – MOVING FORWARD
This "bright spot" is an embodiment of the Black community's understanding of the need for Ujima and Harambee, for "collective work and responsibility" and "pulling together," an understanding of the need for the Black community to organize and mobilize for social justice. It also creates a basis for hope for the future in what I propose must be done in preparation for reparations.

THE ECONOMICS OF PREPARATIONS FOR REPARATIONS

THE CURRENT BLACK COMMUNITY ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

One of the economic issues for reparations planning, and one not being much discussed, is whether the Black community will be prepared to maintain the new wealth created by reparations payments. I'm not talking here about the ability of the government to pay; that is to be discussed later. I'm talking about the ability of the economic structure of the Black community before and after reparations payments are made to maintain the increase in Black community wealth from reparations payments.

Also, to be clear, I'm not talking about any pre-conditions for reparations. Reparatory justice and reparations payments as a part of reparatory justice are established on the moral principle that "unjust enrichment," to use a term coined by Richard America in his 1992 book *The Wealth of Races: The Present Value of Benefits from Past Injustices*, must be fully returned unconditionally, with interest.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY AS A LEAKY BUCKET

The economics of preparations for reparations requires that we plan and implement, or at least plan and be ready to implement, an economic structure in the Black community that corrects the "leaky bucket" effect. The concept of the leaky bucket effect is an economic problem that was introduced in 2009 to the Kansas City Black community during the WEdevelopment™ process and discussed in a report to Kansas City government. From that report:

> For our purposes, a bucket is a representation of an economy. A full bucket represents a healthy local economy. A bucket that cannot be filled no matter how much is poured into it represents a severely unhealthy local economy. Water represents money or all of the financial resources that enter a community i.e. payroll checks, government transfer payments, pension and other retirement payments etc. [With a leaky bucket the] water escapes the bucket via holes in the bucket. The holes represent ways the community's money leaves its community including taxes, consumer purchases of products, goods and services, food purchases, energy, supplies for local businesses, etc. The analysis is very simple: the more holes in the bucket, the more money escapes the community and the worse off the local economy is. **Therefore, the goal is to plug the leaks.**

HOW WEALTH ACCUMULATES

You can think of the leaky bucket in stock/flow terms. Buckets can hold a stock of water, and if the bucket has no holes, the stock of water in the bucket will increase as water flows into the bucket. When the bucket is full, you get a bigger bucket and keep filling. However, if water flows out of the bucket because the bucket has holes, then the water—the stock of water—in the bucket may still rise, but not as much as it should. In fact, if more water flows out of the bucket than flows into the bucket, then the level of water will fall. The accumulation

of wealth is as simple as that. Reparations payments are flows of money into the community, and money that doesn't continue to circulate within the community are flows out of the community.

The Kansas City Black community, like Black communities everywhere in the US, is a leaky bucket. When a community is a leaky bucket, income that should stay in the community and grow wealth instead leaks out of the community. Not only does this decrease the wealth inside the Black community—since money doesn't disappear when it leaks out, leaking wealth increases wealth outside of the community—the Black/White wealth gap grows. As the Kansas City Black community is currently structured, wealth created by reparations payments to the Black community will not stay in the Black community. **The solution is to plug the leaks.**

CAN THE BLACK/WHITE WEALTH GAP CLOSE WITH THE CURRENT BLACK COMMUNITY ECONOMIC STRUCTURE? IS REPARATIONS ENOUGH?

There are not unlimited types of flows of income that are available to accumulate as a stock of wealth. In fact, there are generally only four. I've written about this in an essay titled "What We Must Do Before Reparations" (Tauheed, 2022)

> The framework that mainstream economics proposes for closing the Black/White wealth gap is based on its (insufficient) understanding of the process by which wealth is created in the first place. The mainstream framework ignores the accumulation of wealth from theft and fraud [enslavement and Jim Crow]…and bases its theories of wealth creation on how it defines income. In that framework the flow of income is disaggregated into four components 1) wages (including salary income), 2) rent (with rent including income from property ownership in general, including intellectual property), 3) interest (income from allowing others to use your money), and 4) profit (or loss) from entrepreneurial activity. From a stock/flow analysis wealth creation for the mainstream is an accumulation of these disaggregated income inflows, minus spending outflows, into the stock of wealth. Based on the above disaggregation scheme, there are four pathways for building wealth. I reduce them to three by combining 2) and 3).

> A positive accumulation of net savings from wage and salary income; 1) above, net savings being the difference between income and expenditures, which accumulates over time to build wealth. A positive accumulation out of profits (minus loss) from self-owned business activities; 4) above. Positive increases in the value of owned property and/or publicly available financial instruments 2) and 3) above; where the increased value, or income from sales or dividends flows into the stock of wealth.

Summarizing my reasoning in the above referenced essay, and against what many, including mainstream economists argue, I conclude that none of these ways of accumulating wealth will ever be enough for the Kansas City Black community to close the Black/White wealth gap—currently at $164,100 per household.

All of the proposed solutions (savings, business, and investment) suffer from "the law of the rate of catching up." Unless the Black community's rate of savings, or rate of business profit, or rate of earnings from investment, is greater than the same rates for the White community, no catching up can occur. They must be greater, not just the same. In fact, since the Black community economic structure is a leaky bucket, the gap will widen even faster.

President Johnson understood this when in 1965, in the commencement speech at Howard University, he introduced his program for Affirmative Action. In that speech he used the analogy of a track meet to argue that the Black community needed help to run faster to catch up after being deliberately held far behind.

However, reparations payments can close the Black/White wealth gap. My analysis concludes—it's the only thing that can.

Maintaining that wealth will require a new Black community economic structure.

A NEW BLACK COMMUNITY ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

MAINTAINING AND GROWING BLACK COMMUNITY WEALTH

In his third autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*, the great scholar/activist W.E.B Du Bois discussed his vision for what he called a "Cooperative Commonwealth."

> What Du Bois (1940/1986) did advocate was the establishment of a "cooperative commonwealth" (p. 712) of producer and consumer cooperatives in the Black community that included cooperative efforts in education through school and church, and economic cooperation in the arts, health care, trade unionism, banking, law, and insurance, among other aspects of economic and social life.

> Du Bois did not see his program as able to create an isolated Black economy capable of supplying all of the needs of the Black community. He envisaged interaction between the Black and White economies. Still, he considered that the developed part of the Black economy "could be so important and wield so much power that its influence upon the total economy of Negroes and the total industrial organization of the United States could be decisive for the great ends towards which the Negro moves." (p. 699)

The work to be done to restructure the Black community economic structure along the program proposed by Du Bois, but updated to modern times, can be guided by the work to be done to eliminate the disparities documented at the beginning of this essay. Black community Social (Criminal) Justice, Economics, Education, Health, and Housing are all interconnected. Repair in one area will have positive effects in repairing all areas. There is no need to ask where we should start—we must start everywhere. We must raise the level of Black Civic Engagement beyond what we have had to do just to survive. We must push forward.

A principle of the before-mentioned WEdevelopment™ process is 'Widespread Community Engagement." To modernize and implement Du Bois' "Cooperative Commonwealth" will require widespread engagement of members of the Black community working in their areas of expertise for the common (Black community) good; to build "common-wealth." The local reparations project underway in Kansas City provides an opportunity and framework to raise the level of Black Civic Engagement and to also connect with local reparations projects around the country.

LOCAL VERSUS NATIONAL REPARATIONS

A final thought. There is much current debate pitting local reparations efforts against national reparations efforts. Much of the debate concerns the inability of local reparations to generate reparations payments large enough to close the Black/White wealth gap. In a most recent and most influential work on reparations, *From Here to Equality*, by William Darity and Kirsten Mullen (2020), that gap was estimated to be nearly $11 trillion in 2018.

> The eligible black population constitutes approximately 13 percent of the American community. The nation's total household wealth reached $107 trillion by the second quarter of 2018. Thirteen percent of that figure amounts to $13.91 trillion. If, as an upper bound, black Americans are currently estimated to hold 3 percent of the nation's wealth, that amounts to $3.21 trillion. To eliminate the difference will require a reparations outlay of $10.7 trillion, or an average outlay of approximately $267,000 per person for 40 million eligible black descendants of American slavery. (Darity & Mullen, 2020)

Darity and Mullen's proposal is that the US government, by direction of Congress, pay that amount to eligible members of the Black community, over a 10-year period, or $1.1 trillion per year. They provide evidence that the Federal Reserve could make reparations payments in the $1.1 trillion range "without any difficulty" and point to comparable levels of Federal Reserve outlays during the Great Recession and since, as part of the Fed's "Quantitative Easing" program, as evidence of the viability of their proposal. Importantly, this can be done without the use of any tax dollars and without increasing the federal debt.

Local reparations programs, not having a Federal Reserve to create money, will not be able to make payments of $267,000 for every eligible Black descendent of American Slavery within local jurisdictions. Still, there is much local reparations can do, even with limited funds, to begin the process of restructuring not only local Black economic structure, but local Black social structure as well. Local resources include the financial but are not limited to the financial; they include natural, cultural, political, social, infrastructural, and educational resources as well. These local resources have been available to and utilized by the Kansas City White community and unavailable to the Kansas City Black community since the city's incorporation in 1853. That must change if reparatory justice is to occur.

There is therefore no need to view local and national reparations efforts as at cross purposes. They can be complementary if we utilize local reparations programs to begin the building of that "cooperative commonwealth" envisioned by Du Bois. In fact, doing so will only increase the ability of local Black communities to push forward the national reparations agenda.

UJIMA, HARAMBEE

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HOW THE PROPERTY TAX SYSTEM HARMS BLACK HOMEOWNERS AND WIDENS THE RACIAL WEALTH GAP

JORDAN M. FIELDS
ANDRE M. PERRY, PH.D.
MANANN DONOGHOE

- **The U.S. tax system protects accumulated wealth, which creates a barrier to homeownership for lower-income, low-wealth households.**

- **Black homeowners' property tax burden is 10% to 13% higher than for white homeowners, yet their homes are undervalued by an average of 21% to 23%.**

- **Policies such as a wealth-based refundable tax credit, a living allowance deductible, and greater transparency and access to IRS tax data stratified by race could help close the racial wealth gap.**

This June, the Biden-Harris administration acknowledged the historic role that biased home valuations have played in limiting Black Americans' wealth-building opportunities, releasing a fact sheet[1] detailing how the administration plans to address this systemic racial bias. The plan reflects a call for action to confront a broader set of issues within the housing market[2] that intersect to uniquely affect

Black communities. Black homeowners face inequities in our tax code and housing industry, unfair tax burdens, and a biased appraisal system—all of which undermine the potential of homeownership as a wealth-building tool for Black homebuyers. But structural reforms are possible, and they could help to build systems that grow—rather than extract—Black wealth.

In this piece, we explore the often overlooked and compounding racially discriminatory practices in the housing market and property taxation system,[3] and how they limit wealth-building opportunities for Black homeowners. We also explore how the current housing market allows white homebuyers' preferences to dictate the racial makeup of residential communities and the extent to which Black homebuyers can gain equity from their home. These issues underscore that the Biden-Harris administration must remain committed to addressing the layered practices of discrimination and promote policies that empower Black homeowners to build generational wealth.

HOUSING AND TAX POLICY PENALIZE BLACK HOMEOWNERS AND WIDEN THE RACIAL WEALTH GAP

Twentieth-century discriminatory housing policies and practices are indisputably responsible for segregating America's residential communities and contributing to existing racial wealth disparities. Tax law and practice aggravate these effects and place a disproportionately heavy financial and oftentimes emotional burden on the

average Black homeowner. So, while public conversations about how to close the racial wealth gap often focus on the importance of homeownership, they overlook the impact of the property tax system—particularly, property valuation mechanisms—on the Black homeownership experience.

Property assessments and appraisals are two different estimations of a home's value, conducted at two different times. Their contribution to the improper valuation of Black-owned homes—through both over-assessment and under-valuation—have caused Black homeowners to lose money by way of monthly property tax payments and at the time of sale. This burden is a reflection of America's disinvestment in, devaluation of, and disrespect for predominantly Black neighborhoods. It also reveals a penalty that housing institutions and legal frameworks place on Black homeowners—a penalty that will only grow more harmful if we continue to try to address it with ahistorical, race-neutral solutions.

Today, median white household wealth sits at $187,300, compared to just $14,100 for Black households. And while 72.7% of white Americans are homeowners, only 44% of Black Americans are.[4] These extreme racial disparities in wealth and homeownership signify a chasm in access to homeownership and the opportunities and privileges it affords. As outlined in a 2017 report,[5] home equity is the largest segment in most U.S. families' wealth portfolio. However, Black and Latino or Hispanic families are less likely to own

their homes and accrue less wealth through homeownership than white families. According to the Census Bureau's 2019 Survey of Income and Program Participation,[6] the median wealth for renters was $4,084, compared to $125,500 for homeowners (excluding home equity).

Although homeownership is thought to exemplify the American dream, our tax laws are designed such that homeowners in Black-majority communities don't always see that dream realized as home equity. Empowering Black people and their communities requires housing and tax reforms that affirm their historically unrecognized value.

THE US TAX SYSTEM PROTECTS ACCUMULATED WEALTH, CREATING A BARRIER TO HOMEOWNERSHIP FOR LOWER-INCOME, LOW-WEALTH HOUSEHOLDS

For decades, researchers have shown that qualifying for homeownership is a sizeable financial challenge due to the large upfront costs. Many prospective buyers need financial assistance or must save for years to make a down payment, whereas others can rely on intergenerational wealth transfers to fund their purchase of a home.

White college-educated households are more likely to receive a financial gift of over $10,000 from family members than Black college-educated households: 32% versus 9%, respectively. Moreover, the average gift to white households is significantly larger than the average gift to Black households: $235,353 versus $65,755, respectively.[7]

In white families, wealth transfers are more likely to flow from parent to child or grandparent to grandchild; yet in Black families, wealth transfers are more likely to flow in the opposite direction.[8]

Now, consider that the U.S. tax code provides additional relief to prospective buyers whose families have excess capital to gift them. The code enables a grantor to gift up to $17,000 without having to report the transfer on the IRS gift tax return form, and the grantee does not have to pay taxes on it[9] or report it (unless it comes from a foreign source).

Such financial gifts are powerful in that they provide white families with a head start to wealth-building through homeownership. They also allow wealth to accumulate across generations in ways that it does not for Black families due to family structure and lack of access to excess capital.

PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENTS AND VALUATIONS ARE BIASED AGAINST BLACK HOMEOWNERS

The local property tax applied to the over-assessed value of Black-owned homes is 10% to 13% higher than for white-owned homes.

The average Black homeowner faces a disproportionally higher property tax burden than the average white homeowner. In the U.S., property taxes are supposed to be based on the value of the home; however, researchers at Indiana University concluded[10] that nationwide, tax assessors often over-assess Black-owned homes relative to their market value. Consequently, the local property tax applied to the over-assessed value of Black-owned homes is 10% to 13% higher than for white-owned homes.

Conversely, property assessments for white-owned homes are often closer to the home's market value. Ultimately, Black homeowners end up paying a higher property tax bill than they should because the value of their home has been over-estimated compared to what it will sell for. White homeowners, on the other hand, pay a more accurate property tax bill because their home value estimations are often closer to the actual sales price.

Similarly, Brookings research has shown that real estate appraisers often undervalue Black-owned homes by 21% to 23%,[11] which lowers the price a home is likely to be sold for. The over assessment of Black-owned homes is the fault of tax assessors (81.3% of whom are white),[12] whereas the undervaluation of Black-owned homes is the fault of licensed professional appraisers (99% of whom are white).[13] These discrepancies demonstrate deep flaws in the two mechanisms the housing industry uses to determine "value" and present a real barrier to wealth-building for Black homeowners.

Brookings research has shown that real estate appraisers often undervalue Black-owned homes by 21% to 23%, which lowers the price a home is likely to be sold for.

Data suggests that Black homeowners' ability to gain wealth through homeownership is also largely dependent upon the housing preferences of white Americans. Whereas Black people prefer to live in neighborhoods where the majority of the population is made up of racial and ethnic minorities, white people prefer to live in communities with very low Black populations.[14] Further, homes in white neighborhoods are appraised at three times the value of homes in communities of color, and, over the last decade, homes in white neighborhoods appreciated $200,000 more on average than similar homes[15] in communities of color. Data also shows that homes lose approximately 16% of their value once the neighborhood's population of Black residents reaches 10%.[16]

Therefore, Black people have the highest likelihood of building wealth through homeownership when they purchase in predominantly white neighborhoods, where homes are more likely to appreciate, but where they are also severely outnumbered by white residents. The experience of Black homeowners in choosing where to live is heavily influenced by white preferences, which limits potential opportunities for Black Americans to build wealth.

IDENTIFYING EQUITABLE SOLUTIONS FOR BLACK WEALTH-BUILDING THROUGH HOMEOWNERSHIP

The many racial biases within the housing market are often addressed as individual challenges rather than compounding factors that work together to undermine Black wealth. Despite numerous legislative efforts to combat racial discrimination in housing, racially biased practices are still prevalent and utilized by private actors, lenders, property tax assessors, and property appraisers.

The disproportionately heavy tax burden alongside racialized home appreciation and wealth transfer disparities reveal that our federal, state, and local tax policies and housing industry penalize Black neighborhoods and their residents. At its core, this penalty is rooted in systemic racism and negative perceptions of Blackness enforced by our legal system. In fact, the American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers, in their historic official texts, advocated for appraisal practices that viewed an influx of racial and ethnic diversity as lessening the desirability of a neighborhood and contributing to the lowering of home values.[17]

Access to wealth-building homeownership should exist in every neighborhood, and a Black homeowner's ability to build wealth should not be based on the subjective perceptions of white professionals or the preferences of white homebuyers. Furthermore, using homeownership to close the racial wealth gap—which was estimated to sit at $10.14 trillion[18]—requires that the burden to eliminate wealth inequality in America no longer be placed on Black homeowners as individuals, but the factors that created it in the first place. After all, Black people created America's wealth, not its wealth gap.

FIGURE 1: *Racialized gaps and persistent bias undermine homeownership as an avenue to wealth building for Black families*

Median Household Wealth

Homeownership Rate
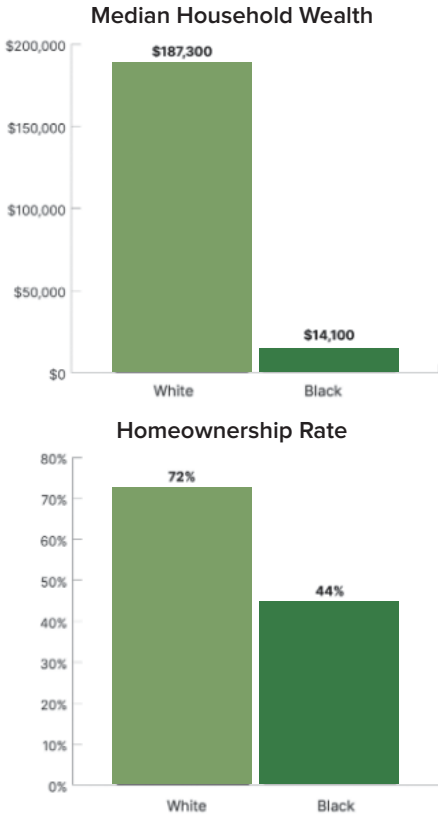
Homeownership data from the National Association of Realtors. Data on housing devaluation and household wealth from The Brookings Institution analysis.

Today, Black Americans are trying to play "catch up" to others that have been afforded the necessary conditions to build wealth for generations. While many Black homeowners have achieved upward social mobility, the tax code and housing industry do not empower them like it does white homeowners. Attempting to close the racial wealth gap by encouraging Black Americans to pursue homeownership—assuming that it will benefit them in the same way it has white Americans—is a hollow hope because of the inequities within the broader housing market. Moreover, it places an undue burden on prospective Black homebuyers to do alone what white people have done with significant government assistance[19] that explicitly excluded Black Americans. Accordingly, reforms must be made to finally acknowledge and cement the value that has always existed in Black communities.

To combat the racial wealth gap, Dorothy Brown, Georgetown Law Professor and author of *The Whiteness of Wealth*, proposed a wealth-based refundable tax credit[20] for taxpayers whose wealth falls below the median of approximately $100,000. Brown has acknowledged that although the tax credit is not targeted directly at Black taxpayers, a disproportionate share of taxpayers that fall below median wealth are Black (83%). Thus, an initiative of this sort is likely to withstand legal challenges because it is directed toward a socioeconomic class rather than a racial group.

The U.S. tax code is somewhat "progressive," although Brookings research[21] has shown that it has become less so over the last five decades. Irrespective of income level, the tax code is structured to reward existing wealth, predominantly held by white households.[22] Creating a wealth tax credit might be a sizable legislative challenge, but one worth fighting for given its potential impact on Black communities and its ability to economically empower those with the lowest levels of wealth.

In addition to proposing a wealth-based refundable tax credit, Brown has also advocated for introducing a "living allowance" deduction.[23] In this, taxpayers would receive a deduction or fixed amount of money that could be subtracted from their taxable income (reducing the amount of taxes owed) based on their cost of living. If they earned more money than the living allowance, they would pay taxes on the excess amount at a progressive rate; if they earned less, they would receive a check from the government. This is different from the current system in that it would tax all income and remove all deductions and exclusions in the tax code, which primarily benefit wealthy white taxpayers.[24]

Lastly, greater transparency would also help address the root causes of the wealth gap. Brown has called for the public release of IRS tax data by race to more easily identify discriminatory tax policies. All of these proposed reforms seek to level the playing field for Black taxpayers and mitigate the advantage the tax code currently provides to wealthy white taxpayers.

These changes to the tax code should be supported by complementary policy. One suggestion is the baby bonds program[25] proposed by economist Darrick Hamilton and William Darity, Jr. Through this program, the government would create and manage investment accounts for infants, providing them with grants based on their family's wealth. The account would grow at a guaranteed annual rate, and upon reaching adulthood, the child could use the money for higher education, a startup, or a down payment on a home. This program has the potential to support low-wealth families in the same way financial gifts empower high-wealth families, again with a high likelihood of disproportionately benefiting Back families.

WE NEED STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN TAXATION AND HOUSING TO MAKE WEALTH-BUILDING THROUGH HOMEOWNERSHIP A REALITY FOR MORE BLACK HOMEBUYERS

Ultimately, removing the influence of white subjectivity on the mechanisms that determine the value of Black communities, people, and assets is imperative to building Black wealth. It is unreasonable and unjust to expect Black Americans alone to close the racial wealth gap through homeownership, especially if solutions to closing the gap continue to rely on the subjective beliefs of white Americans and a housing industry that is still rife with racial bias.

The current systems we use to measure the value of Black homes invite racial biases that influence home value estimations and, ultimately, the market value of Black-owned property. Changing property tax assessment procedures by regulating government-appointed assessors and standardizing assessment procedures so that they are based on the characteristics and quality of a home as opposed to its proximity to Black people would be an effective way to remove biases that lead to the over-assessment of Black homes and the subsequent higher taxation of Black homeowners.

We must confront the inequities in our tax code and housing industry, remove the disparate tax burden from Black homeowners, and make wealth-building through homeownership a reality for more prospective Black homebuyers. The racial wealth gap is not an accident—it is a policy failure rooted in white supremacy and enshrined in biased policy mechanisms that punish low-income and Black communities. Until we acknowledge this truth, the dream of opportunity, economic success, and well-being for many Black Americans will remain deferred.

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THE BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION IS FINISHING THE JOB ON HOUSING

SECRETARY MARCIA L. FUDGE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

For generations, the federal government sanctioned housing policies that allowed racial inequity to fester like an open wound and infect our systems.

Black people make up 13% of the U.S. population but 40% of those experiencing homelessness despite all the progress we have made. Black seniors and families with children are among the fastest-growing groups without access to a safe and stable home.

Ugly discrimination practices in housing persist, blocking hardworking families from purchasing homes because of the color of their skin and denying persons with disabilities reasonable accommodations or forcing them to pay extra fees to rent housing.

The work to undo systemic injustices like redlining, unfair housing, and appraisal bias did not begin with the election of President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris. Still, leaders in this historic Administration are committed to finishing the job and building an economy that works for all people.

As the 18th Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, HUD, I have taken on these challenges.

From day one, our HUD team has worked to ensure that those who have been left behind

and marginalized have access to opportunity, the flexibility to build wealth for themselves and the next generation, and the ability to live in housing and neighborhoods that are affordable, safe, inclusive, and thriving.

We are combating homelessness with the urgency it requires, including unsheltered and rural homelessness, so that people in our country will no longer be forced to seek shelter on the side of the road or under a park bench. We are expanding access to housing vouchers, working with state and local leaders to combat homelessness, and providing access to services and housing so people can get housing *and* get the help they need.

We believe that everyone should be able to aspire to homeownership if they want it.

But we recognize that credit scores have long been barriers to aspiring homeowners, especially people of color. So to create more opportunities for hardworking people, the Federal Housing Administration now allows positive rental history to be used to determine someone's creditworthiness.

Similarly, student loan debt can hinder Black and Brown borrowers' chances for mortgage approval. It is estimated that more than 45 percent of first-time homebuyers who obtain a federally insured mortgage have student loan debt. In addition, studies have shown that regardless of their income after college, people of color carry more student loan debt than their White counterparts. So, in the summer of 2021, FHA adjusted its policy to ensure that the debt associated with continuing one's education would not be

weighed more heavily than any other type of debt.

During the pandemic, homeownership became a reality for more Black, Asian, and Latino people than ever before. Now, with new challenges like higher interest rates and challenges to student debt relief, our message is clear: Let us help you prepare so that you will be ready when the opportunity comes. We have the tools to help.

I want everyone in this country, no matter their station in life, to have the freedom to create the lives of their dreams.

That is why in 2022, HUD issued an Economic Justice agenda that expands access to asset and credit-building services for people of low means. Families and individuals with low incomes deserve a fair chance to build wealth and buy a home of their own if that is their choice. Under our agenda, we are creating pathways for people to save money, build wealth, and set a solid foundation for their future and the next generation.

We know that homeownership is the way many people in this country build savings and wealth. Owning a home can provide a clear and direct path to the American dream.

Yet, that dream has been deferred for Black and Brown people, as we have consistently had our homes undervalued within our biased appraisal system. We have been told that where we live, where we raise our children, celebrate birthdays, and host holidays, is worth less for no other reason than our race.

Through the President's PAVE Task Force, chaired by Ambassador Susan Rice and me, we put forward the most wide-ranging set of reforms ever to advance racial equity in the home appraisal process.

We are focused on empowering consumers, making the appraisal industry more accountable, cultivating a well-trained appraiser workforce that looks like the communities it serves, and ensuring technology does not perpetuate bias.

Additionally, through the Federal Housing Administration, HUD is creating a process that people seeking FHA financing can use to request a review of their appraisal if they believe the results may have been skewed by racial bias.

This will mean that a homeowner who is in the process of refinancing their home with an FHA product can take steps to ensure that their appraisal is fair.

Our goal is to ensure Americans can get help, get informed, and get involved, so we have made $28 million available to fund testing, education, and outreach efforts to communities on appraisal bias. We have also established a uniform approach to investigating complaints of bias against appraisers, appraisal companies, and lenders.

At HUD, our work to undo bias in the appraisal system is a part of our longstanding efforts to root out discrimination and effect change. Now is the time to fulfill the full promise of the 1968 Fair Housing Act. The

Act explicitly prohibits discrimination in housing. At the start of 2023, we issued a notice of proposed rulemaking on Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing.

The proposed rule would charge local governments and grantees to set ambitious goals to confront and reject housing discrimination in all forms and recognize and remedy enduring inequality.

Most importantly, it would give the community a seat at the table in our ongoing work to guarantee fair housing while adding accountability mechanisms to ensure that grantees comply with their duty to affirmatively further fair housing.

Every day at HUD, we pursue equity-focused housing and community-building policies and programs to level the playing field for all, regardless of their life experience.

Over the past two years, we have laid out our vision for economic and climate justice, introduced a new generation to the possibility of homeownership, and remained steadfast in our work to combat bias and discrimination in housing.

We are committed to building on that progress in the months and years ahead. To addressing the challenges we are sure to face with resolve, and, as always, never losing sight of our why: bringing the people of this great country home.

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EQUITY IS THE KEY TO UNLOCKING AMERICA'S ECONOMIC POTENTIAL

DONALD R. CRAVINS, JR., J.D.

Equity is a word that raises the blood pressure of most people who have their ear to the political discourse ground. "Equity" is mislabeled by many as a boogeyman for any and all societal woes, which distracts from its power to benefit *all* Americans. Equity should not be a source of tension but rather a beacon of hope, serving as a guiding principle to elevate our Nation to its true potential.

As the Nation's first Under Secretary of Commerce for Minority Business Development, I am often asked, "What does equity mean to you?"

I proudly serve in the military as an officer in the National Guard. At the beginning of my service, I, like every service member, completed basic training. Recruits in my unit came from all walks of life, from big cities to farm towns, from cul-de-sacs to Section 8 housing. Some have more education than others, some are older than others, some are stronger, some are faster. But at basic training, everyone gets the same uniform and a pair of boots, and most importantly, we each get a pair of boots that fits.

It is important for recruits to understand that no one will run for you. No one will shoot for you. No one will crawl through the mud for

you. But if you have the will, the military will meet you where you are and give you the tools to be successful. That is equity.

An equitable economy is one that is capable of providing support to each individual based on their needs and the challenges they face. It is an economy that accounts for the fact that some businesses, families, and communities have more barriers in their paths than others. In order for every entrepreneur to have a real shot at success and for our economy to be operating at its strongest, we need to break down the barriers.

In order to understand why systemic barriers in business exist, we need to understand our Nation's history. Most minority business owners have, on average, lower net worth, lower credit, and fewer assets than non-minority business owners. That is because for decades, and even centuries, many Americans have not had the same opportunities to build their net worth or grow their assets. The consequences of this generational inequity are being felt today.

Some will say, "Well, slavery was abolished 160 years ago. Jim Crow was abolished 60 years ago. Institutional discrimination is a thing of the past." To them I say, "While we have made strides, our current society does not exist in a vacuum. A boat does not stop once you turn off its engine. It continues gliding along the surface."

The effects of Jim Crow ripple into the present. The effects of slavery and redlining, the displacement of Native Americans, the internment of Asian Americans, and wage discrimination against Hispanic Americans and many others are still felt today.

These patterns of inequity have created a wealth gap in home equity, financial assets, income, and more. For example, Black households hold 2.9% of overall wealth in American despite being about 16% of the population.[1] Hispanic households hold 2.8% of wealth despite being about 11% of the population. This limits opportunity, not just for businesses among these and other underserved communities, but for all Americans.

There is no one solution to closing the wealth gap, but undoubtedly one of the greatest tools in our arsenal is entrepreneurship.

As the opportunity gap between minority and non-minority business enterprises narrows, we create new businesses, new jobs, and more revenue. That in turn will spark innovation, uplift communities, and better prepare us as a Nation to both take on unexpected downturns and make the most of welcome opportunities. If our Nation closed the opportunity gap between minority and non-minority businesses, we would add an estimated two and a half million businesses, twenty million jobs, and $6 trillion in gross revenue.[2] Simply put, when minority and underserved businesses succeed, we all succeed.

The question is, how do we utilize entrepreneurship as effectively as possible? We do so by expanding access to the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and in particular, expanding access to capital, to contracts, to networks, and to domestic and global markets. That is the mission of the Minority Business Development Agency.[3]

MBDA is the only federal agency dedicated solely to the growth and global competitiveness of minority business enterprises. It is our mission to create an equitable business ecosystem by expanding access and opportunities for minority and other underserved businesses and entrepreneurs. We accomplish our mission in two ways. First, we provide technical assistance and business support services to individual businesses. Second, we work to break down barriers in order to improve the system in which these businesses operate.

The Minority Business Development Agency was created at the tail end of the Civil Rights movement. At the time, Civil Rights leaders like National Urban League President Whitney M. Young, Jr., were speaking about how economic rights are just as important as civil and social rights. Their message was simple: the right to build a business is as inherently American as the right to vote.

As a result, in 1969, President Nixon signed Executive Order 11458,[4] creating the Office of Minority Business Enterprise, which later became the Minority Business Development Agency. But because MBDA was created by Executive Order, rather than law, it stood as a temporary Agency.

In 2021, as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Congress passed, and President Biden signed into law, the Minority Business Development Act,[5] establishing MBDA as a permanent federal agency. Through the President's pen, minority entrepreneurs finally seized a permanent seat at the table in the Federal government.

Urban League of **Greater Kansas City**

The backbone of MBDA is our National Network of Business Centers and Programs,[6] which provide technical assistance and business support services to help minority businesses access capital, access contracts, access networks, and access domestic and global markets. Since my swearing-in, we have grown our network significantly from 73 centers and programs to 131 centers and programs, including seven MSI programs and two innovative access-to-capital programs. That is in large part thanks to the launch of our historic new initiative, the Capital Readiness Program.[7] Through this initiative, we are launching forty-three incubator and accelerator programs designed to help minority and other underserved entrepreneurs launch and grow their businesses. This program's primary purpose is to prepare entrepreneurs to secure capital from the U.S. Department of Treasury's $10 billion State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI),[8] which is designed to drive new lending and investment capital to small business owners in towns across America. The Capital Readiness Program is the largest-ever federal investment in small business incubators and accelerators of its kind.

In developing the Capital Readiness Program, it was critical to find organizations that understand the needs and challenges facing underserved entrepreneurs across different regions and different communities. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to business support. A challenge facing a woman-owned business in downtown Kansas City may not be the same challenge facing an entrepreneur in rural Georgia, or a Hispanic-owned business in Arizona. To operate effectively as public servants, we must understand and embrace those differences. That is what it means to invest with equity.

MBDA's elevated status as a leader in government is indicative of President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Secretary Gina Raimondo's commitment to serving with intention.[9] Across the Administration, Agencies are investing with intention, ensuring equity is used as a tool for success.

If successful, these investments can help not only individual businesses, but can also improve the system in which those businesses operate, giving the next generation of entrepreneurs a smoother journey to success.

But just because the path has fewer obstacles does not mean the journey is easy. Not every recruit makes it through basic training. Not every entrepreneur is guaranteed success. But in this country, every American should be guaranteed the opportunity to build a successful business. That is equity.

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GENERATIONAL WEALTH CREATION: THE ELDERS' ROLE IN EMPOWERING OUR FAMILIES

AJAMU K. WEBSTER, P.E.

After battling a long illness, my mother passed away in September of 2010. It was an emotionally painful time for my siblings and me.

Mom was a retired postal worker who was good with her money. She was also a conservative spender. When in need, family members would come to her for loans. My Uncle Gregory (her younger brother) said at her funeral, "My big sister had a big heart. She would give you or loan you money if you needed it. But you couldn't come to her with no weak stuff."

I had been traveling monthly from Kansas City to Los Angeles for over a year to check on her well-being while she was in a nursing home recovering from a stroke. Mom had

appointed me as the executor of her estate and had given me access to her Will. At the time of her death, she owned a 2-bedroom house (free and clear), a life insurance policy with a small death benefit, money in a savings account, and a few U.S. savings bonds that listed my sister's daughter, who was born on Mom's birthday, as the beneficiary. After paying final expenses, Mom's cash assets minus the savings bonds totaled just over $53,000. From that amount, we spent $11,000 on emergency electrical repairs to her home, leaving a balance of $42,000. Mom's Will directed her assets to be divided equally among her three children. That amounted to $14,000 each for three, fifty-something-year-old siblings, which we all could have spent just paying bills.

However, my sister had an interesting idea. She said, "Instead of splitting the money three ways amongst us (siblings), why don't we set up educational funds for each of mom's great-grandchildren?" Made sense. Each of us had at least one grandchild. In total, mom had seven great-grandchildren. So, we agreed and set up 529 College

"There is a difference between being in a position of power and being in a position of responsibility.

Elders in traditional communities do not take power; they take responsibility and empower others."

—Sobonfu Somé

Savings Plans for each of mom's great-grandchildren. We deposited $6,000 into each account, committed to contribute $25 per month to the account of the eldest child, and went on with our lives.

Eight years later, the eldest of Mom's great-grandchildren (my granddaughter Isis) graduated from high school. She was on her way to the University of Missouri in Columbia. On the way home from the graduation ceremony, my daughter Hashina called her mother (Kinda), very worried because Isis needed $8,000 to pay for her freshman year and she (Hashina) didn't have money to help her. Kinda reminded Hashina of the 529 College Savings Plan set up eight years earlier, and that Isis' account had grown to over $28,000 by the time of her graduation. Hearing this, Hashina cried.

I'm proud to report that Isis graduated from MU debt-free. And now, Mom has three more great-grandchildren currently enrolled in college, all supported by 529 Plans that were created from her bequest. This is Gloria Jackson Webster Pegues' legacy and my first experience with generational wealth.

Telling this story is important to me because of the lessons learned and the impact they had on our family's future. Please allow me to share some of those lessons with you.

First Lesson: Although my wife Kinda and I are college graduates who were professionally employed after receiving our degrees and successfully ran a business, we didn't set aside money to help pay college tuition for any of our three children. Each of them finished college with student loan debt.

Second Lesson: We received advice from a financial planner to create college funds for our children when our second child, Nia, was born. We had every intention of doing so, but life kept getting in the way, so the funds were never created.

Third Lesson: Because we didn't plan financially or teach our children how to plan, they were no better prepared to pay for their children's college tuition than we had been.

Fourth Lesson: We did plan financially for our grandchildren, and a small amount of investment in the past is helping them through college today. A relatively small amount of money invested today can become a large amount of money in the future. Therefore, it's much cheaper to save/invest today for future expenses than it will be to pay out of pocket when the bill is due.

Fifth Lesson: Family members working as a team (my siblings and me) can produce better financial outcomes than working alone.

This article is specifically tailored to our Elders. As Elders, we have the perspective

"What an elder can see while sitting down, a child can never see, even if he climbs up a tree!"
– African Proverb

of time and experience that young people lack. We elders say, "If I knew back then what I know now, I would have made different decisions." I suppose that is why I made a different decision about saving for college at age 54 than I made at 24, even though I had the same information. Because of our lived experiences and leadership positions in our families, I'm convinced that Elders must take the lead in generational wealth creation.

WHAT IS GENERATIONAL WEALTH?

What do you envision when you think of generational wealth? Do you see the Rockefeller, Ford, or Carnegie families? Do you imagine entrepreneurs who amassed great fortunes during their lifetimes and who transferred their fortunes to their descendents? Do you associate wealth with multi-million-dollar net worth? Many of us do, and because of this perspective, we believe that wealth and generational transfer are beyond our reach. But what if we had a different definition of wealth? **What if we defined generational wealth as any financial asset that would increase in value over time (a home, commercial property, insurance benefits, land, a business, stock certificates, bonds, intellectual property) and would provide future benefits to our descendants?** It doesn't have to be a fortune; it just has to be a blessing.

I know what you're thinking. *Ajamu, that's cool, but I'm not 25 years old anymore. I'm an Elder (in my 50s, 60s or 70s). I haven't generated much wealth for myself, and certainly not enough to change the financial trajectory of my descendants. There isn't much that I can do at this age.* I understand. Fortunately, I have something for you to consider.

A FAMILY FOUNDATION

The *2023 State of Black Kansas City* publication contains several articles that illustrate the liabilities of being Black in Kansas City. I won't add to that litany. However, I will ask that you focus on two under-utilized resources that we (African Americans) have at our disposal. They are:

1. Family – as a people we have a connection to our extended families and fictive kin that others experience only with their nuclear families. Typically, we will give to a family member in need before we pay on a bank loan or household bill. ("Exploring Ethnic Money Knowledge as an Aspect of Financial Literacy," Jaronda Jane Miller)

2. According to the Kellogg Foundation, "African Americans are the most charitable group of people in the US." Two-thirds of us donate to a charity every year. We have a culture of donating and tithing that has created faith-based institutions, mutual benefit associations, hospitals, and charities.

THE PHENOMENON OF GENERATIONAL POVERTY

I know that you are wondering how the above will help you create generational wealth. Before we explore the answer, let's look at the impact of another phenomenon, **generational poverty**. Yes, it's a thing. Generational poverty refers to families that are experiencing at least two consecutive generations of poverty. As a reminder, here are some effects of poverty from the report, "Long Shadow—Black-White Gap in Multigenerational Poverty":

- Education, occupation, income, and assets, socioeconomic status or SES—are major determinants of health.

- Children are especially vulnerable to the negative health effects of poverty.

- Birth to age 5 is critical for development; just a few years of poverty may negatively affect a child's life course.

- The poverty rate for African Americans is 19.5% (2020).

- Adults in poverty are three times more likely to be arrested than those who aren't, and people earning less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level are 15 times more likely to be charged with a felony—which, by definition, carries a longer sentence—than people above that threshold (Incarceration and Poverty in the US).

- One in five Black families are experiencing poverty for the third generation in a row, as compared to one in one hundred White families.

- The report's authors note that experiencing poverty for three generations **is almost uniquely a Black experience**.

For the survival of our families and people, we are compelled to combat the causes of generational poverty. Fortunately, the solution to generational poverty is generational wealth.

Well, what about the answer to the question raised above: "How will our underutilized resources create generational wealth?" Almost there, but before I answer, let's review the standard method for challenging poverty and poor financial habits—financial education.

Financial Education or Financial Literacy challenges the learner to take the following actions:

- Pay yourself first

- Create and stick to a household budget

- Live below your means

- Create an emergency fund equal to 3–6 months expenses

- Save for future big-ticket expenses like college education or home down payments

- Invest in IRAs, 401ks, and Roths for retirement and start early

- Invest in upgrading your skills and your financial literacy

- Protect your assets with insurance

These are very useful tips to learn, but acting on them is the real challenge.

In the 2013 meta data report titled, "Financial Literacy, Financial Education, and Downstream Financial Behavior," researchers reported the following:

• We find that interventions to improve financial literacy explain only 0.1% of the variance in financial behaviors studied, with weaker effects in low-income samples. Like other education, financial education decays over time; even large interventions with many hours of instruction have negligible effects on behavior 20 months or more from the time of intervention.

• Financial stewardship is more about mindset and attitudes than about money management strategies.

The shortcomings of traditional financial literacy programs, with their focus on education and individual effort, can be overcome with a vehicle that engages financial empowerment on a family scale where support, accountability, shared experience, and mentoring can be used to change poor financial mindsets and inappropriate behaviors. I call this entity the **Family Foundation (FF)**, a legal entity that contains your family's goals, values, rules

"Your children may leave, but they are never gone."
—Mentor, Ancestor Baba Charles Miller

of governance, health directives, Wills, and financial assets, that is housed inside a **Revocable Living Trust (RLT)**—more on RLT later. The Family Foundation is administered by rules of governance (created by the family) that designate how and for what purpose family assets will be deployed. It provides the opportunity for multiple generations to work together to achieve family goals and create generational wealth. One Revocable Living Trust can contain your assets, your adult children's assets, and even your parents' assets. Since African Americans lead the nation in philanthropic/community giving, our Family Foundation creates the opportunity for us to donate to our First Community—our families.

The chart on the next page explains how financial literacy and wealth creation can work much better on a family scale versus individual effort.

But in order for this strategy to work, you must organize your family.

Let's pause for a moment and reflect. Think about places where you work, play, worship, volunteer, pay bills, receive healthcare, or deposit money. What do these institutions have in common? They were all intentionally organized to deliver a desired outcome. They were all started with planning, regularly monitored for improvement, and have systems that are intentionally designed to convert their resources into valued assets. In fact, we attribute our satisfaction with such entities to their levels of organization and attention to details.

So, what do our families have in common with successful businesses and institutions?

GOAL	INDIVIUAL	FAMILY FOUNDATION
Creating and living on a household budget	Must hold yourself accountable to staying on track.	Each member of the of the Family Foundation works to hold each other accountable.
3–6-month emergency fund	May take years to save to that amount.	All adult members of the Family Foundation can deposit into one account to cover 6 months expenses of the household with the largest expense budget. Since chances are slim that all adults will lose their jobs at the same time, only one fund is needed.
Saving for retirement and starting early	Life gets in the way of young people starting early.	Family Elders can serve as motivators and mentors due to personal experience.
Saving for big ticket items like college or home down payment	The urgency of today's bills takes priority over investing for future benefits.	Elders can take the lead by starting and contributing to funds. Young parents can take over later.
Providing insurance to protect assets	Harder to get started while young.	Family Elders can serve as motivators and mentors due to personal experience.
Investing in skills upgrades and financial literacy	Can be challenging given work schedules.	Family Foundation can organize group family literacy sessions and can share members' experiences.
Investing in appreciating assets	While we are young with time on our side, we don't have money to invest.	Family assets are aggregated and invested for the benefit of the group. All members can benefit from time.

When it comes to having resources of labor, creativity, traditions, experiences, contacts, and goodwill, we have a great deal in common with successful entities. When it comes to the intentional organization of (family) resources to create valued assets that benefit our members and community, our families have NOTHING in common with successful institutions. It appears that we've adopted the belief that family members' success or failure is the outcome of individual efforts. This makes about as much sense as expecting to win a basketball game without any pre-game practice, without a game plan, with only one person on the court (against their 5), while having 10 disengaged players sitting on your bench. Can we afford not to organize our families for generational success, if we want to win as a people?

A MODEL FOR ORGANIZING OUR FAMILIES

Okay, Ajamu. You made your point. As an Elder, I can be a lot more intentional about organizing my family. How do I get started?

Good question. I recommend starting by giving thought to the following questions:

- How would I like my family to be described three generations from now? (In the areas of wealth, health, giving, community building, connectivity, spirituality, family unity, education, skills, leadership, etc.)

- What values would be consistent with the above descriptions?

- Where are we now in relationship to the above vision?

Next, call a family meeting. This meeting should include your children and grandchildren. Depending on your family size, you can also include your siblings. Next, share your vision for a Family Foundation with your family members and solicit input from others to create a shared vision. Finally, adopt the shared vision and create your governance plan (roles, responsibilities, expectations, and rules for decision making) for the achievement of family goals, which must include productive management of family assets.

As an Elder of the family, your next step is to create a Revocable Living Trust. This Trust will be the depository of your family's assets. Start with your assets first and invite family members to transfer theirs. Please note that a properly designed life insurance policy can be a major contributor to your Foundation's asset base. The Trust will be administered by your family's governance plan. Upon completion of your Trust, you have your family's financial platform that supports your Family Foundation.

Now that your family is organized with goals, rules of governance, and a depository for family assets, imagine how relevant financial literacy and stewardship becomes. Imagine how planning for college tuition, retirement, home purchase, and investing will change for your family. But don't stop here. Imagine how your Family Foundation can also become the depository of family history, life lessons, success rituals and attitudes, that can be available for current and future generations. Imagine annual family gatherings with dinners and business sessions. Imagine the ability to leverage your family's skills, talents, labor, creativity, and experiences to solve any problem. Imagine the change in our mindsets.

I know a few of you are thinking, "Does this mean that I have to let my children know how much money I have?" It most certainly does. But the other option is to leave them an inheritance without the training on how to manage it or what to do with it. The worst case is leaving an inheritance that your children will end up fighting over.

You may also wonder if you need a Trust if you already have a Will. Yes, you will still need a Will, but your Will becomes part of your Trust. Furthermore, the Trust provides additional benefits over a Will:

- It allows beneficiaries to receive assets while they're still alive and potentially avoid estate taxes and probate after their death.

- It is effective once signed and funded.

- Generally, it takes precedence over Wills.

- It does not provide guardianship, which can be covered by your Will.

- Trusts bypass probate and are less likely to be successfully challenged, which keeps your finances private.

- Trusts protect your assets if you are incapacitated while still alive.

- Assets also transfer without public notices, keeping creditors and predators in the dark.

One more big recommendation. If you want to keep your family working together after your transition, then please, don't disburse your transferable assets (wealth)! Keep them in the Trust. Because your Trust can continue beyond your death, assets remaining in Trust can continue to grow in value and benefit your family for generations.

IN CONCLUSION

Now I know you're thinking, *Ajamu, this is a good idea, but it sounds kind of pie-in-the-sky. Do you know anyone that's done this?* Yes, I do, and so do you. A Revocable Living Trust is a tool used by wealthy families in all 50 states. They are flexible in design and not expensive to create. I encourage you to Google Dynasty Trust, Revocable Living Trust, Family Banking, or Infinite Banking.

My wife Kinda and I created a Family Foundation using a Revocable Living Trust in 2019 for our extended family (children and grandchildren). We created family rules of governance, a moral covenant, and family long-term goals. We meet each quarter to review our assets status, undergo training in financial literacy, review household budgets, report on status of loans to family members, and present member updates. Our Family Foundation was a direct result of what we learned from the use of my mother's bequest.

So, start with what you have. Set goals and organize your extended family. Facilitate financial training by engaging community resources. **You are an Elder, so take the lead for your family.** Remember that If we work as individuals, our people will remain trapped in generational poverty. Instead, let your legacy pass through the generations as your family's **Financial Harriet Tubman**. Get started now!

At WeDevelopment Federal Credit Union, our mission is help build generational wealth in the African American community. We have wealth coaching, saving products, and loan products to help your family along your wealth path. Stop by and see us.

RECLAIMING THE POWER OF THE BLACK DOLLAR: HOW COLLECTIVE ACTION AND COMMUNITY INVESTMENT CAN SHAPE THE FUTURE OF BLACK AMERICA

ERIC A. HAWTHORNE

"When you spend your dollar out of the community in which you live, the community in which you spend your money becomes richer and richer, the community out of which you take your money becomes poorer and poorer."

—Malcolm X

What was once a stark warning quickly became the harsh reality of Black America within just a few decades after Malcolm X delivered his thunderous speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet," in 1964. Unwavering in his position, Malcolm understood the magnitude of group economics. He recognized that the success of the community was dependent upon the very people who lived within its neighborhoods. Collective action by the community results in economic growth, but this philosophy must be deeply rooted within its foundation.

At the time, Malcolm envisioned the over $20 billion annual buying power Black America possessed to be invested directly into its existing small businesses to create larger industries. This was not incomprehensible, especially if other groups had done it with far less. He emphasized that community was the economic driving force behind business growth and development. In fact, huge corporations

started off as small businesses nestled in the neighborhoods of small towns. They grew only with the continued support of local residents. Today, the two most powerful mega-retailers, Wal-Mart and Amazon, account for nearly an astonishing $1 trillion in global consumer spending. Both began as small-scale businesses that eventually expanded after they first built a customer base in their local area.

Historically, Black America had communities with the capabilities to cultivate these types of industries. The Greenwood District in Tulsa, or Black Wall Street, may be the most recognizable. But there were numerous self-sustained areas in the country just like Black Wall Street, including Sweet Auburn in Atlanta, Georgia; Farish Street in Jackson, Mississippi; Bronzeville in Chicago, Illinois; and Hayti in Durham, North Carolina. These communities typically had a strong middle class, affordable housing, robust education systems, vibrant entertainment districts, innovative medical facilities, booming businesses, and efficient transportation systems. They produced and maintained control of ownership in their resources. Unfortunately, Black America often uses other racial, religious, or ethnic groups' economic practices as a standard to follow when Blacks have previously set that precedent.

Black America has exercised collective action in times of prosperity and in times of adversity. As the Civil Rights Movement spread across the nation, they demonstrated consumer activism and the impact of the Black dollar through mobilization efforts—most notably, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which lasted over a year. Ridership plummeted by a staggering 70%, and the City of Montgomery lost approximately $11 million (adjusted for inflation).

The perseverance of the boycotters may have garnered historical acclaim and moved America toward racial progress, but it also had a huge economic cost. Black communities had been presented with numerous institutional challenges, but ironically they were dismantled by social integration. The great misconception of integration is that it would instantly fix the disparities between Blacks and Whites. As a social construct, it has benefited Blacks in some respects; however, it created many unintended consequences. Overall, the policy acted as a mechanism to dilute consumer spending within Black communities.

While other ethnicities and immigrant groups sought to improve the conditions within their respective communities, Blacks fought to integrate. As a result, there was irreparable harm to the future of their manufacturing, financial, hospitality, retail, and food industries. Black-owned businesses that were once upheld by the spending power of their own communities were slowly abandoned for the formerly exclusive "Whites Only" establishments. In the span of just sixty years, that spending power has increased tremendously from $20 billion to over $1 trillion! This redistribution of spending power has effectively left Black communities underdeveloped and Blacks economically disadvantaged.

Therefore, it is important to buy Black first. One trillion dollars in buying power can drastically change economic conditions. The results of buying Black are measurable. Economists can determine buying power by calculating the amount of money added to or withdrawn from a local economy. This is called a multiplier effect.

The following example illustrates this concept. If you were to drop a small pebble into a bucket filled with water, then a small splash would follow. The splash would cause multiple small ripples to form that continue to spread throughout the water. But if you dropped a larger rock in the same bucket, this would create a bigger splash, and the ripples would be even greater in size. There would be increased movement in the water. This is the same basic process of how spending cash affects the economy.

Imagine that the sizes of the small pebble and large rock are the amount of money you spend. The water can be thought of as the economic activity taking place within the bucket. The bucket represents the community. The ripples that form from the pebble and rock are the cash flow that continues to circulate throughout the economy which provides wages, employment opportunities, and resources for members of the community. However,

if you gradually cease to drop the pebbles and rocks into the bucket, there will be no more splashes to cause ripples in the water. The movement eventually stops. Likewise, once you choose to no longer spend money to purchase goods and services from Black businesses, economic activity gradually becomes stagnant and prevents a continuous cash flow from circulating. The consequence is not limited to businesses failing, but also abandoned neighborhoods, inadequate education, and crumbling infrastructure from the lack of financial investment in the community.

There is immense power within the Black Dollar. In order to remain economically competitive, it is important to prioritize spending within the community by supporting and buying Black first. Pooling resources and investing them back into the community results in economic growth. These resources can be used to fund schools, build affordable housing, employ qualified professionals, and start programs that directly enhance the conditions of the community. This requires support, discipline, and willingness to work together. Buying Black is not simply a slogan, but rather a decades-old movement to mobilize the Black community to prevent its economic footprint from being erased.

National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, Alabama.

THE CROSSROADS OF PHILANTHROPY: UNVEILING THE URGENCY FOR ACCOUNTABLE STEWARDSHIP IN AN ERA OF RACIAL AND ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

QIANA THOMASON

As a relatively new entrant to philanthropy, I was asked about my attraction to, and assessment of, the field. Uncharacteristically, I found it challenging to articulate a response. However, a recent experience evoked great clarity about the challenge of my response to that seemingly simple question. This insight came from my second trip to the National Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama—two places every American should experience.

In revisiting the gripping truths masterfully conveyed at the museums, I struggled to read the exhibits through a continual flow of tears. I asked myself why I was crying when these were truths I'd known for years. Why was I responding this way when I frequently speak about these historical realities and their impact on present injustice? This intense emotion caught me by surprise, but I opted to treat myself with tenderness and care. It didn't matter that I knew much of the information and stories, because knowledge does not bar pain, nor does it necessarily translate to responsibility for what is known.

In those moments of silent homage to the resilient legacies of the extracted, the enslaved, and systemically oppressed people, that spaciousness gave way to clarity.

I serve as a philanthropic leader who shares an ancestral identity with people whose vital contributions created and scaled disproportionately held wealth and shaped our country's economy—a financial system they were systematically and intentionally excluded from. I reconcile the paradox between these identities by pursuing accountable stewardship. This is, in part, my attraction to philanthropy. My assessment of philanthropy, however, examines the other side of the same shiny coin: the absence of accountability. Accountability is a mandate imposed upon other sectors and a concept that is, at worst, noticeably missing, or, at best, barely discussed in philanthropic discourse.

Philanthropy is unbossed, unbothered by, and untethered to government, corporate shareholders, or regulatory entities, save for IRS rules. Simultaneously, philanthropy is

uniquely positioned to take the biggest risks and make the boldest efforts to catalyze and facilitate repair of injustices and support the self-determination of resilient and resourceful communities who have borne the brunt of systemic extraction and oppression—if philanthropy so chooses.

In 2020, waves of philanthropic "wokeness" swept over the shores of racial equity work with tsunami-like strength. Now, the tide has shifted, and we are experiencing a retreat to a safer shoreline.

Many foundations calculate the long-term implications and risks of their work within a vitriolic sociopolitical context and instead pursue the safety of comfortable space.

If philanthropy truly aims to live up to our origin and purpose, the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are instructive. "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

At Health Forward Foundation, we work every day to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems. This is our purpose. In view of how wealth was created in our country and our sector's massive collective resources, we step forward and into philanthropy's outsized opportunity for accountability. This accountability is not without formidable challenges. But that should not dissuade us from these pursuits that address persisting injustices and inequities.

Right now, some of these challenges include (but are not limited to):

- Access to capital remains elusive as people who are paid low wages continue to be hit the hardest by inflation and recessions.

- Participation in labor markets and opportunities for wealth generation are on the decline due to higher interest rates on educational and home loans.

- The social and political capital held by Black, Indigenous, and Latino communities is eroding through strategic national and state-imposed barriers to participation in democracy, as experienced in recent exclusionary election law changes and gerrymandering.

- Anti-diversity, anti-equity, and anti-inclusion bills are advancing through state legislative chambers. Notably, in late June the Supreme Court of the United States decided to end affirmative action as we knew it in college admissions, a consequential decision that is already reverberating throughout the social, governmental, and corporate spheres, and undoubtedly will pull philanthropy into the fray.

The confluence of these factors places philanthropy at a crossroads. As a philanthropic leader, I challenge our community partners to prioritize the following touchstones to ensure accountability in philanthropy.

1. **Reparative Systems Change:** People are not broken; systems are. Injustice caused by unjust systems affects us all. Guided by people of color and their personal experiences, we must support efforts to change unjust systems and build power, money, and resources within Black, Indigenous, and Latino communities.

   At Health Forward Foundation, we are pursuing structural change that addresses the racial wealth gap by investing in opportunities that improve health and build wealth. This includes a focus on affordable housing and homeownership, digital equity, and increasing the representation of people of color in high-earning health science jobs.

   Despite being closest to community needs, people of color have historically faced barriers to accessing grants and other capital. A 2022 survey from Nonprofit Finance Fund showed that compared to Black, Indigenous, and Latino nonprofits, White-led nonprofits received more unrestricted funds (15 percent more), more federal funding (14 percent more), and more corporate funding (13 percent more). Meanwhile, Black, Indigenous, and Latino leaders have personal experiences that better represent the communities they serve than White leaders (39 percent more).

   We are focused on upending the inequity that exists in access to capital for Black, Indigenous, and Latino nonprofit leaders and social entrepreneurs in the Kansas City region. Through grants and social impact investments, we are increasing unrestricted and/or low-cost capital for these leaders who, with the community, carry the solutions to Kansas City's most complex problems.

2. **Narrative Power:** Work to change the temperature of polarizing conversations, leveraging language that embraces abundance and rejects notions of scarcity and austerity. Understand how narrative shapes beliefs, policies, and resource allocation. Work to amplify the strengths, power, and contributions of people of color first. Clearly describe the needs of communities in ways which honor their strengths and contributions.

   Recognizing the power of language and narrative and our influence in shaping it, Health Forward began our journey away from using deficit-based language and moved toward asset-based language. In 2021, Health Forward's board of directors approved a new purpose and a reframed mission statement which honor the strengths, contributions, and aspirations of the communities we serve. Our intent is that this codification flows through all of Health Forward Foundation's communications and extends to our belief in and our work with communities. Our partnership with BeGreat Together highlights four highly acclaimed and award nominated DocuCourses which platform Black and Latino change makers who are addressing injustice and sharing blueprints for impact in Kansas City.

3. **Policy and Advocacy:** Difference exists in our understanding and willingness to engage in legally permissible policy and

advocacy. For foundations who choose to use their voice to pursue reparative systems change, the "X" factor is in establishing justice-centered, multi-racial, and pro-democracy, non-partisan policy priorities. For foundations that want to avoid direct engagement in this space, supporting civic engagement may be a viable path.

Health Forward is clear that grant-making alone will not change systemic inequities. Using our full toolkit of leadership, advocacy, and resources, we have increased our investments in foundation- and community-led policy and advocacy encompassing a myriad of approaches to strengthen the quality of our democracy. Amplifying the power and voice within our communities, our current grant-making investments in civic engagement and coalition building total approximately $5 million over 2023-2024.

4. **Racial Equity in Assets:** Research found that less than 1.3% of $69 trillion in global asset classes are managed by people of color and women. Accountable philanthropy ensures a foundation's assets are managed by people of color underrepresented in the finance and investment industry. This is not to be confused with "diversity" in assets under management, for which the industry definition includes White women. The evidence is clear: performance is the same or better for assets managed by people of color. Excavating myths and seeding education to foundation boards with CEO championship is key, as is having a CIO

and/or an investment advisory partner with keen understanding of the opportunity and inclusive investment networks of people of color talent. Currently, 40% of Health Forward's assets in capital markets are managed by firms owned by Black and Latino fund managers. What is fundamental in decolonizing our portfolio is our belief that investment resources are just as much a part of our work as our grants and policy efforts. This is an evolution from our previous orientation, which was that investment assets are intended exclusively to fund the work. Currently, our portfolio maintains the same return objectives it has had since inception because that is required to achieve our purpose. However, we are now demonstrating that we also can achieve the racial equity objective within our purpose through these assets.

5. **Representation in Governance and Leadership:** At the most basic level, credibility and authenticity within accountable philanthropy prioritizes representation by, and a real sense of belonging for people of color in foundation and nonprofit governance and leadership.

In an era of extreme affronts to the well-being, prosperity, and freedom of Black, Indigenous, and Latino communities, I invite the entire social sector, including nonprofit organizations, in Kansas City to responsibly reflect on how we will use our platforms of philanthropic freedom with accountability to our altruistic purpose: the love of humankind—when perfected with power and justice, a virtuous force to be reckoned with.

STOP TALKING, START LISTENING: HOW IGNORING COMMUNITY VOICES UNDERMINES PHILANTHROPY AND PERPETUATES INEQUALITY

PHILIP GASKIN

When I think back to my first days of training as a community organizer, I remember being taught the grounding principles of listening. I remember hearing, "Listen 70% of the time and speak 30% of the time." My curiosity as to why that was advised was quickly replaced with valuable experience as I practiced listening throughout the streets and wards of Philadelphia.

This skill was most applicable in the neighborhoods with the most economic challenges—in West and North Philadelphia, where it seemed that hopes and dreams were so far from being recognized. As I went door to door and then developed a team of volunteer organizers to work side by side with, I heard that what the citizens of these neighborhoods truly found important for themselves and their families was very different than what was assumed.

When I came to Kansas City and the Kauffman Foundation seven years ago as Director of Entrepreneurial Communities, I brought with me this learning and transferred it into our work in building inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems—that listening first produces valuable learnings and helps people understand each other. You can see this approach in our Kauffman Ecosystems Playbook,[1] where I coined the phrase and approach "Declaration of Interdependence"— an inspirational call for people doing the work of building inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems to work together and depend on each other to make sure everyone has a chance to start and grow a business. Working with our grantee, Forward Cities, we then put these ideas to work with our ESHIP Communities initiative. The initiative brought together community leaders of color, some of whom had been doing the same type of work for years but had not worked together, to create new ideas that build inclusive, entrepreneurial ecosystems with listening and trust building at its core.

I urge any organization or effort that is trying to help people to listen first and then be ready to hear answers that don't match your understanding or fit your organization's narrative.

We must move away from the tendency to ignore what we hear, because when we focus too much on one narrative, important facts and data that could further inform our thinking could be disregarded. When too much of the narrative is one of a deficit mindset versus an asset or growth and potential mindset, the initiatives that carry good intent can go awry. In other words, let's look for the positive narratives first—what contributions, ideas, and outcomes have people already had in their communities—and then build off of that.

There are a lot of ways to listen—from door-to-door conversations, forums, workshops, to representative opinion surveys—and philanthropy and nonprofits should take advantage of all the tools to get a clearer read of the communities we work to support.

The Kauffman Foundation works with KC Rising and its partner organization, Mid-America Regional Council, to conduct and publish an annual Quality of Life survey. Over the past several years, the survey repeatedly sampled Black and Latino Kansas Citians to better learn their ideas and concerns and then did follow-up individual interviews with those who took the survey. Although this is a snapshot in time, the year-over-year analysis is informative.

Here are some of the key takeaways voiced by our community members. You'll note that all of these disproportionally impact our Black and Latino communities in Kansas City.

- Quality of life's direct connection to financial stability is hard to overstate. Financial well-being is paramount: lower-income residents have lower agreement on nearly all quality-of-life metrics. Jobs and the economy emerged as a top issue in addition to the rising cost of living. For residents, it's hard to feel secure and satisfied with their quality of life when inflation continues to be a problem and the economic future is uncertain.

- Crime and safety competed with the economy for the top issue on residents' minds. This rise in uncertainty and sense of danger informs residents' decision-making and perceptions of their own quality of life.

- Gentrification and segregation—both by race and economic status—remain concerns for residents. While most residents say they belong in their communities, places of work, and schools, where residents feel they don't belong, race and socioeconomic status are clear factors.

- Lower satisfaction among Black residents on all school metrics points to both a problem and an opportunity. In addition to dissatisfaction with public schools in interviews, we also saw that over one-third of Black residents say the quality of these schools at every level is fair or poor—and the same is true when discussing out-of-school care. The racial gap in perception and experience of public schools is obviously a real issue—one that the Foundation can work to address with interventions in specific communities. The lack of after-school programs is felt strongly in this community, and the same is true for pre-school. Improvements in these specific areas have the potential for strong ripple effects and real impact with families.

- Housing, gentrification, and property costs are increasingly affecting quality of life. Residents are feeling the squeeze of rising costs, and the pressures of affordable housing for both renters and owners are acute. Housing represents a significant economic challenge, and in some cases an impediment to the goals of financial self-sufficiency and advancement that we're working towards—especially among residents of color, who see discrimination as another barrier in this area.

Over the past few years, the Kauffman Foundation has been working to better align its resources with the needs of Kansas City. The Foundation continues to listen, improve, and work alongside community members to co-create solutions.

For example, throughout the height of the COVID pandemic, we responded to immediate community needs with additional, smaller one-year grants. Although necessary in the short-term, we knew, and heard consistently from our stakeholders and many grantees, that the Foundation should engage the community we serve to address long-term needs. Therefore, we shifted to a Foundation-wide approach to support emerging organizations, with a focus on those led by people of color that address many of the issues highlighted above, such as financial instability. To that end, we enlisted United Way, a community partner more proximate to and better suited to deliver grants to the emerging organizations.

The United Way created a new funding platform, intended to support these emerging or smaller organizations. The Nonprofit Catalyst Fund[2] just recently announced its first grantees.[3] The Kauffman Foundation provided $2 million to launch the effort. The United Way designed the approach and has full decision-making rights on grant recipients. It's the type of community grant partnership the Foundation will continue to explore.

In fact, the Foundation's new CEO, Dr. DeAngela Burns-Wallace, has already noted her intention to expand on the Foundation's past efforts for community engagement, make them stronger and core to the work of the Foundation. "I believe our communities are a source of strength, opportunity, and inspiration. The Foundation's many tools can foster innovative approaches that create sustainable, systemic change. But that change must be done in partnership— with those we serve, those with whom we collaborate, and those who lead with us. I look forward to working closely with the Foundation's associates, our community members, and grantees to impact lives and transform communities."

As I penned in my inaugural opinion piece in 2020, "We Need to Retain Our Interdependence,"[4] we need to retain the will to take care of each other and awaken to those who are left behind. Our future based on interdependence, without surrender or retreat, will strengthen our resolve. We will work together in uncommon ways toward common purpose.

Think of the great things we will accomplish together and consider the role you will play to make it happen.

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1   https://www.kauffman.org/ecosystem-playbook-draft-3/

2   https://www.startlandnews.com/2023/02/united-way-nonprofit-catalyst-fund/

3   https://unitedwaygkc.org/2023/07/07/nonprofit-catalyst-grantees/

4   https://www.kauffman.org/currents/we-need-to-retain-our-interdependence/

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: A BLUEPRINT FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT IN KANSAS CITY'S THIRD DISTRICT

**COUNCILWOMAN
MELISSA ROBINSON**

Considerable investments have been made over the past two decades to catapult Kansas City into a world class city, including a best-in-class hotel, luxury housing, the streetcar, a thriving downtown district, and revitalizing the former Bannister Mall, all heavily subsidized by tax incentives. Currently, the City has built a world class airport and the first professional women's soccer stadium and will soon break ground on the park deck over I-670. While these are attractive, strategic economic ventures that have transformed Kansas City from a

perceived "cow town" to a destination, the historically disinvested communities continue to see separate and unequal investment that manifests in blighted neighborhoods with lower life expectancy, poor educational outcomes, high rates of unemployment, violent crime, hopelessness, and despair.

In recent years, the Third District has benefited from rapid mass transit, two grocery stores, and the Central City Economic Development Sales Tax. These strategic improvements add value, but they fall far too short of the magnitude of resources needed to mitigate decades of neglect. The work ahead hinges on the need for a long overdue systems change and scaled investments that have potential to transform distressed communities. The results of the following collective investments will realize the vision that every resident in Kansas City has embraced, which is a fair, just, and equitable City.

We remain steadfast and ready to organize for our demands because we firmly believe Kansas City has the potential to shape neighborhood environments that benefit all residents irrespective of past decisions, race, and socio-economic conditions.

We are poised to take action toward economic development that supports all residents and ensures everyone can benefit from our growing economy. The goal of this equitable development plan is to transform the Third District into a place where all residents have access to economic opportunities, quality, affordable housing, vibrant neighborhoods, and cultural expression.

The projects, programs, and policies listed below have been shaped with input from Third District residents and stakeholders over the past four years.

EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

$100 MILLION IN NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION

Provide forgivable home-improvement loans to longstanding homeowners to increase property values and promote economic mobility.

$150 MILLION IN PREDEVELOPMENT

Underwrite land acquisition, environmental remediation, market analysis, and infrastructure for housing and light industrial to spawn economic development in the inner city. Funds will also support establishing community land trusts, resident-owned multi-family housing, and infrastructure for light industrial businesses.

$30 MILLION DOWN PAYMENT ASSISTANCE

Provide down payment assistance for first-time home buyers with an emphasis on newly constructed or renovated single-family homes in the Third District. The personal wealth for residents in the Third District is significantly lower in comparison to Kansas City as a whole.

$12 MILLION STARTUP AND SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Invest in new and existing small businesses to increase opportunities for employment in the Third District and foster wealth building.

$28 MILLION YOUTH ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

Create places and spaces designed and operated by teens and young adults to provide opportunities for employment, relationship building, and recreation. Young people need positive places to explore, engage, socialize, and have fun.

$40 MILLION GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Utilize the City's Smart Sewer Plan to provide commercial and residential green infrastructure incentives to support rain gardens, electrification, and other green solutions.

$10 MILLION ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Invest in conservation strategies to drive down energy costs and create more sustainable solutions including retrofits, weatherization, and alternative energy sources.

$5 MILLION SUSTAINABLE BROADBAND SUPPORT

Ensure that every resident has access to high speed, reliable, and affordable Internet connectivity.

$25 MILLION FOR THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL TRAIL ALONG BRUSH CREEK

Provide matching funds for the seed investment from a private foundation to attract the remaining funds needed to ensure a fully funded project.

$15 MILLION TO EXPAND GREEN SPACES AND ADDRESS DEFERRED PARKS MAINTENANCE

$15 MILLION TRAINING + EMPLOYMENT READINESS

Provide direct and collaborative employment readiness and placement services for residents experiencing the greatest income disparity within the City.

$25 MILLION TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIVITY

Invest in walkability, street repair, addressing transportation deserts, rideshare programs,

and rapid mass transit to connect career seekers with employment opportunities. It is impossible to access opportunity without connectivity.

$20 MILLION SOCIAL SERVICES AND RESIDENT ORGANIZING SUPPORTS

Disseminate funds and deploy resources to community-based social services organizations to build capacity to provide wrap-around supportive services for individuals and families in need.

$20 MILLION TO SUPPORT CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Upgrade City-owned cultural institutions and museums in the Third District to preserve and amplify Kansas City's history.

$27 MILLION IN COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

Enhance visitor experiences with connected mobility that links the 18th & Vine Entertainment District with small businesses on Independence Avenue, Truman Road, 12th Street, Emanuel Cleaver II Boulevard, and the Crossroads.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

While the City cannot transform communities alone, the City of Kansas City must have a vested interest in reducing income disparities and fostering places that are healthy, vibrant, and diverse. An essential key is to leverage public and private catalytic initiatives that are already underway to address historic blight and socio-economic conditions.

Initial actions should include obtaining seed funding within the next six months and facilitating a civic consortium to build a network for a public/private partnership that achieves complementary goals. An aggressive approach must be adopted to collaborate with Jackson County, the State, Federal, private and philanthropic sectors to acquire necessary resources in a timely manner.

IMMEDIATE LEGISLATION NEEDED

Local policy makers must prioritize the activation of affordable housing on City-owned property, cooperative living models, Community Land Trust projects, and down payment assistance through City funding sources including the Central City Economic Development Sales Tax and the Housing Trust Fund.

Also, policy makers must align current investments with development opportunities and devise a comprehensive collaborative approach with other government, private, and philanthropic entities.

We will begin advocacy efforts for a seed investment of $25 million to be included in the 2024–2025 City Budget for implementation, matching grant opportunities, and leveraging private support.

THE HIDDEN TOLL OF MASS INCARCERATION: HOW BLACK AMERICAN WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES PAY THE PRICE IN WEALTH AND OPPORTUNITY

EBONY REED

Many groups of people who interact with the justice system face financial setbacks due to that interaction. One group of people that suffers a very large toll is Black American women with loved ones in prison.

Gina Clayton-Johnson, a former public defender, is an expert in this area and heads the Essie Justice Group, based in Oakland, California, which has studied and researched this issue across the country, including in Missouri and Kansas.

"The impact of mass incarceration on Black families' wealth has been like an all-out assault," said Clayton-Johnson, who leads the group that supports women who have incarcerated loved ones. "It has been a hemorrhaging of money. And the ways in which that happens are so broad."

The costs are concrete for these women. For many, the costs include lost wages, fees paid, and lawyer expenses as well as the financial pressures of lost earnings from an incarcerated partner and costs of raising children, such as childcare, education, food, and housing. Women often face the immediate impact, but it also trickles down to their children. There is also the cost of lost and limited time.

"People say time is money," Clayton-Johnson said. "I think about that… particularly for women taking on…these

extra responsibilities of care taking, the unpaid work that was never going to be paid because of the way that there's been these distributions of what gets paid and what doesn't get paid in terms of work and labor."

The Essie Justice Group reports 35% of women cannot pay their rent or mortgage on time after the incarceration of a family member, according to its Because She's Powerful survey. The report focused on the economic and social impact of the criminal justice system on women. Women in 41 states participated in the report, and 14 organizations joined The Essie Justice Group to capture their responses in written and focus group formats.

"It's been huge," Clayton-Johnson further lamented about the economic impact. "It's like looking at the sun. You just can't look at it without hurting. You just don't want to look straight at it or it's going to really be painful. It's too big."

Of the women surveyed, 57% said they were separated from two loved ones in prison. Seven percent said more than 10 of their loved ones had faced incarceration throughout their lifetimes.

Black Americans have historically had complex interactions with the U.S. legal and criminal justice systems. Not only do minority prisoners often have longer prison terms, they also do not get equal access to programs that would help their job prospects when they leave prison, a 2022 report in Massachusetts[1] found. All of this has a profound impact on an individual's ability to grow and maintain wealth, which in simplest terms are our personal assets minus liabilities.

When people are in prison they cannot work, and those who do may earn very small wages. They incur fees. They build up debt, and when they exit prison, they often face discrimination. That means interactions with the justice and legal systems are expensive, costly, and often career-stifling.

Many people were not making much money before being jailed, so they may not leave behind much in savings to help out their families. The Prison Policy Initiative[2] has reported that being formerly incarcerated and looking for work is worse than the Great Depression in regard to unemployment rates.

"Incarceration is either a pathway to poverty or it is an entrenchment of impoverished conditions that a family is already in."
—Gina Clayton-Johnson

Women often face childcare costs while their household incomes have dwindled if they are working. And that has a trickle-down effect from mom to child. In some cases, it means children don't have enrichment opportunities, such as early childhood education, when families can't afford them. For the youngest in society, they have already started living the wealth gap.

"The skills you need to be employable later in life are formed now," said CEO Deidre Anderson of EarlystART, an organization that operates an early education program with three facilities and serves hundreds of children across Greater Kansas City. "Going back to social and emotional health, they are building to self-regulate. A small temper

tantrum that's not mediated turns into larger temper tantrums, turns into a variety of things."

And the gaps continue, Anderson said, for children whose families for a variety of reasons cannot afford early childhood education.

"There's been a variety of studies done that show kids that have access to an environment like this compared to those that do not, their earning potential is decreased," Anderson said while pointing to the various classrooms and other facilities inside the location at the former St. Mark Church.

For some women the time cost also means they cannot pursue higher education opportunities. Forty-three percent of women surveyed by The Essie Justice Group say they have had to work more hours, seek a different job, and often forgo their own education advancement.

A significant number of the women surveyed have also directly faced incarceration. About a quarter in the Essie Justice Group's survey have been in jail, prison, or a detention center, and a third of the group's California members are formerly incarcerated women.

In addition to policies and initiatives to address mass incarceration, what does Clayton-Johnson see as needed support to address the wealth gap for Black Americans?

"Free education and debt relief, educational debt relief, and the building of infrastructure that keeps communities connected to one another," she said. "So everything from public transportation to free, ungated parks and green spaces. I have a long list."

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1   https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dee8c40dfaed423632dbd07/t/6 3b5b37a5dd9725124e5c529/1672852347698/Special+Legislative+Com mission+on+Structural+Racism+in+MA+Correctional+Facilities+FINAL+R EPORT+Dec.2022.pdf

2   https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html

Read more on Black-White America in the newsletter and book Ebony Reed is co-writing with journalist and professor Louise Story. Sign up at lande. substack.com.

ECONOMICS RECOMMENDATIONS

In the compelling preface to the *2023 State of Black Kansas City*, Shawn D. Rochester aptly articulates the deep-seated economic injustices that plague Black communities, coining the term "The Black Tax." This insidious burden represents the additional financial strain placed on Black Americans, emanating from systemic, conscious, or unconscious anti-Black biases embedded in our society's institutions.

This Black Tax manifests in an unemployment rate for Black Americans that has been twice that of White Americans since 1960. That's nearly six decades of economic disparity. Rochester lays out the staggering cost; had employment rates been equal between Blacks and Whites as of 2010, an additional two million African Americans would have been employed. This translates to a whopping $80 billion per year in lost income and benefits, accumulating to $3.3 trillion over six decades.

Yet the ramifications extend far beyond the pocketbook. The systemic economic inequities have led to a ripple effect of social issues—most tragically, a heightened level of violence within the Black community. Missouri stands as a harrowing example, with the state holding the dubious distinction of having the nation's highest Black homicide victimization rate for seven consecutive years as of 2020. That rate is more than twice the national Black homicide rate and nearly 16 times the rate for White victims.

What Rochester elucidates is a chilling continuity between economic policies and social outcomes, linking the "redlines" of historical housing discrimination to the "chalk lines" outlining victims of today's gun violence. This isn't just about dollars and cents; it's about life and death, about the quality of life and the denied potential of countless individuals in the Black community.

As we delve into the economics of Black Kansas City, it is critical to understand that these statistics and trends are not abstract—they represent lives, families, and communities burdened by a legacy of inequality. But within this grim reality lies a clarion call for change, an imperative for actionable steps to correct these longstanding imbalances. What follows are recommendations aimed at dismantling this Black Tax and building an equitable economic future for Black Kansas City.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING ECONOMIC DISPARITIES IN BLACK KANSAS CITY

BRIDGING THE INCOME GAP

1. **Workforce Development Programs:** Establish targeted workforce development initiatives aimed at increasing skill levels in sectors with higher-paying jobs. Special emphasis should be on upskilling and reskilling Black workers for emerging markets and sectors, such as technology and healthcare.

2. **Equal Pay Initiatives:** Enact policies that require organizations to report income levels by race and gender, with incentives for companies that demonstrate progress toward equal pay.

INCREASING NET WORTH

3. **Financial Education and Asset-Building:** Launch comprehensive financial education programs within the community to help individuals understand how to save, invest, and build credit. Provide resources for estate planning to prevent wealth leakage.

4. **Community Investment Funds:** Create localized investment opportunities to enable Black communities to invest in local businesses and real estate projects, thereby keeping wealth within the community.

EXPANDING HOMEOWNERSHIP

5. **Down Payment Assistance:** Implement city- or state-funded down payment assistance programs specifically targeted at first-time Black homebuyers.

6. **Mortgage Rate Equality:** Vigilantly monitor and penalize lending institutions that charge higher mortgage rates to Black individuals and families compared to their White counterparts with similar financial profiles.

EDUCATION FOR WEALTH BUILDING

7. **Entrepreneurship Training and Micro Grants:** Offer courses and cash resources aimed at aspiring Black entrepreneurs, covering the essentials of business planning, financing, start-up costs, and operations.

8. **College Savings Plans:** Establish and heavily publicize tax-advantaged savings accounts for higher education, encouraging early investment in educational outcomes.

POLICY ADVOCACY

9. **Local Control of Resources:** Advocate for local control of economic development resources currently mandated by the state of Missouri. This would allow for more nuanced, community-centered economic policies.

10. **Tax Reforms:** Push for progressive tax reforms that would provide more significant relief to low-income households, thereby freeing up income for saving and investment.

FUND THE MAYOR'S COMMISSION ON REPARATIONS

11. **Secure Funding:** Advocate for dedicated city funding for the Mayor's Commission on Reparations to ensure that the work is thorough and can be implemented effectively.

12. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Develop partnerships with local businesses and philanthropies to contribute funds and resources to the Commission and subsequent reparative initiatives.

IMPLEMENT REPARATIVE FINANCIAL MEASURES

13. Direct Payments: Once harms have been quantified, advocate for direct payments to descendants of those who suffered from systemic racial discrimination as a form of economic redress.

14. Tax Incentives: Offer tax incentives for businesses that contribute to a reparations fund aimed at community development and wealth generation in Black neighborhoods.

LEVERAGE SHAWN ROCHESTER'S P.H.D. (PURCHASE, HIRE, DEPOSIT) MODEL

15. Promote Black Businesses: Launch a city-wide campaign encouraging residents to buy from Black-owned businesses. The campaign could include a directory of such enterprises and special business events.

16. Community Hiring: Implement community benefits agreements requiring that local development projects hire a certain percentage of their workforce from within the community, particularly from marginalized racial groups.

17. Black Financial Institutions: Encourage individuals and businesses to deposit funds in WeDevelopment Federal Credit Union, Kansas City's Black community-owned credit union.

INSTITUTIONALIZE REPARATIONS IN ECONOMIC POLICY

18. Legislation: Work towards passing local and state laws that require future budgets to allocate funds explicitly for reparative economic measures, including educational grants, low-interest loans for Black-owned businesses, and down payment assistance for Black homebuyers.

19. Educational Grants: Establish scholarships and grants explicitly aimed at Black students for both vocational and academic tertiary education, funded by reparations allocations.

20. Invest in Black Innovation: Create venture capital funds aimed at investing in Black entrepreneurs and startups, particularly in sectors with significant barriers to entry like technology and healthcare.

By implementing these recommendations, we will not only address the immediate economic disparities but also lay the groundwork for long-term, sustainable economic empowerment in Black communities. Through committed, multifaceted approaches, we aim to convert the recommendations of the Mayor's Commission on Reparations from paper to tangible change, thus substantially reducing the "Black Tax" that has long burdened our community.

EDUCATION

FOREWORD

MOVING BEYOND BUZZWORDS:
DISMANTLING INEQUITIES IN EDUCATION THROUGH BOLD, COURAGEOUS, AND INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP

ANTHONY S. LEWIS, PH.D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF LAWRENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LAWRENCE, KANSAS

In the *2021 State of Black Kansas City*, the Urban League of Greater Kansas City did a phenomenal job spotlighting educational gaps and inequities. President and CEO Gwendolyn Grant asked a profound question: "Is equity enough to mitigate these intractable inequities?" My answer to that question is a loud NO! Equity alone will not address the gaps or the inequities in education. Equity without action is just another six-letter word that may give some folks a false sense of hope. If I were to ask a room of fifty people what equity is, I would get fifty different responses. So, let's start there. If you have been engaged in this work, you may be familiar with this powerful image that depicts the difference between equality and equity.

While I appreciate the *Interaction Institute for Social Change* commissioning illustrator Angus Maguire to create this work, most school systems simply stop here. Another revision to this image shows the wooden fence removed and is called Liberation. The intent of removing the fence as a barrier is good in theory, but the family still needs to be in the stands or, better yet, in the game. These images do an excellent job of an introduction to equity; however, if we are to dismantle systems, policies, and practices that produce these inequities, we have to move past the introduction and equity as a buzzword. This work is about dismantling oppressive systems that work exactly as they were designed.
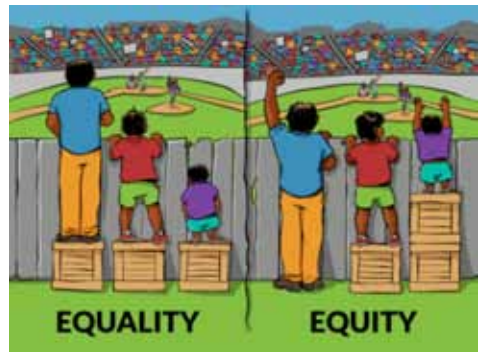
Consequently, school systems continue to struggle and hyper-focus on achievement gaps. The achievement gap refers to disparities in academic outcomes between low-income and more affluent students, as well as Black and Brown students and their White counterparts. I believe the term "achievement gap" unfairly places blame on kids and causes school systems to try to "fix" students. Academic data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

indicates the gap has not narrowed significantly since the beginning of the collection of this data in the 1970s. There is nothing wrong with our students; instead, it is the system that is broken and has been for quite some time. I prefer the term "opportunity gap." Opportunity gap draws attention to the conditions and obstacles that young students face throughout their educational careers. It accurately places responsibility on an inequitable system that is not providing the opportunities for all kids to thrive and succeed.

To emphasize my point, I like the illustrations below by Tony Ruth. In the "Inequality" frame, you can see that one student benefits by getting apples while the other does not. In the "Equality" frame, both students are given the same support (ladder) and opportunities, but one student benefits and the other does not. This is the reality for many school systems. Their communities believe all students should be given the same resources and supports, and it is the student's responsibility to achieve as other students are. In the "Equity" frame, one student is given more resources and supports (a taller ladder) to reach the apples. This can be challenging in some
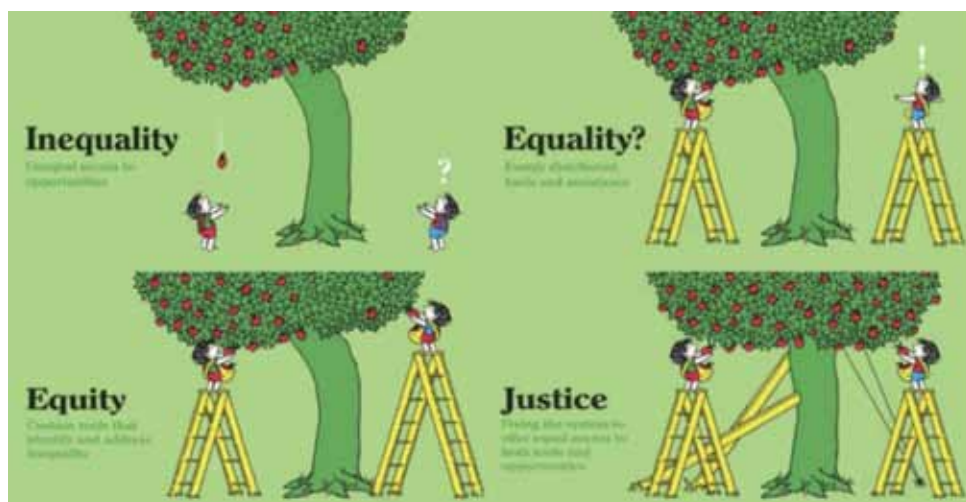
school systems and communities, because some stakeholders will cry that it's not fair that "those students" are given more resources and supports. The reality is that many school systems stop there; however, you can still see that one student still has *access* to more apples. Equity work is about access and opportunity. In the "Justice" frame, the focus is not on the students or their ladders but rather on the tree or the system creating advantages for one student while creating disadvantages for the other. In the first three frames, you knew what the outcomes would be in terms of which student had access to more apples. As educational leaders, our role is to create school systems in which student educational outcomes cannot be predicted by race, socioeconomic status, and/or other historically marginalized identities.

So, what is educational equity? "Educational equity happens when educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to

all people so that each individual has access to, meaningfully participates in, and has positive outcomes from high-quality learning experiences, regardless of individual characteristics and group membership" (Fraser, 2008; Great Lakes Equity Center, 2012, p. 2). This transformative work takes bold, courageous, and innovative leadership to disrupt and dismantle historical legacies of normative assumptions, beliefs, and practices about individual characteristics and cultural identities that marginalize and disenfranchise people and groups of people.

It takes courageous school boards like mine that recognize the importance of making and supporting significant shifts in mindset and practice to provide and sustain equitable outcomes for all students. To disrupt systemic racism and other forms of injustice that profoundly impact students' current and future quality of life, my school board is committed to advancing educational equity by applying a systemic change framework to school governance and resource allocation. They adopted the district's first-ever equity policy that guides the works and holds all of us accountable for equitable outcomes. The school board, district administrators, and certified and classified staff will work together to aggressively and efficiently eliminate inequitable practices, systems, and structures that create advantages for some students and families while disadvantaging others. School and district staff at all levels are encouraged to raise issues of inequity and offer solutions to remedy them. Our employee behaviors shall contribute to a school district where all students and staff are engaged in a positive and academically rigorous environment where educational equity is woven into every single department or division.

The school board directed me to develop and implement the following system-wide equity and justice strategies for our school system.

1. The strategies shall contain clear accountability measures and metrics, which will result in disparity improvements for minoritized students.

2. The strategies shall include resource allocation that accounts for educational equity.

3. The strategies shall include measurable workforce considerations. The district shall actively work to recruit, support, promote, and retain a workforce that reflects racial, gender, and linguistic diversity, as well as culturally sustaining and racially conscious administrative, instructional, and support staff.

4. The strategies shall include the development, implementation, and ongoing review of culturally sustaining teaching and learning practices and curriculum, sustained via continuous professional learning opportunities.

5. The strategies shall include social-emotional learning frameworks and behavioral health approaches that connect to equity and culturally sustaining classroom practices and protect students' dignity in discipline.

Our district's racial equity journey began nearly 18 years ago with a book study of *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* by Glenn Singleton. We expect all staff to participate in the training "Beyond Diversity: Introduction to Courageous Conversations and a Foundation for Deinstitutionalizing Racism and Eliminating Racial Achievement Disparities." Our educators participate in culturally relevant teaching and unconscious bias training. Each of our schools has an Equity Leadership Team. We have Parents of Color and groups throughout the district. We engage students in discussions about race and involve our Equity Advisory Council, Parents of Color, and Students of Color advisory groups in decision-making. We also partner with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, which provides technical assistance and training to public school districts to promote equitable educational opportunities and work in the areas of civil rights, equity, and school reform.

As a result of moving this work forward, we needed to examine the curriculum materials we were putting in front of our students to ensure we addressed this part of the system that may have been creating disadvantages for some students. According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center's (CCBC) multicultural publishing statistics, in 2018, there were more children's books featuring animals and other non-human characters (27%) than all types of visible minorities combined (23%). Meanwhile, half of all the children's books reviewed featured White children.

DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp

1%	5%	7%	10%	27%	50%
American Indians/First Nations	Latinx	Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific American	African/African American	Animals/Other	White

Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen. Released under a Creative Commons BY-SA license https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

During this same year, when I arrived at my current school system, I had the pleasure of talking to high school students during my Listening and Learning Tour about what was going well and what we needed to improve. I remember listening to a Black female student as she recounted her experiences from a previous year in her literature class as the class openly discussed the required reading of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This novel uses the N-word close to 220 times. As she shared her experiences with me, she began to cry profusely. That was enough for me. We no longer allowed this book to be required reading. As a result, we developed the Culturally Sustainable Resource Criteria to use when selecting, reviewing, or adopting instructional resources that allow for individual reflection on the criteria below and the seeking of multiple perspectives.

1. Does the resource represent a balanced power structure between race, ability, and sexual orientation, with multiple sides of complex issues equally presented?

2. Does the resource accurately represent people of diverse backgrounds in culture, language, history, and social norms free of stereotypes and bias?

3. Does the resource empower students to consider other perspectives and points of view, advocate for inequities, and think critically in a safe and supportive manner?

4. Is the resource demonstrating only a dominant culture or lens and are students exposed to alternative and equal perspectives within the resource?

5. Does the resource equally value multiple identities and cultural differences and allow for student critical thinking and exploration of social inequity issues?

Discipline data was another area where we noticed disparities of students of color being suspended at higher rates than their White counterparts. Our data looked no different from any school district around the country. White students are suspended more than students of color for objective behaviors (i.e., smoking, vandalism, etc.), and students of color are suspended more than White students for subjective behaviors (i.e., defiance of authority, disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering). As we looked at dismantling a system that created disadvantages for some, we removed what I call the "Dreaded D's" (Defiance, Disrespect, Disobedience) from our discipline matrixes. In addition, we trained staff on Restorative Practices.

While we have made tremendous progress, we know that much more work must be done. To bring about change and disrupt systemic racism and systems of oppression, it is up to each of us to commit to act individually and dedicate ourselves to working together collectively to continue these conversations in our classrooms, homes, and community. We must work to create more inclusive environments for all of our scholars, families, staff, community, nation, and world. As a school system, we must ensure we are doing our part to continue to foster empathy and kindness. Our schools must be diverse spaces where our scholars can learn acceptance and belonging. We must continue our work to ensure that we reach our aspirations of closing

opportunity, access, and achievement gaps for our students of color and other marginalized groups.

We celebrate our diversity and will provide the necessary resources and supports to eliminate barriers and disproportionalities so all scholars leave us with the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our diverse society. We want our scholars to become change agents who will work to end systemic racism. This urgent work starts with each of us. This is our legacy work. We all can lead the way if we commit to examining personal bias, speaking out against social injustices, and standing up for and learning from others who do not look like us. We must continue to eliminate behaviors, policies, practices, and procedures that perpetuate systemic racism.

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SILENCING TRUTH: THE BATTLE FOR HONEST EDUCATION AMIDST CENSORSHIP AND INJUSTICE

MARC H. MORIAL, J.D.
PRESIDENT AND CEO
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

This year, an alarming incident took place in Alabama in which high school students were prohibited from referencing any events before the 1970s in their Black History Month presentation. Moreover, in the first half of this school year, more than 870 books were banned from libraries, with the majority concerning race and racism. PEN America, an organization tracking book banning, suggests that the true extent of this issue is far greater, as several states have enforced "wholesale bans," effectively suspending, closing, or emptying entire classrooms and school libraries of books.

Even more troubling, educators are attempting to rewrite history. They seek to rebrand slavery as "involuntary relocation" and distort its horrors as beneficial to the enslaved. In this alternative narrative, Rosa Parks' arrest is stripped of its connection to

racism, and Black people are portrayed as aggressors during race massacres.

The agenda of these so-called "anti-woke" extremists is clear: They aim to preserve the systemic advantages that racism provides them. Teachers have been dismissed simply for acknowledging the existence of systemic racism. In their alternative version of history, they attribute racial disparities in wealth, income, educational attainment, home ownership, civic engagement, and political representation to "meritocracy" and a strong work ethic. Proposed "anti-woke" legislation in states like Missouri would effectively ban any discussion or acknowledgment of the true causes of these racial gaps, including discriminatory hiring practices, persistent redlining, biased home appraisals, inequitable school funding, voter suppression, and gerrymandering—all glaring evidence of systemic and institutional racism that educators would be forbidden to address.

Their efforts have already yielded concerning results. Following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to strike down affirmative action in college admissions, former vice president and current presidential candidate Mike Pence boldly declared that there is no racial inequity in the nation's education system. This assertion, made during a period that witnessed the most aggressive rollback of civil rights in over a century, could not be further from the truth.

The National Urban League's most recent Equality Index™ for education stands at a dismal 74.3. Under true equality, this index should reach 100. More than 100 separate

metrics contribute to this index, and Black Americans have achieved parity with Whites in almost none of them.

Even before considering the full impact of school closures during the COVID pandemic, which disproportionately affected Black students, racial disparities in education have worsened since 2005, when the education Index was 77.2.

Last year, only 17% of Black fourth graders were reading at or above proficiency, compared to 42% of White fourth graders. In math, only 15% of Black fourth graders were at or above proficiency, compared to 48% of their White counterparts.

Instead of dedicating our collective efforts and resources to rectify this injustice, extremists who have taken control of school boards, state legislatures, governors' offices, and courts are fervently working to perpetuate it.

School districts where the majority of enrolled students are people of color receive $23 billion less in education funding than predominantly White school districts. Districts with a high percentage of students of color receive, on average, 16%, or about $2,200, less per student than predominantly White districts.

In the alternate reality constructed by "anti-woke" extremists, the blatant underfunding of Black students' education won't even be acknowledged, let alone addressed.

The National Urban League and our partners in the civil rights and social justice communities stand united in advocating for every student's right to a meaningful education that teaches honestly and accurately about our nation's history. We believe in supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion; preparing all students to think critically; and contributing to building a multiracial democracy.

During the March on Washington in 1963, my predecessor Whitney M. Young, Jr. stated that our national leaders would be judged by "the speed and sincerity with which they pass necessary legislation, with which they admit to the tragic injustice that has been done to our country and its Black citizens by historic discrimination and rejection."

Those who continue to deny the tragic injustice of historic discrimination do not deserve to be called national leaders.

Four of the 10 chairmen of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom program on Aug. 28, 1963 on the platform in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the national anthem. From left to right: Whitney M. Young Jr., executive director of the National Urban League; the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Walter P. Reuther, president of the United Automobile Workers Union; the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake, chief executive officer of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and acting chairman of the National Council of Churches' Commission on Religion and Race.

OUTSPOKEN

A POEM BY **LAILA JOHNSTON**

Did you know
Suicide is the 11th
Leading cause of death
In the United States?

Now that I have your attention,
Listen.
Listen to a Black girl
Break your system down,
And build it back up
With her tongue.

I speak for those who can't
And I speak for those who refuse.

My assertion
Is not my aggression,
My devotion
Is one with myself.

Our people are oppressed
Our voices suppressed.

Can white privilege truly handle Black
power;
The power to grow;
The power to succeed;
The power to be more than just our skin?

We all bleed the same blood,
We all breathe the same air
Just because I have coils in my hair
Does not make your foul treatment fair.

People think that my good articulation
Has to do with my racial situation,

And I hate to use the word hate,
But the fact that
Including Black history in school
Has to be a debate, is disappointing.

And I am sick of sitting here,
And being looked at
Like I am an intruder in my own body

This body, in which I was gifted
This body,
That I will use to break this unforgiving
system.

Because why should,
My skin color determine the way you look
at me?
Why should my pronouns,
Determine the way you look at me?
Why should the fact that I wear,
Punk rock or Y2K clothes determine the
way you look at me?

Should my personality not be
The first and last thing you see?

And I am tired of having to search.
Search through people
To find the good
In this forbidden brotherhood.

Now for those of you that don't understand
That cannot comprehend,
Let me break it down for you,
N.I.V. style.

The system is broken,
Is my life nothing
But a token
In your gum-ball machine?
Just so you can say,

"Oh, we have a Black girl on the team?"

And I am sick of being here,
I am sick of having to have these meetings
Because nothing is different.

Why do the classrooms in 1976
Look like the ones in the present?

Put your hand over your heart
Look at the flag.
All the while we're scared
Someone has a gun in their bag.

And all I have left to say is,

Thank you, to the teachers that neglected
me.
And thank you, to the teachers,

Who respect me.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ADVANCING EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR MISSOURI'S CHILDREN

DEIDRE ANDERSON

The prevailing perspective on early childhood education and childcare often lacks depth and insight. However, the critical connection between the availability of high-quality care and education and its profound impact on broader social issues necessitates our collective responsibility. This responsibility is even more pronounced for Black families, who face systemic barriers and inequities that amplify these challenges.

In the realm of early childhood education, Black women shoulder a significant burden in caring for young children. Unfortunately, their wages and credential attainment consistently lag behind those of their White counterparts. This inequity persists, with many of these dedicated caregivers qualifying for public assistance while nurturing other families' children.

The recent pandemic has only intensified a fundamental issue that, while complex in nature, boils down to a simple question: Do we genuinely value and appreciate our children? Do we aspire to cultivate a thriving economy that not only sustains but allows families with young children to flourish? Do we recognize those who care for these young souls as professionals, and are we

willing to compensate them accordingly? While we may verbally affirm these principles, our actions often fall short. The real challenge lies in galvanizing collective willpower not only to declare our commitment to all children, but also to take tangible action.

Currently, only 50% of Kansas City's children have access to the childcare and education services they require during their most formative years. This means that numerous families face the impossible choice between work and their child's safety and well-being. Our duty is to diligently bridge the gaps in the early education system, celebrate its strengths, and emphasize our profound appreciation for the fact that at the heart of all discussions regarding early education and equity lie a child and their family. We must cast a spotlight on the systemic racial and socioeconomic disparities faced not only by families and children but also by early childhood educators.

Disciplinary discrepancies also loom large. Black children are nearly three times more likely than their White peers to face suspension. Shockingly, expulsion rates in preschool settings are nearly three times higher than in K-12 settings, with childcare settings estimating rates as much as 13 times higher. The absence of laws in Missouri requiring the reporting of this data leaves us without a comprehensive understanding of the extent of this problem.

Early education centers and providers are foundational infrastructure, especially in historically marginalized and overlooked neighborhoods. A career in early childhood education transcends conventional

perceptions; it is about inspiring children and their families daily, offering a glimpse of a world beyond their immediate surroundings. Given that 90% of a child's brain development occurs by age three, every moment holds significance. We must ensure that all children, especially Black children, have access to high-quality early childhood education, closing gaps in access and ensuring excellence in service provision.

The following *Equity for Missouri's Children and Families* report details the inequities in Missouri's Early Care and Education system; outlines a data-driven approach to equitable service and program delivery; and provides numerous policy and practices recommendations that, if executed, will result in systems change and positive outcomes for Missouri's children.

SPECIAL REPORT:

EQUITY FOR MISSOURI'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

Regardless of the location within the state, all families are in need of access to high quality services that are responsive to their diverse needs. There is an inadequate, inequitable, unconnected, and under-resourced system of Early Care and Education (ECE) in the State of Missouri. While every stakeholder group—children, parents, employers, and taxpayers—will benefit from a more effective and efficient system, the providers of early childhood care and education services have the most

to offer in conceptualizing, designing, and implementing a more child- and family-centered system of care.

The vision for Missouri's children is that they are safe, healthy, successful learners. Based on the fragmentation and lack of coordination within the previous system, a statewide framework is needed that supports equal access to services, consistent delivery of services, and fair distribution of resources and delivers results in achievement that are fair and equitable throughout the state. For the purpose of this report, equity means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment (full definition included in Key Terms section at the end of the report). The demographics of Missouri's children are incredibly diverse and therefore warrant intentional focus to ensure equitable and inclusive practices are evident in the programs and services delivered throughout the state. Specific information about the nearly 450,000 children in Missouri include:

- 41% of children ages 0-5 are living in under-resourced communities with approximately 185,000 children living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

- Nearly 22% of Missouri's children ages 0-5 are identified as children of color.

- All parents are working in 66% of Missouri households, which warrants attention in supporting the delivery of adequate programs that enable families to access the workplace.

Limited opportunities and access to services in underserved populations and communities have created persistence in less favorable outcomes for children and families. Account should be given in the provision of services to children and families that have historically been underserved and marginalized. Prioritization in funding allocations as well as offering supplemental services such as case management, occupational/physical therapy, behavior/mental health supports, and parent education will address inequities that currently exist.

All children and families of Missouri are in need of leadership that is equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively meet their needs. In order to address the inequities within the structure of the current program and service delivery system, the report includes recommendations in the following key areas:

a. Meaningful engagement of families, providers and other key stakeholders

b. The importance of utilizing a data-driven approach in decision making and allocation of resources

c. Ensuring accountability in the allocation of resources to historically marginalized populations and communities

d. Providing adequate funding and financial supports

e. Ensuring there is a qualified and well compensated as well as culturally responsive workplace

f. Delivery of services that are culturally and linguistically responsive

Throughout this report, recommendations have been provided to address gaps and inequities in systems to align and coordinate early care and education programs and services. There are many examples of similar work that has been done in other states that has been referenced as a resource to consider in Missouri. A key terms section is included at the end of this report that will ensure there is common understanding when speaking on matters of diversity, equity and inclusion. The recommendations in this report are merely the beginning of strengthening the early care and education system to be more responsive in meeting the needs of Missouri's children and families.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

The success of the delivery system rests on centering the voices of families and providers in the development and

implementation of services. A thorough examination of the current system of program delivery and gathering the thoughts and feelings of Missourians is needed. Some guiding questions to consider when engaging stakeholders and developing systems that will encourage inclusivity and equitable practices include:

1. Was the programming or service co-developed by and is there broad buy-in from families, child care providers and teachers, state agency partners, advocates, and other key stakeholders?

2. How have families, child care providers, and teachers, particularly those who have been historically excluded from or marginalized in the formal childcare system and decisionmaking processes such as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other communities of color, been prioritized and centered?

3. What is the history of interactions with the families and providers who can benefit from the system but have not had equitable access to these resources?

4. How will the harm of past interactions be acknowledged? What is required to initiate repair of the relationships?

5. How will respectful outreach to the communities that have been historically disregarded be handled if relationships are fractured or non-existent?

6. Which trusted community partners can be collaborated with to find the most respectful and authentic ways to gain input?

DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH

A statewide framework of childhood measures to include specific equity measures is in need of development. While particular emphasis on prenatal to age 3 is important, also including additional measures for Pre-K to age 8 performance will support a continuum of equitable programs and services. Decisions for programs and allocation of resources should be made by analyzing data relative to where the need is most evident. Key recommendations to move to a more data-driven approach to service and program delivery include:

1. Create a statewide dashboard for tracking progress across various programs and services.

2. Develop a strategic plan that adopts and implements the Zero to Three policy framework domains of well-being, which include good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences.

3. Map access by census tract level as well as zip codes by using additional community needs assessment data such as indicators of child well-being, infant mortality rates, poverty, crime, etc. and prioritize resources to areas with limited access to quality care to create/enhance/expand early learning access that closes gaps, particularly in areas identified as child care deserts.

4. Increase home visiting services by targeting support of families in under-resourced communities and areas identified through needs assessment

mapping at census tract and zip code levels that need targeted support.

a. Ensure targeted recruitment of parent educators that are representative of communities that are being served and that services are culturally and linguistically relevant.

b. Increase training and resources to support parent educators in delivering culturally responsive services.

5. Create an action team/data working group with diverse representation of parents, providers, university partners, and community agencies to identify measures that include risk and protective factors. Use the data team to track progress in improving inequities and developing strategies to reduce risk and close gaps in achievement, access, and opportunity. Measures should include:

- School readiness – undetected developmental delays at kindergarten, kindergarten readiness based on state assessment, kindergarten screeners and reading proficiency at third grade

- Population-based risk – low birth weight, teen parents, poverty, exposure to 3+ risk factors (i.e., teen parent, non-English speaking, poverty, employment, non-high school graduate)

- Health and medical home – health insurance, medical home, immunizations, BMI, blood levels, developmental screenings

- Special needs – identified developmental delays, substantiated

cases of abuse/neglect, enrollment in special needs preschools, early intervention enrollment (i.e., First Steps)

- Social emotional development/mental health – expulsions from preschool, out of home placement birth to age 6, screening of mothers for depression

ACCOUNTABILITY AND ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

Re-imagining the delivery of programs and services throughout the state of Missouri will require the creation of a system of accountability. This also means resources will need to be mapped appropriately throughout the state to ensure that all, not just some, of Missouri's children and families have access to high quality programs and services. Accountability recommendations to ensure equitable outcomes and to close identified gaps include:

1. Create statutory authority that enables the creation of comprehensive early childhood education services in underserved communities/populations with identified gaps in achievement (i.e., infant mortality rates, literacy rates, school readiness, and low access/child care deserts).

a. Coordinate resources and services with Early Learning Hubs

2. Create an Equity and Inclusion Officer position that is responsible for coordinating efforts that result in a more equitable, inclusive system of early learning and the delivery of programs and services for children and families. An annual report of state progress in addressing gaps in achievement and improving the

delivery of programs and services will be presented by the Equity and Inclusion Officer (i.e., State of Missouri children and families that are disaggregated by race, language acquisition, ability, and economic status). Develop a Statewide Equity Task Force that is charged with specific tasks of monitoring and implementing progress toward meeting the goals and recommendations established and approved (i.e., disaggregating data, budget recommendations, monitoring activities of Statewide Advisory Council, reviewing information from ongoing community engagement and listening sessions) to ensure equitable practices and participation is evident throughout all state-funded activities for children and families. The Equity Task Force will be coordinated and staffed by the Equity and Inclusion Officer.

3. Provide resources to promote diversity in all programs to reduce segregation of programs by ability, race, language, or income, to also include monitoring the metrics to ensure accountability.

   a. Require regional cooperation and collaboration of mixed-delivery system participants: public schools, home-based providers, center-based providers, and faith-based providers.

   b. Provide infrastructure assistance to create innovative partnerships between provider groups to care for child-peer groups to be inclusive of all income levels, demographics, and children with special needs.

c. Promote "best-in-class" examples across rural, urban, and suburban contexts that promote diversity of race, ability and financial capacity of families that also highlights a varied fund delivery system that supports all families (i.e., subsidy, private tuition, public school partners).

d. Create a toolkit, roadmap, and technical assistance opportunities for utilizing federal, state, local, and nonprofit resources to braid funding, rewarding and encouraging partnerships between school districts and community-based providers.

4. Develop a tracking system for harsh punishment of children, including suspensions and expulsions, in early learning programs and provide resources. Some of the services and supports to provide for children with challenging behaviors include:

   a. Conduct public awareness education and provide education for families on the importance of positive social emotional development, how to handle implicit bias, and where to turn if unfair disciplinary practices occur in programs.

   b. Provide mental health support (i.e., mental health consultants and professional development that promotes healthy social emotional development, prioritized in underserved and under-resourced areas of the state that have historically disproportionately used harsh disciplinary practices (i.e., communities of color and areas of persistent poverty).

c. Utilize a community engagement process in the selection of services, curriculum, and selection of trainers and community agencies to ensure that services provided are delivered in a culturally relevant and responsive manner.

FUNDING AND FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Research shows that investments in a high-quality public early care and education system improves health outcomes, prevents gaps in achievement, and boosts earnings in the long term for those that have historically been marginalized. While there have been some advances in funding for early care and education, Missouri's State Child Care Subsidy system has been tremendously underfunded for many years. The children served within this program are among the most economically under-resourced in the state. In order to effectively meet the needs of Missouri's children, financial support is needed to increase access to quality early care and education services. Recommendations toward financially supporting Missouri's early care and education system include:

1. Create a tiered reimbursement structure and cost modeling versus market rate prices for the child care subsidy reimbursement system that is more equitable. Consider factors such as rural versus urban, infant toddler versus preschool, income levels, and under-resourced communities.

2. Ensure the families' cost of child care does not exceed 7% of household income commensurate with federal Health and Human Services Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) rule 45 CFR 98.

3. Prohibit secondary provider co-pay in addition to state co-pay within the state subsidy system, which inherently limits access to quality programming for many families.

4. Enhance the state child care subsidy reimbursement structure to be payable based on enrollment of children versus attendance. This will provide continuity in enrollment for children as well as funding for providers.

   a. Evidence shows that this enables additional revenue to providers, which in turn results in increased compensation.

5. Financial resources should be allocated to support working families not only in the early childhood system but also for school-aged children that provides extended day, summer school, and other options for school-aged children that aligns with the working hours of families.

A QUALIFIED, WELL COMPENSATED, AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE WORKFORCE

Those working with the children and families of Missouri must have the core competencies and ability to effectively meet the diverse needs of the state—not only the staff of the Office of Childhood but also those working within the various programs and organizations serving children and families. Therefore, ongoing professional development should be readily available that addresses issues of inclusive practices and quality of services that meet the diverse needs of Missouri children and families. This also includes leadership and management training that address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion by addressing implicit bias.

There is also a need to address compensation within the workforce of early learning and children's programs to remain competitive and to address retention. The salary structure for early childhood teachers and staff has a myriad of challenges. Not only are there differences in the salary structure based on the type of provider, there are also disproportionate rates of promotion and representation within the programs delivered. Many of the teachers within programs are also recipients of state subsidy for their own children, which is an indicator that the salaries are in need of public support to attract and retain high quality personnel. In order to better understand and then later address the inequities, there is a need to more thoroughly understand the extent to which the problem exists.

Recommendations to address equitable compensation and a qualified workforce within the Missouri early care and education system include:

1. Annual training that covers topics relevant to diversity, equity, inclusion, and bias.

2. Delivery of training for program and organization staff as a part of annual requirements for licensure, accreditation, etc.

3. Collect data on early educator compensation and identify as well as remedy inequities and wage gaps, including disparities in infant and toddler teachers as well as home visiting compensation rates. Disaggregate the compensation report by provider type, position held, and also include demographic data. Provide statewide compensation level mapping throughout the state.

   a. Increased subsidy reimbursement rates are directly tied to the provider's ability to implement increased wages for staff.

4. Create a statewide stipend or tax credit to supplement early educator compensation.

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES

Missouri families, like our nation, are culturally and linguistically diverse. There is a need to improve the services provided to non-English proficient (NEP) or limited English proficiency (LEP) families within the programs and services provided in Missouri. Implementation of the following

recommendations will support the enhancement of programs and services to meet the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of all children and families.

1. Provide funding to expand early learning dual-language immersion programs as well as professional development for all early educators on culturally relevant instruction for English Language Learners in early education.

2. Increase college coursework, professional development, and clock hours offered in topics related to equity (i.e., culturally responsive teaching, dual language inclusion, inclusion of differently abled children). Add as a requirement to the new hire orientation requirements as well as requiring a minimum number of hours annually and annual training for Office of Childhood staff.

3. Ensure linguistically appropriate home visiting services are available throughout the state by increasing the prevalence of multi-lingual parent educators by partnering with community agencies that provide refugee and immigrant services.

4. Provide funding for translation services for providers to include translation of written

documents, translators during enrollment as well as at parent teacher conferences to support non-English speaking families navigating the system.

KEY DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

The use of this terminology aims to raise awareness, guide learning, and support the use of culturally sensitive terms and phrases that center the voices and perspectives of those who are often marginalized or stereotyped. As we strive to embed equitable and inclusive practices in the early care and education system, clarity is needed to ensure that all constituents have a common understanding and do not cause continued harm by use of offensive language and terms. Key definitions for the purpose of the delivery of these recommendations include:

Bias — Attitudes or stereotypes that favor one group over another. Explicit biases are conscious beliefs and stereotypes that affect one's understanding, actions, and decisions; implicit biases also affect one's understanding, actions, and decisions but in an unconscious manner. An anti-bias approach to education explicitly works to end all forms of bias and discrimination.

Equity (Federal definition) **–** Equity means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.

Equity lens – Emphasis is placed on closing identified gaps by ensuring fair access, and opportunities are provided for underserved populations such as communities of color, English language learners, rural communities, and economically disadvantaged populations. Particular attention is given to mapping resources and increasing access to quality services within identified underserved populations.

Inclusion – Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society.

Mixed delivery system – Administers funds across licensed center- and family-based child care programs, Head Start, Early Head Start, public schools, and community-based organizations to ensure access to high quality, affordable options for children through age five and their families.

Under-resourced – Programs, schools, or providers that are usually characterized as having insufficient resources and tend to serve large numbers of disadvantaged and/ or low-income students.

Underserved – Populations or communities that face barriers in accessing and using services, and includes those underserved because of geographic location, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, racial and ethnic groups, special needs (such as language barriers, disabilities, alienage status, or age), and any other population or community determined to be underserved.

CONNECTING THROUGH UNDERSTANDING: BRIDGING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

EUGENE J. HAMILTON

In the bustling landscape of education, the achievement gap casts a long shadow, disproportionately affecting Black and Brown children. This chasm in academic outcomes stems from a web of complex factors, including socio-economic disparities and systemic biases. These biases manifest as differential treatment, unequal access to advanced courses, and disparities in disciplinary actions. The compounding effect of these adversities creates a steep uphill climb for students who must navigate an uneven playing field, where success is determined by more than just their academic prowess.

As educators, parents, and communities strive for educational equity, the importance of acknowledging and addressing these challenges becomes paramount. Getting to know students on a deeper level demands more than superficial interactions; it requires a genuine curiosity and willingness to engage. It's important to recognize that every student carries a personal narrative, a life story that influences their thoughts, actions, and aspirations. This understanding, this willingness to immerse oneself in the rich tapestry of their lives, is the foundation upon which substantial bonds are built.

UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENT'S REALITY: WALKING IN THEIR SHOES

To truly drive change within the academic system, teachers must recognize that their students often carry burdens to school with

them that are beyond their control. From a lack of resources at home to tension between family members, children are faced with issues that most educators will never know if they fail to look beyond the grades. According to a report by the NAACP, African-American children are more than twice as likely to have an incarcerated parent compared to their Caucasian peers. Not only that, but a study published in the *Journal of Family Issues* found that children with incarcerated parents are more likely to exhibit behavioral and emotional problems, which can impact their school performance.

For educators, the first step towards having a heart of compassion for these young people lies in stepping into their students' shoes, truly immersing themselves in the struggles these young minds navigate daily. As a community leader, I received a call to intervene in one such case. An 8-year-old African-American boy, enrolled in what was labeled as the state's "worst" school due to its high percentage of incarcerated parents, faced a challenging situation. His older brother had been arrested for drug-related reasons, casting a shadow over his life. The next morning, he arrived at school visibly affected—his behavior was disruptive, he struggled to focus, and his demeanor was marked by disrespect. Unfortunately, instead of inquiring about the underlying issue, the school responded by placing him in detention, even threatening suspension. In this critical moment, no effort was made to uncover his story or the context of his distress.

I sat down with the young student and through our conversation, I learned that he

was grappling with an incredibly traumatic event within his family. This heart-wrenching experience was impacting his behavior and emotions, something that the school administration, comprised entirely of Caucasian males, seemed oblivious to. In a world where inclusivity and cultural sensitivity are crucial, this incident raises concerns about the need for educators and administrators to embrace a more wholistic perspective.

Each student brings a unique background and set of circumstances to the classroom, and these factors inevitably influence their behavior and academic performance. By failing to acknowledge and address this student's personal struggle, the school leaders demonstrated a lack of awareness regarding the challenges he was navigating. This story serves as a poignant illustration of the disparities that can arise when educational institutions fail to recognize the individual narratives of their students. By taking the time to understand the broader context, schools can provide not only education but also empathy and support, nurturing an environment where every student feels valued and understood, regardless of whether their story aligns with that of the administrators.

EMPATHY AND CONNECTION: UNLEASHING THE POWER OF UNDERSTANDING

Understanding your students' perspective is essential, and equally vital is cultivating empathy throughout this process. A study conducted by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence found that students who perceive

their teachers as empathetic and caring have higher academic performance and better emotional well-being. Creating a classroom environment steeped in empathy involves more than just walking in your students' shoes; it's about standing beside them and offering unwavering support. By showing that you truly value and understand their experiences, you're not only building trust but also fostering a sense of belonging that empowers students to embrace their learning journey.

Furthermore, when empathy is at the heart of education, it opens doors to insightful conversations, proactive solutions, and the creation of safe spaces for learning and growth. It transforms the teacher-student relationship into a partnership in which both parties collaborate to overcome challenges and celebrate achievements. Empathy serves as a powerful tool to empower educators in championing the diverse needs of their students and cultivating a nurturing environment in which each individual's potential can flourish.

CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY: CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

Cultural awareness goes beyond the curriculum. It fosters a sense of belonging and safety. When students see their identities and backgrounds reflected and respected in the classroom, they are more likely to engage, participate, and excel. When teachers take the time to learn about the histories, traditions, and perspectives of their students, it sends a powerful message that each student's identity is valued and respected.

Educators armed with cultural awareness and sensitivity create an inclusive classroom environment where students can thrive irrespective of their origins. By educating themselves about diverse backgrounds, teachers foster an environment of respect and understanding, nurturing every student's potential.

Moreover, gaining insights into students' backgrounds can lead to more inclusive teaching methods. An educator who appreciates the cultural diversity within their classroom can craft lesson plans that resonate with a wider range of experiences. This not only enriches the educational experience but also empowers students to take pride in their cultural heritage.

CREATING SAFE SPACES: NURTURING GROWTH AND CONFIDENCE

Safe and supportive environments foster growth, empowering students to flourish academically and personally. The American Psychological Association states that a positive school climate and supportive teacher-student relationships contribute to students' psychological well-being and academic success.

Consider the story of the 8-year-old African-American boy whose older brother was arrested for drug-related reasons. In a critical moment in which understanding was needed, the school's response was disappointing. The story of this young student underscores the urgency of creating safe spaces within our schools. Had the initial response been one of empathy and understanding, his path might have been different. By offering a listening

ear and a non-judgmental space, I was able to unlock the door to healing and growth. It is pivotal for educators and mentors to embrace their roles as not only purveyors of knowledge but also as pillars of support and understanding.

The stories of students who have thrived under the nurturing care of educators who valued, heard, and understood them are a testament to the transformative power of a safe space. This nurturing cocoon allows students to break free from the chains of adversity and reach for their full potential.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT: FROM CONNECTION TO ACHIEVEMENT

When educators take the time to know their students—understanding their strengths, challenges, interests, and the narratives that shape their lives—the classroom is transformed into a haven of trust and collaboration. In this nurturing environment, students are empowered to voice their questions, express their doubts, and share their aspirations without fear of judgment.

The Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development found that students with strong social-emotional skills, fostered through positive relationships with teachers, tend to have better academic and life outcomes. When teachers connect with students on a personal level, a ripple effect is set in motion. Improved academic performance, enhanced well-being, and a renewed sense of self-worth are the outcomes of

these connections. Such transformations reverberate far beyond the classroom, shaping students' self-esteem, confidence, and motivation to succeed.

AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THE PURSUIT OF EQUITY

In the voyage to bridge the achievement gap, teachers stand as potent agents of change. By understanding their students' backgrounds, stories, and experiences, educators become catalysts for positive transformation. As we reflect on the importance of empathy, cultural awareness, and safe spaces, a collective effort emerges—a concerted movement towards a more equitable education system. Every action and every connection contributes to the fabric of change, weaving a future where Black and Brown children not only break through barriers but soar beyond them.

Educators who transcend the conventional role of a teacher and become true advocates for their students build a foundation of mutual respect and understanding. They become mentors who inspire not only academic growth but also personal development. By making the effort to know their students on a profound level, educators demonstrate that they are invested in each student's success, well-being, and future. In addition, by forging meaningful connections, educators become catalysts for positive change, propelling students toward a future where academic success is not just a destination but a steppingstone to lifelong growth and empowerment.

INDOCTRINATION, INEQUALITIES, AND INJUSTICE: HOW EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES IMPACT BLACK STUDENTS

MARCHEL ALVERSON

"There would be no lynching if it didn't start in the schoolhouse."
—Dr. Carter G. Woodson

Two parallel universes exist in education. To find the sharp contrasts in Greater Kansas City, one need only drive 15 minutes down a suburban back road in Lee's Summit to South Kansas City. Two secondary schools—one elaborate with crisp, pristine hallways adorned with delicately placed awards and medals, carpeted classrooms, and smartboards. Students happily walk with shiny new Chromebooks in hand. The other, a dated brick exterior, armed resource officers, an on-site daycare and nursery, and old chalkboards with "Class of 1988" and other words in permanently etched chalk. However, there aren't any chalk, erasers, or other necessities such as staplers or pencil sharpeners, and there is an abysmal shortage of paper and textbooks.

As a substitute teacher, I traveled that exact 15-minute route almost daily for approximately two years. The remnants of my frustration, anger, and disheartement can still be found littered along that back road. And, while I won't go into detail about the atrocities I witnessed at the South Kansas City high school, I can elaborate on how disenfranchisement presented in the students from the two different tax bases.

On one side, students were respectful (even towards a substitute teacher) and astute. They quietly listened and politely raised their hands to ask questions. On the other, the students were often defiant, loud, and brazen and bold in their disrespect. Theft and fighting were as commonplace as school lunches. These are generalities, of course, but it's easy to determine which students were disenfranchised. Why? Because a district that cannot invest properly in their teachers, administrators, facilities, and resources risks educational outcomes that are as antiquated and abysmal as those old chalkboards. How can students deem themselves worthy when there is nothing of worth being placed before them?

Ironically, I was paid $15 more per day to teach at the South Kansas City school. But it was not the small increase in pay that fueled me to drop one district in lieu of the other. I quickly realized the disenfranchised students needed me more. While that decision would have me chain-smoking my lunch hour away and leave me weary at the end of each day, something miraculous occurred. The students and I began to show mutual respect. Instinctively, I knew they needed to see someone who looked like them and showed up for them every day, who chastised them for their wrongdoings and equally applauded their successes. We know that Black students perform better academically with Black teachers. When Black children have one Black teacher by third grade, they are 13% more likely to enroll in college. With two Black teachers early on, that statistic jumps to 32%. When

Black boys from underserved communities have a Black teacher, they're also far more likely to graduate high school on time, and their dropout rates plummet by approximately 40%.[1]

But the faces of educators and students are most often dissimilar. At the suburban school my two children attended, there was only one Black teacher, but several Black coaches. Yes, I chose to raise them on the opposite side of that road, and I have become somewhat of an anomaly—a single mom who managed to raise a boy and girl, who both have full rides in academics pursuing doctorate and master's degrees at division one colleges. Would I choose to do it again? The answer is always unequivocally, yes. Racism is pervasive, regardless of zip code, and it presents itself in different forms, depending on the tax base in which the school is located.

THE INDOCTRINATION OF BLACK DEMISE

Today, there is much rhetoric around the "anti-woke" movement and how it's being used to oppress Black students. While the target is now on woke ideology, in truth, America has been anti-woke since its inception, particularly in the educational system. While not downplaying how detrimental the latest aggressive roll-back of civil rights in modern American history is on students, there can be no denying that the prevailing structure of public education is inexorably stacked against Black students from day one.

As early as preschool, Black students are bombarded with the faces and places

of whiteness, plastered on walls, ABC worksheets, and the teachers themselves. Is it any wonder that Black students experience a higher suspension rate as early as preschool? In fact, Black preschool students are three times more likely than their White peers to face suspension. Expulsion rates in preschool are nearly three times higher than in K-12 settings. In childcare settings, rates are as much as 13 times higher.[2]

At age 4, my son was almost expelled from his preschool after he threw his shoe at the teacher in defiance of an assignment. Imagine being a parent in a room of all White educators pleading for them to give your child another chance. Racism and rage often co-exist, and the permanence of racism extends into all classrooms. What they failed to notice about my son is that two days prior to this incident, his only Black male classmate had left to attend another school. He was crestfallen, and he couldn't articulate his feelings to the teacher or administrators. This is why I strongly believe parents must be their children's greatest advocates starting on that ever-crucial first day. But what if a student doesn't have a parent or guardian who can advocate for them? This is where programs such as the Urban League of Greater Kansas City's Parent Education and Empowerment Center (PEEC) can assist in disciplinary proceedings.

We do our students of color a disservice by not recognizing the importance of emulating our likeness, and the detrimental effect of standard historical textbooks where Black history starts, not at the basis of African queens, kings, agriculturists, and inventors, but as slaves in America. Again, it all starts on day one.

SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL

The analogy of the back road is akin to the railroad tracks of old whereby White students on the "right" side of the tracks received a better education than their one-room-schoolhouse counterparts. In some towns, those railroad tracks still exist. This by-design disenfranchisement continues to have detrimental effects on our students of color. Black students in Kansas City are performing worse educationally than Whites in the region. In the 2020 Black/White Equality Index, the Education Sub-Index was not surprisingly lower than that of White students. Key variables included:

- The percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers.

- The percentage of adults (25 and older) who were high school graduates.

- The percentage of adults (25 and older) with a bachelor's degree.

- ACT composite scores

In a faltering education system, all things are not equal, and arguably in no factor is this more evident than poverty. When students in under-resourced schools arrive to class, they carry more weight in their book bags— the heaviness of growling stomachs, lack of toiletries and clean clothes, community violence, perhaps an incarcerated family member, and a digital divide exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Black children in Greater Kansas City are two to three times more likely than White children to live

in poverty and live in a household with no parent in the labor force. Furthermore, 100% of Black students in Jackson County are eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch compared to 19% of White students.[3]

Not to be overshadowed by poverty is the high probability of Black students who are removed from classrooms for disciplinary issues. In Jackson County, Black students are three times more likely than White children to be suspended from school for 10 or more days.[4]

Most White teachers and administrators are more threatened by a Black male student with a pen and notepad in his hands than a weapon because when he picks up that pen, he gains knowledge. In that plushly carpeted classroom of suburbia, my son was once suspended for retaliating verbally after a White student called him a "coon." However, he had a Mama Bear who refused to back down and promptly went before the principal, the school board, and the media to get her point across. Although this brought attention to the unfairness of the issue at hand, it did little to change the system. Racism is perpetual. It knows no borders, and racism works in tandem with a system doing what it's always been designed to do—make true knowledge unattainable for a select few.

INJUSTICE AND THE "ANTI-WOKE" AGENDA

The terrain of racism is closing in on any modicum of progress gained since *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. The reversal of affirmative action has bolstered confidence in ruling class racists. Where textbooks have failed Black students, teachers have taken up the slack by providing literary materials from authors that include Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Michelle Alexander, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Ibram X. Kendi, and the like. But these educators and librarians are facing backlash from those who have somehow morphed the "Great Replacement Theory" into Biblical scripture. Truly invested educators are now left with an arduous task.

In Missouri, House Republicans have passed legislation that would ban any discussion or acknowledgement of the true causes of racial divides, including discriminatory hiring practices. Also in Missouri, diversity, equity, and inclusion offices, once considered sacred ground after George Floyd's murder, are undergoing mounting pressure since the Missouri House banned diversity funding from the state budget at many institutions, including public universities. Another proposal would ban "compelling, requiring, inducing or soliciting diversity, equity and inclusion statements" from job applicants, employees, students and contractors at public universities.[5] Diversity scholarships, which many Black students rely on, will be stripped from college students in the state as early as 2024.[6]

This assumes that Black students make it to public universities. In the structured system of "miseducation," it's hard to fathom that Black children now must deal with the brutal aftereffects of being the "COVID generation," while also grappling with monthly school shooting drills. Of course, the violence inflicted upon Black children

often occurs without guns. The weapon is the false narratives and the indoctrination of "Whiteness." Dr. Carter G. Woodson said, "The knowledge system of schools constructed Black people as historical subjects, obscured historical systems of oppression, and taught students to look to White-Eurocentric colonial ideology as a human standard. At an epistemic level, Black people were 'human beings of the lower order.'"[7]

Today, I call on the dreamers—those activists, educators, and educated who dare to rectify a broken educational system. Although I have never stopped seething inside about the lack of resources and investment in the poverty-stricken South Kansas City area, genuine care and concern has reframed my mindset. I never stopped caring. As someone born into poverty, their stories could have easily been mine. I still see myself in their young faces, and I carry them in my heart. As Barack Obama so aptly titled his book, I dare to believe in "The Audacity of Hope."

Every Black child deserves to be educated in student-centered systems that are equally inclusive and rigorous, regardless of the direction of the road.

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REDEFINING AMERICAN EDUCATION: A 10TH GRADER'S PLEA FOR LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVE HISTORY, AND FREE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT WOULD I DO IF I HAD THE POWER TO CHANGE THE NATION?

ISIS KALAIYAH CROSS

If I had the power to change things in our country, I would start with our schools. Our schools are good, but they could be better. Most schools in the U.S. don't teach kids different languages when they're young. Other countries teach English to their little ones, so why can't we teach their languages to our kids? Also, we don't learn all the history we should, especially Black history. How can Black students know about their ancestors and culture if it's not in regular history classes? And why do you have to pay so much for a good education? Education should be free for everyone.

One reason other countries teach their kids different languages early is that young minds are like sponges, ready to soak up new things. Think about families that speak two languages at home. Their kids grow up understanding both, and that's a big advantage when they're older.

If we taught our kids other languages in school, they'd be ready for travel and better job opportunities in the future. We'd be helping them succeed from the start.

History is a big deal in school, but we don't learn all the history we should. We hear

more about Britain and Europe than Africa. Many Black students don't know enough about African history. Take me, for example. I've learned more about my ancestors on social media than in school. If not for social media, I wouldn't know how hard my ancestors worked to get us here. We should put African history in schools and help families learn about their roots. Knowing where you come from gives you an identity and a sense of belonging.

Many students struggle with who they are, so knowing their roots can help them feel like they fit in. We deserve to learn about ourselves.

College is expensive, especially for those who can't afford it. Sure, there are scholarships, but they're not guaranteed. In my opinion, knowledge should be free or way cheaper. Why should we make people pay to learn? Why charge for something that's been around forever? College is great for education and making friends, and I want more people to have that chance, no matter what their life is like. We shouldn't keep knowledge from people just because they can't pay.

I'd make education free because everyone should have a fair shot at learning. We're all human, and we all deserve education.

In the end, I'd change what we teach and how we teach it. I think it's unfair that some people can't get the education they want or struggle with how it's taught. History, languages, and free education should be for everyone who wants it. Our society would be better if we learned right and got what we needed to succeed. If we started our kids on the path to more education early, we'd break down many barriers.

Our future depends on what we learn, and without good education, our future isn't bright. I want to make a difference in education, and I'll do all I can to make it happen.

SPECIAL REPORT: ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SCHOOL CLOSURES

ARGUN SAATCIOGLU, PH.D.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF PUBLIC SCHOOL CLOSURES WITH PROPERTY VALUES AND CRIME INCIDENCES IN KANSAS CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT, 2007–2018

December 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses the impact of public school building closures on residential property values and incidences of crime in surrounding areas within Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) boundaries. It also addresses how public school building closures are related to the growth of charter school presence. Finally, the analysis compares academic outcomes of students in KCPS with those in the growing population of charter schools. The time frame for the analysis is the 2007-2018 period. Data were drawn from multiple sources, including U.S. Department of Education, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, National Institutes of Health, and OpenDataKC in Kansas City, Missouri. The analysis offers important findings, outlined below.

1) KCPS has experienced a significant decline in the number of buildings between 2007 and 2018, particularly after 2010. From 2007 to 2108, KCPS closed a total of 44 locations. In the same period, the number of charter school buildings increased from less than 20 to nearly 30.

2) Between 2011 and 2015, the average census tract in KCPS lost nearly 0.20 public school buildings. This means the average tract lost about one-fifth of its local (or nearby) school building volume (there are 91 census tracts within KCPS boundaries).

3) Existing scholarship on public school closures indicates that such closures are related to:

   - overestimated positive fiscal outcomes

   - greater student transportation costs

   - forced mobility of students with negative effects on test scores

   - lowered sense of belonging, attendance rates, and graduation likelihood

   - increased racial/ethnic and social class segregation

4) Of the 44 locations that KCPS closed between 2007 and 2018, 30 of them (about 70%) currently remain abandoned, regardless of any third party purchases. One of them was reopened. Nine were repurposed as educational facilities. Two currently operate as private businesses.

And one is currently replaced by a public park in its location.

5) Net of critical control measures, including charter school presence, closing 1 KCPS building reduces the median home value by about $5,000 two years later in a census tract where only 1 percent of residents are below the federal poverty line. In a tract where 35% of residents are below the poverty line (about a third of the tracts in KCPS are like this), closing a public school building is related to a decline of nearly $15,000 in the median home value two years later.

6) Net of critical control measures, including charter school presence, closing 1 KCPS building increases the total incidence of crime by 1,000 units two years later in a census tract where only 1 percent of residents are below the federal poverty line. In a tract where 30 percent of residents are below the poverty line (about half of the tracts in KCPS are like this), closing a public school building is related to an increase of nearly 3,000 total incidences of crime two years later.

7) Charter school openings/closures in a census tract have little effect of the density of nearby KCPS presence. Conversely, KCPS closures in a tract strongly predict growth in number of nearby charter schools. Closing a KCPS building in a location where 30 percent of residents are below the poverty line (about half of the tracts in KCPS) is associated with 1.2 more charter schools arriving in that (or nearby) location two years later.

8) The average charter school consistently outperforms the average KCPS school in math and ELA proficiency, but this difference is strongly associated with differences in student composition. For instance, in the 2017-18 school year, 30 percent of charter school students were proficient in math compared to 21 percent of KCPS students. This difference of nearly 10 percentage points disappears completely when controlling for building-level racial/ethnic and socioeconomic status (SES) composition. A similar pattern is prevalent with regard to reading proficiency. A difference of nearly 9 percentage points (in favor of charter schools) is nearly completely accounted for by student composition differences.

CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ON SCHOOL CLOSURES

Public school building closures in large urban areas are becoming increasingly commonplace due to cities' and school districts' increasing debt, shrinking local and state tax revenues, and greater competition for enrollment from charter schools (Royal and Cothorne, 2021). A growing number of cities view school closures as a cost saving strategy that in the long run can help stabilize finances, increase efficiency, and even improve quality of academic and social services to students. Yet, a large body of pertinent scholarship indicates that school districts' expectations of relative cost savings and ultimate financial returns from school closures (e.g., from projected revenues of building sales) are often overestimated (e.g., Dowdall 2013; Bierbaum

2021). Moreover, mass closures have been found to be associated with greater student transportation costs, lower academic achievement and graduation likelihood for dislocated students (disproportionately for low-income students and students of color) (e.g., Sunderman, Cohlan, and Mintorp 2017), reduced sense of belonging and attendance rates (e.g., de la Torre and Gwynne 2009), and increased racial/ethnic and social class segregation (e.g., Siegel-Hawley, Bridges, and Shields 2017).

As the debate on closures ensues, two other highly relevant issues remain overlooked, both in policy work and in scholarship, namely the effects of school closures on property values and social order (crime) in surrounding areas. Because housing and school choices are intrinsically tied in the U.S. (Lareaus and Goyette 2014), school closures in a given area can reduce demand for housing and depress the value of existing housing stock in that area. This

effect can be particularly pronounced in the absence of countervailing forces that can restore losses in property values, such as new commercial activity in affected areas and the productive repurposing of vacated school buildings (see Rosburg et al. 2020). Since schools are supported by their local tax base, depressed property values could have negative implications for school revenues, in addition to reducing the private equity of affected households. Such dynamics essentially run counter to the idea of school closures as gateway to financial stabilization and improvement in struggling districts.

As for the potential effects of school closures on social order, these effects are posited by two theories. First, the broken windows theory suggests that visual cues of instability, such as abandoned buildings, attract crime because offenders assume from these cues that residents are indifferent to what goes on in the neighborhood

People hold signs opposing school closures at a Kansas City Public Schools school board meeting Nov. 16, 2022. (Photo: Zach Bauman/The Beacon)

(Wilson and Kelling 1982). Second, social capital theory suggests that the stock of large vacant buildings undermines social control in the surrounding area because it reduces the density of people whose mere presence and, possibly, their norm-enforcing actions may preclude criminal activity in the first place (simply put, the less the number of potential bystanders, the more the crime) (Wilson 1987). Key insights from both theories converge on the basic conclusion that closed school buildings can reduce social order, particularly when these buildings are not productively repurposed and when other countervailing forces in the area (such as increased commercial and social activity) are scarce or absent. Relatedly, there is a large literature on how increased deviance and reduced safety can, in turn, undermine community bonds and children's wellbeing and academic performance (see Laurito et al. 2019). Such processes essentially run counter to the idea of school closures as a strategy to help improve student outcomes.

Aside from the effect of school closures on property values and crime, a third issue that deserves greater attention is the growth of charter schools in areas experiencing traditional public school closures. This is because school closures may create new enrollment opportunities for charters. Conversely, however, increasing charter school presence may reduce traditional public school enrollment, which may then motivate districts to close even more schools. This potentially recursive dynamic is not well understood. Moreover, because charter schools vary significantly in their

quality and performance (Harris 2020), how the density of traditional public schools and the density of charter schools affect one another, and how charter schools perform in districts experiencing closures and charter school growth are critical questions.

THE POLICY CONTEXT IN KANSAS CITY, MO

Kansas City Public Schools has closed 44 school buildings between 2007 and 2018. Most of these closures have been justified and thus driven by rising costs, declining enrollments, and reduced revenues. KCPS have viewed the closures as a financial and academic turn-around strategy (Gross 2010; Saulny 2010). Yet, over the last decade or so the district has experienced neither the fiscal nor the academic progress at levels that can be attributable to closures. In fact, KCPS lost accreditation in 2011, gaining it only partially in 2014. Despite receiving full accreditation in 2022, the district remains one of the lowest performing systems in the state (and nationwide) (see *U.S. News & World Report*, 2022). It also has continued to face worsening financial challenges (Moxley 2019). Despite this historical record, KCPS has recently proposed to close 10 more school buildings in 2023 as a new turn-around strategy to bring stability to the district and improve student enrollment and outcomes (Pepitone 2022). Past local experience along with well-established insights from studies of school closures in various other cities suggest that a new wave of closures may not have the formally intended consequences in Kansas City, MO in coming years. Against this robust

background, this report focuses on a set of relatively overlooked, yet critically important, implications of school closures, effects on property values and crime, as well as charter school expansion. The following questions, all pertaining to the 2007-2018 period, guide the overall analysis:

1) What happens to KCPS public school buildings that are closed?

2) How are school closures related to property values in surrounding locations? How does this relationship vary by relative affluence of location?

3) How are school closures related to social disorder (crime) in surrounding locations? How does this relationship vary by relative affluence of location?

4) How is traditional public school building density and charter school building density related in KCPS? Does this relationship vary by location?

5) What are academic outcome differences between KCPS and charter schools?

The analysis seeks to build on and extend existing insights on school closures in order to enrich the ongoing conversation on new proposals to close buildings in KCPS. It also seeks to set the stage for a pluralistic and inclusive debate on closures in KCPS and the future of the district.

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS AND TO VIEW OR DOWNLOAD THE FULL REPORT:

OR VISIT: https://www.ulkc.org/2023-state-of-black-kc

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EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

*Let us put our minds together and see what kind of
life we can make for our children.*

—Sitting Bull

School districts must acknowledge the critical need for substantial shifts in both mindset and practice to ensure and maintain equitable outcomes for all students. It is imperative that every child, regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, or other marginalized identities, has unimpeded access to the resources and support required to realize their potential fully. Regrettably, historical and current inaction at the federal, state, and local levels has contributed to decreased access to educational opportunities, resulting in disparities in academic achievement, graduation rates, and disciplinary actions, particularly affecting students from historically marginalized communities.

Disrupting systemic racism and advancing equity in schools is a complex, multifaceted, and ongoing process that requires the collective efforts of educators, students, parents, policymakers, and the broader community. It is a fundamental step toward creating a more equitable and just educational system for all students. It requires collaboration, dedication, and a willingness to confront biases and systemic barriers. By implementing these recommendations, schools can work toward creating a more equitable and inclusive educational environment for all students.

- **Develop an equity policy that will guide the work of the school district and hold all staff accountable.**

- **Adopt staff evaluation tools which include equity standards and metrics.**

- **Develop an equity-centered curriculum resource evaluation tool to use when selecting, reviewing, or adopting instructional resources.**

- **Develop a district-wide equity evaluation tool that will address the following:**
  - **Assess the extent to which educational equity aspects are evident within your school district.**
  - **Evaluate the presence and effectiveness of educational equity measures within the school district.**
  - **Identify opportunities and areas for potential growth in advancing educational equity.**

- **Eliminate subjective discipline infractions from the school district's code of student behavior.**

- **Cultivate a data-sharing culture within the school district, disaggregating student attendance, behavior, and academic data by subgroups.**

- **Diversify the teacher workforce.**

Research underscores the cognitive, social, and emotional advantages derived from fostering diverse classrooms that include students from various backgrounds and cultures. Moreover, these benefits extend to the educators who lead these classrooms, as studies highlight the positive impact of diversifying the teacher workforce. For instance, a longitudinal study revealed that Black students randomly assigned to at least one Black teacher during their K-3 years were nine percentage points (13%) more likely to graduate from high school and six percentage points (19%) more likely to enroll in college compared to their peers of the same school and race. Consequently, many states, districts, and teacher preparation programs have invested in strategies aimed at recruiting and retaining a diverse pool of educators. The following are recommendations related to teacher diversity:

- **Districts should establish policies that promote and safeguard diversity among students, educators, and staff.**

- **Promote the expansion of Grow Your Own (GYO) programs statewide, offering incentives to GYO program graduates who choose to teach in "hard-to-staff" schools.**

- **Grant flexibility to student teaching programs to accommodate non-traditional students who must balance work commitments with their student-teaching responsibilities.**

- **Develop initiatives that incentivize the recruitment and hiring of educators residing and working within the neighborhoods where they will teach.**

Resources

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HEALTH

FOREWORD

UNMASKING THE ROOTS OF INJUSTICE:
TACKLING SYSTEMIC RACISM, VIOLENCE, AND HEALTH DISPARITIES IN KANSAS CITY

TIFFANY LEWIS, R.N.

As I write this foreword, Kansas City is experiencing one of its deadliest years ever, with a disturbing concentration of homicides occurring on the city's east side. In these neighborhoods, poverty prevails, blight is pervasive, and a sense of hopelessness looms large. It is impossible to delve into the topic of health without recognizing the deep-seated intersection of systemic racism and violent crime that plagues our community. Equally impossible is discussing violent crime without understanding the multifaceted factors at play, from the historical legacy of redlining to the ongoing issues of poverty and the mass incarceration of Black males, all of which contribute to the cycle of crime and violence.

In the *2021 State of Black Kansas City* report, Dr. Lydia Isaac poignantly stated, "Systemic racism is a public health problem because the systems that support health outcomes are not fair and do not support optimal health for Black people and communities of color." These words resonate more powerfully than ever in the context of our city's current challenges.

Healthcare, as a fundamental aspect of individual and community well-being, cannot be isolated from the broader societal issues we face. Our healthcare system must grapple with the intertwined issues of racial disparities, poverty, and violence if we are to effect meaningful change. We must recognize that the path to better health for all communities begins with addressing the root causes that perpetuate these disparities.

In the Health section of the *2023 State of Black Kansas City* report, we delve into the critical intersections of health, systemic racism, and violent crime. Through the lens of these complex issues, we aim to shed light on the challenges we face and inspire collaborative efforts to dismantle the systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality.

This report is a call to action, a plea for change, and a testament to the resilience and strength of our communities. It is my hope that, as we navigate these challenging times, we can come together to forge a brighter, healthier future for Kansas City—one that leaves no one behind, regardless of their zip code or the color of their skin.

UNDOING THE MOMENTUM OF SYSTEMIC RACISM: THE SUPREME COURT'S IMPACT ON COLLEGE ADMISSIONS AND THE RIPPLE EFFECT ON HEALTHCARE EQUITY

CARLTON ABNER, DNP

On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court overturned 45 years of established precedent when they declared that race cannot be a factor in the admission process, thus invalidating admissions plans at Harvard and the University of North Carolina. The decision will now force every institution of higher education that receives federal funding to adjust their approaches to their goals of achieving diverse student bodies.

The disappointment in the decision was palpable. It served as yet another example of how the power and momentum of systemic social norms can be an unstoppable force. According to Wikipedia, inertia is "the idea that an object will continue its current motion until some force causes its speed or direction to change." The parallels between physics and human behavior are sometimes quite uncanny. For centuries, people of color were marginalized, subjugated, and dismissed. Without an opposing force to change the direction of that previously established norm, it will not cease to be a part of what makes up our society.

Efforts around affirmative action and the consideration of race in college admissions was intended to be a part of the disrupting force that would redirect centuries of inertia involving the suppression of people of color. Institutions of higher education will respond to the Supreme Court's decision in a variety of ways. States that have already had similar rulings serve as an example of what is to come. According to the Associated Press, the termination of similar efforts in California, Michigan, Washington state, and other regions resulted in a significant decline in minority enrollment at the top public universities in those states. In Michigan, the enrollment of Black and Hispanic undergraduates has not fully recovered since the 2006 decision to end the use of race in admissions. Despite an increase in Hispanic enrollments, the number of Black students in Michigan universities has continued to decrease, dropping from 8% of undergraduates in 2006 to a mere 4% at present.

Following the recent Supreme Court decision, officials from Amherst College relayed that they anticipated that adopting a completely race-neutral approach would lead to a 50% reduction in the Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous student populations at their university. This predicted lack of diversity in higher education enrollment will undoubtedly impact efforts to diversify the workforce, especially in higher paying white-collar jobs. One industry that may be particularly impacted by this decision is healthcare, particularly when it comes to the number of African-American physicians. According to the AAMC, African Americans

make up 5.7% of the physician workforce while comprising 12.8% of the population. Diversity among medical school students has continued to climb, but that growth has fallen short in comparison to their share of the population. The number of African-American medical school students has lagged far behind other diverse groups.

The lack of proportional representation in healthcare is one of the biggest contributors to health inequities seen in African-American communities. As stated by the National Medical Association, "the more Black physicians in the U.S. healthcare system leads to greater patient satisfaction and better adherence to medical recommendations, which translates to better outcomes for Black patients, reducing the overall healthcare disparities that plague Black communities." Despite the known impact to health inequity, 21 public medical schools across eight states were forced to change admissions practices when affirmative action bans were implemented in their states.

A study published by the *Annals of Internal Medicine* tracked the percentage of underrepresented minorities (URM) prior to the bans and five years later. A year prior to those bans, URM enrollment averaged 15%. Five years later, all schools saw that number drop by at least a third.

In 2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared racism a "serious public health threat." The scarcity of Black physicians in the United States is a cause for concern, as it exacerbates the disproportionate impact of infectious

diseases, chronic illnesses, and other medical conditions on communities of color. Experts have warned that this shortage poses a significant public health threat. When the inertia of our implicit biases is allowed to go unchecked in healthcare, it leads to substandard healthcare delivery that is influenced solely by race. For example, several studies have reported that African Americans were less likely to undergo cardiac catheterization compared to Whites, even after controlling for age, education, and clinical variables. For Black patients having suffered from a myocardial infarction (MI), a three-year reduction in life expectancy post-MI compared to Whites is attributed to this disparity in treatment. These findings are another important reminder of the need for diversity in medicine.

Recognizing the inertia of systemic racism is unfortunately omitted from most conversations on race in our country. Perhaps this illustration may help. If you were to extend your arms and imagine that from fingertip to fingertip represented our country from 1619 to present day, the time invested in sincere efforts to reverse centuries of systemic racism would be represented by one of your hands. Who we are now as a society bears no resemblance to who we were centuries ago. But ask yourself, how long does it take to undo something like that?

If we all decided tomorrow that we would no longer shake hands, how long would it take for hand shaking to end in our country? Days? Months? Years? Or maybe decades?

The most likely answer would be measured in generations. When a social norm is ingrained, it is very difficult to dislodge. It takes a concerted effort to reverse the inertia established by generations of familiar ways of thinking, responding, and acting.

What's missing from most conversations about race in our country is the intentionality needed to reverse the inertia of centuries of norms. In fact, quite the opposite is occurring where there is a concerted effort to downplay the horrific circumstances of periods like slavery, Jim Crow, and systemic marginalization based on one's race. What's missing is context and empathy. In their place, people of color have witnessed time and time again the refusal by Whites to play a role in slowing the inertia of centuries of racism. It is that effort and only that effort that can provide the healing that our nation so desperately needs.

The Supreme Court's decision on college admissions will likely reverse gains in diversifying student representation across the nation. This will likely result in fewer underrepresented minorities entering the health professions. The only way to mitigate these risks is by taking a physicist's approach to social momentum by addressing head-on the inertia of systemic practices intended to marginalize people of color. This means having tough conversations. We will need to turn animosity into allyship. We will need people who are willing to try trading comfort for compassion. We don't need laws. We need love. We don't need walls. We need bridges.

RACE AND PLACE MATTER: THE INTERSECTION OF RACE, REDLINES AND MATERNAL HEALTH IN KANSAS CITY

**COUNCILWOMAN
MELISSA ROBINSON**

Maternal and Infant Mortality is an overall marker of the health of a community. Infant Mortality is defined as the death of an infant before his or her first birthday, and the occurrence of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is measured by the rate of death per 1,000 live births. Maternal Mortality is defined as the death of a woman during pregnancy, at delivery or soon after delivery (45 days). The occurrence of Maternal Mortality is measured per 100,000 births.

The overall Infant Mortality Rate in the United States masks significant disparities by race. In the United States, the Infant Mortality Rate is 5.58 per 1,000 live births in comparison to 10.8 for the Black population.

The Maternal Mortality Rate in the United States is 20.1 per 100,000 births in comparison to 44 per 100,000 live births for Black women.

Contributing factors for health outcome inequities include experiencing racial abuse; differential access to goods and services; income and educational attainment; neighborhood environments;

quality housing; access to health insurance; and access to quality healthcare. In a nine-year study to monitor risks during pregnancy, feeling upset by experiences of racism in the 12 months before delivery was significantly associated with greater odds of preterm birth (the leading cause of infant mortality). A plethora of evidence demonstrates that there is a strong correlation between race and infant mortality. Because of these factors, communities and decision makers should be expected to advocate for basic human rights and the eradication of racial discrimination wherever it exists. Further, it is critical to consider the effects of racism when examining underlying causes and formulating solutions to achieve parity.

TALE OF TWO ZIP CODES

Redlines in Kansas City, used to segregate the privileged and the oppressed, are just as visible in 2023 as they were in 1943. Examining current health outcomes and the quality of life in historically redlined communities in comparison to non-redlined communities substantiates the need to break the cycle of oppression and acknowledge that race remains a critical factor in the distribution of wealth and opportunity in Kansas City. In this essay, we examine two Kansas City zip codes—64128 and 64114—and the entire City to illustrate how race and place are key contributors to inequities in maternal and infant mortality and the importance of building a sense of urgency to design a more equitable future.

The 64114 boundaries generally include Gregory Blvd. to 119th Street and Oak

Street to State Line. The 64128 boundaries generally include 27th Street to 39th Street and Prospect to Stadium Drive.

SOUNDING THE ALARM

Kansas City's statistics regarding maternal and infant mortality are alarming and are a cause for immediate, rigorous, and fully resourced action. Residents living in 64128 are experiencing one of the highest rates of maternal and infant mortality in the city, in comparison to residents who live in 64114, who are experiencing the lowest rates of maternal and infant mortality. The maternal mortality rate is 250 and infant mortality rate is 12 for zip code 64128. The infant mortality rate for residents living in zip code 64114 is zero and the maternal mortality rate is 2.

Social Determinants of Health are the nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes. They are conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, as well as the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.

For both zip codes and the City, we examined race, property vacancy, unemployment, income, poverty, and high school diploma attainment as reported in the American Community Survey.

In addition to the measures above, we also examined the differences in the City's Healthy Homes Inspection Program. This program is designed to protect public health, safety, and welfare in residential rental property in Kansas City, Missouri. The Health Department is responsible for ensuring residential rental properties meet minimum health and safety standards by

CITY OF KANSAS CITY, MO	
White	60.9%
African American	28.2%
Property Vacancy	12.6%
Poverty	16.1%
Unemployment	4.8%
No High School Diploma	6.6%
Income over $60,000	45.3%

ZIP CODE 64114	
White	77.6%
African American	13.7%
Property Vacancy	6.8%
Poverty	7.3%
Unemployment	1.9%
No High School Diploma	2.6%
Income over $60,000	54.1%

ZIP CODE 64128	
White	13.8%
African American	80.6%
Property Vacancy	30.1%
Poverty	31.2%
Unemployment	10.1%
No High School Diploma	17.9%
Income over $60,000	12.3%

responding to complaints of neglect in rental properties.

In 64114, 12% of registered rental housing received healthy homes violations in comparison to 60% of rental housing in 64128, indicating the inequities in healthy housing conditions for tenants in redlined communities in Kansas City.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is critical that we turn the tide on the devaluation of human capital in Kansas City by ensuring sufficient investment in populations experiencing the deepest inequities, especially Black mothers and their babies.

1. Expecting mothers living in redlined communities should have access to a Doula to provide support before, during, and after delivery.

2. Fully invest in programs like the Black Health Care Coalition that utilize the Family Development Credential to address social determinants of health, ensuring families have access to full employment, stable housing, reliable transportation, and access to early childhood education.

3. Continue to advocate for the Child Income Tax Credit and work with lawmakers to eliminate sales tax on fresh groceries, formula, diapers, and feminine hygiene products in historically redlined communities. If the City can establish special tax districts such as Community Improvement Districts to increase sales taxes, we should be able to implement the inverse to support those living in communities experiencing disparate poverty outcomes.

4. Utilize City-owned land bank properties to attract philanthropy and private investment to remediate vacant lots by building attainable housing for current residents and ensuring they have access to own the housing and create generational wealth.

5. Residents living in redlined communities and are Pell Grant Eligible should be able to attend local colleges and universities at no additional cost.

6. The City of Kansas City should launch a "Live Near Your Work" program to stimulate business and employer growth in redlined communities. Housing, childcare, and business incentives should be offered to build a stabilized economy in distressed communities.

7. Transportation mobility is inextricably connected to economic mobility. Increased investment in the City's public transit system is necessary to ensure residents have access to opportunity. Strong east-west connections, common sense transit to employment/industry centers, improved safety, and transit reliability is key.

The disparities in the social determinants of health in Kansas City are compelling and call upon us to address the trauma and impacts of racism. We must reimagine and implement policies that create an ecosystem in which residents can prosper in place; and we must provide narrowly tailored economic mobility opportunities for residents experiencing poverty and living in redlined communities. Without these transformative interventions, Black maternal and infant mortality rates will continue to rise.

EMPOWERING BLACK BIRTHING: OVERCOMING SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE FOR HEALTHY FUTURES

SHALESE CLAY

I have worked in maternal health for many years, and during this time, it has been my mission to educate Black birthing people on the importance of our life expectancy once we become pregnant. Did you know that the maternal death rate for Black women in Missouri is 87.6 per 100,000 pregnancies? This results in Black women being four times more likely to experience pregnancy-related fatalities compared to White women and increases the chances that Black women may not live to witness their baby's first birthday.

All Black birthing people are affected by these increased risks, and your education and economic background will not reduce your risk. We all know the story of Serena Williams and her experience after giving birth to her first child. If you are a Black woman in America, you have an increased risk of complications and death during pregnancy, delivery, and after birth. These risks are not genetic or related to where you grew up, what type of insurance you have, or where you work. This is due to a dirty secret kept out in the open in America. Discrimination, racism, bias, and the institutions and their policies (health, education, legal, etc.) created long ago are still in place today.

In a recently published report, Missouri shows the infant mortality (death) rate for Black babies in Missouri is 11 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to 5.3 for White babies. And truth be told, it was safer for Black moms and babies 15 years before the end of slavery! When we look back on Black history, in the early 1920s, Black families used midwives and had home births that supported healthier birth outcomes.

Dr. Jana J. Richards, M.D., of the University of Chicago, stated early this year, "The root causes are driven by inequality, discrimination, and long-standing racism deeply rooted in the U.S. healthcare system." Systemic racism impacts every aspect of healthcare. It begins before birth and continues until death. Black babies are more than twice as likely as White babies to die at birth or in the first year of life. And life expectancy is shorter for Black women compared to White women.

Race is a social construct with a significant impact on the health and well-being of Black people. At every stage of life, generations of structural racism impact Black people disproportionately in the form of social and health disparities, such as segregated housing, the digital divide, educational barriers, economic suppression, and access to quality healthcare.

We know that the system is just not made for us, and our voices are limited when we want to be an advocate for ourselves or the birthing persons in our family. The system was created with inaccurate information that has historically been taught in medical textbooks.

One common misconception is that Black people experience less pain than their White counterparts. This gives the impression that we are unsure of what our bodies are experiencing.

The U.S. healthcare system has historically failed people of color, including during the crucial time of pregnancy. Multiple health, social, and economic factors are contributors, including inequitable access to maternity care. With limited access to quality healthcare in Missouri, our risk increases. These inequities and unequal access to quality care contribute to higher rates of maternal and infant health complications and death.

In the Black community, we must provide more education and resources about family planning. Having conversations about reproductive life planning could help you make sure you have the support you need to make an effective decision about your future. Speaking with a reproductive life planning expert, a Maternal Community Health Worker, or a trusted medical professional can support you as you consider your options. It is okay to ask yourself questions like: Do I want to have a child? Do I want to wait to have a child? If I do not want to have a child, what precautions should I take? The choice is yours, but you must be willing to have these conversations with your doctor, partner, and even your age-appropriate children.

Remember that you have the right to make these choices for yourself. Organizations like the National Association to Advance Black Birth are working to support Black birthing people and their birthing decisions. They have created the Black Birthing Bill of Rights, which states, "All Black birthing persons are entitled to respectful, equitable, and high-quality pre- and postpartum care." The Black Birthing Bill of Rights is a resource for every Black birthing person who engages in maternity care. We want each Black birthing person to know their rights and to have the tools to confidently exercise these rights. It can also serve as guidance for government programs, hospitals, maternity providers, and others as they transform their policies, procedures, and practices to meet the needs of Black birthing people.

I am here as your expert to educate and support Black families in reclaiming our power. Our power lies in birth planning that supports our desired birthing experiences and gives us a chance to see our Black babies, Black birthing people, and Black families thrive. Understanding your rights, having important conversations, and preparing with a trusted professional can change your birthing experience.

Black birthing people are in danger in our current system, and if we do not do something about it now, we will continue to die. My mission is to share education about our rights and how to navigate this unjust system. We must come together to save more Black birthing families and babies. We have the right to choose our medical provider, the right to change our mind about where and how we receive care, and the right to have a baby the non-traditional way. These traditions belong to us, and it is our birthright to continue these practices.

We must continue to learn our rights and make our voices heard.

SILENT STRUGGLES AND THE "STRONG BLACK WOMAN": THE HIDDEN IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

J. CAMILLE HALL, PH.D., LCSW

Black advocates are sounding the alarm on the impact of the Supreme Court's decisions to overturn affirmative action and President Biden's student loan debt forgiveness plan, warning both will disproportionately affect Black families. There is growing concern about how these rulings will affect the mental well-being of the Black community. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression has been found to be the leading cause of disability worldwide (WHO, 2019). In new report from Gallup, depression is more widespread than ever in the United States; about 18% of adults—more than 1 in 6—say they are depressed or are receiving treatment for depression, a jump of more than 7 percentage points since 2015, when Gallup first started polling on the topic (CNN, May 17, 2023). There is compelling evidence that depression rates in Black people are similar to or slightly lower than those of Whites (Hall et al., 2021). One study found a lifetime depression rate of 10.4% among Black people and 17.9% among White people. Women experience depression at roughly twice the rate of men; and girls 14-18 years of age have consistently higher rates

of depression than boys in this age group (CDC, 2023). By some estimates, only 7% of Black women suffering from depression receive treatment, compared to 20% of the general population (Hall et al., 2021). In the U.S., the depression rate among Black women is estimated to be almost 50% higher than that of Caucasian women (CDC, 2023). The rates of mental health problems are higher than average for Black women because of psychological factors that result directly from their experience as African Americans.

The "Strong Black Woman" or "Superwoman" (SBW) is a unique, cultural gender norm mandating Black women uphold a mask of emotional and physical strength, appear fiercely self-reliant, and serve as caretaker for their family, church, and community (Watson-Singleton, 2017). Black women who endorse the SBW ideology exhibit shame, embarrassment, negative social judgment, and employment-related discrimination, and they are reticent to disclose a need for emotional or mental health supports about emotional problems (Hall, 2018). Very little attention has been given to examining how SBW affects Black women's beliefs about seeking mental health treatment. Black[1] women are more likely to endorse religious factors (e.g., sin, lack of faith, and/or trusting God) or personal weakness as causes of mental illness. A few studies have examined Black women and their endorsement of the SBW ideology (Clement et al., 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2015), but research focused on developing public education and awareness strategies and engagement activities to reduce stigma for Black women is sparse.

This essay seeks to provide insights based on the findings from theoretical and empirical studies that have shown how the endorsement of the SBW cultural ideology affects Black women's beliefs and attitudes about mental health utilization.

MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT UTILIZATION

In 2019, 46.8 million people in the U.S. identified their race as Black, either alone or as part of a multiracial or ethnic background (Pew Research, 2021). Understanding the prevalence, attitudes, and treatment issues, and lack of access to insurance regarding mental health and mental health utilization for African Americans is important. According to the U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Minority Health (2020):

- Adult Blacks are 20% more likely to report serious psychological distress than adult Whites.

- Adult African Americans living below poverty are three times more likely to report serious psychological distress than those living above poverty.

- Adult African Americans are more likely to have feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness than are adult Whites.

- Although African Americans are less likely than White people to die from suicide as teenagers, African American teenagers are more likely to attempt suicide than White teenagers (8.3% compared to 6.2%).

Historical adversity, which includes slavery, sharecropping, and race-based exclusion from health, education, social, and economic resources, translate into socioeconomic disparities experienced by African Americans today. Socioeconomic status, in turn, is linked to mental health. For example, people who are impoverished, homeless, incarcerated, or have substance abuse problems experience more psychological problems. Despite progress made over the years, racism continues to have an impact on the mental health of African Americans. Negative stereotypes and attitudes of rejection have decreased, but they continue to occur with measurable adverse consequences. Historical and contemporary instances of negative treatment have led to a mistrust of authorities, many of whom are not seen as having the best interests of Blacks in mind. African Americans of all ages are more likely to be victims of serious violent crime than are non-Hispanic Whites, making them more likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Hall et al., 2021). Researchers who reviewed more than 50 studies found that Black people were nearly 2.5 times more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia than White people (Hall, 2018; Mental Health America, 2020). According to Hall, Connor, and Jones' research study:

- African Americans hold beliefs related to stigma, psychological openness, and help-seeking, which in turn affects their coping behaviors.

- Black men are particularly concerned about stigma.

- Participants appeared apprehensive about seeking professional help for

mental health issues, which is consistent with previous research (2021).

African Americans are over-represented in U.S. jails and prisons (Garcia-Hallett et al., 2020). Blacks also account for 37% of drug arrests, but only 14% of regular drug users (illicit drug use is frequently associated with self-medication among people with mental illness) (Garcia-Hallett et al., 2020). Disparities in access to care and treatment for mental illnesses have also persisted over time. While implementation of the Affordable Care Act has helped to close the gap in uninsured individuals, 16% of African Americans, versus 11.1% of White Americans were still uninsured in 2014 (Catalyst, 2023). In 2015, the percentage of people who were unable to get or delayed in getting needed medical care or prescription medicines was significantly higher for people with no health insurance (18.7%) than for people with private insurance (8.4%) (Catalyst, 2023). In 2015, 54.3% of adult African Americans with a major depressive episode received treatment, compared with 73.1% of adult White Americans (Catalyst, 2023). Compared to 45.3% of White Americans, 40.6% of African Americans aged 12 and over were treated for substance abuse and completed their treatment course (Catalyst, 2023).

Research reveals a compelling link between financial strain, occupational stress, family dynamics, limited social support, inadequate healthcare access, violence, and poverty with the manifestation of depressive symptoms in African American women (Abrams et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2021). These women bear the weight of distinct stressors stemming from both racial and gender discrimination. The confluence of multiple risk factors can escalate psychological distress across women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. However, when these risk factors intersect with the added burdens of racism, sexism, and socio-economic class inequalities, the result can be a heightened sense of depression among African-American women in comparison to their White counterparts (Hall, 2018).

While the prevalence of depression within the African-American community signals a clear need for assistance, the research literature consistently highlights a significant underutilization of therapeutic services among this group. A mere 7% of African-American women displaying signs of mental health issues have sought treatment (Abrams et al., 2019; Hall, 2018).

Data from the American Psychological Association (APA) shows that only 2% of the estimated 41,000 psychiatrists in the U.S. are Black, and just 4% of psychologists are Black. Many African Americans may worry that mental health care practitioners are not culturally competent enough to treat their specific issues (2020). This is compounded by the fact that some African-American patients have reported experiencing racism and microaggression from therapists (Watson-Singleton, 2017). Stigma and judgment prevent African Americans from seeking treatment for their mental illness (Hall et al., 2021). Research indicates that African Americans believe that mild depression or anxiety would be considered "crazy" in their social circles (Abrams et al.,

2019). Many believe that discussions about mental illness would not be appropriate, even among family members.

SBW AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

The SBW provides African-American women with a "blueprint" on how to appropriately perform a set of cognitive and behavioral expectations. Many women portray an image of survival and strength, which often prevents them from expressing their psychological distress and seeking psychological services. Abrams, Hill, and Maxwell (2019) posited, "the SBW is an amalgamation of beliefs and cultural expectations of incessant resilience, independence, and strength that guide meaning making, cognition, and behavior related to Black womanhood" (p. 522). Data reported from Watson and Hunter's study indicate that 70–80% of the sampled Black women endorsed the SBW ideology (2015). Society expects Black women to handle losses, traumas, failed relationships, and the dual oppressions of racism and sexism. Falling short of this expectation is viewed by many Black women as a personal failure, because they must be fully self-sufficient, both emotionally and economically (Watson-Singleton, 2017). The SBW ideology may be passed on intergenerationally, particularly through the mother's socialization of females (Hall, 2021). Findings from several studies show that regardless of age, education level, and/or type of mental illness, Black women endorse the SBW idea and experience stigma (Abrams et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2021; Watson-Singleton, 2017). Other studies that have examined endorsement of the SBW

ideology show that age, educational level, and socioeconomic status significantly impact Black women's assessment of feeling emotionally overwhelmed (Donovan & West, 2015; Hall, 2018; Hall et al., 2021).

Researchers have observed how the SBW ideology influences Black women's mental health in ways quite different from other racial groups. These studies fall short of addressing how the SBW impacts mental health utilization. Theoretical, anecdotal, and empirical evidence indicates an association between the SBW endorsement and negative health outcomes such as high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. Being an SBW means that Black women unconsciously learn to defend against internalized feelings of anxiety and depression (Abrams et al., 2019). Some Black women perceived the SBW ideology to be a precursor to their experiences of depression, and they view the SBW ideal to be a barrier to recognizing their experiences of depression. A study of Black women who endorsed the SBW in therapy suggests that Black women are at greater risk of mental health disorders (Hall et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although U.S. Black women have historically and relentlessly felt pressure to be strong for their families and communities, many struggle with decisions to engage in mental health services due to their endorsement of the SBW ideal. The SBW ideal is both a coping strategy and a barrier to utilization of mental health services for Black women. The research indicates that we need to develop

public education and awareness campaigns to reduce stigma among Black women and enhance engagement in mental health services. Hall, Connor, and Jones (2021) suggested health education campaigns targeted at Black women that carry the message that having depression does not make you weak, and recognition that you need professional help makes you strong. It is critical that these campaigns ensure that Black women are receiving these messages.

These findings offer crucial insights for both researchers and practitioners, informing and enhancing mental health interventions and services tailored to Black women. A tendency among Black women is to downplay their depressive symptoms or psychological distress, often donning the mask of strength represented by the "Strong Black Woman." This underscores the utmost importance for providers to possess cultural competence, enabling them to effectively navigate the complexities of the SBW phenomenon for accurate assessment and diagnosis.

In this context, providers must undertake the task of reshaping perceptions. They need to guide clients towards recognizing that seeking professional help signifies neither strength nor weakness. However, embracing this notion can prove challenging when it diverges from cultural norms and values. Therefore, it becomes imperative for culturally sensitive assessment and treatment approaches to acknowledge strength as both an asset and harbinger of concealed vulnerabilities.

The potential outcome of such efforts is an increase in the number of Black women who access essential mental health support and persist in treatment over the long term. This article serves as a resounding "call to arms," urging heightened awareness about the necessity of dedicating time and energy to self-care.

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1 The terms *Black* and *African American* refer to individuals of African and or Caribbean descent and are used interchangeably throughout the essay.

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VIOLENCE IN KANSAS CITY AND THE MISUNDERSTOOD TRAGEDIES: UNVEILING THE HIDDEN LAYERS OF RACISM, MENTAL HEALTH, AND TRAUMA

LESTER E. BLUE, JR., PH.D.

Often citizens of Kansas City are baffled when they hear that a person was killed over a pair of shoes, an argument about five dollars, or some other trivial matter. In fact, Ladden-Hall (2022) of *The Daily Beast* reported that in Kansas City, a boy was killed by his brother when the older brother discovered that his sibling had turned off the oven with a pizza in it.

In 1985, the Pulitzer Prize-winning African American playwright, August Wilson, explored profound themes that played out in seemingly trivial incidents. His play, "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," concludes with a dramatic moment in which one character, Levee, fatally stabs another character, Toledo, over a seemingly insignificant matter—Toledo stepping on Levee's shoe. Through this incident, Wilson provides us with a window into the complex and troubled life of Levee.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Levee's family had a degree of economic prosperity and pride. Then eight-year-old Levee witnessed sexual violence perpetrated against his mother by eight White men. Levee was stabbed while trying to defend his mother; he was taken to the White doctor, who was attending to the birth of a calf and refused healthcare to the bleeding Black child. Levee was aware of the economic exploitation of his family, his father avenging his mother's rape, the lynching and mutilation of his father's body, and his subsequent fatherlessness. Years later, minutes before Levee, the trumpet player, stabbed Toledo, the piano player, Levee belligerently recounts God's betrayal of his mother, who called out to God as she was being sexually assaulted.

Levee's shoes symbolize the new life he hoped for, tied to recording the songs he'd written with the band he dreamed of leading some day. Levee's dreams of success are shattered. Experiencing racism and getting fired by Ma Rainey further compounds his despair. In a moment of blind rage, unable to overcome the racism and powerlessness he feels, Levee directs his anger at the most defenseless person, Toledo. He impulsively stabs Toledo for accidentally stepping on his shoes. He initially does not realize the gravity of his action, but he immediately regrets it. This tragic turn of events reflects the profound impact of racism, exploitation, and shattered dreams on Levee's life.

Wilson (1985) eloquently illustrates that what could be seen as a senseless action is frequently multi-factorial and extremely complex. In commenting on Wilson's play, Parris (2018) posited, "Black rage contextualized, historicized and humanized is something we need a lot more of right

now" (p. 5). Although the complexities are elucidated in this play, in real life, they usually remain hidden from most of us.

MENTAL ILLNESS AND VIOLENCE

Another simplistic explanation often given for violent crime is that the perpetrators must be severely mentally ill. Politicians frequently declare, "Guns don't kill people, people do." The accompanying characterization is that the individual must have severe mental health issues. DeAngelis (2021) states that violence is not commonly committed by severely mentally ill individuals (e.g., individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder). In a large longitudinal study, Elbogen and Johnson (2009) did find that the incidence was slightly higher in people with mental illness. However, when a severe mental illness is present in those who commit seriously violent crimes, it usually co-occurs within the context of background factors, including childhood physical abuse, residing in poor and/or dangerous neighborhoods (often the historic result of redlining), and/or concurrent substance abuse problems. The primary predictors of violence in the general population are the same predictors in those with severe mental illness: antisocial behavior (i.e., psychopathic/sociopathic behavior), substance use, and anger issues (DeAngelis, 2021). Most criminal acts, including violent crimes, are not committed by people with mental illness, and most people with mental illness are not violent. People with severe mental illness are more likely the victims of violent crime rather than the instigators.

ALCOHOL AND VIOLENCE

Another factor closely associated with violent crime is substance abuse. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2022) about 88,000 people in the United States die each year due to alcohol related issues, including homicide, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and suicide.

Alcohol intoxication alone is not the sole cause of violence, as clarified by Ackermann (2022). It is the interplay of various factors, including the environment, dependency, and exposure to aggression or violence, that can ultimately lead to violent behavior. However, it is worth noting that alcohol can exacerbate emotions like sadness, irritability, anger, and aggressiveness, thereby elevating the likelihood of making regrettable decisions, sometimes of a violent nature. This heightened risk persists even when consuming moderate amounts of alcohol. According to Ackermann (2022),

The American Society of Addiction Medicine finds that alcohol is involved in 28% to 43% of violent injuries and 47% of homicides.

DRUG USE AND VIOLENCE

The percentage of violence from drug use is not dissimilar to that of individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, but because the number of people abusing drugs is higher than the number of severely mental ill individuals, the public health risk of violence from drug abusers is greater (Zhong et al., 2020). In other words, though the percentages are the same, the sheer number of drug abusers is greater. Although different drugs are associated with different risks for violence, every drug category yielded more violent behavior than that of the general population. The physical and psychological effects of drugs can include irritability, agitation, aggression, cognitive impairment, and poor decision making. Like every other contributor to violence, the relationship between drug abuse and violence is complex. Other factors include past experiences with violence, both as a victim and perpetrator, poverty, co-occurrence of mental illness, lack of treatment availability, and homelessness. Moreover, some individuals who abuse drugs may turn to violence to finance their drug habits or encounter

disputes within the illegal drug markets (Zhong et al., 2020).

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES) AND VIOLENT CRIME

Violent crime rarely occurs due to a single factor, such as mental illness or a trivial slight, but tends to be related to multiple factors, often stemming from childhood trauma. Specifically, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are significantly correlated to both juvenile and adult violent crime (Freeze, 2019; Reavis et al., 2013). Adverse Childhood Experiences include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; physical and emotional neglect; witnessing violence toward mother; substance abuse in household; mental illness in the household; household member incarcerated; parental separation or divorce; discrimination and/or racism; witnessed violence; unsafe neighborhood; and/or poverty. Research findings have suggested that higher levels of ACEs are found in minority and lower-income neighborhoods. The most commonly experienced ACEs include physical and emotional abuse, family member struggling with substance abuse, community violence, feeling unsafe in their neighborhood, and racial discrimination. Ninety percent of juvenile offenders have

been found to have experienced traumatic and violent events. Adult offenders reported nearly four times more ACEs than adult non-offenders. It is important to note that every individual who experiences ACEs will not commit crimes (Freeze, 2019).

A 2019 Attorney General's report found that community violence often prevents children from feeling safe at home, in their neighborhoods, or at school. As a result, they may believe that violence is the norm. Experiencing those close to them being murdered or incarcerated, they often grow to think that relationships are too fleeting to trust. They may turn to gangs and violence to prove to others that they are not weak and/or to counter feelings of isolation, despair, and impotence, thus perpetuating community violence and imprisonment and leading to another generation of children suffering ACEs.

INTERVENTION

The mental health, substance abuse, and trauma of ACEs usually can be ameliorated by treatment, which in turn can decrease violent crime. Severe mental problems usually can be managed on an outpatient basis or by short-term in-patient treatment. Generally, severe mental illness is first addressed with psychotropic medications to manage delusions, hallucinations, and mood swings. Additionally, the illness can be addressed with individual and/or group psycho-educational and/or psycho-therapeutic treatment. The third component of the treatment of severe mental health problems is community treatment. Specifically, case management teaches severely mentally ill individuals to live as independently and healthily as possible, given their abilities and limitations. Case managers help monitor and manage medication, assist with making and keeping mental and physical health appointments, and facilitate obtaining and maintaining social services.

Substance abusers often require inpatient, partial-hospitalization, and/or intensive outpatient treatment. This is generally followed by community-based support groups, frequently 12-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Individual and group psychotherapy can be effective adjunctive treatment to address the psychological factors related to the underlying causes of substance abuse disorders. Zhong et al. (2020) state that substance abuse treatment programs can lead to a decrease in violent crime. Medical treatments, including medications that reduce cravings, and non-medical treatments, such as psychotherapeutic treatments, therapeutic communities, and drug courts, are associated with reduced crime rates. Even prison-based drug and alcohol treatment and communities reduce recidivism and further violent crime.

Freeze (2019) states that caring, informed, and responsible adults need to identify at-risk youth and provide leadership and guidance to attenuate the traumatizing effects of ACEs. Community approaches to addressing ACEs is often effective. Community leaders, teachers, and family members, and even police officers who show leadership, embrace vulnerability, and communicate high expectations can help mitigate the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences. Mindfulness as a strategy in classroom and schools is another effective means of addressing the effects of traumatic experiences. Some children, especially those exhibiting symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, should be referred for psychological and psychiatric treatment. Community policing that involves officers building positive relationships with children and other community members is a key component of addressing ACEs; moreover, policing techniques that involve social workers who help identify needs and resources is vital. Freeze (2020) reports that "an effective approach will involve social workers, officers who interact directly with juveniles, mental health and medical personnel, educators, representatives of nonprofit groups, and authorities who decide on alternatives to detention" (p. 2).

CONCLUSION

The causes of violent crime are complex and multi-dimensional; therefore there needs to be a multi-faceted means of addressing and treating it. Greater Kansas City needs to become serious about focusing on the problem of violent crime and not rely on old unidirectional remedies. We must embrace and fund a multi-pronged approach that includes greater emphasis on mental health and substance abuse treatment, assessing and addressing individual needs, increasing focus on community policing, and addressing social ills. The expenditure of community and financial resources to intervene to treat the convergence of psychological, social, and substance abuse contributors to violent crime could lead to fewer homicides and safer communities.

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BREAKING THE CHAINS: THE URGENT CALL FOR REFORM IN THE CRIMINALIZATION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG BLACK COMMUNITIES

LATANYA DUMAS

The criminalization of substance abuse among Black people has been a deeply rooted issue in the United States, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and injustice. This article sheds light on the historical context, societal implications, and the urgent need for reform in addressing this systemic problem. By examining the disproportionate impact of drug policies on Black communities, we can better understand the underlying factors that contribute to this issue and advocate for a more equitable and compassionate approach.

Understanding the criminalization of substance abuse within the Black community requires an examination of the historical factors that have contributed to this issue. The War on Drugs, initiated by President Richard M. Nixon approximately 50 years ago, played a pivotal role in exacerbating the criminalization of drug-related offenses. This policy had a disproportionately adverse impact on Black communities, resulting in a sharp increase in arrests, convictions, and severe sentences for drug-related crimes. These consequences have inflicted profound harm on the community.

The criminalization of substance abuse among Black people has had far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and communities. Black individuals are more likely to be arrested, convicted, and incarcerated for drug offenses compared to their White counterparts, despite similar rates of drug use. This disparity not only undermines the principles of fairness and justice but also perpetuates a cycle of poverty and social marginalization. It has contributed to the perpetuation of racial disparities within the criminal justice system, which causes Black citizens to distrust law enforcement.

Moreover, the criminalization of substance abuse has hindered access to vital resources such as education, employment, and housing for Black individuals with a history of drug offenses. The stigma associated with drug convictions often leads to limited opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration into society, further exacerbating the cycle of substance abuse and criminal behavior. This systemic discrimination not only affects individuals but also weakens the fabric of entire communities, hindering their ability to thrive and prosper.

The rise of mandatory minimum sentencing and the implementation of the "three strikes policy" have significantly influenced incarceration rates for drug offenses. During the era of the war on drugs, Congress enacted the Comprehensive Crime Control Act in 1984, which established mandatory minimum sentences and eliminated federal parole. Consequently, these sentences often

turn out to be greatly disproportionate in relation to the actual severity of the offense. The focus on specific types of offenses tends to disproportionately affect certain social groups and individuals. Additionally, this approach transfers discretion away from judges and places it more in the hands of law enforcement and the prosecution.

A recent study reveals a stark disparity: White individuals struggling with heroin or opioid addiction are 35 times more likely to receive treatment involving a medication known as buprenorphine, in comparison to African Americans or other individuals of color. This discrepancy extends to their likelihood of actually accessing treatment as well.

Methadone, a substance that has been in use since the 1940s, acts as a blocker, diminishing the impact of opioids on users. Buprenorphine, developed in the 1960s, serves a similar yet superior purpose compared to methadone. It is more convenient, effective, and efficient. Recent reports from the CDC found that only one in twelve Black people who died of an opioid-related overdose had been engaged in substance use treatment, with White people being nearly twice as likely to receive treatment. Statistics showed that not only are White patients more likely to receive Medications for Opiod Use Disorder (MOUD) than Black patients, they also are more likely to receive buprenorphine compared to methadone. One recent study from the University of Michigan found similar patterns of structural racism, where White patients were three to four times more likely than Black patients to receive buprenorphine, with Black patients being more commonly referred

for methadone treatment (*Journal of Mental Health and Clinical Psychology*, 2023).

Media depictions of urban minorities, particularly in impoverished communities, often perpetuated a stereotype of them as drug addicts and lawbreakers, whereas White individuals were commonly cast as victims in the media narrative. This portrayal has contributed to a stark contrast in how crack cocaine, an opioid that predominantly affected poor Black communities, was treated compared to opioid use among White individuals, which was often decriminalized and regarded as a medical issue.

An illustrative study underscored the gravity of the situation. In the United States, over 64,000 drug overdoses were recorded, with opioids accounting for a significant 66% of these cases. Within the realm of opioid overdoses, a staggering 79% were attributed to White individuals, while non-White minorities constituted only 10%. This divergence sheds light on the stark disparity in how drug-related issues were framed, managed, and treated among different racial groups.

The urgent need for reform in addressing the criminalization of substance abuse among Black people cannot be overstated. There must be a shift in drug policies towards a more compassionate and health-centered approach. Rather than focusing solely on punitive measures, emphasis should be placed on prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. This approach would not only reduce the burden on the criminal justice system but also provide individuals with the necessary support to overcome addiction and reintegrate into society.

FROM ADDICTION TO REDEMPTION: A 35-YEAR JOURNEY OF SOBRIETY AND GIVING BACK

KEITH FAISON

On June 18, 1971, President Richard Nixon declared drug abuse in the U.S. to be "public enemy number one." He immediately increased federal funding for military intervention and drug-control agencies. The "War on Drugs" had officially begun.

The War on Drugs vilified Black people who used drugs and weaponized the criminal justice system against them. Since 1980, over 31 million people—mostly Black—have been arrested for minor drug offenses such as marijuana possession, according to Michelle Alexander in her critically acclaimed book, *The New Jim Crow*. Prison sentences quadrupled in two short decades.

Over 50 years after Nixon's racially motivated declaration, we are still grappling with the effects of mass incarceration with its enormous tentacles that have strangled Black communities nationwide.

Below is one man's personal account.

I grew up in Virginia. There were four of us in my family—my mother and three brothers. Drugs and alcohol were not allowed in the family home, but my extended family members were involved in criminal activities, such as bootlegging and running

gambling "numbers." Soon, I became a numbers runner myself, giving my mother's numbers to the local barber. We grew up so impoverished that one of my dreams was to be able to move into the projects. Again, let me emphasize that we lived well below the poverty line.

In all honesty, I had always felt different from my brothers. They were tall; I was short. They were stout; I was skinny. Even though I was very much loved, spoiled, and protected, I think this feeling of inadequacy led me into high-risk situations. I was constantly reinventing myself to try to raise my self-esteem. Although I'd always felt different from my family, it wasn't until I was 18 years old that I was told I was adopted. My birth mother had given me away to her best friend, who I knew as "Mama." I was devastated.

A few years after this discovery, my birth mother took me back in, and I moved with my birth family to New York City. My mother worked tirelessly every day to put food on the table for three growing boys. She ruled with an iron fist, and she had old school rules such as family first, respect for others, and stay in school. Chores were also high on her list. My mother was always tired, so we weren't allowed to go outside and play with our friends much. And when we did, we all went out together. My brothers' job was to protect me, the baby boy. For years it felt like a Gestapo camp to me.

I started experimenting with drugs and alcohol at age 14. Alcohol was my first vice. I fell in love with drinking at first usage, and it quickly became one of my best friends and

coping mechanisms. I'd later discover my predisposition to alcohol was due to my birth mother's addiction to heroin. My brothers and sisters also suffered gravely from drugs and alcohol use and/or drug involvement.

By age 18, I was using drugs and liquor regularly and partying heavily. I was so into the street life that I barely graduated from high school. Once, while under the influence, I was almost shot in the face. After that incident, I decided to join the Air Force.

I thought I had finally found my independence in the military. I did well in basic training and went to my first active-duty station with confidence. My mother and her friends were so proud of me. But their pride was short-lived. Drinking was normal in the Air Force back then, and it was a daily activity, especially on Fridays. Most of the sergeants literally drank more than I did. One day, a sergeant mentioned to me that I needed to learn how to hold my liquor. So, I aimed to do just that.

While alcohol was my drug of choice, I also loved to smoke marijuana. I began to smoke on a regular basis, and within a year, I suffered the consequences of my drug and alcohol use. My friends began to isolate themselves from me. Still, I didn't believe I had a problem. I only thought that I loved to party.

My military career ended after three years, four months, and 22 days. I received two Article 15 disciplinary actions within a two-year period due to my marijuana usage, which resulted in termination from the Air Force with a general discharge. I was filled with shame, and I felt guilty. With my tail tucked between my legs once again, I went to live with one of my brothers, my sister-in-law, and their two children in Junction City, Kansas.

By this time, I was very much in active addiction. I was using daily and clubbing every night. I wasn't motivated to find a job, but I knew I had to find a hustle to make money. That's when I started selling drugs, including cocaine. I had tried cocaine before and had never gotten any gratifying feeling from it, but one night I did, and wow! Within two months I was completely addicted to cocaine as well. Within six months of daily cocaine use, I was arrested, charged, and sentenced to three years in federal prison.

You would think that would have been the end of my addiction, but almost immediately, I met some fellow addicts in prison, and I began using again. After a year, I was transferred to another prison because of my heavy drug use. Probably, the hardest part in all the mayhem was having to call home and tell my mother what had happened. She said, "I can't believe that you're messing up while in prison." That's when reality began to set in. Maybe I did have a problem with drugs and alcohol after all.

After three years in prison, I went before the parole board. I made parole, but it would be eight months before I was released. By this time, I was desperate to get out of prison. I was sick and tired of being locked up. I tried Bible study and talking in tongues, and I experimented with just about any form of spirituality.

In September 1987, I decided to quit smoking marijuana. On December 2, they

called my number on the intercom, "42260! Pack your stuff."

For the first time in my life, I was frightened. Not even almost being shot had caused me this much fear. I reached out to a friend who was in the 12-step program. He asked what was going on with me. I told him that I was being released soon, and that's when I said it: "I'm scared because I'm an alcoholic." I am an alcoholic. That was the first admission in my life. He advised me to attend 12-step meetings regularly upon my release. However, I didn't heed his advice. Not long after our conversation, I was stealing again to support my alcohol and drug habit.

I was paroled to the Kansas City, Kansas SOS program at a halfway house. I drank on Christmas Eve, only 22 days after my release. On Christmas, the halfway house gave us a pass to spend time with our family. I headed back to Junction City to visit my brother and his family. My intention was to have a wonderful holiday. I was not thinking about drinking or using again. However, what I could not have predicted was how that visit would transport me back into my old ways. It was like a complete time lapse when I went to visit an old friend. His house looked exactly as it had before I went to prison. He offered me a beer. Without thinking, I grabbed it, popped the top, and drank.

Addiction to alcohol is a type of thirst that you can't quench, regardless of how much you drink. We went to a club, and I continued to try to satisfy my thirst. We have a saying in Narcotics Anonymous that one drink is too many and thousands are never enough. Unfortunately, I only attended one NA meeting at that time. I never stayed to learn the rest of the lesson.

Around 2 a.m., I returned to my brother's house after partying and ran smack dab into my niece. She asked me how I was. To this day, I can't remember my reply, but I will always recall the look in her eyes. Ashamed, I looked away, my eyes red and heavy from a night of using. How could she still respect me—an uncle who had promised them Christmas gifts but had none. One who had also promised her that I would turn my life around. It was at that moment that I hit bottom. I once read in prison that hitting rock bottom is like breaking your own heart.

That was 35 years ago. I'm proud to say that I've been sober all 35 years. Today, as a certified substance abuse counselor, I've helped thousands of Black men maintain their sobriety. I've also trained 10 substance abuse counselors, all of whom are Black, and brought them into the field. For me, it's important that we see people who look like us doing this work. I participated in the Million Man March, which helped transform my life, and I was active in the Put Down The Pipe coalition from 1990 to 1995.

Life is like a dream today. In addition to my work as a substance abuse counselor, I also work in health equity with the Health Forward Foundation. I continue to train other professionals in the field. Giving back keeps me going. It's a privilege to share my blessings with others who are struggling. The program says you can't keep it unless you give it away, and I live that philosophy. In 2019, I was awarded Professional of the Year by the Kansas City Recovery Coalition.

I also have the joy of helping others and sharing my story. I thank God for this new life that has emerged. As I look back over the early years of my sobriety, I don't regret going through the struggles I've been through. Each one made me stronger and made me gain a closer relationship with God as I understand Him. I still attend 12-step meetings, and I live an active program of recovery. I've sponsored hundreds of men in the program.

I have worked for the Jackson County Department of Corrections for 25 years, where I go directly into the jails and do group sessions for others with substance use disorder. I've counseled hundreds of incarcerated individuals and, not surprisingly, the majority of them are Black. When I walk into the jails, they see me, a Black man, who is living an active recovery program.

I try to never get complacent or satisfied, and I'm always working to improve my craft. The legacy I want to leave is that no case is too difficult and impossible, and all who seek recovery and freedom from alcohol and drug addiction may find light. I offer a hand, and I am someone who truly understands their problems.

To my brothers and sisters who are still incarcerated right now and about to be released—your dreams can come true! I know the priority on our lists is to find and seek true freedom. The freedom we seek is not only a physical location, but an internal destination. Our bondage lies on the inside. I'd always thought it was my drinking and drug use that was the issue, but my way of thinking was the real problem. I was incarcerated long before I served my sentence.

To anyone reading this story, please understand, it's not so important how many times you fall, but how many times you get back up. Never give up! Find someone that you can connect with on a positive level. For me, that person was my wife, to whom I've been happily married for 24 years. I have two adult kids and two grandsons as well. I'm very active in my church, First AME, where I sing in the choir every Sunday morning. My youngest brother, Kurt, also found sobriety. I am proud to say that he died clean and sober, unlike the rest of my birth siblings.

Though my number is 42260, I don't have to live that lifestyle anymore. The 12-step program really works. They say the only way you can maintain the gift of sobriety is to give it away. By helping others, I am blessed to give life and live this wonderful dream every day. Thank God.

HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Health is more than a medical issue; it is profoundly shaped by an array of social, economic, and political factors known as social determinants of health. In America, and more pointedly in our community of Kansas City, these factors do not influence everyone equally. Marginalized communities, particularly Black citizens, face systemic barriers that contribute to dire health outcomes. This unacceptable disparity is a result of structural inequalities ingrained in every sector of our society, from education and housing to employment and, crucially, the criminal justice system.

The long-term effects of violent crime and law enforcement violence on community health cannot be overstated. These are not isolated incidents but public health crises that perpetuate cycles of trauma and disenfranchisement. The stress and trauma associated with violence and systemic discrimination, both at the hands of civilians and law enforcement, have quantifiable adverse impacts on mental and physical health.

Addressing these deeply entrenched issues is no small task and requires a committed, multifaceted approach. It calls for meaningful engagement from all sectors of society— government agencies, healthcare providers, community-based organizations, and more. Single-issue solutions are not enough; comprehensive, collaborative strategies are required to dismantle these pervasive systems of inequality.

In light of these challenges, the Urban League compiled these research-based recommendations aimed at mitigating the social determinants of health that disproportionately affect our Black communities. These recommendations represent not just the aspirations of a single organization but are an urgent call to action for every stakeholder with the power to enact change.

By treating health as a comprehensive issue, influenced by a multitude of social and political factors, we hope to create a roadmap for a healthier, more equitable future. We invite you to engage deeply with the recommendations that follow, considering how each stakeholder— be it a government body, a healthcare provider, or a grassroots organization—can contribute to a more equitable landscape in health and well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

1. **POLICE VIOLENCE**

    Implement Community Policing Models: Establish community oversight boards and mandate crisis intervention and de-escalation training for all officers. Create opportunities for community engagement and dialogue between law enforcement and residents to build a restorative system that fosters accountability, requires transparency in reporting and data collection, and prohibits racial profiling.

2. **GUN VIOLENCE IN KANSAS CITY'S URBAN CORE**

Community-led Violence Intervention Programs: Invest in grassroots organizations specializing in violence prevention and mediation. Integrate these community leaders into a larger public safety strategy that addresses the root causes of violence, such as poverty and lack of education.

Improve Violent Crime Resolution: As of June 28, 2023, *The Kansas City Star* highlighted a staggering shortfall in the Kansas City Police Department's performance—only 32 out of 97 homicides had been resolved, equating to a clearance rate of just 33%. This lack of resolution not only perpetuates but exacerbates the cycle of violent crime. To improve these outcomes, KCPD must take decisive action to rebuild the community trust that has been eroded by years of over-policing, racial profiling, and instances of excessive or lethal force. Addressing these systemic issues is paramount for both improving the clearance rate and fostering a safer, more just community.

3. **RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

Race-based Health Data Tracking: Mandate the collection of race-disaggregated data across all public health agencies. Use this data to identify health disparities and inform equity-based policies that specifically target marginalized communities.

4. **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

Expand Access to Culturally Competent Mental Health Services: Increase funding for mental health clinics in underserved neighborhoods and ensure that mental health professionals are trained in culturally competent care. Prioritize the inclusion of therapy and mental health support in schools, especially in neighborhoods affected by violence and systemic discrimination.

5. **COMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE**

Protect Medicaid in Missouri and Expand Medicaid in Kansas: Advocate for policies that ensure equitable access to healthcare services, irrespective of income or zip code. This includes improving public transportation to medical facilities and ensuring affordable or free services for vulnerable populations.

6. **HOUSING INSECURITY**

Enact Rent Control and Tenant Protections: Advocate for local policies that stabilize rent increases and protect tenants from unjust evictions.

7. **EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION**

Enforce Anti-Discrimination Policies in the Workplace: Collaborate with local businesses to establish and enforce anti-discrimination policies. Create pathways for reporting and addressing incidents of racial discrimination in the workplace.

Promote diversity in the healthcare workforce to reflect the communities being served.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING MATERNAL AND FETAL HEALTH DISPARITIES IN KANSAS CITY'S BLACK COMMUNITY

1. **Implement Culturally Competent Prenatal Care Programs:** Establish prenatal care programs that understand and address the unique cultural and systemic barriers faced by Black women. Medical staff in these programs should be specifically trained to acknowledge and combat implicit biases that often affect the quality of care provided.

2. **Invest in Community-based Outreach and Education:** Fund and support community-based organizations that can effectively educate Black women on prenatal care, nutrition, and mental health. This should include easily accessible workshops, mobile clinics, and telehealth services tailored to the needs and schedules of the community.

3. **Expand Access to Mental Health Services:** Mental stress can significantly impact maternal and fetal health. Develop specialized mental health services that focus on the needs of pregnant Black women, providing stress management tools and psychological support through the course of pregnancy and postpartum periods.

4. **Increase Data Transparency and Monitoring:** Require healthcare providers to publicly report data on maternal and fetal outcomes by race and socioeconomic status. Use this data to identify disparities and develop targeted interventions for improving Black maternal and fetal health in Kansas City.

5. **Legislative Advocacy for Medicaid Expansion in Kansas:** Advocate for the expansion of Medicaid coverage to include comprehensive prenatal and postnatal services. Make the case that early and consistent healthcare access is a vital component in reducing maternal and fetal mortality rates in Black communities.

6. **Involve Black Community Leaders in Decision-Making:** Establish a community advisory board composed of Black women, healthcare providers, and community leaders to guide policy and program development. Their lived experiences and insights are invaluable for creating interventions that are both effective and culturally sensitive.

7. **Improve Healthcare Provider Accountability:** Implement stringent accountability measures for healthcare providers, including mandatory bias training and performance evaluations based on equitable health outcomes. Healthcare institutions with recurring disparities in maternal and fetal health should face penalties and be mandated to undergo retraining.

By taking a multi-pronged approach that combines medical care, community education, and policy reform, we can start to close the disturbing health gaps affecting Black mothers and their children in Kansas City.

Each recommendation is tailored to address the root causes of health disparities in the Kansas City area, with a focus on implementing multifaceted solutions that engage stakeholders. We urge local governments, community organizations, and all involved parties to consider these recommendations as a roadmap for creating a healthier, more equitable Kansas City.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

FOREWORD

KANSAS CITY'S ENDEMIC VIOLENCE:
A STARK INJUSTICE THAT DEMANDS REAL CHANGE

ELLIOTT P. CURRIE, J.D. AND **DION SANKAR, J.D.**

Community violence in Kansas City is much like that in America as a whole—only more so. High levels of violence have been endemic to the city for a long time. And though the city's violence isn't confined to any race, violent death in Kansas City continues to have a disproportionate impact on the city's Black communities. Community violence in the city, as across the country, thus represents a profound and enduring social injustice.

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased the magnitude of this injustice, but endemic violence in Kansas City has been a longstanding problem that has persisted across varying economic conditions and in the face of a variety of different social policies to combat it. What this suggests is that the stark racial disparities in Kansas City's violence, like those in the United States generally, will not be truly resolved until and unless their underlying causes are directly and seriously confronted.

In this foreword, we lay out some of the dimensions and trends of this crisis, putting them in the larger context of the state of Missouri and the United States as a whole. We consider briefly what current and past research tells us about its causes, examine some of the historical forces that have shaped the social context of violence in Kansas City today, and then suggest some elements of a strategy for change.

Police statistics on homicide in recent years in the city tell part of the story. Though Black Americans represented less than 27% of Kansas City's overall population in 2022, they were roughly 70% of the city's homicide victims. And the victims of homicide also shared some other predictable features. Homicide could, and did, strike people of every gender, but male victims of homicide in Kansas City outnumbered female victims by more than 4 to 1 in 2022. And though homicide also struck people across the age spectrum, the victims were concentrated among the relatively young. Those victims were also linked together by the nature of the weapons involved in their deaths: the preponderance of firearms in violent deaths among residents of Kansas City is overwhelming. Of 129 homicides in 2023 through the month of August recorded by the Kansas City Police Department, 120 involved a firearm.[1]

These patterns are not isolated, nor are they unique to the city. They reflect a picture that holds throughout the state of Missouri, and, with important differences, the United States as a whole. Tragically, rates of death by violence in Missouri are significantly higher than the American average—which is itself extraordinarily high.

Recent figures from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention put these disparities in stark relief. The Black homicide death rate in Missouri in 2021—the latest year for which the CDC has provided data—was more than double the rate for the United States as a whole. Nationally, Black Americans died by violence at a rate nearly 10 times that of non-Hispanic Whites. In Missouri, the Black homicide death rate exceeded the White rate by more than 14 to one. That figure would be even higher were it not for the fact that White Missourians are more likely to die by violence than their counterparts across the United States.[2]

As is true in the United States as a whole, but to an even greater extent, the racial disparity in violent death in Missouri upends the usual gender balance in the risks of dying by violence. In the United States, as in most countries with high levels of violence overall, men are far more likely to be the victims of fatal violence than women. But In Missouri in 2021, a Black woman had almost 3 times the chance of dying by homicide as a White man.

These contrasts are even sharper and more troubling if we focus on young Black men, who—in Kansas City, the state of Missouri, and across the country—are the group at highest risk of death by violence. In 2021, the homicide death rate for Black male youth aged 15 to 29 for the United States as a whole was 121 per 100,000, a level that cannot be found anywhere in the world except within some of the most harshly unequal and volatile countries of the global South— and is a startling 22 times the rate for Whites the same age. But in Missouri, things were even worse—much worse. Black youth in the state died that year at a rate of 214 per 100,000—more than 75% higher than the national rate, and 27 times the rate for Whites the same age.

Reflecting the pattern in Kansas City specifically, of the 179 homicides among Black male youth in Missouri recorded by the CDC in 2021, only six involved a weapon other than a firearm.[3]

As in the United States as a whole, the toll of deadly violence increased in Kansas City and statewide during the pandemic years, accelerating a trend that was already beginning to be apparent a few years before. According to figures from the Kansas City Police Department, 2022 was the second deadliest year, and 2020 the deadliest, in the city's history. The three pandemic years 2020 through 2022 averaged 168 homicides a year: the three years before—2017 through 2019—averaged 147.

If we go back a little farther, the trend is even stronger and more troubling. From 2010 through 2014, for example, Kansas City averaged roughly 100 homicides a year. Thus, homicides overall in Kansas City increased by roughly two-thirds from the early years of the decade of the 2010s to the recent years of the pandemic. CDC data make clear that, in Missouri as a whole, this rise struck hardest at young Black men, who were already at the highest risk for fatal violence. The homicide death rate for young Black men age 15 to 29 in Missouri was already an astonishingly high 131 per 100,000 in 2012. By 2022, it had risen to 214 per 100,000.[4]

Research done both before and after the pandemic rises paints a remarkably consistent picture of the social context in which these increases took place. In Kansas City itself, a 2022 Brookings Institution study shows that gun homicides—again, by far the most common kind of fatal violence

in the city—both just before the pandemic and during the year 2020 when it first hit—were concentrated in a handful of highly specific places in the city. Those included the low-income Parkview and Likens neighborhoods as well as Oak Park and Swope Park, while "more affluent areas within the city were largely untouched by homicides." The increase in gun killings, the researchers concluded, took place largely in neighborhoods "where gun violence has long been a persistent fixture of daily life, alongside systemic disinvestment, segregation, and economic inequality."[5]

This study found similar patterns in three other cities—Baltimore, Chicago, and Nashville. Other recent research confirms this general portrait of the social location of the sharp pandemic-era rises in violence in many other cities across the country. There are some significant local variations—in such things as the relative rises among men versus women, younger versus older victims, and more. But the big picture is remarkably consistent. COVID-era increases in violence tended to take place within communities already at very high risk of violence and, for the most part, in communities that had suffered endemic high levels of violence for years. These communities were characterized by a common and distinct pattern of extreme economic and racial disadvantage. One recent study, which focused on rises in both homicide and other forms of violence before and after the pandemic in 13 large American cities, found the hardest hit communities tended to suffer both historic racial discrimination and extreme economic inequality, rather than either one of these alone.[6]

That finding meshes with the accumulating conclusions of research on community violence conducted well before the recent COVID pandemic, and indeed for more than a century. Almost without exception, research has consistently found that violence is bred most predictably in communities that suffer both extreme economic disadvantage and a history of pervasive and corrosive racial discrimination and disinvestment. High levels of violence are not unique to communities of color; extremely poor White communities may suffer it too.[7] But the combination of extreme economic marginality and long-standing patterns of racialized disinvestment and discrimination—what some scholars call "racialized economic segregation"[8]—predictably generates the highest levels of both fatal and non-fatal violence. These are communities that suffer not only from a history of sharply constricted opportunities for economic security and stable housing, for example, but also from a toxic pattern of policing that is simultaneously abusive and neglectful, as well as under-resourced schools and minimal public support.

America has failed to fully address Black poverty and racial inequality, and our failure to do so perpetuates violence. Yet, many still allege that these issues will only be addressed when Blacks take responsibility for their circumstances and actions of their community members. This sentiment is a stinging reminder of our history of racial inequality. First, it ignores the longstanding structural forces that have made it impossible for Black communities to tackle these problems on their own—and also the multiple examples of successful government-supported financial, social, and legal programs for Whites only that allowed for the creation of disproportionate wealth and security for their communities.[9] From redlining to racially tilted mortgage loan practices to

heedless disinvestment, Black communities in Kansas City, as across the country, have been systematically buffeted by political and economic forces beyond their control. They cannot be expected to combat the legacy of those forces on their own. Second, the emphasis on Black cooperation in bringing justice to victims does not contemplate the unique circumstances and challenges for Black victims and witnesses.

In many circumstances, Blacks weigh the benefit of cooperation against the fear of retaliation from those seeking to escape prosecution, the benefit of cooperation against the fear of reprisals and pressure from law enforcement, and the benefit of cooperation against the fear of disruption to their families and financial livelihood. And, not insignificantly, the cost of not cooperating on the safety of their neighborhoods and their children, families, and fellow citizens.

Black Kansas Citians, like the great majority of their fellow citizens, want accountability. Nothing demonstrates this more than the repeated engagement of Black witnesses and victims in many criminal trials within Jackson County. Criminal trials require evidence and witness testimony. In many cases, Blacks sift through those challenging decisions and come forward. They do so not because they are paid to do so or because it is their duty to do so, but because of their continued desire to strive for a safer community. It is because of them, rather than in spite of them, that homicides are solved. For example, between May 2022 and June 2023 alone, 123 charged homicide cases in Jackson County resulted in guilty pleas and 13 defendants were tried and convicted. None of these prosecutions and outcomes could have taken place without the participation of these citizens. There is another point that must be stressed. While cooperating with law enforcement can help in the prosecution of a specific instance of violence, research has repeatedly demonstrated that this, by itself, is an insufficient violence reduction strategy or crime prevention plan. Simply put, it is responsive in nature rather than proactive, and it does not address the root causes of violence.

These realities have powerful implications for developing effective strategies against concentrated violence.

Kansas City must focus its efforts on sustainable research-based solutions rather than chasing quick fixes and nominal victories. A commitment must be made to a violence reduction strategy, and that commitment should be paired with efforts to engage those closely involved in street violence. Kansas City has made some attempts at initiatives like these to some degree with varying levels of success. But all too often, the commitment to these initiatives has been inconsistent and/or resistant. This must stop.

Kansas City deserves a criminal justice system that is neither negligent nor harmful. To achieve and sustain that system, we surely need to commit to investing sufficient resources into police and courts. But we also must address bias in policing and prosecution. Prosecutors and police must focus their efforts on firm but fair enforcement of the criminal laws. This includes creating and maintaining a relationship with Black communities through regular interaction and information sharing. In addition, efforts should be taken by prosecutors to ensure charging

decisions and sentencing recommendations are vetted for bias. When necessary, in keeping with the Missouri Supreme Court's ethical rules, prosecutors should be held accountable. Police departments should do the same regarding their policies and practices on bias. Likewise, police departments should participate in ensuring that officers who violate the criminal laws and/or internal policy are held accountable.

But criminal justice-based programs are only one part of a truly serious strategy to address violence. Investing in appropriate employment opportunities that pay a living wage and offer meaningful work to people is critical. Important steps in this direction have been taken in recent years through the job-creating provisions of the federal Infrastructure and Inflation Reduction Acts. But we need more. Enhancing those opportunities for highly vulnerable people—including young people first entering the labor force and those returning to the community after incarceration—is especially crucial. The same can be said of efforts to ensure that our education, healthcare, childcare, and elder care systems are properly working and have sufficient resources to address the needs of the community they serve. These investments can offer significant, and in some areas, immediate economic returns to Kansas City while addressing the public's safety and supporting Black Kansas Citians at a level that we have long aspired to but that has not yet been achieved.

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1   Kansas City Population figures from U.S. Census Bureau, *Quickfacts*, Kansas City, Missouri: Homicide figures from Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department, *Dashboard Data and Crime Statistics*, accessed September 2023.

2   U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, WISQARS Fatal Injury Data, accessed September 2023.

3   Ibid.

4   Calculated from Kansas City Police Department, *Dashboard Data and Crime Statistics*, accessed September 2023.

5   D.W. Rowlands and Hannah Love, "Mapping Gun Violence: A Closer Look at the Intersection between Place and Gun Homicides in Four Cities," Washington, DC, Brookings Institution, April 21, 2022.

6   Julia P. Schleimer et al., "Neighborhood Racial and Economic Segregation and Disparities in Violence During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *American Journal of Public Health*, 112 no. 1, 2021.

7   Lauren J. Krivo and Ruth D. Peterson, "Extremely Disadvantaged Neighborhoods and Urban Crime," Social Forces, 75 no. 2, December 1996.

8   For a review of this evidence, see Elliott Currie, *A Peculiar Indifference: The Neglected Toll of Violence on Black America* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2020), Chapter 5.

9   The list of government programs handing land, money, and education and employment opportunities to Whites include the Headright System in 1618, the legal enactments of the Virginia House of Burgess in 1705, and the Land Ordinance Act of 1785. Thereafter, there were additional government enactments that overwhelmingly and disproportionately favored Whites. Those include the land given to Whites through the Homestead of Act of 1862, which allowed Whites to simply claim 10% of America's land. Following this, there was the providing of home loans through the Federal Housing Administration, which gave Whites 98% of the over $120 billion in government loans from 1933 to 1962. In addition, there was the providing of Social Security to Whites overwhelmingly over Blacks when it was created in 1935. Moreover, there were also the benefits of education and employment opportunities through the G.I. Bill, formerly known as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act. A more full discussion of this topic is covered in great detail in John Biewen's Podcast, "Seeing White Podcast, White Affirmative Action" (Part 13) (2017), chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://sceneonradio.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/SeeingWhite_Part13Transcript.pdf. This podcast references an Anti-Racism workshop by Deena Hayes-Greene of the Racial Equity Institute.

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KANSAS CITY'S BATTLE: ABOLITION VS. REFORM—THE QUEST FOR TRUE TRANSFORMATION

AMAIA COOK

Kansas City, Missouri is at a turning point, driven by grassroots movements advocating for social and political changes. These efforts, amplified by the 2020 uprisings and the global pandemic, have deepened the discourse about building safe and healthy communities, and, ultimately, have brought into sharp focus the groups most affected by both the health crisis and racial violence: the Black community, the poor, and the working class.

The events of 2020 were not isolated events but rather were fueled by a long-standing demand to address systemic racism and economic disparities—legacies originating from 400 years of slavery and perpetuated by White supremacist institutions. While some reforms have been proposed to modify these systems, an abolitionist movement has also emerged, seeking to dismantle and replace them entirely. This growing movement in Kansas City underscores the importance of understanding the difference between mere reform and genuine transformation. The history and current momentum in the city serve as both a reflection of the broader national context and a unique case study, providing a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of superficial reforms and the need for more profound solutions to tackle the root of the problem—and get at the very core of the community.

During that year, the atmosphere at Kansas City's City Hall was one of hope. Many gathered at the foot of City Hall filled with the expectations that the policy changes

and speeches by city officials would lead to change. However, many of those promises did not result in transformative outcomes.

In response to city-wide protests, the City of Kansas City endorsed a series of reforms aimed at confronting the racist legacy of policing within the Kansas City Police Department, signaling the city's commitment to change. On the surface, these measures appeared to be proactive steps toward rectifying the longstanding harm caused by KCPD and those who have historically championed the institution. One notable policy came from a closed meeting with the Board of Police Commissioners, which outlined a comprehensive solution. The policy incorporated whistleblower protections for officers, revoked a departmental practice that withheld probable cause statements from prosecutors in incidents involving officer shootings, and required periodic reports to the City Council about the department's efforts in community engagement. To bolster this reform, the city redirected $2.5 million from private funding towards implementing body cameras. However, subsequent years have cast shadows of doubt over the efficiency of these reforms with police violence persisting. Moreover, while all cops now have body cameras, a recent audit revealed that 20% of dispatches lacked proper body-worn camera footage, suggesting gaps in adherence and monitoring. Though initially heralded as significant progress, the actual outcomes of these reforms hint at an underlying motive: preserving police violence instead of ending it.

Across the nation, similar efforts unfolded with the same hopeful intentions. Numerous initiatives aimed to overhaul police departments and related public safety entities. Take, for instance, the "8 Can't Wait Campaign"—a widely circulated set of reforms proposing eight alterations to policing practices. These were intended to bolster community safety and foster trust between police and communities. In many ways, this campaign was similar to the platform championed by Mayor Quinton Lucas and the City Council, emphasizing shifts in police responses and safeguarding officers who intervened against malpractice within the force. However, despite its popularity, the campaign drew considerable criticism. Critics argued it failed to address the inherent issues of systemic racism and White supremacy pervasive within police departments. Worse, some believed it inadvertently amplified police authority by vesting reformative powers within the very institutions in question, similar to the Minneapolis Police Department, which had such reforms in place when George Floyd was killed.

The growing abolitionist movement underscores a fundamental principle: reforms that merely reinforce existing power structures are ineffective against state violence. Addressing this requires innovative solutions that confront violence directly, informed by a nuanced understanding of systemic issues. Over the years, organizers and activists have dissected the complexities between reforms aimed at sustaining existing systems and those seeking genuine transformation. The

former, often termed "reformist-reforms," are characterized by their efforts to enact superficial changes within the confines of existing institutions. This approach, while appearing progressive, often perpetuates the very power dynamics it professes to challenge. In contrast, abolitionist reforms aim to deconstruct the harmful foundations upon which systems are built, advocating for a thoughtful and deliberate process towards their eradication. These transformative measures prioritize the complete elimination of the carceral system rather than its mere expansion or modification.

Moreover, the objectives of the abolitionist movement extend beyond the simple decarceration of prisons and jails. The movement's vision is to overturn the institutions, systems, and frameworks underpinning White supremacy and racial violence—core tenets of the prison-industrial complex. It is imperative to recognize that the carceral system is designed to perpetuate the ideologies that birthed it. Without this understanding, any movement challenging it remains inherently flawed. Decarceration is not just about reducing carceral populations; it's about dismantling the inherently racist and violent institutions and values that the carceral system represents. The focus also lies in establishing alternatives that both hold perpetrators accountable and address the underlying causes of their actions. At its heart, the movement seeks to create transformative spaces and frameworks that prioritize the needs and experiences of those most harmed by existing systems.

The abolitionist movement in Kansas City signifies a reimagining of community safety, aligning with transformative efforts unfolding both nationally and globally. Instead of relying solely on conventional power structures, the movement works outside of conventional systems, exploring solutions for safety imagined and implemented by the collective voice of everyday people. This shift is evident in local policies that prioritize preventive measures over incarceration, such as finding alternatives to incarceration instead of building a new jail; providing bail funds and mutual aid funds for those impacted by incarceration; uplifting narratives authored by and for Black people, challenging the often biased and racist police reports. These grassroots endeavors, although often met with resistance, continuously bring more awareness and power to those most affected by oppressive systems.

Real change happens when those most impacted by the carceral system—and its oppressive manifestations—lead the way. It is in this context that we can envision a society that genuinely supports those most impacted, from sex workers to the unhoused, from the incarcerated to the queer and trans communities, and from single mothers to the poor and working class laborers. By tapping into the collective power of the community, we can envision a future centered on our shared health, safety, and well-being, uplifting grassroots initiatives and visions over power holders and policies that continue the cycle of harm.

IT'S TIME FOR KANSAS CITY TO TAKE BACK CONTROL OF ITS POLICE DEPARTMENT: A CASE FOR LOCAL OVERSIGHT OF KCPD

SPENCER J. WEBSTER, J.D.

Kansas City, Missouri, is in a unique and untenable position— it doesn't have control over its own police force. This structural disconnect has led to a problematic relationship between the Kansas City Police Department (KCPD) and the community it serves. It's more than just a matter of administrative inconvenience; it's a crisis that exposes the city and its residents to financial instability, systemic constitutional abuses, and a widening social rift.

THE UNSUSTAINABLE STATUS QUO

A Missouri Constitutional amendment increased the mandatory funding for KCPD to 25% of Kansas City's general revenue. Even then, the KCPD sued the city, demanding even more money. Let's put this in perspective: The very department that drains a quarter of the city's budget is suing the city for more, while taxpayers foot the bill for the expensive legal showdown. All of this occurred after the City's attempt to reallocate a mere $42 million from the KCPD budget to community services was shot down by a court. The existing setup doesn't

just lack fiscal responsibility; it sows seeds of division, making Kansas City feel like two adversarial entities rather than a united community.

THE TROUBLING RECORD OF KCPD

Behind the budgetary disputes lies an even darker issue: systemic constitutional abuses within the department. Discriminatory practices, excessive force, and a lack of transparency are not anomalies but patterns within KCPD. Despite a plethora of public complaints, lawsuits, and settlements, there has been no incentive for internal reform. The Board of Police Commissioners, which is supposed to oversee the department, acts more like a rubber stamp than a watchdog.

THE SOCIAL IMPACT

The emotional cost of this crisis is devastating. Shootings, such as those involving Cameron Lamb and Ralph Yarl, have exacerbated the tensions between KCPD and the community. Protests and social unrest are not just probabilities; they are current events.

BREAKING DOWN THE CRISIS: HIGHLIGHTS AND LOW POINTS

ACCOUNTABILITY ABYSS
KCPD operates in a vacuum, with inadequate oversight and a resistance to reform, while the city's top elected official, Mayor Quinton Lucas, expresses frustration but can't initiate change.

COST OF MISCONDUCT
Multi-million-dollar settlements, like a $5 million wrongful death payout, are

being shouldered by the city, yet KCPD's operational procedures remain unchanged.

DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES

Data show that KCPD disproportionately targets Black individuals, and internal issues like unjust treatment of Sgt. Herb Robinson further prove the need for reform.

COSTLY LEGAL BATTLES

KCPD's funding drains the city's budget, and excessive spending on lawsuit settlements only worsens the financial outlook for Kansas City.

THE OPPORTUNITY OF LOCAL CONTROL

Local control isn't a silver bullet, but it provides a framework for meaningful reform:

1. **Enhanced Training:** With local control, the city can mandate sensitivity and diversity training, aiming to address the racial disparities plaguing the department.

2. **Accountability and Oversight:** The city could set stricter standards for employment, terminating those with a history of violations or excessive force.

3. **Strengthened Community Relations:** Local control would facilitate a dialogue between the community and its police force, fostering trust and mutual respect.

4. **Financial Responsibility:** With the reins in their hands, Kansas City could enforce fiscal discipline, reducing the financial burden on taxpayers.

THE PATH FORWARD

If we do nothing, we tacitly endorse the ongoing issues within KCPD, from racial discrimination to financial instability. Local control offers Kansas City the opportunity to bring about meaningful change, creating a police department that is truly by the people, for the people. Let's seize this moment and restore accountability, justice, and community trust.

TO READ THE URBAN COUNCIL AND MORE[2] LETTERS TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE REGARDING A CIVIL RIGHTS INVESTIGATION OF THE KANSAS CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT, SCAN THE QR CODE.

OR VISIT: https://www.ulkc.org/ 2023-state-of-black-kc

LOCAL POLICING, LOCAL OPTIONS: REFORMING QUALIFIED IMMUNITY WITHOUT DEFUNDING

PATRICK TOUHEY

HIGHLIGHTS

- Qualified immunity creates an unsupportable situation for cities: A vague legal standard for seeking redress of constitutional rights violations, a frustrated public that feels helpless, and a community of sincere government professionals viewed as being no better than the worst among them.

- Better Cities Project (BCPs) recommended model ordinance allows cities to eliminate qualified immunity in their own jurisdictions.

- A victim of municipal misconduct could sue the government employer when one of its employees violates her constitutional rights. Qualified immunity is expressly barred as a defense.

- The ordinance empowers government employers to fire bad-acting employees. If a victim succeeds in their lawsuit under Protecting Everyone's Constitutional Rights Ordinance (PECRO), that judgment establishes a presumption of "just cause" for termination of employment.

- The end result: victims of municipal misconduct are made whole, and bad-acting officials quickly lose their jobs.

QUALIFIED IMMUNITY REFORM: ACCOUNTABILITY WITHOUT DEFUNDING

The police play a vital role in our society, and every officer will tell you that they can only be effective when the community stands with them. Too often, wayward public servants are shielded from the consequences of their actions by a court-created legal principle called qualified immunity. Ending the use of qualified immunity creates an incentive for public employees—including the police—to be more mindful of individual civil rights, and it will help institutions weed out bad apples.

As a result of qualified immunity reform in New York City, the nation's largest police union wrote to members that searches of individual or private property should be conducted only when the officer is "clearly and unequivocally within the bounds of the law." That is a result everyone should cheer. The reform proposal herein helps move us there.

Far too often, though, legal doctrines like qualified immunity protect government workers from accountability even when they blatantly violate people's constitutional rights. The result: trust and faith in government diminishes, and it becomes harder for the government to do its job.

Well-intended efforts to reform qualified immunity have understandably focused on police. But these efforts, often coupled with calls to defund police departments, leave police officers feeling singled out, unsupported, and cast as rogue.

By addressing qualified immunity for all government employees, cities address

the problem of unaccountability at its core. Permitting victims of government misconduct to pursue legal action when their rights are violated can go a long way toward incentivizing better behavior and promoting trust between the government and the people it serves. Likewise, empowering local governments to fire bad-acting employees helps to ensure that repeat offenders are quickly shown the door.

What most cities have now is unsupportable: a vague and seemingly impossible legal standard for seeking redress of constitutional rights violations, a frustrated public that feels helpless, and a community of sincere government professionals viewed as being no better than the worst among them.

There is a better way.

HOW DOES QUALIFIED IMMUNITY WORK?

No local, state, or federal legislature set out to create a set of circumstances in which government employees could not be held legally responsible for violating an individual's constitutional rights. Indeed, for much of American history, government employees were held accountable when they violated a person's rights.[1] And in 1871, Congress enacted a statute that is today codified as 42 U.S.C. § 1983 ("Section 1983"), which expressly authorized lawsuits against state and local officials who violated a person's constitutional rights.

But in 1967, the Supreme Court started to reverse course. In a landmark decision involving Section 1983, the Court for the first time introduced the doctrine of "qualified immunity."[2]

Fifteen years later, in 1982, the Court modified the doctrine into the version in effect today. Under the current doctrine, public officials are protected even when they maliciously violate a person's constitutional rights as long the rights they violated were not "clearly established."[3] The doctrine applies to conduct performed by all government officials, including law enforcement, code inspectors, teachers, and tax collectors.

Application of qualified immunity hinges on the meaning of "clearly established." As it stands, victims of government misconduct seeking damages under Section 1983 must demonstrate not only that their constitutional rights were violated, but that the right was "clearly established" by a prior legal case with functionally identical precedent.[4] As the American Bar Association explains, "In other words, it is entirely possible—and quite common—for courts to hold that government agents did violate someone's rights, but that the victim has no legal remedy, simply because that precise sort of misconduct had not occurred in past cases."[5]

THE PROBLEMS CAUSED

By placing such a high burden on the victims of government misconduct, qualified immunity not only shields public officials from bad behavior, which is itself a problem, but also erodes public trust in government institutions.

In 2019, for example, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that qualified immunity protected Fresno, California, police officers who falsified search warrant inventory sheets to steal over $225,000 in cash and rare coins

from a criminal suspect. Even though the Court recognized that the officers' conduct was "morally wrong," it applied qualified immunity because the Ninth Circuit had never previously issued a decision involving the theft of property covered by the terms of a search warrant.[6]

Likewise, in 2020, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that qualified immunity protected a social worker accused of sexually harassing the legal guardian of a minor he was assigned to protect. Even though the Court held that the social worker violated the guardian's constitutional rights, it awarded qualified immunity because past cases involved coworkers, supervisors, classmates and teachers, but not social workers.[7]

Lastly, in 2017, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals held that qualified immunity protected prison guards who kept an inmate in solitary confinement for over a year and forced him to wear leg irons and underwear while showering, all because the inmate once asked a guard to speak to the lieutenant about why he was not allowed to visit the commissary. Despite recognizing that the guards violated the prisoner's constitutional rights, the Court awarded qualified immunity because it could identify no prior case involving the precise punishments employed by the prison.[8]

These cases are not outliers. In each of these cases—and countless others—victims of government misconduct were denied justice because the unique facts of their case did not precisely match prior precedent.

REFORM OPPORTUNITIES

The Supreme Court could end the doctrine it first created. But it has shown little interest in doing so.

Congress could remove qualified immunity as a defense for public officials who violate civil rights. But a recent effort failed.

States could reform qualified immunity, and some have. In 2020, Colorado enacted the Enhance Law Enforcement Integrity Act, which permits residents whose rights were violated to sue officers for damages in state court. Although the Act applies only to violations committed by law enforcement, it expressly forbids officers from using any immunity to defend themselves.[9]

In 2021, New Mexico followed suit by enacting the New Mexico Civil Rights Act. Unlike Colorado, the New Mexico Act applies to all state and local government employees, not just police. If, within the scope of their official duties, a government employee violates someone's rights, the victim can sue the government employer for damages under the state constitution. As with Colorado, this new law bars the use of immunity as a legal defense.

CITIES AND COUNTIES DON'T NEED TO WAIT FOR THE STATES

In March 2021, the New York City Council passed legislation barring qualified immunity for police officers accused of violating New Yorkers' rights in cases involving searches, seizures, or use of force. As a result, the world's largest municipal police union, the Police Benevolent Association, released a memo in which they "strongly caution" police officers to limit their searches of individuals or private property to cases where the officer is "clearly and unequivocally within the bounds of the law."[10] When qualified immunity is removed as a protection, government employees like police have an incentive to take constituent rights more seriously.

PROTECTING EVERYONE'S CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS ORDINANCE (PECRO)

Recognizing that meaningful reform often starts at a local level, the Institute for Justice recently released a model ordinance that cities can adopt to eliminate qualified immunity in their own jurisdictions. Called the Protecting Everyone's Constitutional Rights Ordinance (PECRO), it creates a municipal cause of action for violations of a person's constitutional rights.

Under PECRO, a victim of municipal misconduct can sue the government employer when one of its employees violates her constitutional rights. Qualified immunity is expressly barred as a defense. Importantly, though, PECRO goes one step further by empowering government employers to fire bad-acting employees. If a victim succeeds in their lawsuit under PECRO, that judgment establishes a presumption of "just cause" for the termination of the perpetrator's employment.

The end result: Victims of municipal misconduct are made whole, and bad-acting officials quickly lose their jobs.

LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS

The following are useful guideposts to help legislators and courts develop practices regarding qualified immunity as well as make clear to everyone in the community that their individual civil rights are the most important consideration.

1. Government's most important responsibility is to protect rights under

the laws and constitutions of the State and the United States.

2. Government's violation of rights diminishes the lives, liberty, property, and pursuits of individuals.

3. Government's failure to remedy a violation of rights imposes an unjust cost on an injured individual.

4. Government's legitimacy is threatened by the absence of a meaningful civil process for an injured individual to seek redress of a violation of rights.

5. Government is responsible for hiring, training, supervising, and retaining employees, and for ensuring they perform their duties consistent with rights under (a) the laws of the municipality, the State or the United States; and (b) the constitutions of the State and the United States.

6. The U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the U.S. Constitution to protect police officers and other government employees against claims of excessive force in an arrest, investigatory stop or other seizure under a standard of objective reasonableness. An objectively reasonable action does not violate the U.S. Constitution. The Court's interpretation of the Fourth Amendment protects against second-guessing reasonable split-second decisions made by police officers. The legislature recognizes and agrees with the Supreme Court's precedent.

7. Courts can address frivolous lawsuits. Rules of civil procedure authorize judges to (a) grant a motion to dismiss and (b) sanction an attorney who files a case to harass a defendant.

8. Courts must be free to engage in fact finding to determine whether a government employee's action violates a constitutional right. By making the government a defendant and the financially responsible party, the legislature wants to free courts to determine if an employee's action violated the constitution (a) unencumbered by doctrines that impede fact finding, like the federal doctrine of qualified immunity, and (b) without the employee being exposed to personal financial liability.

1   *Little v. Barreme*, 6 U.S. 170 (1804).

2   *Pierson v. Ray*, 386 U. S. 547 (1967). https://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/386/547.html

3   *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 800 (1982). https://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/457/800.html

4   *Zadeh v. Robinson*, 928 F.3d 457, 479 (5th Cir. 2019) (Willett, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part). https://casetext.com/case/zadeh-v-robinson-3

5   American Bar Association, "Qualified Immunity," 2020. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/publications/insights-on-law-and-society/volume-21/issue-1/qualified-immunity/

6   *Jessop v. City of Fresno*, 936 F.3d 937 (9th Cir. 2019). https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca9/17-16756/17-16756-2019-03-20.html

7   *Sampson v. County of Los Angeles*, 974 F.3d 1012 (9th Cir. 2020). https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca9/18-55450/18-55450-2020-09-09.html

8   *Allah v. Milling*, 876 F.3d 48 (2d Cir. 2017). https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca2/16-1443/16-1443-2017-11-22.html

9   Sibilla, "Colorado Passes Landmark Law Against Qualified Immunity, Creates New Way To Protect Civil Rights," *Forbes*, 2020. https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicksibilla/2020/06/21/colorado-passes-landmark-law-against-qualified-immunity-creates-new-way-to-protect-civil-rights/?sh=58d53844378a

10 Reese, "New York's qualified immunity reforms already paying dividends," *Daily News*, 2020. https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-new-yorks-qualified-immunity-reforms-are-paying-dividends-20210428-iffrwgluk5hs3da6ryesoasxvy-story.html

PROSECUTOR'S BOLD MOVE: UNCOVERING RACIAL DISPARITIES IN DRUG PROSECUTIONS AND BUILDING TRUST IN JUSTICE

**PROSECUTOR
JEAN PETERS BAKER, J.D.**

One of the most significant challenges facing the criminal justice system is the racial disparities that persist in police referrals and prosecutions, manifesting in a lack of trust in the system. As the elected Prosecutor, I seek to eliminate inappropriate disparities by taking a more evidence-based approach to all offenses presented to the office. By focusing on the most significant threats to public safety, regardless of race, we hope to promote a more just and equitable system. But to achieve that outcome requires a modern prosecutor's office with new skill sets, such as the ability to analyze how well the system is operating. By adding crime analysts to the prosecutor's staffing model, we were able to study our own data and make appropriate policy guided by that data. Prosecutors can become data-informed, and hopefully, evidence-based, in our work of increasing public safety overall; however, some of our previous policy, especially as it relates to drug prosecution, was informed by gut instinct and faulty logic.

After a deep dive into our own data, I was faced with some stark realities: my prosecutions regarding drug-related crimes were ineffective in deterring violence, expensive, and heavily focused on racial minorities. As we analyzed the previous five years of our data, we found that policing drug users was more likely causing harm to the most vulnerable communities we served. The most striking findings from our analysis were the deep racial disparities in our drug prosecutions. Those disparities were so extensive, it contributed to a system of distrust.

It was unconscionable to continue to sanction drug enforcement practices that were rife with racial disparities and at the same time, not improving public safety. While I expected to see racial disparity in our review, I was dumbfounded by the breadth of that disparity.

Other findings also begged for a change. Our analysis found that most drug cases were not tied to violence or even gun possession; our prosecutions of these crimes were ineffective due to the elongated criminal justice process, along with being wildly racially imbalanced. Our study showed that the current system is highly ineffective in using vast resources and taking too long to get eligible defendants to treatment—months, sometimes years beyond the intervention moment of an arrest. As a result, the Prosecutor's Office was participating in a system that was largely based on our gut feelings that drugs lead to violent crime, rather than viewing it as a public health addiction issue. Further, we were endorsing an enforcement plan with outcomes that

were unfair to the community, especially racial minorities—and specifically Black people. Admittedly, this data was hard for some to absorb. Americans were taught that drugs lead to violence and the quicker we could enforce the law on anyone with drug possession or drug sales, the safer the community would be.

Our data told a much different story about the cases that found their way to my office. In the study, only 25% of our drug prosecutions were linked to violence in any manner.[1] It is important to note that we used a broad definition of violence, much broader than the state of Missouri's definition, including child endangerment, even when no physical harm came to the child. This data brought us face-to-face with the facts: our system was inefficient, unfair to people living east of Troost, and grossly disproportionate to people of color, but primarily to Black adults. Though it caused initial conflict with some in law enforcement, we changed our policy and now seek treatment at the community level.

In 2017, before these policy changes, the Prosecutor's Office filed over 1,400 drug cases annually. By 2023, that number has decreased substantially, both in the number of cases the police submit, but also in the number filed. Now, the number of drug cases filed annually across the county is approximately 350. While all prosecutors use discretion in which cases to file, law enforcement plays a larger role in determining who, what, when, and how laws are enforced. Utilizing limited resources to build drug cases was a priority for law

enforcement for decades, but community norms have changed. There are collateral consequences of being arrested, even if the prosecutor does not pursue the case. An arrest can become a matter of public record, undoubtedly limiting job opportunities, housing options, and access to education or professional licenses. Being arrested can also result in emotional and psychological harm for an entire family. We have also learned more about the long-term impacts of drug use and how best to treat those addictions. Most have concluded that our war on drugs was immensely costly but produced too few results in protecting public safety. Our initial response to combat drugs was not based on science or the most effective way to address the harms of drugs in our communities.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

In June of 1971, President Nixon announced a "war on drugs," which involved expanding the scope and visibility of federal drug control agencies and implementing policies such as mandatory sentencing and no-knock warrants.[2] The war on drugs was not based on any scientific assessment of the relative risks of any particular drug, but "it has everything to do with who is associated with these drugs."[3] Domestic Policy Chief John Ehrlichman later admitted the war on drugs was a ploy to defeat Nixon's political rivals:

> You want to know what this was really all about. The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and Black

people. You understand what I'm saying. We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or Blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.[4]

A special commission established by Nixon unanimously recommended decriminalizing the possession and distribution of marijuana for personal use.[5] If you trust the Nixon administration's own words, they ignored the reports from their own commission to further his personal political campaign.

The implementation of zero tolerance policies in the 1980s led to a surge in incarceration rates, particularly for nonviolent drug offenses, with the number of those imprisoned rising from 50,000 in 1980 to over 400,000 by 1997.[6] Bill Clinton then rejected the U.S. Sentencing Commission's recommendation to eliminate the gap between crack and powder cocaine penalties, cementing racial disparities in the criminal justice system.[7] George W. Bush increased the budget allocated toward the drug war, even as public support for it waned.[8]

This anti-drug effort has cost taxpayers an astonishing $1 trillion.[9] State governments have spent another $7 billion.[10] And grant money flowed into the police departments across the country to fight this drug war.

The data is clear that Black people were targeted for drug enforcement, and prison sentences were more punitive.[11] Though illegal drugs are destructive, America's expensive drug enforcement policy has not fixed the problem. Rather, it has likely caused a greater distrust in vulnerable communities because drug laws are almost exclusively enforced in communities of color, even though White Americans use drugs in roughly the same quantity.

KANSAS CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT'S DRUG ENFORCEMENT

Drug cases were the most common KCPD cases, by far, submitted to the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office and more than one-third of all the KCPD cases presented to the Prosecutor's Office.[12] The conservative estimates cite the cost of a single drug case is $146,000.[13] At a rate of 1,400 cases per year in Kansas City, the cost to the criminal justice system—police, prosecutors, judges, juries, jails, and related costs total a staggering $200 million.[14] Yet, our study found that approximately 75% of drug cases submitted by the KCPD had no connection to violence.[15] And surprisingly, firearms were found in less than 5% of those drug cases.[16] These findings challenged the beliefs we were taught about drug possession. The data shows that there is a very limited connection between drug possession and violent crime—which remains a key priority in my jurisdiction.

But the biggest concern was this fact: in Kansas City, Black people were grossly disproportionately charged in drug cases.

A concerning aspect of this was the clear racial disparities in drug referrals, and, hence, prosecution.[17] Even though all Black people (including children) make up only 39% of the population in Kansas City, Black adults accounted for 84% of the referred drug sale defendants, with the majority of those sales being for small amounts of marijuana.[18] Black people were 2.2 times more likely to be arrested for low level, non-violent offenses than a White person.[19] And shamefully, 68% of those drug cases occurred east of Troost and south of Independence Avenue—the predominantly Black urban core of Kansas City.[20] It is fair to say that drugs are found wherever we look for them. But our data supports how rarely the system looks for drugs west of Troost or in predominately White neighborhoods.

In fairness to police, commanders reported that drug enforcement was directed where violence occurred. While that policy is logical, it did not make the community any safer. In any community, unfair enforcement of any crime can impact the community and lead to other significant enforcement challenges. Clearance rates are widely used as a barometer to judge the effectiveness of law enforcement. Over a three-year average, less than 60% of KCPD's homicide cases have been cleared, compared to just 24% of non-fatal shootings.[21] Lack of trust between the community and police is a major hurdle to curbing gun violence in Kansas City. The resulting low clearance rates have a negative impact on citizens' confidence in police, prosecutors, and judges' ability to bring shooters to justice, which creates barriers to collaborative problem-solving and in some cases, disincentivizes victim and witness participation, motivating victims to take matters into their own hands, leading to retaliatory gun violence.

JACKSON COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S NEW PATH FORWARD

The data reveals a clear path forward: Enforce fairly and do not concentrate drug prosecution in the city's most segregated, poor, and vulnerable neighborhoods. Instead, prosecute when there's a clear reason to—to address violence or a community concern. Some will point to the anecdotal case where a drug dealer was also found to be violent. They may cite those cases as a reason to utilize the old enforcement strategy. But our new policy encourages enforcement when the suspect is violent—placing the focus on stopping harm in the community. It requires police to be strategic, like fishing with a spear, rather than throwing a stick of dynamite into the deep end of the pond. Unfair enforcement practices squander exactly what is needed to improve criminal justice outcomes—trust. Victims, witnesses, jurors, and even defendants want to know that the system is fair, above almost all else. The old method produced little or no public safety to outweigh the harm. Rethinking drug prosecutions allows resources to be redirected to focus more proactively on violent crime, which is a significant threat to the community.

A modern prosecutor's office must seek data to help create a system that is fair and

open to the public. This type of prosecutor is under attack across the country for using discretion in making filing decisions—rather than the traditional prosecutor who simply waits for the police to bring them a file and looks no further as to how that case was referred. But discretion has always been and always will be demonstrated by governmental bodies. Certainly, police exercise their discretion determining how, when, and where they will enforce on all crimes. These policy decisions are generally made without public input, and these policies are unwritten. And police are neither elected by the people nor accountable in any direct manner for their community relationship. It seems logical that the elected representative who must determine which cases can survive in a judicial process should also determine what cases are fair and equitable to carry though the system. This use of discretion should be demonstrated transparently and be evaluated for improving public trust.

This prosecutor's office has not stopped with our drug analysis. Instead, we are using other tools to help identify bias in our charging decisions. We are undertaking a race-blind charging effort in partnership with Stanford Labs as a tool to detect bias in the system. This is one of the only objective tools available to measure bias. When bias is shown, a prosecutor can be specifically trained on how to recognize that bias in their decision-making and employ strategies to

reduce bias going forward. Anyone should seek to improve their system with as many tools as are available to add transparency and fairness to our system. Race-blind charging demonstrates to the public that this prosecutor's office will continue to take corrective measures to eliminate or reduce the bias found in the criminal justice system. It is not enough to see bias in the system. Leaders must take concrete steps to eliminate that bias in all decision making.

1   Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, Drug Reform in KCMO (PowerPoint, Dec. 2022) (presentation on file with the author).

2   Tess Borden, *Every 25 Seconds: The Human Toll of Criminalizing Drug Use in the United States*, ACLU (2016).

3   A History of the Drug War, Drug Policy Alliance, https://drugpolicy.org/issues/brief-history-drug-war (last visited April 6, 2023).

4   Ibid.

5   Ibid.

6   Ibid.

7   Ibid.

8   Ibid.

9   Brian Mann, After 50 Years of the War on Drugs, 'What Good is it Doing for Us?,' National Public Radio, June 17, 2021.

10   Christian Henderson and Ruth Delaney, *The Price of Prisons: Examining State Spending Trends*, 2010-2015, Table 1 (New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice, 2017); Wagner and Rabuy, *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie,* 2015.

11   NAACP, "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet," https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/ (last accessed June 2023).

12   Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, Drug Reform in KCMO.

13   Ibid.

14   Ibid.

15   Ibid.

16   Ibid.

17   Ibid.

18   Ibid.

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20   Ibid.

21   Kansas City Police Department Scorecard at a Glance, Police Scorecard, https://policescorecard.org/mo/police-department/kansas-city (last visited April 6, 2023).

UNCOVERING ROOT CAUSES OF CRIME AND FORGING A PATH TO CHANGE: A SINGLE MOTHER'S JOURNEY

STEPHANIE M. BURTON, J.D.

In the heart of Kansas City, Missouri, stands a humble three-bedroom townhome at 900 Michigan Avenue. It was within these cinder block walls that I raised my four children while pursuing my education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. When I first arrived in Kansas City at the age of 21, it was following a difficult divorce, and I was determined not to become another statistic. My family support system was limited, with only my mother residing a short 30-minute drive away in Platte County.

As I embarked on my educational journey, initially with dreams of a double major in Political Science and Business, I was hopeful for a brighter future, even landing a job in downtown Kansas City's advertising sector through my stepfather's connections. I settled into a cozy apartment in the southern part of the city. But, as life often does, it threw a curveball my way. A sudden job loss left me teetering on the brink of eviction.

During this challenging period, a fellow parent at my child's daycare center suggested that I explore the option of applying for public housing—a concept entirely foreign to me at the time. Following this advice, I submitted my application and

was assigned an apartment in an area known as Wayne Miner, which appeared decent enough during daylight hours. What I didn't realize was that I was about to become a resident of what's colloquially referred to as "the projects."

In this new part of the city, I couldn't ignore the shift in dynamics. By day, it seemed peaceful, but as the sun set, the neighborhood transformed. Police activity escalated, and the place that looked serene during daylight hours became a hub of criminal activity after dark. It was an eye-opener, and I felt desperate to find a solution. Moving wasn't an option, so I was compelled to make the best of a difficult situation.

One of the most troubling aspects was that I didn't feel safe letting my children play outside. Our neighbors were using their apartments for illegal activities, including drug use, and the parking lot had become a hotspot for such behavior. It begged the question: Why were we tearing down our own community?

My path took a turn when I enrolled in two elective courses during my college years: one on Supreme Court Criminal Procedure and the other on Policing. Although I hadn't initially considered a career in Criminal Justice, I needed to understand why this neighborhood wasn't thriving, and, as a mother, I wanted to shield my children from the pervasive violence around us.

These courses became a turning point in my academic journey, leading me to switch my major from Business to Criminal Justice & Criminology. Simultaneously, I became more involved in the housing

development where I resided. I assumed the role of Treasurer within the Wayne Miner Tenants Association and later ascended to the position of President. Additionally, I joined the Head Start Policy Council at my children's daycare center, seeking ways to ensure they remained insulated from the wrong influences in our community. My transformation from a concerned resident to an active advocate for change was underway.

Upon graduating, I embarked on a career with the State of Missouri as a Probation and Parole Officer, a choice driven by my desire to help individuals successfully reintegrate into the community. In this role, I gained invaluable insights into the root causes of crime, which I discovered to be alarmingly common across many cases. These root causes included a lack of education, a dearth of community support, moral redirection, untreated mental health issues, poverty, and the pervasive specter of racism.

One of the prevalent issues that stood out was the high rate of non-violent offenders grappling with problems related to drug abuse, housing instability, limited sustainability upon release, and a lack of job opportunities offering a respectable income. The inability to thrive upon reentry often led individuals to return to their baseline of criminal behavior as a means to meet their family's needs. This, in turn, raised the rate of recidivism—a heartbreaking cycle I was determined to break.

My pursuit of higher education continued as I entered law school, consistently striving to improve the lives of my clients. This journey allowed me to actively contribute to reshaping the criminal justice system, advocating for alternatives to incarceration that addressed the underlying issues faced by non-violent offenders. With a focus on rehabilitation and community reintegration, we as a people can strive to see a change in the way we address and view crime. Our community must look and plan to find ways to address these needs to make our community safer.

In pursuit of these goals, we must have a comprehensive plan encompassing policy changes, community-based initiatives, and educational programs tailored to address the unique needs of our community. This plan is grounded in a commitment to making our neighborhoods safer, fostering opportunity, and dismantling the systemic barriers that have held us back for far too long.

Comprehensive Drug Rehabilitation Programs: We must develop and expand drug rehabilitation programs within the criminal justice system, offering evidence-based treatment, counseling, and support for those battling substance abuse.

Affordable Housing Initiatives: Collaborating with local governments and non-profits is the baseline to create affordable housing options for those reentering society post-incarceration, reducing homelessness and recidivism.

Job Training and Placement Programs: We must establish and embrace vocational training within correctional facilities, equipping inmates with practical skills and forging partnerships with local businesses to create job opportunities.

Educational Opportunities: Let us consider education programs within prisons and detention centers, focusing on GED and post-secondary education, helping inmates acquire valuable skills.

Restorative Justice Programs: Promote restorative justice practices, and emphasize accountability, empathy, and repairing harm to victims and the community, encouraging offenders' involvement in community service and restitution.

Community-based Support Services: As has been long stated and explored through the Urban Summit, there is a need for community reentry centers offering a range of support services, including mental health counseling, addiction treatment, job placement, and legal aid.

Sentencing Reform: There is an imperative need for sentencing reform to reduce mandatory minimums for non-violent offenses and promote alternatives to imprisonment.

Expunge or Seal Records: Streamline expungement and record-sealing processes, facilitating reintegration for those with criminal records.

Mental Health Services: There must be increased access to mental health assessments and treatment within correctional facilities, addressing undiagnosed or untreated mental health issues. More importantly, there must be encouragement among our community to seek mental healthcare and destigmatize the pursuit thereof.

Community Engagement and Awareness: Our community needs to engage in public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage community support, fostering involvement in rehabilitation efforts.

Research and Data Analysis: Invest in research to assess program effectiveness, using data to identify areas for improvement.

Legislative Advocacy: Collaborate with legislators to introduce bills aligned with our goals of reducing incarceration rates and addressing root causes of crime.

Evaluation and Accountability: Implement regular evaluations of programs to ensure effectiveness and equitable distribution of resources.

Community Policing and Conflict Resolution: Promote community policing strategies that build trust between law enforcement and communities, emphasizing de-escalation techniques and conflict resolution.

This comprehensive plan, shaped by our collective experience and commitment to positive change, addresses root causes, prioritizes rehabilitation and reintegration, and works to create a fair and just criminal justice system. It requires collaboration among government agencies, community organizations, and the public to effect lasting change. Together, we can make our neighborhoods safer and more inclusive and transform them into places where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

PARADE OF HORRIBLES: WHY PRETEXTUAL STOPS MUST STOP

BENJAMIN COX, J.D.

Pretextual traffic stops are permitted by the Constitution and often lead to the prosecution of significant crimes. But they should stop. The benefits of such stops must be weighed against their costs, which are significant: pretextual stops impair liberty, disproportionally burden minorities, erode trust in law enforcement, and lead to deaths of innocent people. Evidence obtained from such stops can have real value, but that value does not justify these costs. Because the Constitution permits pretextual stops, it falls upon society—police departments, prosecutors, state courts, and legislatures—to make sure that the practice comes to an end. There are avenues to do so, and we should take them.

A pretextual stop occurs when police pull over a driver for a technical violation of a traffic ordinance—one that does not immediately impair public safety—when the officer's true motivation is to investigate some other crime, despite lacking probable cause or reasonable suspicion that the driver has committed such a crime.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that such stops do not violate the Fourth Amendment. In *Whren*, the Court held that "the Fourth Amendment's concern with reasonableness allows certain actions to be taken in certain circumstances whatever the subjective intent."[1] That language has been interpreted to mean that an officer can, without violating the Fourth Amendment, have explicit racial animus in deciding to pull someone over, provided that the driver has in fact committed a traffic violation.[2]

At least one state court thought that the Supreme Court could not possibly have meant that. The Supreme Court of Arkansas

held that "it did not interpret *Whren* as blanket authority for pretextual arrests for purposes of a search in all cases."[3] The U.S. Supreme Court promptly reversed, holding that the Arkansas court's opinion was "flatly contrary to this Court's controlling precedent."[4] Out of respect for that precedent, Justice Ginsburg concurred in the judgment over-ruling the Arkansas case. But she made an important point: the Court had previously held that there was a "dearth of horribles demanding redress" in this area.[5] She was unsure that the Court's perception on that point would prove correct.[6] Unsurprisingly, she was right.

Far from a "dearth of horribles," recent events have made clear that pretextual stops are common and often lead to tragic results. When *Whren* was decided in 1996, there were approximately 10.5 million traffic stops in the United States.[7] By 2018, that number had swelled to over 27 million.[8] So, there cannot be said to be a "dearth" of these cases, and experience has shown that they can indeed be "horrible."

Pretextual stops impact Black drivers at a higher rate than White drivers. Black drivers are at least 20% more likely to be pulled over for a traffic stop, and in some jurisdictions, the discrepancy is significantly higher.[9] Here in Missouri, it is widely believed that Black drivers are stopped more frequently by police. The data have shown that belief to be correct. In 2020, the Missouri Attorney General's Office report on police stops showed a definitive disparity in the number of Black drivers pulled over by police.[10] The data submitted by state law enforcement agencies also showed that no other racial group (i.e., Whites or Hispanics) came close to the disparities reflected in the data for Black drivers. Two years later, in 2022, the Missouri Attorney General Office's report showed the same thing.[11] Once again, Black drivers were stopped at a higher rate, based on their share of the population. By contrast, Whites have been stopped every year at lower rates than their share of the population.[12] The 2022 report marked the 23rd consecutive year in which Missouri law enforcement statistics "show Black drivers are stopped at higher rates than their share of the population."[13]

Black drivers are also much more likely to be searched once they have been stopped.[14] Such a disparity can create a "reservoir of resentment" in the community,[15] which adversely affects crime rates. In addition, being stopped by police can result in arrests or even convictions that carry far-reaching collateral consequences. However, an arrest or even a conviction, are, unfortunately, not the worst possible outcome for Black drivers.

Philando Castile was pulled over for having a broken taillight.[16] So was Walter Scott.[17] Daunte Wright was pulled over for having expired tags and/or for having an air freshener on his rearview mirror.[18] During these traffic stops, all three men were shot and killed by law enforcement.[19] Sandra Bland was pulled over on suspicion of an improper lane change.[20] She later allegedly hanged herself in her jail cell.[21]

Kansas City is no stranger to tragedies such as these. Here, Donnie Sanders was

followed for traveling faster than the other traffic on the roadway and was then pulled over for an improper turn signal, and Brittany Simek was stopped for being a passenger on a scooter that was being driven on the wrong side of the road. Mr. Sanders was shot and killed, and Ms. Simek was shot and severely injured. The tragic incidents identified here do not begin to scratch the surface of incidents across this country and this state. Moreover, the tragedy is compounded by the fact that, as illustrated by the data, the danger of death or injury from a traffic stop is not equal across all races.

As noted above, the Fourth Amendment does not remedy this problem, but that does not mean that there are no remedies. As the Supreme Court itself has noted, "it is in the interest of the police to limit petty-offense arrests, which carry costs that are simply too great to incur without good reason."[22] Some police departments have done just that. The Los Angeles Police Department instituted a policy that officers must have reason to suspect a more serious crime is occurring before initiating a traffic stop, and they are required to record their reasoning on body camera before making the stop.[23] Likewise, police departments in Minnesota have "issued policies directing officers to minimize non-public safety stops and instead focus on the things that threaten public safety, like speeding, distracted driving, and drunken driving."[24]

Some prosecutors too, have stopped prosecuting most felonies that arise from pretextual traffic stops. For example, John

Choi, in Ramsey County, Minnesota, has so stated, and he has been successful in coordinating with the Minneapolis Police Department to that effect.[25]

One court has held that, in the context of traffic stops, its state's Constitution protects individuals more than the Fourth Amendment does. The Supreme Court of Oregon held that Oregon's state constitution "precludes officers from asking certain investigative questions during investigatory stops—those unrelated to the purpose of the investigation and without independent constitutional justification."[26] In other words, the investigation that follows the traffic stop must be related to the traffic violation itself. "By applying subject-matter limitations to investigative activities and questioning, [the Oregon Constitution] ensures that officers do not turn minor traffic violations into criminal investigations without a constitutional basis for doing so."[27]

State and local governments have also taken measures to end or mitigate pretextual stops. The city of Oakland, California, has deliberately reduced the number of pretextual stops by not stopping low-level offenders.[28] Washington D.C.'s mayor transferred operation of the city's automated speed, red light, and stop sign cameras from the police department to the transportation department.[29] Similarly, Berkeley, California seeks to transfer enforcement of traffic violations from the police to the transportation department.[30] The City of Philadelphia and the State of Virginia have gone further still, outright banning the police from initiating many low-level traffic stops.[31]

Kansas City—whether by police policy,[32] prosecutor discretion, Court decision, or legislative action—should join the jurisdictions noted above in seeking to limit or eliminate pretextual stops. Any law or policy limiting pretextual stops can be tailored so as not to prevent stops when danger is apparent—for example, when there is reasonable suspicion that drunk driving, reckless driving, or some other felony has occurred. Yes, collecting evidence from pretextual stops can help in solving crimes. But limiting dangerous encounters between police and motorists, and fostering trust and respect between the two, is more important. Furthermore, there are any number of practices (such as warrantless police entry into homes) that would help solve crimes, yet we simply do not tolerate them. We should likewise cease to tolerate pretextual stops.

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3   *State v. Sullivan*, 340 Ark. 315, 648 (2000).

4   *Arkansas v. Sullivan*, 532 U.S. 769, 771 (2001).

5   *Atwater v. City of Lago Vista*, 532 U.S. 318, 353 (2001).

6   Ibid., 772.

7   Haywood, "Ending Race-Based Pretextual Stops," 26 Rich. Pub. Int. L. Rev. at 65.

8   Ibid.

9   Haywood, "Ending Race-Based Pretextual Stops," 26 Rich. Pub. Int. L. Rev. at 66-67.

10 Missouri Vehicle Stops 2020 Annual Report (https://ago.mo.gov/docs/default-source/vsr/2020-vehicle-stops-annual-report.pdf?sfvrsn=ffd40b8a_2).

11 Missouri Vehicle Stops 2022 Annual Report (https://ago.mo.gov/docs/default-source/vsr/2022-vehicle-stops-report-executive-summary.pdf?sfvrsn=ddb3e949_2) .

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19 See notes 9-11.

20 David Montgomery, "The Death of Sandra Bland: Is there anything Left to Investigate?," nytimes.com, May 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/08/us/sandra-bland-texas-death.html.

21 Ibid.

22 Atwater, 532 U.S. at 352.

23 Jany and Poston, "Minor Police Encounters Plummet."

24 Melissa Turtinen, "Ramsey County will No Longer Prosecute Cases that Stem from Low-level Traffic Stops," bringmethenews.com, Sept. 8, 2021, https://bringmethenews.com/minnesota-news/ramsey-county-will-no-longer-prosecute-cases-that-stem-from-low-level-traffic-stops.

25 Mara H. Gottfried, "Ramsey County attorney says he won't prosecute most felonies that result from pretextual traffic stops," twincities.com, Sept. 8, 2021, https://www.twincities.com/2021/09/08/ramsey-county-attorney-says-he-wont-prosecute-felonies-that-result-from-pretextual-traffic-stops/.

26 *State v. Arreola-Botello*, 365 Or. 695, 712 (2019).

27 Ibid.

28 Marsha Mercer, "Police 'Pretext' Traffic Stops Need to End, Some Lawmakers Say." Marsha Mercer, stateline.org, September 3, 2020, https://stateline.org/2020/09/03/police-pretext-traffic-stops-need-to-end-some-lawmakers-say/.

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30 Ibid.

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32 Police Departments should embrace policies such as this as they focus resources on violent crime, address community concerns over fairness in policing and over policing and have the ability to address officer safety. According to an analysis by the *New York Times* in 2021, 60 police officers were killed in the line of duty by a motorist who had been pulled over. David D. Kirkpatrick, Steve Eder, Kim Barker, and Julie Tate, "Why Many Police Traffic Stops Turn Deadly," nytimes.com, Oct. 31, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/31/us/police-traffic-stops-killings.html.

UNLOCKING SOLUTIONS: FORMERLY JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS LEAD THE WAY IN REDUCING VIOLENCE

MELESA N. JOHNSON, J.D.

Modern society has an unfortunate history and practice of marginalizing invaluable human assets. Whether it was the exploitation of Native Americans or the gross devaluation of Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, this country has had a troubled tendency to demean and devalue individuals who have assisted in wealth creation, sustainability, and peace in the United States of America. Sadly, the practice of disenfranchising key demographics continues to persist in the realm of public safety.

At a time when violent crime is the worst it has ever been in Kansas City, with the municipality trending toward surpassing the homicide record established in 2020, leveraging every community asset for violence prevention and intervention is more important now than ever before. Killings and shootings disproportionately harm younger men of color. These statistics tend to be remarkably consistent across a wide span of years. From 2017 through April 2021, Black residents comprised between 72.14% and 78.92% of victims. For that same time frame, men make up between 81% and 85% of victims. These victims tend to be young

men, between 20 to 40 years of age, with 62.4% of 2020 non-fatal shooting victims falling in that age bracket. In 2019, the homicide rate in Kansas City was around 31 / 100,000 residents, but for Black males aged 18-21, the homicide rate was 477 / 100,000 (more than 15 times the city average, and more than 80 times the national average). Non-fatal shooting and homicide victims have more than just race, gender, and age in common. A large portion of non-fatal shooting victims are justice-involved. One quarter have at least one previous felony conviction, while about 40% have previous law enforcement contact in Missouri. Gun violence victims tend to have lower incomes. Of the 2020 homicide and non-fatal victims that had identified employment, the average annual salary of a victim was just $14,700 per year. Most of them had an average income of less than $10,000 per year, below the Missouri poverty line.[1] In order to reach people most likely to offend or be victimized, we must look to a relatable demographic to lead in this space.

Individuals with criminal histories and that have been justice involved are ostracized from numerous sectors in our community, including access to workforce development opportunities, affordable housing, and general acceptance as productive human beings. However, I believe that anecdotal and empirical evidence prove that residents with lived experience in the world of crime are the key to a safer Kansas City. As a life-long resident of the city's urban core, I know that there are a host of intangible or unmeasurable reasons why people with criminal histories are essential to

the violence prevention and intervention apparatus.

First, former justice-involved individuals' relatability and credibility make them a priceless cohort of change. Individuals with criminal records experience first hand the consequences of violence and criminal behavior. This personal experience can make them more relatable and credible when working with individuals at risk of engaging in violent behavior or those who have already committed crimes. Their stories and experiences can resonate with these individuals in a way that professionals without similar experiences might struggle to achieve. People who have overcome their own criminal histories to engage in positive work can serve as powerful role models for those who are on a similar path. Seeing someone who has successfully turned their life around can inspire hope and motivate others to make positive changes.

Secondly, individuals with criminal records have a level of cultural competence that cannot be duplicated. Many violence prevention and intervention efforts target communities that are disproportionately affected by crime and violence. Individuals with criminal records who are also from these communities might better understand the cultural nuances, challenges, and specific needs of these communities. This cultural competence can enhance the effectiveness of prevention and intervention programs. Because these individuals come from the communities most impacted by violent crime, they often have connections within communities that can be leveraged

for positive change. They might have insights into who the influential figures are and how best to approach them to support violence prevention efforts.

And lastly, engaging in violence prevention and intervention work can provide individuals with criminal records a sense of purpose and an opportunity to give back to their communities. This journey of personal growth and redemption can be deeply fulfilling and contribute to their continued rehabilitation. By actively participating in violence prevention work, individuals with criminal records challenge negative stereotypes and stigmas associated with their pasts. Their presence in such roles can help reshape public perceptions and promote a more inclusive approach to addressing violence.

While the intangible and unmeasurable benefits of engaging those with criminal records are extremely important, the realm of violence prevention has become so academically centered that the supporting data must align with the understood beliefs. As it pertains to engaging justice involved individuals in public safety work, there is ample evidence to support the notion that they must become an integral part of this work. A telling example of the potential and actual impact is the Aim 4 Peace program (A4P).

The Aim4Peace Violence Prevention Program is adapted from the evidence-based Cure Violence program and uses a public health approach to prevent and reduce killings. Since 2008, A4P has been implemented in focused priority areas of

Kansas City, Missouri within the East Patrol Division, which has historically experienced disproportionately higher levels of violence. During the reporting period of 2018 through 2020, A4P focused supports in the 330 sector of East Patrol and had numerous formerly justice-involved members on staff.[2]

A critical function of A4P is to identify and mediate conflicts in the community before a violent incident occurs. As of August 16, 2023, 49 of the 125 homicides that have occurred in 2023 thus far were caused by an argument, according to the Kansas City Police Department; thus proactive conflict mediation in the community is an essential service to offer. From 2018 through 2020, A4P mediated 446 conflicts, with 84% resolved and ending in a peaceful resolution. Most mediations (59%) occurred in the A4P priority area of Sector 330. Furthermore, over one-third of the conflicts were referred to A4P by community members, which indicates a level of community trust and acceptance of the program. For the reasons explained above, A4P has also has immense success with reaching a demographic often deemed unreachable by other programs or initiatives—extremely high-risk individuals who are likely to shoot or be shot. A4P focused on recruiting those at greatest risk for experiencing violence to become participants in the program based on identified risk factors. Between 2018 and 2020, 90% of new A4P participants were assessed as high-risk for experiencing future violence during the initial risk assessment. Of the enrolled participants, 88% reported progress on goals in at least one or more monthly progress reports. Nearly 70% of participants reported not experiencing any violence over the previous 30 days during monthly check-ins.

The data from A4P is undeniable. Rashid Junaid, the Executive Director of A4P, stated that we need people who have been incarcerated or justice involved in this work because "people closest to and affected by violent crime look to them as credible messengers. They know their struggle because they've lived it every single day. Because they succeed, others around them can see hope that they can overcome their trials. Formerly incarcerated individuals are a shining example of what we want to see for people who have overcome obstacles." I could not agree with Mr. Junaid more.

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1   Internal JCPO Data Analysis
2   Watson-Thompson, J., Harsin, J., Stewart, D., Everett, M., & Esiaka, C. (2022). Aim4Peace Evaluation Brief Report, 2018-2020. The University of Kansas, Center for Community Health and Development.

UNCORNERED: A MINDSET, A MODEL, A MOVEMENT

MICHELLE CALDEIRA

On both sides of the state line in Kansas City, community violence is reflective of trends across the country, with violence on the rise since 2014. According to the FBI, in 2020 there was a 30% increase in homicides and manslaughter, the highest one-year increase ever recorded.[1] Kansas City has experienced the three deadliest years on record, reporting between 180 and 250 homicides each year between 2020 and 2022, with shootings as high as 788 in 2022. For far too many years, Kansas City has been one of the top ten most violent cities in the country, outpacing Chicago and New York City in homicides per capita. Young African-American men are disproportionately overrepresented in homicide and shooting numbers, both as perpetrators and victims. The impact of the violence generated by this small group reverberates throughout entire cities as individual lives are lost, acute and secondary trauma stifles possibility, families struggle, hope is squashed, and the whole city fails to thrive.

Research shows that street violence represents almost 75% of all violence in major urban cities in America and involves less than three percent of the population. Further, those involved in community violence are less than one percent of the population, and this violence is highly concentrated in neighborhoods that are also experiencing wide disparities in health, life expectancy, and educational outcomes.

While this data and outlook are sobering, this is not the story, nor the reality we want to have. Enormous potential and possibility exist in Kansas City—a place of exceptional educational institutions, philanthropic generosity, successful businesses, and championship sports teams. KC Uncornered has a vision that violence-free neighborhoods are possible and that eliminating street violence will lead to thriving communities.

Uncornered is about tapping into this potential and realizing possibility for all. It begins with the curiosity of a question—what if the catalyst for community change was within those who had never been reached? And what if to get to the end of street violence, we must create change from the inside out by turning to former and active gang-involved individuals, whom we call Core Influencers? And that they alone have the proximity and credibility to reach those most directly involved in and deeply impacted by community violence and to support their transition to agents of peace? Core Influencers are unseen leaders and catalysts for change right here in our community.

We wondered if communities were stuck in cycles of violence in part because a small group of highly disruptive, disengaged individuals had never been effectively tapped for their brilliance and power in a positive way. They had been pushed out of classrooms, locked up in correctional facilities, and relegated to paths away from success. And our collective failure to engage this key group of individuals traps

the community in generational struggle. This led us to develop the Core Influencer Theory of Change in 2013. We believe that opportunities, resources, and joy that are generated here must be felt, experienced, and shared by all. Success should also reach those who have been left out of progress for far too long, those who have been marginalized and vilified.

The Core Influencer Theory proposes that to create community change, you need to focus on a tiny section of the most disruptive and actively violence-involved individuals in a neighborhood and support them in novel ways. They not only need education; they need intensive mental health care and access to resources to break the cycle of poverty and violence. And what they really need is the opportunity to lead their crews to peace, rebuild their communities, and break out of systems that have kept them trapped.

Therefore, Uncornered's approach is laser-focused to reach those at the heart of street violence. Uncornered hires, trains, and supports full-time mentors who are close to violence in their communities and influential in their networks. These mentors then recruit young people actively involved in violence and redirect them in their journey to stop violent activities and instead, shift their mindset to lead their cities to peace. To be clear, Uncornered is not an effort to save or fix individuals. In fact, we are trying to reach out to Core influencers because we believe they can save us. They are uniquely positioned with credibility, proximity, knowledge, and power to tap into those most active in the violence and redirect their

activities by modeling excellence and by showing a path to a peaceful future.

With evidence-based best practices, Uncornered launched in Boston, Massachusetts, in 2016. The model has demonstrated the effectiveness of successful pathways that offer solutions to violence reduction, with replicable best practices and promising results. The results and impact of Uncornered after more than six years of implementation led to Boston recording one of its least violent years in more than 20 years, with 41 homicides and 146 shootings in 2022 in a city with a population of nearly 700,000.

In 2017, Uncornered hosted a group of elected officials, business executives, and civic leaders in Boston, to share and learn from each other. In 2021, a million-dollar grant from a private foundation allowed Uncornered co-founders to continue their exploration to collaborate with leaders in Kansas City to implement the Uncornered approach. Over these last five-plus years, and especially in the last 18 months, we have been extremely grateful for the warmth and learning offered by community leaders, public, private and philanthropic leaders, and Core influencers.

These hundreds of hours of conversations led to the decision to launch a demonstration pilot project in July 2022 in Kansas City. With funding from several individuals, KC Uncornered began with a small cohort of Core Influencer mentors and gang-involved individuals. Just a year later it is now supporting more than 100 gang-involved young people with a team of 18 full time

employees and four part-time consultants. It is partnering with nearly 25 community organizations that are rooted in Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas communities. The national team works collaboratively to support their efforts with resource and talent development, financial operations, and impact measurement.

After 15 months in operation, Kansas City Uncornered is already seeing positive results.

- 300+ individuals in the KC Uncornered Network

- 9 catalysts have been promoted to employees as Leads, and 3 Leads have been identified as emerging managers

- 28 crews in the Uncornered network across Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas

- 16 of the crews have 2+ individuals connected to Uncornered

- 94% of Core influencers have not been rearrested compared to 13% typical rate of no new arrests without Uncornered involvement

- 70% are engaged in prosocial behaviors and activities such as reengaging with education, seeing a mental health clinician, and seeking employment or training

To measure these outcomes, Uncornered implements an empowerment evaluation framework which harnesses the knowledge and experiences of Core Influencers to build data and evaluation skills so that they can lead the cycles of learning that are key to the impact of Uncornered. Within this framework, whether our standard data or original research and evaluations, we use a mixed-methods approach for data collection. For these data, Leads and Catalysts are using a combination of field observations, interviews, surveys, and assessments, all developed by Uncornered.

Core Influencer Lead Victor shares his joy from doing this work:

> "I love helping my people. I have a passion for seeing people change, build their lives and their community. This is my calling and I get to model change for other people. The ones coming up behind me, see me talking to Jeff [mental health counselor] and let their guard down a little bit and get into a place where they can think differently about how to deal with their problems."

With the right scale of investment, KC Uncornered, partnering with many exceptional community groups and city agencies, can contribute to the elimination of street violence in less than a decade.

The Uncornered approach is a mindset, a model, and a movement. The mindset shift asks us to turn to and ask for help from those driving the violence (Core Influencers). The model operates on the premise that by holding high expectations and a belief in their brilliance, and pouring into them love, support and resources, young people actively violent today can and will move from surviving to thriving. The movement will be driven by the unlikely few—if and when those of us with choices and resources have the courage to try something different.

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THE UNSEEN STRUGGLES: ERASURE AND RACIAL INEQUITIES IN KANSAS CITY'S QUEER COMMUNITY

NASIR ANTHONY MONTALVO

The Dixie Belle Bar is lauded, perhaps, as one of the most nostalgic places for Kansas City's LGBT nightlife from 1983 to 2006[1]—but it was also once one of Kansas City's most racist queer establishments. On July 27, 1993, Yul Stell, a Black organizer with Men Of All Colors Together-Kansas City, penned an open letter to the Dixie Belle.[2] In the letter, he condemned the bar for displaying a Confederate flag and called out racial practices the bar upheld—requiring that Black folk show four to five pieces of identification for entry into the establishment and placing a quota on Black folk who could be in the bar at one time.[3]

The Dixie Belle Bar is but one example of an unspoken issue in Kansas City: that Black queer Kansas Citians have faced, not only erasure, but immense anguish for the sake of White LGBT progress—demonstrating a deep seated anti-Blackness that needs to be upended in order for true LGBT freedoms to exist. This essay examines how infringement of Black queer space,
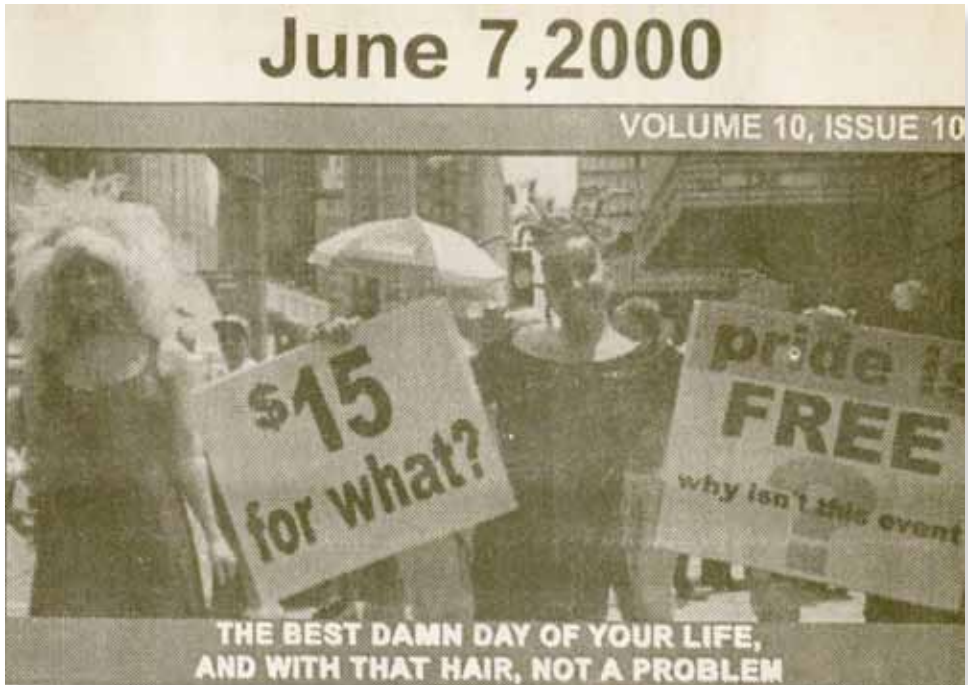
Figure 1. Pictured is a Black organizer holding two signs, one in each hand, in protest of an unknown year of Kansas City's Pride Festival and their entry fees. In their right hand, the sign reads "pride is FREE...why isn't this event?" In their left hand, the sign reads "$15 for what?" The caption of the image mocks the Black organizer's locs, reading "The Best Damn Day of Your Life, And With That Hair, Not A Problem." This issue of the paper, let alone this page, mentions nothing of the protest or entry fees. (Image printed in *Current News 10*, no. 10 [June 7, 2000]: 3. Courtesy of the Gay and Lesbian Archives of Mid-America.)

Black joy, and sexual violence enacted on Black queer folk has created a long-reigning racial power imbalance within Kansas City's queer community—ultimately leading to the subjugation of Black queer Kansas Citians.

THE RACIAL COMMODITIZATION OF KANSAS CITY'S PRIDE

Kansas City's Pride is the prime event for local LGBT folk: a three-day event encompassing a parade, performances, and queer vendors—but the event here has been plagued with accusations of racism, transphobia, and classism. Kansas City's Pride was originally founded by Lea Hopkins in 1977 and served as a protest march—with a small group of 25–30 people advocating for representation and LGBT rights.[4] In 2001, John Koop, more commonly known by their stage name, Flo, created Show Me Pride, LLC[5] to run what we know as today's Pride parade. With this change in management, Kansas City's Pride became a capitalist spectacle—charging vendors for table space, up-charging food and refreshments, and, most notably, charging an entry fee for attendees. According to John Koop, the fees were to combat financial mismanagement.[6] However, in interviews with four Black queer Kansas Citians (who have requested anonymity), the fees were meant to bar low-income folks from attending the celebration (see Figure 1). By making it difficult for low-income folks to attend Pride, Show Me Pride, LLC prevented those most affected by poverty from attending an event that was originally founded as a protest and celebration of identity.

The festival has also been marred by Rick Bumgardner—who bought out Show Me Pride in 2008—when he moved the parade to the Power and Light District (P&L) in 2012. The Power and Light District was already under fire for its funding by the Cordish Company, an organization (with no queer ties) that is responsible for the $850 million development project that is P&L and, thus, dually responsible for third- and fourth-wave gentrification that pushed out Black gay nightlife.[7] Moving the parade to this location was met with protests[8] and immense vitriol.[9]

THE LOSS OF BLACK QUEER SPACES: THE GENTRIFICATION OF POWER & LIGHT

In the early 2000s, Black queer Kansas City nightlife was more than an activity. Soakie's and Tootsie's were unofficial Black gay bars

Figure 2. An Ad in *Current News* for Soakie's, a former Black gay bar. The headline of the ad reads, "The ONLY Black Gay Bar in KC," followed by the name of the bar, location, drink specials, and hours of operation. (Ad printed in *Current News* 3, no. 11 [June 24, 1993]: 37. Courtesy of the Gay and Lesbian Archives of Mid-America.)

in Downtown Kansas City that were filled to the brim with local Black queer folk.[10] So much so that the Soakie's-adjacent parking lot became an extension of the club: hosting balls, performances, and the signature "parkin' lot pimpin'" that Black queer elders reminisce about today. The clubs, however, shut down as Downtown became more gentrified at the hands of government-sponsored beautification projects. Soakie's would shut down in 2004. And Tootsie's, a hang-out space for (Black) lesbians, would undergo a "remodel" and clientele shift in which lesbians were ultimately pushed out[11] to allow room for swingers. The club closed down completely in 2010.

Now, no Black gay bars exist in Kansas City. Instead, folks must rely on local organizations to produce life-affirming events and make use of other spaces. These same organizations, however, rely on White entities for event space, funding, resources, and connections. This has created a cycle wherein Black queer Kansas Citians cannot attain their needs, or "move" towards freedom, without the actions of their White counterparts and White capital.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE—THE FETISHIZATION OF BLACK GAY KANSAS CITY MEN

In conjunction with loss of spaces, we also must examine how sexual desire has served in the oppression of Black queer Kansas Citians.

The Black gay male community of Kansas City, particularly, suffers from this sexual exploitation—as can be seen in the case of the organization, Black-White Men Together-
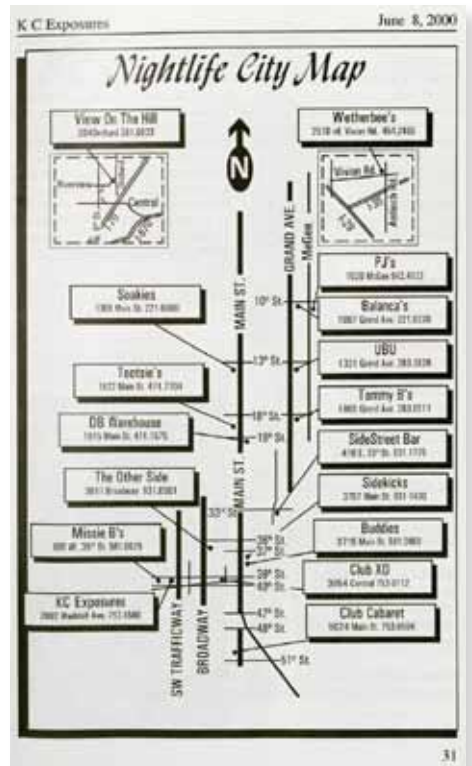
Figure 3. A Map of Gay Bars in Kansas City in 2000. Most of these bars no longer exist today. Missie B's and SideStreet Bar are the exceptions. (Map printed in KC Exposures 1, no. 31 [June 8, 2000]: 31, Courtesy of the *Gay And Lesbian Archives of Mid-America*.)

Kansas City (BWMT-KC). Founded by Michael J. Smith in 1980, the National Association of Black and White Men Together (NABWMT) was expressly founded for White gay men to more easily find Black men to have sex with.[12] Smith was described by his peers to be an "interracialist," believing that Black men were more well-endowed; he would face vitriol in the media for his comments and actions. Despite this, chapters of the organization opened across the nation, including in Kansas City. The local chapter was able to accomplish a great deal in pushing sex education and creating systems of support for gay men, at large—but part of the violence faced by Black queer men

is sexual exploitation, which includes fetishization based on race.

Similarly to the loss of Black queer space, this sexual violence and the need to feel desired limits access to new futures. Desirability only furthers White supremacy—informed by stereotypes (e.g., sexual endowment) and unwritten codes (e.g., hyper-masculinity) that create power structures among Black queer men in relation to the White male gaze. To end White supremacy is to put an end to this sexual desire, and to eradicate the tools which White men use to subjugate Black queer men to sexual dependence.

The BWMT-KC chapter was ontologically violent; Black men in BWMT-KC sought safety in this group during a period where being sexually open was more readily pathologized than today. But this feeling of safety is undermined by what the group was meant to do—to enable White male Kansas Citians to sexually exploit Black gay men.[13] Black gay men based their safety on feeling "recognized" by White counterparts and thus built this organization in a condensed view of their freedom.

FROM REDLINING TO... RAINBOW CROSSWALKS

There exists a paradigm in Kansas City's queer community wherein Black queer Kansas Citians are made reliant on White LGBT progress in order to progress themselves—yet, Black queer struggles for power have proven that Western governing bodies are only meant to uphold Whiteness.

It is this paradigm that has led to a mass erasure of Black queer history and to LGBT progress being celebrated in Kansas City even if it has come at the expense of Black folks in that struggle. This essay is not meant to target non-Black queer Kansas Citians and should not be mistaken by bigots to be validation of their beliefs. Instead, it should serve as what history should always be used to do: to inform the future. And that future is one that Black queer Kansas Citians must not create within the bounds of White power structures, but destroy servility in order to build anew.

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2   Scrapbook clippings of BWMT/MACT-KC, 1980-1999. Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America, LaBudde Special Collections, Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, MO.

3   Ibid.

4   D. W. Jackson, *Changing Times: Almanac and Digest of Kansas City's LGBTQIA History* (50th Anniversary Commemorative Edition, pp. 115–116). The Orderly Pack Rat, 2016.

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12 Sarah Nicole Burgin, "The Workshop as the Work: White Anti-Racism Organising in 1960s, 70s, and 80s US Social Movements." The University of Leeds, School of History, September 2013.

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LISTENING TO OUR MOTHER: ECONOMIC WITHDRAWAL AS A TOOL WITHIN THE BLACK EON OF THE 21ST CENTURY BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENT

THE REV. DR. VERNON PERCY HOWARD, JR.

One of the most glaring, troubling, and inescapable truths looming large within the consciousness of Black Liberation advocates and scholars is the reality of the long, arduous, and painful nature of our freedom struggle. Blacks have lived within the crucible of American racism for over four centuries and have assembled a kind of griot's wisdom that springs forth in their musings and vernacular often inspired by voices, leaders, and thinkers steeped deep in the cause. One especially noteworthy quote referenced amid many conversations about the ongoing Black Liberation Struggle
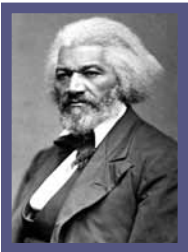
is passed down from activist, diplomat, intellectual, and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who boldly and courageously stated:

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

The unvarnished reality and the poignant beauty of this statement can be applied to every facet of the Black Liberation Movement, including the strategies employed by this community in their relentless pursuit of freedom. This quest seems never-ending, and many believe it will forever be a fundamental part of the Black experience in America. I refer to it as the "Black Eon"—a period marked by time, suffering, and resilience in which Black people persistently live, work, serve, sacrifice (and never truly falter), struggle, and perish, only to rise again in the ongoing endeavor to finally attain and bequeath to our offspring a life infused with human dignity. This life would ideally include a culture and societal systems that dispense justice and equal opportunities rather than withholding them.

If Douglass is right about power's proclivities, how have Black people demanded what is rightfully theirs? Should Black people look more deeply into our past and our pain in this country to re-imagine effective strategies for a speedier end to the continued social

crucifixion we face amid American racism and injustice? With the current assault on historic Civil Rights legislation, the dissing of Affirmative Action in higher education by the Supreme Court, and Voter Suppression now becoming a staple of states' rights political ideology, more accommodating tactics toward Black freedom become less tenable, practical, and effective. This writer claims that Black Liberation strategies most employed by Blacks during the Black Eon are many, all of which have been prevalent and useful in the quest for freedom. And yet here we are in 2023, 160 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, and diverse forms of slavery still persist, resulting in stubborn inequities and prolonged suffering. It is far beyond the time that the vanguard of Black Liberation advocates shift to a rarely used yet proven to be effective tactic—the gauntlet of economic withdrawal.

Black Dollar Potency (BDP) within the collective Black populace has been well documented in recent decades. Most recently it has been estimated that Black spending power in America has eclipsed the $1 trillion mark, with some political economists estimating it as high as $1.6 trillion. This astounding number exceeds the gross national product of the country of Mexico and other developed nations such as Switzerland and Spain. Yet the prevailing philosophy toward leveraging such economic potency among Blacks toward greater freedom of the people has been to re-think the ways Blacks become more embedded in the economic mainstream to benefit from it. For example, Blacks

have been encouraged to increase home purchasing, stock market investments, savings, and entrepreneurship and become better trained for higher paying STEM-related jobs and the like. In such approaches, the Black wealth gap remains, and other indicators of Black inequity reflect a worsening of conditions for Black people as a whole. Black wealth still sits at a miniscule 15% of White wealth, and Black net worth has decreased in recent years amid rising net worth totals among Whites, Hispanics, and Asians. Historically, Blacks have turned to boycott and economic withdrawal, leveraging Black Dollar Potency to pressure systems and structures to act justly toward them.

How must Black people now respond to economic systems and structures which refuse to do more to protect and secure Civil Rights and expand wealth and access for Blacks? In Kansas City an approach employed recently which is closer to the philosophy of boycott and economic withdrawal was articulated by a Civil Rights collective in Kansas City, Missouri called the Urban Council, comprised of the Missouri National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Black United Front of Kansas City, Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City, Urban League of Kansas City, and the Urban Summit of Kansas City. The collective drafted a letter to National Basketball Association (NBA) Commissioner Adam Silver during the City of KCMO's explicitly stated efforts to draw a men's NBA franchise to Kansas City. Because of the severe economic inequities and use of

excessive force cases, including a striking number of killings of unarmed Black men by local law enforcement, this civil rights collective wrote:

> While having the NBA choose Kansas City as a home for the Toronto Raptors would be a huge honor, and excite NBA fans in Kansas City, as you understand, there are some issues which supersede fun and economic interests. The protection of Black lives remains our most pressing concern. As the NBA surveys the landscape for a temporary home during the 2020-2021 season for the Toronto Raptors, we encourage you to weigh the following factors as you consider Kansas City as an option. Although Kansas City is a great sports city, it is also a city where law enforcement has demonstrated extreme hostility and excessive force towards Black people....Moreover, racial profiling by police is a routine occurrence across our city. The Missouri Attorney General's Vehicle Stops Report reveals that Black residents are 91% more likely than Whites to be stopped while driving in Kansas City. In 2017, the Missouri NAACP issued a travel advisory, which remains in effect, and calls for Black American travelers, visitors and Missourians to pay special attention and exercise caution when traveling throughout that state given the series of questionable, race-based incidents occurring statewide.

Mr. Silver wrote back to the Civil Rights organizations in November of 2020 saying in part:

> Thank you for your letter. I appreciate your sharing your concerns regarding incidents of racialized violence and racial inequality in Kansas City. Please know that the NBA remains committed to standing for social justice and racial equality and advocating for meaningful reform through our recently established National Basketball Social Justice Coalition.

This illustration is designed to demonstrate the paradigm with which Black Liberation Movement advocates will have to approach systems and structures of power as the struggle continues into the second quarter of the 21st century if systemic change is to occur. The probability of the NBA franchise in question relocating to Kansas City is not known. Nor is it known how the cultural and economic framework of Kansas City could even support an NBA franchise. However, what is important here is the posture of the Civil Rights collective making the bold decision to force a seat around the table of the discussions and influence decisions that are made to ensure that economic prosperity for some must be inseparably tied to economic justice and human dignity for all. And to do so without apology and without permission. A new application of the pre-existing approach is needed to enter the normal flow of the discussions and decisions which shape systems and structures and "demand" justice, even if it means agitation and disruption, which have always been necessary in our struggle. Economic withdrawal is the underused and underrated tactic which has proven successful.

It is important to note that the concept of economic withdrawal is wedded closely to Black Nationalist thought, which posits in part that the best hopes for Black Liberation lie in Black economic independence and self-sufficiency. And, while the mid-20th century Civil Rights Movement is often wrongly perceived as an accommodating effort which lacked radical Black consciousness and strategy, nothing could be further from the truth. The singular campaign which led to arguably the most significant systemic and structural change in America society was the Montgomery Bus Boycott, an economic withdrawal tactic which turned out to be the birthing of a movement and the rebirthing of a four-hundred-year Black Liberation Struggle. On April 3, 1968, the night before he was assassinated, and thirteen years after the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his final speech in which he stated:

We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles, we don't need any Molotov cocktails, we just need to go around to these massive industries in our country, and say, 'God sent us by here, to say to you that you're not treating his children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda—fair treatment, where God's children are concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do

that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you.

Dr. King had a basis for such bold confidence. It had worked before. In reflecting upon the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott, we find an enduring source of inspiration and a roadmap for our ongoing struggle for Black Liberation. Dr. King's unwavering confidence was rooted in a legacy of resilience, a legacy exemplified by Rosa Parks, the mother of the Civil Rights Movement. She fearlessly defied the oppressive forces of White power, challenging centuries of patriarchal domination over Black women. She reached a depth of discontent that resonates even today, starkly contrasting with those among us who remain distant from the Black Liberation Struggle, hampered by middle-class privilege. Ms. Parks stared down the towering specter of social intimidation and refused to yield.

In considering the lessons from this transformative boycott, we find a blueprint for effective activism:

- **Grassroots Organization:** The Montgomery Improvement Association (which later became the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) grounded the movement and engaged those directly affected.

- **Principles:** Non-violent direct action, Black unity, and collective sacrifice were foundational.

- **Ongoing Mobilization & Education:** Weekly protest meetings in churches

served as forums for speeches, prayer, songs, updates, and strategy, connecting with potential sympathizers.

- **Strong Charismatic Leadership:** Leaders like Dr. King and Ms. Parks galvanized the Black masses.

- **Plans for Alternative Services:** Clear communication and consistent provision of transportation alternatives were crucial.

- **A Moral Claim that is Right:** The Movement's just and righteous cause was unquestionable.

- **Funding:** Resources were secured to support various needs, from personal car gas to walkers, carpooling, and more.

- **Legal Counsel:** Legal experts willing to champion the cause navigated the complex realm of policy, law, and the courts.

- **Patience:** Acknowledging that campaigns are marathons, the boycott persisted for a year to generate the necessary pressure, notoriety, and structural change.

- **Selection of a Key Industry or Service to Withdraw From:** Careful consideration was given to the impact of the withdrawal on the target industry, the availability of alternatives, and its cultural significance.

As we continue our pursuit of justice and equality, let us heed the wisdom that emanates from the actions of those who came before us. The Montgomery Bus Boycott serves as an enduring testament to the power of collective action, tenacity, and the unwavering belief in the righteousness of our cause. Just as our forebears reshaped history, we too have the capacity to bend the arc of justice toward a more equitable future.

African Americans boarding an integrated bus following the Supreme Court ruling, a result of the successful 381-day boycott of segregated buses.
Photo by Don Cravens. Source: Time Life Pictures/Getty

SOCIAL JUSTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN MISSOURI

In the Foreword for this Social Justice section, noted scholar Elliott Currie and Chief Deputy Prosecutor Dion Sankar paint a stark picture: The Black homicide rate in Missouri in 2021 was more than double the national average. Research corroborates that violence predominantly takes root in communities marred by extreme economic disadvantage coupled with a history of pervasive racial discrimination and disinvestment. While high levels of violence are not exclusive to communities of color, the toxic blend of racialized economic segregation amplifies the rates of both fatal and non-fatal violence.

It is important to recognize that these patterns are not coincidental but the result of long-standing systemic factors. Communities suffering from these issues are not just "unfortunate," they are disenfranchised. Their condition is a direct outcome of decades, if not centuries, of deliberate policies and neglect that have disproportionately affected them.

Acknowledging this, the urgent need for comprehensive social justice initiatives becomes apparent. Policy prescriptions must go beyond Band-aid solutions and aim to dismantle the deeply ingrained systems of inequality. What follows is a set of actionable recommendations designed to challenge and change the status quo, break the cycles of violence, and engender long-lasting social justice.

SOCIAL JUSTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Community Investment Programs:** Allocate substantial funding to community-led organizations that focus on economic empowerment, education, and healthcare in marginalized communities.

2. **Police Reform and Accountability:** Implement widespread police reform measures that include de-escalation training, community policing, and independent oversight boards with the power to investigate and prosecute instances of police misconduct.

3. **Affordable Housing Initiatives:** Develop and implement policies that prioritize affordable, quality housing to address the foundational issue of economic and racialized segregation.

4. **Mental Health Services:** Increase the availability of community mental health services, focusing on trauma-informed care that acknowledges the long-term psychological impacts of systemic inequality and violence.

5. **Job Training and Employment Programs:** Develop robust job training and placement programs that aim to lift people out of poverty and into stable, well-paying jobs.

6. **Sentencing Reform:** Advocate for comprehensive sentencing reform to include non-custodial alternatives for non-violent offenders, end mandatory minimum sentences,

and ensure that sentencing guidelines do not disproportionately affect marginalized communities. The aim is to shift the focus from punitive measures to rehabilitative and restorative justice models.

7. **Discretionary Sentence Re-evaluation:** Advocate for a new provision under Missouri law that would provide local jurisdictions the discretion to re-evaluate sentences for excessiveness or factors supporting second chances. People of color are disproportionately impacted by excessive sentences—adding to the community distrust of the judicial system.

8. **Community Policing:** Implement a community policing strategy that involves citizens in the co-production of public safety. Officers should be incentivized to become part of the neighborhoods they serve, including living in these areas, to build trust and improve relations between the community and law enforcement.

9. **Independent All-Civilian Review Board:** Establish an independent all-civilian community-based review board with the authority to receive, investigate, and resolve all civil complaints of police misconduct. The board should also have subpoena power and the ability to recommend disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

10. **Local Control of KCPD:** Push for legislation that allows Kansas City to gain local control over its police department. As the only major city in the U.S. that does not have this control, this change is crucial to ensure that law enforcement is accountable to the local citizenry rather than state-level authorities.

11. **DOJ Patterns and Practices Investigation:** Petition the Department of Justice to conduct a "patterns and practices" investigation into the Kansas City Police Department. This would help uncover systemic issues within the department, potentially leading to court-ordered reforms.

12. **State-Mandated Funding Oversight:** Advocate for a change in state laws that mandate the funding of the Kansas City Police Department, allowing for more local oversight and discretion in how law enforcement funds are allocated.

13. **Criminal Justice Reform:** Advocate for changes in sentencing laws and prison reforms that focus on rehabilitation over punishment, with an eye towards ending the cycle of incarceration in marginalized communities.

14. **Healthcare Access:** Expand access to quality healthcare services, with a focus on preventative care and treatment for chronic conditions that disproportionately affect communities of color.

15. **Youth Engagement Programs:** Invest in programs aimed at the youth, focusing on mentorship, education, and activities that provide alternatives to criminal behavior and offer a pathway out of the cycle of violence and poverty.

CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT

FOREWORD

AMERICA'S FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY:
BATTLING FASCISM AND SYSTEMIC RACISM IN THE 2024 ELECTION

AMAIA COOK

As the threat of fascism rises in America—heightened during the presidency of Donald Trump—the upcoming November 2024 election points to a pivotal moment. The potential for another Trump term and increasingly far-right ideologies represent grave concerns for the future of American democracy. These challenges are especially concerning for the Black community and for poor and working-class individuals, who are already confronting long-standing battles for civil rights and access to basic resources. While voting remains important, it should be seen as one component of a multifaceted strategy for liberation that is catalyzed and directed by community organizing.

The Trump era marked an escalating boost in White supremacist violence, emboldening far-right factions and hate groups. Events like the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, serve as alarming manifestations of how these ideologies rooted in Trump's presidency can erupt into violence.

The vulnerability of the Black community in this political environment is clear. Hate crimes against Black Americans have surged, and voter suppression efforts have escalated, disproportionately affecting Black people. These tactics are a continuation of a long history of disenfranchisement—from poll taxes and literacy tests of the past to current practices such as voter ID laws, which are notably evident in states like Missouri. In addition, limited voting locations and long lines in predominantly Black communities serve as additional barriers to the ballot box, aiming to silence Black voices and subjugate Black people.

Voting holds a powerful place in the fight for Black liberation. The Civil Rights Movement, which reached a critical milestone with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, emphasized the importance of voting rights. Organizations like the Urban League have been key in this ongoing movement, advocating for social change for Black Americans and other marginalized communities, both then and now.

The experiences of the voters' rights movement underscore the fact that voting, while important, is not sufficient to dismantle the entrenched systems of White supremacy in America. Community organizing serves as another vehicle for liberation. Direct actions, educational initiatives, and advocacy work with voting to advance civil rights and fight systemic racism and the threat of fascist ideologies.

Community organizing also empowers everyday poor and working class people to confront and challenge the oppression perpetuated by political and social systems. Recently, there has been a surge in efforts to undermine educational systems, particularly in states like Missouri. For instance, Missouri has become a battleground for book bans targeting literature that examines race, social justice, and the lived experiences of Black Americans. The banning of books by Black authors and about Black experiences reveals a clear purpose: to whitewash American history and stifle critical thinking.

However, book bans are only one aspect of systemic racism infecting educational environments. Anti-Black violence against students, both verbal and physical, often occurs with limited repercussions, demonstrating how fascist tendencies are like a virus in our education system. This is only a microcosm of state-sanctioned violence against Black communities through policing, rising rent prices, unemployment, and gentrification.

As we approach the next election, it is imperative for Black communities, poor and working class individuals, and allies to vote and organize against this looming fascist regime. Voting and organizing are vital in countering the infectious spread of authoritarian tendencies that threaten not just Black Americans, but all poor and working class people. This is not a burden for the Black community to bear alone; it demands the solidarity of all who value democracy and justice. This must be our hope and strategy in our fight for civil rights: to mitigate the grave threats of fascism and systemic racism which jeopardize not just the Black community but the integrity of American democracy.

To begin the Civic Engagement portion of the *2023 State of Black Kansas City*, we share these essays and insights from the National Urban League.

Reprinted with permission of the National Urban League.

IT IS TIME TO WORK ACROSS THE AISLE TO STOP DOMESTIC EXTREMISM AND PROTECT OUR DEMOCRACY

U.S. SENATOR CORY BOOKER OF NEW JERSEY

Only twice has our nation's Capital building been under direct attack. The first came in 1814, when British redcoats marched into Washington, D.C., burning multiple federal buildings and setting fire to the White House and the Capitol.

The second attack came 207 years later, not by a foreign power but from within. January 6, 2021, is a day that will remain scorched in my memory for the rest of my life. I remember the shattered glass littering the halls of Congress, the violent mob encircling lawmakers trying to advance a peaceful transition of power, and the screams of police officers as they put their bodies in between members of Congress and rioters intending to topple our government.

I remember being forced to flee the Senate chamber for fear for my life. The United States Capitol was under siege, and I remember looking at my colleagues; some were shaking, and others were making phone calls to loved ones back home who were anxiously following the news.

I remember sitting in my office, attempting to catch my breath and process what was

happening. Soon, I turned on my television to witness an insurrection that was still going on just steps away from my door.

And then, I remember the Confederate flag flashing on my screen, waving inside the Capitol building. The presence of that flag, along with the violent actions of rioters, brought to my mind some of the darkest chapters of our nation's history. I remembered the stories my father had told me about my Black ancestors who endured terrorism at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan, lynchings as white supremacists looked on with approval, and the bombings of Black churches, Black homes, and entire Black communities.

The sobering fact is that America has not yet fully confronted the threads of domestic extremism that have existed since its very beginnings. The failure to do so has meant that, in recent years, domestic terrorism has been on the rise again.

By large margins, far-right groups are the perpetrators of most domestic terrorist incidents in the United States. The Center for Strategic and International Studies labeled these groups as responsible for 67% of the terrorist plots and attacks in the country during 2020. Another study by the Council on Foreign Relations noted that 71% of extremist-related fatalities between 2008 to 2017 were attributable to white supremacists and other far-right groups.

Emboldened by the rhetoric of some elected officials and coordinating their actions through the dark web, extremist groups have sought to disrupt our elections and undermine fundamental freedoms.

For example, ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, members of right-wing extremist groups harassed election chiefs, intimidating many into leaving their positions. In Arizona, armed vigilantes stood in tactical gear mere feet from ballot boxes during early voting, stoking fear in voters.

We've also seen individuals who subscribe to white supremacist views perpetrate horrific attacks on houses of worship that have resulted in the tragic loss of life—from the slaying of nine Black souls at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston to the 2018 terrorist attack at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh that left eleven dead. These mass shootings have heightened fear among ethnic and religious minorities in the United States, depriving them of the chance to worship or gather safely.

Given the threat far-right groups pose to constitutional rights, it is up to the federal government to safeguard the fundamental freedoms we cherish. Congressional action must focus on protecting targeted communities, developing better coordination amongst federal agencies, and preventing the recruitment of young followers by far-right groups.

We must take immediate steps to protect targeted communities. Resources allocated to houses of worship through federal efforts such as the Nonprofit Security Grant Program have helped enhance security at churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples in recent years. Such initiatives should be continued, especially as the rates of hate crimes rise across the country.

To further protect Americans from such attacks, there's a dire need to coordinate interagency efforts to monitor, investigate, and prosecute domestic terrorism. Recently, I joined Senate Democrats to introduce the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act of 2022, which would authorize the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to begin such an effort.

Equally important is the need to respond proactively, to stamp out hate before it gets a chance to fester and grow. Online websites, including popular social media sites, have been used to recruit followers into far-right groups. We must hold tech platforms accountable for monitoring hate speech on their sites. We should also build relationships between the federal government, institutions of higher learning, and nonprofit organizations that will enable us to positively reach out to children during their formative years when they are most at risk of being recruited into hate groups.

Every member of Congress, including myself, has taken an oath to "protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." We often turn our attention to the myriad of foreign threats our country faces, and rightfully so. Yet, at the same time, we cannot ignore the growing danger far-right groups constitute to our country. The violence we have seen in past years against minorities and lawmakers threatens our very democracy.

When people cannot worship safely, when a violent mob stages an attempted coup that almost prevents the transition of power,

it should draw our concern. Such violence, alongside myths of voter fraud, the embrace of racist conspiracy theories, and the appeals by elected officials and candidates to stoke white nationalism, crude nativism, and demagoguery, have contributed to the erosion of the democratic ideals we cherish.

We stand at a dangerous precipice. Safeguarding our democracy is not the sole responsibility of Democrats or Republicans. It is the burden we carry as Americans. We must shoulder it today and every day after.

CONFRONTING HATE: THE CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION'S EFFORTS TO COMBAT RACIALLY-MOTIVATED HATE CRIMES

KRISTEN CLARKE, J.D.
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL FOR CIVIL RIGHTS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

From the brutal lynching of Emmett Till to the heinous dragging death of James Byrd to the violent shooting of Ahmaud Arbery, racially-motivated hate violence remains a long-standing and persistent threat in our country.

On February 23, 2020, three white men murdered 25-year-old Arbery simply because he was Black. Mr. Arbery was running on a public street in Brunswick, Georgia, when two men armed with guns got into a truck and chased him through the neighborhood. They yelled at him, used their

truck to cut off his route, and threatened him with firearms. A third man also joined the chase. After Mr. Arbery repeatedly and desperately tried to get away, he found himself facing down the barrel of a shotgun. In desperation, he ran toward the man holding the gun and tried to redirect it away from himself. The man with the gun fired three times, shooting Mr. Arbery through the chest and killing him.

The state tried and convicted the men on murder charges, but Georgia did not have a hate crimes law at the time of Mr. Arbery's death. The Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice stepped in to fill that gap, mounting a federal case against the men who murdered Mr. Arbery. The evidence in the federal trial revealed that the defendants harbored racist beliefs that led them to make assumptions and decisions about Mr. Arbery because he was Black. For example, one defendant associated Black people with criminality and wanted to see them killed or harmed. After hearing the federal government's evidence on the crime and the racial motivation, on February 22, 2022, a federal jury convicted the three men of hate crimes and kidnapping and two of the men of additional firearms offenses.

The lead defendant was sentenced to life plus ten years in prison, a second to life plus seven years in prison, and a third to 35 years in prison.

Unfortunately, this case is not unique. One day after the verdict in Georgia, a Texas man pleaded guilty to federal hate crimes charges following an attack on an Asian family at a store in Midland, Texas. The defendant followed them into the store and violently attacked the father and his two young children with a knife, slashing the face of a six-year-old boy. The defendant admitted to targeting the family because he believed they were Chinese and responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic.

And another tragic example is the shooting at a Tops grocery store in Buffalo, New York. On July 14, 2022, the Justice Department obtained a 27-count indictment charging a man with using a Bushmaster XM rifle to kill 10 Black people in the store. The indictment charges that this man violated the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act by willfully causing the death of the victims because of their actual and perceived race and color.

As these incidents illustrate, combatting hate crimes and violent extremism remains an urgent and pressing mandate for the Department of Justice.

According to FBI statistics, in 2020, hate crimes rose to their highest levels in nearly two decades. The FBI's most recent statistics from 2021 confirm that hate crimes remain prevalent. The 2020 data shows that the majority of these crimes—over 60%—were motivated by race and ethnicity. And of those crimes, more than half targeted Black people.

We also saw a shocking rise of over 70% in hate crimes targeting people of Asian descent—the highest in over a decade—and an increase of over 30% in hate crimes motivated by the victim's gender identity. In addition, numerous other acts of hate violence have targeted houses of worship and religious communities.

The Justice Department is using every tool at its disposal to reduce unlawful acts of hate. The Civil Rights Division plays a critical role in these efforts. Hate crimes not only harm the direct victims but also reverberate to instill fear across entire communities. That is one of the reasons why Attorney General Merrick Garland's very first directive in March 2021 called for an internal review to determine how the Justice Department can counter this troubling rise in hate.

In May 2021, the Attorney General issued a memorandum strengthening the Justice Department's efforts to address unlawful acts of hate. From incident reporting to stronger law enforcement training and coordination to community outreach and designation of a Department-wide hate crimes coordinator, the Department has been fully activated in the fight against hate.

The Civil Rights Division is expediting its review of federal hate crimes. From January 2021 through February 2023, we charged more than 70 defendants with federal hate crimes and secured convictions against more than 60 defendants. As this work shows, the Justice Department will hold perpetrators of these heinous acts accountable.

The FBI has identified acts of hate motivated by race and ethnicity as a top domestic terrorism threat, and the Justice Department's prosecutions reflect that unfortunate reality. For example, in January 2023, four white supremacist men were sentenced for the brutal, racially-motivated assault of a Black man at a bar in Washington State. The defendants, members of white supremacist organizations Crew 38 and the Hammerskins, attacked the victim,

who was serving as the disc jockey, while using racial slurs. The defendants wore shirts with phrases, numbers, or logos that expressed white supremacist ties and had visible tattoos, including swastika tattoos, that expressed their views on white race superiority.

In December 2022, a former correctional officer was sentenced for, among other crimes, facilitating an attack on a Black inmate carried out by inmates who were white supremacists. Also in December, a Georgia man with ties to a white supremacist organization pleaded guilty to firing numerous rounds into two convenience stores with the intent to kill people inside because they were Black or Arab.

The Civil Rights Division is also fighting back against unlawful acts of hate that violate other civil rights statutes we enforce. For example, we secured a settlement with a school district in Utah for failing to address rampant racial harassment of Black and Asian American students, including hundreds of documented uses of the "N-word" and physical assaults. And we are also focused on prevention, leading the launch of the nationwide United Against Hate Initiative, through which all 94 United States Attorney's Offices are activating local outreach and engagement programs to forge coalitions and build community resilience while identifying localized strategies to counter hate.

Unlawful acts of hate come in many forms— from mass murders, physical assaults, cross-burnings, and attacks on houses of worship, to online harassment and verbal threats. But these acts have one thing in common: they

terrorize not only individuals and families but entire communities because of their race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity. The Civil Rights Division will continue using the law, public education, and outreach to stand up to racially-motivated violence and to protect the foundational principles of our democracy.

THE TOLL OF ONLINE HATE

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PRESIDENT AND CEO
UNIDOSUS

More than three and an half years after the mass shooting in El Paso, the perpetrator pled guilty in February 2023 to the murder of 23 people who were shopping at a Walmart on the morning of Saturday, August 4.

In this long overdue step towards for justice for the victims, their families, and the community of El Paso, the plea also confirmed in a court of law what we have known for nearly four years: The El Paso shooting was a hate crime. The perpetrator drove ten hours from his home in Dallas to El Paso to commit what is the largest single mass shooting of Latinos in US history.

An avowed White nationalist, the shooter posted a manifesto right before the shooting in El Paso on 8chan, an extremist website frequented by White supremacists and White nationalists. In that manifesto, he wrote that "the attack was a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas." According to the *New York Times*, the shooter spent eight hours a day on platforms inundated with xenophobic, bigoted, and extremist language.

Rhetoric that was once limited to the fringe corners of the Internet has become ubiquitous on the Internet and social media due to several factors. The first factor is the exponential growth of the Internet and social media. To be clear, the internet and social media did not create anti-immigrant sentiment or rhetoric. In fact, anti-immigrant sentiment has been a constant in American history dating back to the 19th century. Widespread anti-Irish sentiment, political parties such as the "Know Nothing" party of the mid-19th century and policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1888 attest to that.

The Latino community has been a target of considerable and powerful anti-immigrant efforts in the last 40 years despite the fact that 80% of the population is made up of American citizens. And for those under 18, more than 90% are native-born US citizens.

But what the Internet and social media has done is turbocharge the proliferation of anti-immigrant sentiment and hate rhetoric. A recent study by Ditch the Label, a U.S. and U.K. based global youth charity, found that online hate rose by 20% during the pandemic. And in a 2022 Texas Tribune article, Texas A&M professor Jennifer Mercieca, a researcher specializing in political rhetoric, noted the language used around immigration has shifted dramatically since 2015, with harsh and demonizing rhetoric becoming far more prevalent.

Notably, 2015 was the year that Donald Trump announced his first campaign for

President, kicking off his campaign with a notorious speech in which he stated that "[Mexico is] not sending their very best... they're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists." This was just the beginning. Trump used every campaign rally to denigrate and demonize immigrants, especially Hispanics and Muslims. His presidency turned that rhetoric into heinous policies such as the Muslim ban and the separation of immigrant children from their families at the border.

For the first time in recent memory, an American president was openly anti-immigrant in both word and deed and giving aid and comfort to White supremacists and White nationalists. Research has shown that when those in power take these kinds of positions, it does not change minds as much as it emboldens those with similar views.

Those like the shooter in El Paso were hearing from the highest office in the land that Latinos were a threat to this country, using words like "invasion," "animals," and "bad hombres." And the day before the shooting, Governor Greg Abbott of Texas sent out a fundraising letter that urged Texans to "defend" the state from those who wanted to "transform it through illegal immigration." Given that phrases like "invasion" and "defend" are used to describe an enemy, it is not a leap to imagine that the shooter in El Paso may have thought he was doing what those in power wanted.

Another key factor in the extreme becoming mainstream is the lack of counter-information to the widespread hate on the Internet and social media. In March 2023, UnidosUS and the Berkeley Media Studies Group released a report about the lack of visibility of Latinos in stories about racism and racial equity—mirroring a lack of visibility of Latino issues in general—in mainstream news outlets in print and online. The report found that over the last three years, only 5.6% of racial equity stories included Latinos. As alarmingly, the report also found a precipitous decline in the number of racial equity stories overall since 2020, the year of nationwide protests following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others at the hands of law enforcement.

This combination of rampant and largely unchecked hate online and the decrease of accurate news coverage of communities of color in this country only increases the potential for more racial and ethnic-based violence. El Paso was not an isolated incident. It was preceded by a mass shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue killing 11 and followed by a mass shooting at a Buffalo supermarket in which 10 people were gunned down. These heinous hate crimes targeting the Jewish and Black communities, respectively, were also perpetrated by shooters who were heavily influenced by online hate websites.

We must act now to address the epidemic of bigotry and hate and prevent future hate-fueled tragedies such as Pittsburgh, El Paso, and Buffalo, and many others. For years, civil rights organizations such as UnidosUS, the National Urban League, and others have urged social media companies to do a better job of monitoring and removing hateful and violent content on their platforms or in their algorithms. While some progress has been made, it is now clear that there is a need for

a federal regulatory framework that centers racial equity and improves the accuracy and safety of social media platforms for users and communities.

It is also key to increase coverage of communities of color and their issues in the mainstream media. One important step in this process is to increase diversity among both those in front of and behind the camera, especially in leadership roles. Latinos, in particular, have historically been severely underrepresented in the English language news media.

Finally, we need more visible and more courageous leadership from our nation's elected officials when it comes to denouncing hate, bigotry, and xenophobia, especially in their own ranks. UnidosUS' polling has consistently shown that Latino voters reject candidates who seek to divide or are embraced by hate groups and want candidates who both work to bring together and treat others with respect and dignity. Working to stem White supremacy and hate is key to ensuring equality and justice for all of us.

THE WRONGS OF THE "PARENTAL RIGHTS" MOVEMENT

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In the nation's collective memory of the days following the 1954 landmark—unanimous—U.S. Supreme Court Brown v. Board of Education decision outlawing segregation in public schools, a rallying cry for parental rights echoes. It arose as the outcry of a massive resistance countermovement that birthed such groups as white Citizens' Councils or "Uptown Klans," comprised mostly of middle- to upper-class white Southerners seeking to preserve their segregationist way of life.

Today, the country is in the chokehold of a new wave of so-called parents' rights advocates. In 2021, as COVID-19 mask and vaccine mandates in schools became hot topics, so did what was being taught and how. Critical race theory (CRT), a decades-old concept normally only discussed in graduate-level coursework, became a mainstream boogeyman for most things about Black history and culture. Divisive parents took to school board meetings like never before and formed groups from coast to coast in the name of protecting children and reinforcing parental engagement.

SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL VULNERABILITY

Just as in years past, the unifying interest is protecting only the rights of children and parents of the majority, namely those who are white, cisgender, and straight. Today, groups like Moms for Liberty, Parents Defending Education, and Parents Against CRT work diligently with politicians, right-wing celebrities, and extremists groups to spread their messages of hate, lobbying for anti-CRT and anti-LGBTQ legislation and making sweeping changes by influencing school boards to fire superintendents, constrain diverse curricula, and ban books.

Students of color already face inequality in outcomes. For example, in the most

recent scores released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), white students' average fourth- and eighth-grade reading scores were 26 points higher than those of Black students. This gap widened to 29 points by the 12th grade. Ultimately, the average high school graduation rate for Black students is 80%, lower than the 86% national average.

A TROUBLING INTERSECTION

The parents' rights groups have amplified their oppression with today's anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. A 2020 study by GLSEN and the National Black Justice Coalition revealed that 51.6% of Black LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, those who experienced victimization were more likely to skip school, experience a decreased sense of belonging, and have depression. They were also less likely to plan to graduate.

In March 2022, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis doubled down on the perilous intersection of students in parental group crosshairs, signing the controversial and unprecedented "Don't Say Gay" bill, which now serves as a blueprint for similar legislation in several other states.

CLOSING THE BOOK ON DIVERSITY

A now common tactic of reactionary anti-student inclusion groups is calling for book bans in school libraries and classrooms. According to Pen America, during the 2021-2022 school year, 1,145 unique book titles by 874 different authors were banned. Most of these books either pertained to characters of color or LGBTQ characters and themes. Similarly, books about race,

racism, civil rights, activism, and stories with religious minorities were among the favorites targeted for banning.

Teachers and school librarians using these books have found themselves under verbal attack and even facing the threat of physical violence. What's more, some states are beginning to pass legislation that would put educators at risk of a felony if they do not personally remove such literature. Such efforts leave core minority groups in schools without reading material that keeps them grounded, focused, and motivated.

BANNING HISTORY—WHILE TRYING TO REPEAT IT

Recently DeSantis went so far as to bar an AP African American studies course from Florida high schools, claiming it "lacks educational value." This was another devastating blow to Black students searching for a curriculum to identify with, especially considering that most recent stats by the NCES reveal that Black students are earning fewer AP credits than their peers.

A 2022 poll showed that most people support the accurate teaching of history, including the civil rights movement, slavery, racial inequity, and systemic racism. However, with the support of reactionary anti-student inclusion groups, states and school boards continue down a history-denying pathway to enact anti-CRT legislation and curricula. This once again puts a target on teachers' backs, limiting what and how they teach.

MISEDUCATION FOR ALL

Taking away books, knowledge, and support from minority students will not

only continue to constrict their awareness, literacy, identity, and mental health. Other students and society as a whole suffer.

According to the National Education Association, racially inclusive education better prepares all students for the increasingly changing world. Additionally, students who are exposed to culturally responsive education and inclusive pedagogy are better prepared for productive employment. Most importantly, these students develop a better sense of self and social responsibility.

Our country, communities, and schools are again under attack by the descendants of hate groups of decades past, spewing the same hateful messages dressed up with fresh political rhetoric.

ANTISEMITISM: AN ENGINE FOR ANTI-BLACK RACISM

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On May 14, 2022, a white supremacist attacked and killed 10 people, all of them Black, at Topps Supermarket in Buffalo, New York. From our reporting it was clear that the shooter became radicalized online and was inspired by other acts of white supremacist violence and by the January 6 insurrection.

Along with invocations of the "great replacement" narrative, the man responsible for this massacre spewed hateful, false assertions online about the intellectual inferiority and inherent criminality of Black people and false, antisemitic allegations of wide-ranging Jewish conspiracies against whites.

This racist "great replacement" conspiracy, which promotes the false notion that there is a systematic, global effort to replace white, European people with nonwhite, foreign populations, furnishes the central framework for the white supremacist movement. The murders in Buffalo last year provide a brutal example of how antisemitism is an animating feature of white nationalist ideology, inextricably intertwined with anti-Black racism. And this conspiracy theory has motivated many other deadly, terror attacks and instances of extremist violence. Antisemitism and racism intensified the past few years with the political rise of Donald Trump and the pandemic, but both forms of hatred have a long and disturbing legacy in America.

Eric Ward, senior adviser to the Western States Center and a core partner of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), in recent congressional testimony poignantly said, "...antisemitism is the loom on which other hatreds are woven, so essential that it is easy to ignore. If we seek to counter domestic extremism, we must recognize that antisemitism remains the energizing principle behind white nationalism."

Established in 1971, the SPLC has been tireless in identifying and rooting out hate and extremist groups to create a fair,

inclusive and unified nation. The SPLC Intelligence Project monitors the activities of domestic hate groups and extremists, including the Ku Klux Klan, the neo-Nazi movement, anti-government militias, anti-immigrant groups, and others.

Antisemitism serves as a connective tissue between hate groups that are otherwise seemingly unconnected. Particularly among white supremacist groups, antisemitism is often the entry point into the hate movement and is the fuel that feeds white nationalism. We saw this in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 ("Jews will not replace us") and in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6 (many breaching the Capitol flaunted antisemitic imagery).

White nationalists seek to return to an America that predates the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. There is also a core belief among many antisemitic or racist organizations that the civil rights movement was beyond the capability of African Americans and that their progress was due to the Jewish financiers and puppet masters. The hard right in America sees the nation's increasing diversity as a threat that must be countered in politics, in law, in court, in the media—and with violence.

After four years of national alignment with Trump Administration policies and priorities, extremist groups have not gone back into the shadows. With anti-LGBTQ and anti-inclusive education messages, hard-right hate and antigovernment extremists have coalesced, returning to their bread-and-butter focus on attacking local democratic institutions, targeting local public health boards, elections administration as well as school boards and libraries. Throughout 2022, celebrities, politicians and other public figures promoted and embraced antisemitic rhetoric. This normalization of antisemitism has boosted the profile of many extremist groups and has resulted in direct threats to the Jewish community. The antisemitic tirades and online threats from Ye—formerly known as Kanye West—for example, appear to have had real-world consequences.

Another example of the normalization of antisemitism: In the 2022 election cycle, no name was invoked more in association with dirty money, control of media and politics, or the existence of a "deep state," than George Soros, the Hungarian American Jewish financier and philanthropist. Right-wing media and politicians have consistently positioned Soros as a boogeyman whose influence and ideas will destroy American democracy.

As SPLC relayed to Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff and other members of the White House interagency working group on antisemitism, Jews are not responsible for antisemitism. The recognition that anti-Jewish hatred is a core facet of other bigoted ideologies reinforces the need for a more robust interracial and intersectional approach to combating antisemitism in America. To advance the goal of a multi-racial, inclusive democracy, fighting antisemitism is at the heart of the fight against structural racism.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Expand Upstream Prevention Initiatives to Build Community Resilience:** To bolster community well-being and ensure that all individuals are prepared to inoculate young people against radicalization, funding for prevention and education initiatives is imperative.

2. **Defend and Promote Inclusive, Truthful Education:** Concealing the truth about our history leaves our youth without the skills and education to navigate a new age of disinformation. Young people must learn the unvarnished truth about American history—to learn from the past—like the universal lessons of the Holocaust—to shape a better future. We must support digital literacy initiatives and fiercely oppose book banning and all efforts to place restrictions on inclusive education.

3. **Speak Out Against Hate, Political Violence and Extremism:** Elected officials, business leaders and community officials must use their public platforms to condemn antisemitism, hate crimes, and threats to houses of worship and other minority institutions.

4. **Mandate Hate Crime Data Collection:** Data drives policy; we cannot address what we are not measuring accurately. After 30 years of incomplete data and underreporting from the FBI, the U.S. government should support mandatory hate crime reporting as a condition precedent to receiving federal funds.

5. **Provide Equitable Access to Government Funds for Prevention Initiatives and Security Infrastructure:** Government funds for hardening houses of worship and community institutions should be complemented with long-term prevention and antibias education initiatives.

6. **Promote Online Safety and Hold Tech and Social Media Companies Accountable:** Consistent with the First Amendment, tech companies must follow civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination and should not enable the funding or amplifying of conspiracy theories, racist or antisemitic ideas, or provide a safe haven for extremists.

NURTURING THE TORCHBEARERS OF TOMORROW: EMPOWERING BLACK YOUTH IN KANSAS CITY

MADISON LYMAN

A few weeks ago, I attended a community session about Black history and Black life. The topic was "40 Acres and a Mule." During the discussion, the topic of Black youth came up. Some called them "lazy." Others said, "They are lacking motivation and don't want to be anything." One person even called youth "killers and murderers." This is not the first time I've heard these

sentiments, though not in such drastic terms. I have sat on a few front porches with elders who have condemned the current generation.

These sentiments often distance older generations from newer generations, despite the older generations' role in molding the Black youth of today. To act as if they played no part in creating the so-called "lazy, unmotivated, irresponsible, disrespectful, too-grown, and even criminal" generation alienates us from one another. The bigger issue is that these sentiments are White supremacist rhetoric. White people and the idea of whiteness as a whole uses the idea that Black youth are innately criminal or lazy as justification for our subjugation. While these aren't the only times when White supremacist rhetoric has muddied Black progress (i.e., classism, capitalism, sexism, homophobia, ableism,

etc.), when it comes to the state of Black life in Kansas City, it is one of the most detrimental.

BLACK YOUTH AND WHITE SUPREMACY

The idea that Black children are more dangerous and must be held to adult standards, making them seem less innocent than their White peers, is a White supremacist idea. White supremacy is one of the most lucrative and productive forces in American society, and therefore this idea has become an integral part of all institutions—most notably the education and carceral system. These systems work together to teach anti-Black rhetoric to Black children and criminalize them.

Schools act as prisons, and they increasingly become more prison-like when they are filled with Black children. In Kansas City, the schools of KCPS are littered with metal detectors and security officers, all under the guise of safety. In our schools, we are constantly being monitored. Our laughter and even our bodies, especially those of Black girls, are punished. When Black students make mistakes or "commit infractions," the punishments we receive are far worse than those of our White peers (if they receive punishment at all). By being monitored and policed, we learn that there is something wrong with us.

This sentiment is only amplified by the education we receive that centers Whiteness and glorifies the United States. We don't learn about who we are as Black people and who our people have been. We don't learn about how this country

was made and continues to make it hard for us to flourish. This leads to Black students being more likely to be expelled or suspended in comparison to any other group of students. It should be noted that expulsion and suspension do not help students but create a cycle. This cycle leads to incarceration.

Black people make up 13% of the population yet are overrepresented in the prison population. Black youth are more likely to be in juvenile detention centers. When exiting these centers, Black people aren't provided the resources to not only survive but prosper outside of jail and prison. This does not excuse the actions of those that are incarcerated "justly" or remove them from autonomy. This is not to ignore the harms perpetuated interracially, as it is also a problem. However, it is important to note that the "high rate" of crime in the Black population is not because Black people are "genetically more dangerous." Instead, look at the environment we are raised in and then go deeper and ask why our neighborhoods, why our schools and the places where we spend most of our time are made for poverty to thrive and not us. Not our life, not our joy.

BLACK YOUTH IN BLACK-LED MOVEMENTS

The belief that Black children are rowdy and rambunctious has resulted in Black youth being forgotten in the fight for Black liberation despite always being at the forefront. For example, at the session that I went to, my sister, another young woman, and I were the only youth present. We

were there because our father had brought us, and the other young lady was there because her father had brought her. None of the people who mentioned how lazy and irresponsible and unmotivated Black kids of today are brought their children or brought children at all. The person who talked about how violent Black kids are didn't bring children.

The failure to include Black youth in ideating and creating and fighting for Black liberation creates dissonance between us and those before us. In the Civil Rights tradition, Black youth have always played a major role in not only fighting for the right to live but also creating spaces where we as Black people can be more than what we've been labeled.

Our inclusion is vital not only to our liberation becoming a reality but also to sustaining it. It is vital in sustaining our culture. In a world where Black kids aren't allowed to be kids, it is important that we allow them the opportunity to do so. The same world criminalizes us and calls us everything but our names, which is why it is of the utmost importance that we allow and invite youth into the rooms where revolution and liberation are discussed. This allows us,

as a community, to learn, grow, create, and dream bigger.

BLACK YOUTH IN KC AND HOW WE CAN SUPPORT THEM

As Kansas City continues to become gentrified, Black people, especially Black youth, are being left behind to survive in the scraps. We are priced out of our businesses and our spaces. We are being shut out of places we should be able to go. Curfews are installed to limit our access. And the places made specifically for us are either forced out of business or lack the resources to fulfill all that they hope to achieve.

It is necessary that we support the organizations that are still standing and that we support our Black kids. We must invite them to the table and also allow them the space to be all that they are. This requires unlearning the White supremacist rhetoric that has infiltrated our discussions and Black liberation efforts. We must come together as a community to support single parents and their children as well as investing in our neighborhoods and programs. This will strengthen the community and allow Black youth to imagine their own liberation and have a hand in bringing it to fruition.

FROM CHILDREN TO CHANGEMAKERS: WHY EMPOWERING YOUNG BLACK AMERICANS IS THE UNTOLD SOLUTION TO FIXING AMERICA'S CRISES

DJ YEARWOOD

"The youth are our future" is a quote that is beloved by many and is supposed to motivate those in charge to make decisions in the best interests of young people. However, there are a few issues with that. First, the youth are also "the present." Next, the quote isn't working. There's no motivation. The same people who emphasize this quote are the very same people who believe that youth should sit back and "stay in a child's place" when it comes to politics and governance. We must recognize that it is a "child's place" to take a stake in their current and future lives. Not only is it their place, but it is their duty and will be the means by which our country can effectively face tomorrow's challenges while still addressing yesterday's problems. We must empower young Americans, especially young *Black* Americans, to become educated and engaged in the community and decision-making process around them. This change, however, requires a shift in culture, parental techniques, civic education, and much more.

Young people are taking on leadership roles around the world in order to sit at the table when making decisions regarding their future. From climate change to youth violence to corporate harm and much more, young people around the world are stepping up to the plate. "Students and young adults participate in politics and their communities far more than they are given credit for—and in ways that often go unrecognized." This quote from the Brennan Center for Justice outlines exactly how increasingly engaged young people are becoming. But here's the fatal flaw: Young Black Americans are falling behind in this engagement. This means that the experiences and perspectives of young Black Americans are being lost.

We must recognize, first, the importance of young Black citizens becoming engaged and contributing their experience and perspectives to the collective effort to improve our futures. A study by Josefina Bañales and colleagues of the University of Pittsburg found that Black and Latino young adults had higher civic engagement when they recognized systemic racism and its impact. There are a number of issues that independently and uniquely impact young Black people differently than other demographics. Here are a few examples:

- Tobacco industries have openly admitted to exploitative marketing of menthol cigarettes directly to young Black Americans in order to hook them for a lifetime of addiction, illness, and ultimately death. So much so that the NAACP wrote a letter to the FDA

encouraging the FDA to take action on these products due to their long-standing harm to the Black community. In this letter, the NAACP stated, "it is well established and documented that one of the leading causes of death for African Americans is tobacco-related chronic illness." This industry is just one example of how a number of corporations have exploited Black communities and directly targeted them in a way that creates a public health crisis. This industry tactic has morphed and adapted to modern culture in order to specifically target and manipulate young Black people across the world. Not only this, but these addictions are causing gateways into other addictions including vape, drugs, and alcohol addictions that are highly prevalent among today's high schoolers.

- The "School-to-Prison Pipeline" is a phrase that's often used as shorthand for the means by which schools are funneling students, specifically low-income Black students, into the criminal justice system. Schools across the country are criminalizing Black students by over-policing campuses, implementing "zero tolerance policies" that are counterproductive to their education and disproportionately affecting students of color, resulting in students finding themselves eventually wrapped up in legal trouble. Simply put, school districts are treating Black students like criminals, so they eventually become criminals.

- In Kansas City, last year (2022), almost 45% of all known homicide suspects were under 24, and 52% of all homicide suspects were Black. In addition, almost 30% of all known victims were under the age of 24, and 70% of all victims were Black. This tells us that there is an environmental and cultural issue to be addressed that requires those directly impacted, involved, or familiar with these issues to step up to the plate and work to address this crisis.

Based on these three examples, we can come to one conclusion: Our peers are getting killed during the school year, they're falling to addiction at the hands of corrupt industry, and schools are acting in a counterproductive manner that only adds fuel to the flames. There couldn't be a more dire time for young Black Americans to recognize the need to work to fight these issues and to no longer leave it to people who cannot see the direct perspectives or understand the direct experiences and culture of being a young Black citizen.

Why is it that young Black Americans are falling behind compared to other ethnicities? This conversation starts at home. A number of reports find that raising a good citizen is a parenting necessity. It is commonly known that Black children are told to "stay in a child's place" or "out of grown folks' business" when it comes to talking about the many issues impacting our communities and families. Raising a good citizen requires that parents help their children understand the issues that they themselves currently face or will face. "It's important to communicate that civic participation is a value for your family, and

separate it from all of the negative things about politics," says D. Sunshine Hillygus, Ph.D., a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University and author of *Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitude into Civic Action*.

Telling a child to stay in their place will not protect them from the impacts of any existential or systemic issues; thus it is best for them to know about and understand the issues, along with what their responsibility is as a citizen and community member to use their voice and skills to bring awareness and change. This can be done without breaking down the daily political drama in the tabloids. While this is easier said than done, there are a number of ways a parent can help their child recognize and understand the power that is often suppressed and hidden from them:

- **Take your kids to the voting booth with you:** It's not enough to just talk about your civic values with your children; you have to show them that you walk the walk, too. "The single biggest predictor of the participation of young people is the participation of their parents," Dr. Hillygus says. "It's so important for young people to see their family participating in civic life. It is more important than anything they'll be exposed to in school or elsewhere."

- **Discuss current events and issues:** It is important for children to not be hidden from the real world around them. They'll eventually have to face it and understand the impact of the very things that are being hidden from them. And

if they're not getting their information from their parents, they're getting it from somewhere else.

- **Find ways for them to volunteer to support an issue they care about:** This is all about walking the walk. We can sit around the table and complain about various issues all day every day, and if it ends there, that's what the child will learn to continue to do. However, if they can become involved in any issue they care about to help them understand how much of an impact they can have by directly working to address issues impacting their community, they will be equipped with knowledge that many current adults lack.

- **Let them speak for themselves:** Oftentimes, a parent's initial instinct when their child is facing an issue is to speak on behalf of their child. It is incredibly important, however, to empower your children to find and use their own voice, advocate for their own best interests, and express various issues from their point of view. The tricky part is this is necessary not only when they are facing issues outside of the home, but also within.

By parenting in a manner that uplifts the voice and perspective of your child while establishing the value and importance of civic engagement, young Black citizens will learn the importance of civic engagement and the need for their contributions to their community.

In addition to the vital role that parenting plays in cultivating a generation of civically

engaged Black Americans, civic education is also important. Research from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement helps us understand the crux of this issue: Impactful civic education is far beyond what's confined to the classroom. Youth are stakeholders in their communities. The best opportunity for youth to learn about civic engagement, build participation habits, and set expectations for representation is becoming actively engaged in their communities. Local elected leaders must work to engage youth in their communities by providing them the opportunity to actually be engaged. Much becomes lost in a system in which adults speak on behalf of their children. In order to make great strides toward engaging youth from marginalized communities, community leaders must recognize the necessity of valuing their voices and working to promote their perspectives. There are many avenues that local governments can take to incorporate and value the voices of the youngest few:

- **Lower the Voting Age in Missouri's Nonpartisan Local Elections to 16:** Lowering the voting age in nonpartisan local and school board elections would make huge strides toward increasing civic engagement and valuing the voices of young folks. This approach would effectively address taxation without representation, create a civic transition into voting, strengthen civics education, value the voices of the underrepresented, and increase civic engagement.

Compelling evidence supporting the potential increase in civic engagement stems from data originating in Takoma Park, MD. Prior to 2013, the region grappled with dishearteningly low voter turnout rates, plummeting to as low as 3%. Remarkably, the most substantial participation was observed within the oldest demographic. Recognizing the imperatives of this situation and the advocacy for involving younger generations in democratic processes, Takoma Park took a transformative step by reducing the voting age for their municipal elections. Since this action was taken in 2013, Takoma Park's voter turnout rates have jumped from 3% to 49.77%, with the youngest demographic consistently showing the greatest turnout. Learn more about why we should lower the voting age in these elections at www.vote16mo.org.

- **Create a Youth Advisory Board within the City Council:** In Kansas City, a person cannot hold elected office until they are 25 years old—in other words, 6 years out of high school and 11 years out of middle school. Due to the rapidly changing environment within schools and the differing cultures among student bodies, it isn't realistic to assert that City Council members, who are older than 25, can truly grasp all of the factors involved in various issues like substance use and abuse, violence, and education from a student's point of view. This point of view is crucial to addressing the pressing issues that are facing the youth of Kansas City today. The City Council can

work hand-in-hand with youth leaders to create a Youth Advisory Board to the City Council, which can work on matters relating to youth and help leaders build their plans to address the challenges of the new generation.

- **Allow Student Representatives to Serve on the School Board:** Students are a school district's largest stakeholder. Not only can students not elect any member of the school board; they often face barriers to even speaking to school board members. The policies that are implemented by a district's Board of Education have great impacts on the physical and mental well-being of students in their daily lives. By giving students an opportunity to have representation within the governing body that has the most direct impact on their lives, students will have a voice in their education and be able to better connect with the district's leaders.

We must do away with an era of keeping students, or any community stakeholder, out of the conversation. There are real issues with which my peers, the youth of Kansas City, have had direct experience, and we can offer true value to the conversation of improving the futures of all. However, it is clear that this is not an easy ask. We're asking parents to take new steps in order to foster Black children to become independent and vocal at a young age. We're asking community leaders to invest in the power of youth and have confidence in their capabilities. We're asking for improvements in the overall education system relating to civic education. Most notably, we're working to turn students who are most at risk of falling victim to a system designed against them into the very forces that will work to redesign that system. It is not an easy task, but it is a necessary one, and communities that understand this necessity will be far ahead of those that take longer to grasp its importance.

SHAPING THE NARRATIVE WITH RADICAL BLACK PRESS: A NEW ERA OF LIBERATION MEDIA

RYAN SORRELL

In 1704, *The Boston News-Letter* made its mark as the first weekly publishing newspaper in U.S. history. In its first month, it also assumed a disturbing identity: the first-ever slave broker, advertising enslaved Black people for sale.

The ugly truth about the origins of news in America reveals that it began as a revenue stream built on the blood and suffering of Black individuals. *The Boston News-Letter* wasn't just a media outlet; it connected suppliers with customers to expand an industry synonymous with inhumanity—the slave trade.

This historical thread continues into our current era. Just as propaganda once fueled the rise of fascist regimes like Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, mainstream White American journalism played a role in perpetuating the slave trade, apartheid, genocide, and the mass criminalization of Black and impoverished communities. This is not merely a moral failure; it is a systemic one, deeply rooted in allegiances to White journalism and racial capitalism.

Take, for example, the events of 2020 in Kansas City, when media outlets enabled police to suppress Black protests, later issuing insincere apologies about racism.

The headlines were misleading, highlighting alleged "violence" of thrown water bottles by teenagers, rather than addressing the long-standing police brutality and terror that prompted the unrest.

THE DECLINE OF BLACK COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE: A FORGOTTEN NECESSITY

In the push for diversity within mainstream media, we must recognize that merely adding more diverse voices will not resolve the underlying issue of White supremacy within the media. News and journalism institutions that cater primarily to White audiences and profits will inevitably subvert the aims of Black journalists, limiting their ability to genuinely represent and speak to the Black community.

The time has come to break away from the tradition of capitalist White American journalism, a history often masked by teaching "objectivity" as the sole legitimate approach. This paradigm fails to acknowledge the rich legacy of the radical Black Press, an unapologetic voice of advocacy and a beacon of survival, self-defense, and liberation.

Throughout history, the Black press has played a pivotal role in movements for Black liberation, such as the slavery abolitionist struggle, the civil rights movement, and the great migration. Publications like the *Chicago Defender* were not mere observers but catalysts for change, informing and inspiring communities.

However, the importance of Black communications infrastructure has been overshadowed, especially following its decline since the peak of the radical Black press in the 20th century. At their prime, Black

newspapers were powerhouses nearly as influential as the Black church in shaping community life. These platforms were not just sources of news; they were instruments of empowerment, advocacy, and community building.

Today, our mission is twofold: constructing new media platforms grounded in racial justice and dismantling the outdated values that have long stifled genuine progress.

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW ERA: RADICAL BLACK MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In the ever-evolving digital landscape, we stand on the threshold of a new era in which radical Black media is not just an aspiration but an unfolding reality. The barriers that once seemed insurmountable—such as limited access to capital and biased philanthropy frameworks—still exist but have been significantly reduced. Today's digital platforms have democratized the media landscape, breaking down walls and opening doors that were previously closed to us.

But these platforms are more than mere tools; they are channels of empowerment and tremendous opportunities for Black voices to be heard. They are the soil in which the seeds of not just Black-owned media, but radical and unapologetic Black media, can take root and flourish.

RETURNING TO THE PROPHETIC ROOTS: HONORING THE BLUEPRINT

The analogy of the Black press as a vital organ of the community's body is not merely poetic; it is profoundly accurate. Like a heart that pumps life-giving blood to every part of the body, the Black press circulates vital and accurate information essential for the survival, liberation, and flourishing of Black people. It is not an external entity observing from afar; it is an intrinsic part of the community, feeling its pulse, understanding its needs, and responding with empathy and urgency.

Our commitment must transcend the conventional ethics and guidelines crafted by organizations like the Society of Professional Journalists or the Associated Press, which were created by White men for a predominantly White audience.

Instead, radical Black media must forge its own path, guided by a unique set of principles that align with the needs, values, and aspirations of the Black community. Our goal is not merely to inform but to empower; not just to report but to inspire; not only to reflect the current reality but to shape a future filled with promise and justice.

In this spirit, our commitment should be to providing information that serves the purpose of survival and liberation. We are not merely echoing the narratives of the past but amplifying the voices of today and envisioning a future where Black joy, strength, and dignity prevail. The birth of this new era in radical Black media is a testament to our resilience, creativity, and unbreakable bond with our community. It is a movement that honors the legacy of those who came before us, ensuring that the Black press remains not just a vital organ but the very heartbeat of our collective journey towards a world that celebrates and uplifts Black life.

1968 Kansas City Riots, UMKC-LaBudde Special Collections

UNFULFILLED PROMISES: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CIVIL RIGHTS TASK FORCES IN KANSAS CITY, 55 YEARS AFTER MLK'S ASSASSINATION

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SENIOR PASTOR, THE HISTORIC ST. MARK CHURCH

"The road map to address the civil unrest stemming from the asssassination of Dr. King and the years of oppression of Blacks in Kansas City went largely unimplemented."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023 I was commissioned by the Urban League of Kansas City to conduct qualitative social research and analysis to be included as a contribution to the agency's bi-annual *State of Black Kansas City* publication. This is a most prominent research journal and social analysis tool utilized for educating the greater Kansas City metropolitan area, region, and nation pertaining to the ongoing crisis in the quality of Black life in Kansas City, Missouri, and the state of the Black freedom struggle in America within this local context.

The Urban League pinpointed interest in ascertaining whether and to what measure the various recommendations of both the 1968 Mayor's Commission on Civil Disorder (MCOCD) and the 1971 Human Relations Task Force on Civil Disorder (HRTFOCD)—also referred to as the Advisory Commission on Human Relations—have been executed, now fifty-five years after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King's assassination was socially catastrophic and disrupted the momentum of the mid-twentieth-century Civil Rights Movement. The assassination prompted dramatic protest, social unrest, and civil disobedience campaigns across the country, including in Kansas City, Missouri.

The assassination of Dr. King in 1968 opened wider and exposed more deeply the social atrocities, wounds, and ills American racism had caused for Black life since the 1619 birth of forced migration and chattel slavery of Africans on these shores. The shedding of Dr. King's blood, his assassination, was itself viewed by Black people as an act against Black progress and a rejection of the policies, laws, and culture shifts which were beginning to mount in favor of Black progress because of the power of the Civil Rights Movement. Black people and justice-loving Kansas Citians of many backgrounds took to the streets in social unrest in response to his murder.

Between April 8, 1968, four days after his assassination, and October of 1971, three separate task forces were created in response to the citizen uprising. The first was the 1968 Commission on Civil Disorder (COCD) appointed by Mayor Ilus Davis to study the unrest. The second was the appointment of the 1969 Commission on Human Relations (COHR), which the mayor envisioned would follow up on the recommendations of the initial commission. The COHR conducted interviews of key public officials from the four public agencies it saw as critical to addressing what the City called at that time "civil disorder." The public agencies interviewed included the KCMO City Government, the KCMO Police Department, the KCMO Public School District (now Kansas City Public Schools [KCPS]) and the Metropolitan Junior College (now Metropolitan Community Colleges). The third and final task force created was the 1971 Advisory Commission on Human Relations (ACHR) which, partnering with the City's Department of Human Relations, assessed initial execution of original recommendations, organized its findings, made additional recommendations, and published a final report, which is the document core to my research work contained herein.

In October of 1971, the ACHR published a document, *Three Year Report: The Quality of Urban Life*, wherein it stated as its prime aim the following:

> This report—two years after the Interim Report, three years after the Civil Disorder Report—has been undertaken for two purposes. First, a sufficient period of time has elapsed to allow for most of the policy and program changes originally recommended to have been implemented; a review of the status of those changes is commensurate with the continuing desire to minimize dissension among the citizens of Kansas City through elimination of tension-inducing circumstances. Secondly, the recently elected officials of city government have expressed a need for examining the current status of social conditions in Kansas City in order to explore approaches to further improving those conditions.[1]

All in all, my research identified a total of ninety clearly defined recommendations from the work of three separate task forces or commissions which targeted six different government or public institutions in their focus with implications for a plethora of private and civic agencies or institutions. My research is designed to analyze and assess the follow-through implementation or execution of those recommendations (to the extent that such occurred and to the extent that such recommendations were worded or framed in such a manner that was measurable and fit for qualitative analysis).

I. **General Recommendation Analysis: Number, Target, Typology, Category**

a. Number of Clearly Defined Recommendations = 90

b. Types of Clearly Defined Recommendations =
Policy (60)
Budget (26)
Programming (23)
Law/Legislation (11)
Institutional Establishment (7)

c. Number of Public Agencies Explicitly Targeted = 6
KCMO Police Department
City of Kansas City Missouri
Kansas City Missouri Public School District
Missouri State Legislature
Jackson County Government
Metropolitan Junior College (MCC)

d. Category of Systems or Structures Focused Upon = 9
Law Enforcement (30)
Education (24)
Government Functions (23)
Black Consumer Protections (5)
General Employment (3)
General Housing (2)
Health (2)
Mass Media (1)
Criminal Justice (0)

Note: Criminal Justice report contained general commentary only.

e. Number that are Measurable and Fit for Qualitative Research = 40
Law Enforcement (22)
Education (9)
Government Functions (4)
General Employment (1)

General Housing (1)

Health (2)

Mass Media (1)

Note: Criminal Justice report contained general commentary only.

II. Implementation Results: Measuring Extent of Execution of Recommendations

The following are findings which represent the percentage of recommendations which have or have not been executed in each of the seven systems or structures for which measurable and fit recommendations were presented in the 1971 report. Many of the recommendations presented by the task forces were too general and lacked sufficient specificity to be measured within a framework of social research and therefore were identified as unmeasurable and could not be included in the analysis. Additionally, in some cases there was no available information in the historical record to assess whether execution occurred. For a recommendation to be measurable means that it contained some numerical or qualitative aim which can reasonably be concluded to have been achieved or presented, such as a policy or program or law change which can be known to exist and effectual via budget, activity, etc.

For a recommendation to be deemed "fit" means that its aims align with current day priorities and crises within our current Black liberation efforts. For example, recommendations toward racial integration of students within the KCPS, a prominent focus included in the 1971 report, is not relevant as we know that simple integration of White and Black students does not necessarily translate to educational equity for Blacks,

making such goal of racial integration unfit for our purposes in 2023. Each system below includes indication as to whether execution of recommendations occurred or not and to what extent if applicable.

a. Law Enforcement: Yes=2, No=19, Partially=1

b. Education: Yes=1, No=3, Partially=5

c. Government Functions (KCMO): Yes=1, No=3, Partially=0

d. General Employment: Yes=0, No=1, Partially=0

e. General Housing: Yes=0, No=1, Partially=0

f. Health: Yes=0, No=2, Partially=0

g. Mass Media: Yes=0, No=1, Partially=0

The percentage of measurable and fit recommendations executed among the systems and structures of focus is below:

• Recommendations Executed = 10%
• Recommendations Partially Executed = 15%
• Recommendations Not Executed = 75%

CONCLUSIONS

Interpreting Poor Execution Results

Four of the forty measurable recommendations were fully executed—a poor percentage, given the gravity of the conditions which precipitated the citizen uprising. This speaks to two very important truths we have learned in social research, activism, and advocacy. Firstly, it indicates the complications and resistance within American culture when serious efforts are made toward systemic and structural change toward Black liberation. Secondly, the poor percentage of recommendations executed contributes directly to the persistent disparities and

inequities racism has caused and continues to cause today for Black people in Kansas City and in America more broadly. The road map to address the civil unrest stemming from the asssassination of Dr. King and the years of oppression of Blacks in Kansas City went largely unimplemented.

Assessment of Task Forces and Their Recommendations

The three appointed task forces commissioned between 1968 and 1971 produced a combined 61-page report, which included a total of approximately 90 recommendations spanning a cross-section of government jurisdictions and key systems and structures which perpetuate Black oppression. Forty of the recommendations were deemed measurable. The forty measurable recommendations included key budget, policy, law, and programming which were never executed. They include:

- Returning Local Control of the Kansas City Missouri Police Department

- External Promotions Board within the KCMO Police Department Structure

- Proven Cultural Competence as a Hiring Factor and Qualification for Police Officers

- Enhanced/Increased Foot Patrol (policy has actually been diminished, virtually non-existent)

- Assigning Culturally Competent Officers to Racial/Ethnic Communities and Neighborhoods

- Citizens' Advisory Council for Each Patrol Division

- Affirmative Action in Public & Private Hiring, Procurement, Contracts, and Procurement "beyond federal, state, and local standards"

- Vocational and Technical Programs to be "greatly expanded"

- Public School Buildings and Facilities Made Available for Summer Long Comprehensive Recreational and Academic Enrichment Programming "especially for inner city kids"

- Establish New "Day Nurseries" for the "underprivileged freeing mothers to work"

- Establish a Department within the City Manager's Office to Continue Recommendation Implementation

- Adaquate Funding of City Government Operations

- Major New Construction of Housing "subsidized and non-subsidized, scattered site, small and multi-family" designed to solve the chronic affordable housing crisis remaining today

- Complete Health Services to All Persons in the Inner City

These recommendations reflect progressive and visionary task force particpants who aimed at the kind of systemic and structural change which is still sought after today and still provides part of the road map toward Black liberation, ending racism and systems and structures, and solving racial disparities and inequities in Kansas City.

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1   Advisory Commission on Human Relations. October 1971. *Preface i.* KCMO 1971 Task Force on Civil Disorder - Three Year Report.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

In the wake of increasing socio-political challenges facing the greater Kansas City area, the need for robust civic engagement has never been more critical. Our community is currently grappling with far-right legislatures in both Kansas and Missouri, actively introducing or passing legislation that aims to silence the teaching of African Studies and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training. This not only stifles educational freedom but also perpetuates systemic ignorance and bigotry.

Moreover, Black students in our educational institutions are alarmingly subjected to racial aggression—from teachers, administrators, and their White peers—further underscoring the urgency of DEI education and the implementation of more inclusive school policies.

As we look toward the 2024 elections, another critical area of concern is the dismally low voter turnout among young Black and Brown voters, aged 18 to 35. Their voices are essential for driving change and yet are significantly underrepresented at the polls.

The recommendations that follow aim to address these issues head-on. By focusing on education reform, racial justice, and voter mobilization, we seek to empower individuals to take an active role in their civic duties. It is only through concerted, collective action that we can hope to counter the deeply entrenched systems of inequality and discrimination that continue to plague our communities.

We invite you to engage with these recommendations as not just suggestions but as essential action items. The time for change is now, and it starts with each of us taking our civic responsibilities seriously.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Advocate for Educational Freedom and Inclusion:** Lobby against legislation that stifles the teaching of African Studies and DEI training. Support educators who are committed to offering a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum.

2. **Establish Safe Spaces in Schools:** Work with local school boards to implement policies that protect Black students from racial aggression. Create reporting mechanisms and offer training for teachers and administrators on how to identify and address racially motivated incidents.

3. **Voter Education and Mobilization:** Develop and implement targeted campaigns aimed at educating young Black and Brown voters about the importance of voting. Partner with local influencers, celebrities, and community leaders to amplify the message.

4. **Civic Education in Schools:** Introduce mandatory civic education programs in local schools that focus on the importance of voting, community engagement, and knowledge about the legislative process.

5. **Challenge Extreme Legislation through Legal Channels:** Fund and support legal challenges against far-right legislation that stifles educational freedom and aims to marginalize Black and Brown communities.

6. **Establish Community Forums:** Create platforms where community members can engage with local politicians, law enforcement, and other figures of authority to address issues affecting their neighborhoods and livelihoods.

7. **Empower the Youth:** Invest in leadership training programs specifically designed for young Black and Brown individuals, focusing on skills that are vital for civic leadership such as public speaking, problem-solving, and negotiation.

8. **Encourage Corporate Civic Responsibility:** Engage local businesses in supporting civic initiatives, from sponsoring voter registration drives to offering internships that focus on social justice and civic engagement.

9. **Facilitate Local Control over Law Enforcement:** Advocate for local control of the Kansas City Police Department, including the establishment of an all-civilian, community-based review board empowered to handle complaints of police misconduct.

10. **Voter Rights Protection:** Implement measures to protect voter rights, particularly in communities of color, to ensure that marginalized populations have a say in the policies that directly affect them.

These recommendations represent a multi-pronged approach to fostering active civic engagement in the Greater Kansas City area. While the challenges are daunting, the solutions start with us—every individual, community, and organization that is committed to seeing tangible change.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Carlton Abner, DNP, has more than 25 years of healthcare experience, including 15 years of operational and leadership experience within a variety of acute care, academic, and corporate settings. Previously, he served as Dean and Lead Faculty for the Veterans Affairs Innovative Technology Advancement Lab at Cerner in Kansas City, Missouri. His healthcare, leadership, and operational experience also includes over 20 years of military experience, including his most recent role prior to his retirement, where he served as a Lieutenant Colonel and Chief Nursing Executive in the Kansas Air National Guard.

In 2021, Dr. Abner joined Kansas City University, where he is serving as an Assistant Professor and KCU's first Associate Provost of Campus Health & Wellness. In this newly established role, Dr. Abner works on elevating and strengthening the overall culture of health and wellness at KCU by developing and executing comprehensive wellness strategies throughout the University, including those impacting emotional, mental, physical, financial, spiritual, and social health.

Marchel Alverson is Vice President of Marketing and Communications at the Urban League of Greater Kansas City. Marchel has worked in the communications field for over 25 years. She is a published author and Thorpe Menn Literary Excellence Award nominee. Marchel is a former substitute teacher and served as a Sunday school educator for approximately 20 years at various churches in Florida and Missouri. Marchel served on the Board of Directors for Comprehensive Mental Health Services in Greater Kansas City. Marchel is certified in Mental Health First Aid. She obtained a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Central Missouri. Marchel earned a master's degree in communication studies from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Deidre Anderson is the Chief Executive Officer of EarlystART (formerly known as United Inner City Services-UICS) in Kansas City, Missouri. EarlystART delivers high-quality, arts-integrated early childhood services to nearly 300 children annually. Ms. Anderson is a passionate advocate for all children and works across multiple levels to ensure that families are afforded the maximum opportunity to access high-quality programs and services with a particular focus on addressing disparities for children of color. She serves as the co-chair of Partners in Quality, a regional collaboration that works to address early childhood issues. She is also a member of the Governor's statewide Zero to Three committee administration.

Jean Peters Baker, J.D., was appointed Jackson County prosecutor in May 2011 and was elected to the position in November 2012. She is only the second woman elected to lead the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office; the first, former U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, hired Baker as a young assistant prosecutor. Baker has since served in nearly every unit of the office.

Baker is widely credited with being unafraid of tackling difficult cases. In 2011, Baker prosecuted the bishop of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph for failing to report potential abuse of children by a priest. The case attracted national attention after a Jackson County grand jury's indictment made the bishop the highest-ranking cleric in the United States to face a criminal charge related to the church's child sex abuse scandal. In another case that attracted national attention, Baker, as a special prosecutor in October 2013, filed charges in a high-profile sexual assault involving high school football players in northwest Missouri. And in 2021 and 2022, Jackson County prosecutors convicted a series of police officers accused of wrongly using excessive or deadly force on citizens. In 2021, Kevin Strickland, who had spent 43 years in a Missouri prison, was freed after a team of Jackson County prosecutors, led by Baker, demonstrated to a judge that Strickland had been wrongly convicted in 1979. Today, Strickland is a free man.

Lester E. Blue, Jr., Ph.D., is a native Kansas Citian. He has been a clinical psychologist in private practice for the past 30 years. He primarily works with adults, providing individual and group psychotherapy for a variety of issues, including depression, anxiety, trauma, and personal growth. Before moving to private practice, he worked in community mental health at the Wyandot Center. Early in his career, he was an adjunct assistant professor in the doctoral Clinical Child Psychology program at the University of Kansas-Lawrence. He received a B.A. in Psychology from Rice University in Houston, Texas, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Missouri at Columbia. Over the years, he has served on several nonprofit boards. One of his greatest joys is teaching an adult Sunday school class at Friendship Baptist Church.

Senator Cory Booker has represented New Jersey in the U.S. Senate since 2013. He was the first African American from the state to serve in the Senate. In 2017, he was rated the third most liberal senator based on his voting record, according to *The New York Times*. His current term ends on January 3, 2027. Booker also ran for election for President of the United States. He suspended his presidential campaign on January 13, 2020. Before being elected to the Senate, Booker served as the 36th mayor of Newark. He also served on the Newark City Council for the Central Ward. He attended Stanford University, where he received his bachelor's and master's degrees. He was a Rhodes Scholar at the University of Oxford, where he earned a graduate degree in history. He then attended Yale Law School, where he earned a J.D. In 2016, Booker published a memoir titled *United: Thoughts on Finding Common Ground and Advancing the Common Good.*

Stephanie M. Burton, J.D., is a distinguished legal professional whose journey in the field of law has been marked by a commitment to justice, a passion for advocacy, and a deep sense of community involvement. Graduating from the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law in 2010, Stephanie's academic achievements were underscored by her dedication to pro bono work. She earned Pro Bono Honors by completing an impressive 240 hours of service to the profession through her work with the Midwest Innocence Project and the Death Penalty Litigation Clinic.

Stephanie is licensed to practice law in both Missouri and Kansas, as well as in multiple United States District Courts, including the Western District of Missouri, District of Kansas, District of Nebraska, Western District of Wisconsin, Western District of Oklahoma, Eastern District of Oklahoma, and the Northern District of Oklahoma. Her multi-jurisdictional practice reflects her commitment to serving communities across state lines. As an accomplished criminal trial attorney, Stephanie brings extensive trial experience to her practice. Her courtroom prowess includes numerous jury trials and bench trials in both State and Federal Courts, with a particular focus on high-stakes cases such as homicides, violent crimes, and federal conspiracy cases. Her dedication to justice and commitment to ethical representation have earned her a reputation as a formidable advocate in the legal arena. In addition to her legal pursuits, Stephanie serves as a Missouri State Public Defender Panel attorney, assisting the Missouri State Public Defender's office with overload and conflict cases. Her dedication to public service and indigent defense highlights her commitment to ensuring access to justice for all members of her community.

Michelle Caldeira is the co-founder and co-CEO of Uncornered, which operates programs in Kansas City, Missouri; Kansas City, Kansas; Boston, Massachusetts; and Providence, Rhode Island. Born in Guyana, raised in Brooklyn, New York, and having lived for the last 20 years in Boston and more recently in London, UK, Michelle brings her lived background, her degree in sociology from Binghamton University, and her ambitious ideals to a career in nonprofit fundraising and organizational strategy. Michelle currently lives with her husband in Harlem, follows politics ardently, has run a dozen marathons, and keeps her work to change communities rooted in this viewpoint by Angela

Davis: "You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time."

Maya Henson Carey is a research analyst in the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center. She holds a bachelor's in business administration from Stillman College, a master of arts from Argosy University, a master's in education, educational leadership-higher education from the University of South Alabama, and an Ed.D. from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Kristen Clarke, J.D., is the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Justice. In this role, she leads the Justice Department's broad federal civil rights enforcement efforts and works to uphold the civil and constitutional rights of all who live in America. Clarke is a lifelong civil rights lawyer who has spent her entire career in public service.

Clarke began her career as a trial attorney in the Civil Rights Division through the Honors Program of the Department of Justice. In 2006, she joined the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, where she helped lead the organization's work in the areas of voting rights and election law across the country. In 2011, she was named the head of the Civil Rights Bureau for the New York State Attorney General's Office, where she led broad civil rights enforcement actions. Under her leadership, the Bureau secured landmark agreements with banks to address unlawful redlining; with employers to address barriers to reentry for people with criminal backgrounds; with police departments on reforms to policies and practices; with major retailers on racial profiling of consumers; with landlords on discriminatory housing policies; with school districts concerning issues relating to the school-to-prison pipeline, and more. In 2015, Clarke was named the president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, one of the nation's leading civil rights organizations founded at the request of John F. Kennedy. Clarke received her A.B. degree from Harvard University and her J.D. from Columbia Law School.

Shalese Clay grew up in Kansas City, Missouri. She has a degree in Business Management. Shalese is a passionate advocate for maternal and infant health issues, and her sole focus for the past seven years has been on advancing the health of women of color. As a Program Manager for the Community Health Council of Wyandotte, she fosters family engagement by creating safe spaces for families to share experiences with decision-makers. Additionally, Shalese works with health leads to educate parents on the importance of reproductive health and safe sleep. She is also a Community Engagement Consultant.

Amaia Cook is the Director of Community Organizing, Advocacy, and Strategic Initiatives for the Urban League of Greater Kansas City. She is also a founding member of Decarcerate KC, an organization building community power in Kansas City around issues of policing and incarceration. Amaia is a graduate of Washington University in St. Louis (B.A.) and Harvard Divinity School (MTS), where she focused on literature and African-American Studies. She is a proud Kansas Citian who applies theory and praxis to create change in the prison industrial complex in Kansas City and beyond.

Susan Corke is the director of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project. At the SPLC, Corke leads a team of investigators, analysts, and writers who track and expose the activities of hate groups and other far-right extremists. She is a former senior fellow and director of the bipartisan Transatlantic Democracy Working Group with The German Marshall Fund of the United States. In this role she built a bipartisan and transatlantic platform for discourse and coordination to address democratic backsliding in Europe.

Benjamin Cox, J.D., is a Chief Trial Assistant for the Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney's Office's Warrant Desk and General Crimes Unit. For the past seven years, he has tried cases in the Violent Crimes Unit, where he became the trial team leader. Before that, he served as trial team leader for the Attorney General's Office, where he defended

police officers from civil liability, including arguing cases before the Supreme Court of Missouri and the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. In his role as Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, he is a member of the Use of Force Committee, which determines whether law enforcement officers are charged for actions taken under color of law. In that capacity, he has helped secure convictions against four law enforcement officers for unlawful use of force. He graduated from Tulane Law School with honors and taught an undergraduate pre-law class there. He has been published by the University of Arkansas Law Review.

Donald R. Cravins, Jr., J.D., serves as the first Under Secretary of Commerce for Minority Business Development, where he leads the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) in its service of the nation's 9.7 million minority business enterprises. President Biden signed the Minority Business Development Act of 2021, expanding and making MBDA permanent (after more than 52 years in existence) as the United States' newest federal agency. Under Secretary Cravins was unanimously confirmed by the United States Senate on August 4, 2022.

In addition to serving as Under Secretary, Mr. Cravins is a United States Army Lieutenant Colonel in the District of Columbia Army National Guard Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps. His awards and military decorations include two Meritorious Service Medals, three Army Commendation Medals, the Air Force Commendation Medal, and the Army Achievement Medal. He is also a Life Member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., a Life Member of The Rocks, Inc., and a member of the 100 Black Men of Prince George's County.

Mr. Cravins holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Louisiana State University and a Juris Doctor from the Southern University Law Center, where he served on the Law Review and the Moot Court Board. His honors include induction into the Southern University Law School Hall of Fame in 2018, recognition as a Distinguished Alumnus

of Louisiana State University in 2015, and 2020 Advocate of the Year, awarded by the National Bar Association.

Isis Kalaiyah Cross was born on April 26, 2007, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and was raised in Lawrence, Kansas. She was born premature and is the only child of Benita Morrison. At an early age Isis was diagnosed with ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder). As she progressed through her school years at Pinckney Elementary and Lawrence Memorial Central Middle School (LMCMS), she gained dominion over her behavior and mental disorder. While attending LMCMS, she became a straight-A and honor roll student while battling her disorder. Over the years leading into high school, she has been accepted to the Lawrence Sister City and the KU Upward Bound programs. She was also recognized as a top KU scholar, and she accomplished these achievements with determination and dedication.

Isis is loving, kind, observant, loyal, family-oriented, and intelligent. She is known for her sarcasm, her ability to make people laugh, and her gentle heart. She has helped the homeless on many occasions and helped clean up the community. She has also worked in the community gardens, along with helping with tutoring and assisting others in school. Her goal is to go to college and study aerospace engineering so she can become a pilot in the military.

Elliott P. Currie, J.D., is a Professor of Criminology, Law, and Society at the University of California, Irvine, and an Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Law, School of Justice, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. His work focuses on the social and economic roots of American violence and the problems of the criminal punishment system in the United States. His most recent book, *A Peculiar Indifference: The Neglected Toll of Violence on Black America*, explores the sources of enduring racial disparities in violent death and injury in America and outlines strategies to reduce them. It was named a New York Times Notable Book of 2020.

He is the author of many works on crime, delinquency, drug abuse, and social policy, including *Confronting Crime: An American Challenge; Dope and Trouble: Portraits of Delinquent Youth; Reckoning: Drugs, the Cities, and the American Future; The Road to Whatever: Middle Class Culture and the Crisis of Adolescence;* and *The Roots of Danger: Violent Crime in Global Perspective.* His book, *Crime and Punishment in America*, revised and expanded in 2013, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in General Nonfiction in 1999.

He is a co-author of *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Colorblind Society*, winner of the 2004 Book Award from the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, and a finalist for the C. Wright Mills Award of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. He is the co-editor, with Walter S. DeKeseredy, of *Progressive Justice in an Age of Repression*.

Manann Donoghoe is a Senior Research Associate at Brookings Metro, conducting research for the Valuing Black Assets Initiative. His work focuses on majority-Black neighborhoods and cities, identifying the possibilities and constraints for supporting secure, safe, and opportunity-rich communities. Donoghoe's expertise is in environmental and social justice, previously working to develop international social protection responses to the climate crisis, including with the World Bank, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Donoghoe has also worked as an environmental economist for the Australian Department of Agriculture and has published on issues related to environmental racism, COVID-19 economic and housing policies, food security, sustainability, and water policy. He holds a master's degree in human geography and environmental governance from the University of Oxford and a bachelor's degree in resource economics from the University of Sydney.

LaTanya Dumas is a native of Kansas City, Missouri. Her journey in the field of mental health and addiction began in 2005, when she started as a Mental Health Technician (MHT) and Certified Substance Abuse Specialist (CSS). She earned her Certified Reciprocal Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CRADC) certification in 2020. LaTanya has facilitated Dialectical Behavioral Therapy sessions for men and veterans with substance use disorders. She joined the Adhoc Group against Crime, driving positive change through the "THINKING for a Change" initiative in Jackson County. LaTanya established her own LLC, providing recovery groups tailored to men and women. She currently attends New Vision Bible College.

Keith Faison has worked as a lead counselor, reentry team manager, and educator with First Call for 12 years. He has been in recovery for 33 years and has provided counseling and education services for others in recovery for 29 of those years. As a Certified Reciprocal Alcohol and Drug Counselor, Certified Criminal Justice Addictions Professional, and a Kansas Licensed Addiction Counselor, Keith has over 26 years of experience working with Department of Corrections offenders of various custody levels. He also conducts training in the community, including the National Criminal Justice Training Center in Ozark, Missouri, and is especially devoted to working with DWI and domestic violence offenders.

Jordan M. Fields is a former Brookings research intern at Brookings Metro, which is the nation's leading source of ideas and action to create more prosperous, just, and resilient communities. Fields is an alumna of the University of Pittsburgh, where she was named the Omicron Delta Kappa Senior of the Year. Fields is currently attending the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and the Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University. She is the Articles Editor and an Associate Editor of the Pittsburgh Tax Review. She is also the Graduate Student Representative for the Board of Trustees Athletics Committee. She is passionate about racial justice and empowering marginalized communities.

Marcia L. Fudge, J.D., is the 18th Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. She served as U.S. Representative for the 11th Congressional District of Ohio from 2008 to 2021. She was a member of several Congressional Caucuses and past Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. In 1999, Fudge was elected the first female and first African-American mayor of Warrensville Heights, Ohio, a position she held for two terms. As mayor, she adopted one of the first vacant and abandoned property ordinances in the state. She worked with local officials to develop a task force to protect against predatory lending, and she secured the inclusion of property maintenance grants in the Warrensville Revitalization Action Plan. Fudge earned her bachelor's degree in business from Ohio State University and her law degree from the Cleveland State University Cleveland-Marshall School of Law. She is a Past National President of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Philip Gaskin is strategic advisor to the Office of the President and CEO, and Executive Fellow at the Kauffman Foundation. He is responsible for advising on the foundation's local and national efforts to build an economy that works for all people by making entrepreneurship an integral component of economic mobility and development policies, practices, and programs. Gaskin previously served as Vice President of Entrepreneurship, where he formulated and led the Foundation's Kansas City and national entrepreneurship portfolio and $50M+ budget—including grantmaking, operating programs, community engagement, research, policy, entrepreneur learning and support, and capital access. As the face of entrepreneurship and economic development and mobility for Kauffman Foundation, Gaskin was in charge of strategy and vision, strategic partnerships, and thought leadership and directing program staff to achieve impact with cross-Foundation programmatic platforms at a local and national scale.

Prior to joining the Kauffman Foundation, Gaskin was chief operating officer for Impact Hub in the U.S., where he led organization-wide initiatives to develop and scale a social innovation marketplace to support entrepreneurs and impact investors to build sustainable businesses that drive long-term social and environmental change.

Gwendolyn Grant is President and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City. She is the first female CEO in the affiliate's 103-year history. Grant is devoted to the causes of social justice, civil rights, and parity. A true champion for change, her limitless advocacy brings the plights of African Americans and women to the forefront. Grant is the founder and convener of the Urban League's Police Accountability Task Force—a coalition of civil rights, community-based, faith-based, and civic organizations that sheds light on the discriminatory practices of the Kansas City Police Department and advocates for sweeping reforms. The task force has uncovered numerous incidents of excessive and deadly force, discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, racial profiling, and over-policing in the Black community, leading to a request for the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice to conduct a patterns and practices investigation of the KCPD.

Gwendolyn serves on the Urban Council, a coalition of legacy civil rights organizations, including the Missouri NAACP, Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City, and Urban Summit. She is the immediate past chair of the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education and Workforce Development, president of the Kansas City Public Schools Buildings Corporation Board, and more. Additionally, she is the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of the Urban League's *State of Black Kansas City*, a bi-annual report on African American progress in economics, education, health, social justice, and civic engagement.

Jean Camille Hall, Ph.D., LCSW, serves as Vice-Chancellor of Diversity & Inclusion at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Dr. Hall joined UMKC in June 2022. She holds the position of Professor in the School for Social Work, Education and Psychology. Previously, she was the Associate Dean of Equity and Inclusion and Professor in the College of Social Work at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Dr. Hall completed a bachelor's and master's degree in social work at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, and a Ph.D. from Smith College, School for Social Work in Northampton, MA. She has 25+ years of experience in clinical social work practice and supervision. Dr. Hall has worked with a myriad of clients and supervisees in numerous private and public social service agencies. Her research focuses on multicultural competence and risk and resilience among Black Americans. Hall developed an evidence-based college-level multicultural competence course instruction model that is used throughout the United States. Dr. Hall has numerous refereed journal articles with more than 700 citations. Throughout her academic journey, Dr. Hall has demonstrated a vigorous record of external funding. She is a servant-leader, holds a leadership role in the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, and is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

Eugene J. Hamilton is a renowned speaker, educational consultant, and authority on social-emotional learning, equity, and resilience. His nearly 20-year career as an educator and organizational leader has afforded him the opportunity to impact thousands of lives in over 25 U.S. states and internationally in such places as England, Bermuda, Zimbabwe, the Virgin Islands, and Canada. Mr. Hamilton began his career in the Everman (TX) Independent School District and served as the Director of Community and Academic Partnerships at Loma Linda University in Southern California. As a dedicated servant leader, Mr. Hamilton has received numerous awards including the Excellence in Community Service Award from California's 35th Congressional District, and Civilian of the Year Award from the City of North Charleston, South Carolina. Currently, he serves as the Lead Consultant and Chief Executive Officer of The Eugene Hamilton Group, a professional speaking and PreK-12 education consulting firm.

Eric A. Hawthorne is the Founder and CEO of The Hawthorne Group. He uses his expertise to enhance the conditions of the community by providing education on practical applications in economic theory. As a graduate of the University of Missouri-Kansas City, he earned a degree in economics and is passionate about helping others achieve generational wealth through financial literacy with easily digestible information. He is an entrepreneur, head financial columnist, published author, content creator, and accomplished orator.

E.A. has been dedicated to advocacy for those with intellectual and physical disabilities since 2005. As an ally for the special needs community, he is an active participant in bridging the economic and social divide between the disabled and able-bodied population. He also remains a passionate supporter of foster care reform and believes in finding loving, nurturing environments for locally displaced children.

The Reverend Dr. Vernon Percy Howard, Jr., is president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City, a historic human rights organization founded in the mid-20th century by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a vanguard of men and women in the Southern and Midwestern parts of the United States. He is an educator, activist, and faith leader currently serving as senior pastor of the Historic St. Mark Church in Kansas City, Missouri. His academic work has included teaching within the African Studies department of the University of Arizona in Tucson. He is currently an Adjunct Instructor and Teaching Fellow within the Center for Faith and Culture at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri.

Melesa N. Johnson, J.D., is an attorney who currently serves as Director of Public Safety for Mayor Quinton Lucas, where she manages high-priority policy issues and strategic planning in the areas of violence prevention and intervention. Melesa also handles program management of Partners for Peace, a city-wide violence intervention collaborative strategy involving the city, KCPD, Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, Jackson County COMBAT, and dozens of community-based service provider organizations. Prior to assuming her role as Director, she was Mayor Lucas' Deputy Chief of Staff and General Counsel.

Before joining Mayor Lucas' office on February 1, 2021, Melesa served as an attorney at Seyferth Blumenthal & Harris in both private practice and governmental roles. Melesa also served as a law clerk for U.S. Magistrate Judge Willie J. Epps, Jr. in the Western District of Missouri. Melesa served as an Assistant Jackson County Prosecutor, where she tried numerous jury trials, earned the distinction of Office Rookie of the Year, and oversaw the internship program.

Laila Johnston is a hardworking, spunky, creative girl! She currently resides in Lee's Summit, MO, and is a freshman at Lee's Summit High School. In addition to spoken word, she is also an artist, programmer, athlete, and illustrator. Her latest published illustration is in the book *Living in Variety*. Laila believes that the world is not accepting of those who are different, and she aspires to make a change in the world, not only through her poetry but also through her artwork.

Anthony S. Lewis, Ph.D., earned his Bachelor of Science and Master of Education degrees in Special Education, along with a degree in Educational Leadership, all from Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama. He further honed his educational expertise by successfully completing the Instructional Leadership Academy at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. His commitment to education led him to attain a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri.

In recognition of his leadership potential, Dr. Lewis was selected for and successfully completed the American Association of School Administrators/ The School Superintendents Association's Urban Superintendents Academy in partnership with Howard University in 2017. In January 2018, Dr. Lewis was unanimously approved by the Lawrence Public Schools School Board to become the ninth Superintendent of Lawrence Public Schools.

Governor Laura Kelly appointed Dr. Lewis to the Kansas African American Affairs Commission in November 2019, where he contributes to the development of strategies addressing public policy concerns within the African American community, fostering partnerships with state agencies, corporations, and foundations. Additionally, he is actively involved in programs, grants, and research. In June 2020, Governor Laura Kelly appointed Dr. Lewis to the Commission on Racial Equity and Justice, tasking him with studying and addressing issues of racial equity and justice in Kansas, with a particular emphasis on law enforcement-community relations.

Tiffany Lewis, R.N., studied at Troy University (Montgomery, Alabama); she later received a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from Fort Hays State University (Fort Hays, Kansas) and a Master's in Healthcare Administration from Colorado State University Global Campus (Aurora, Colorado). Tiffany began her medical career as an Office Manager for Vining's Family Healthcare and Internal Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia. She was later recruited to become the Practice Manager of Alpharetta Cardiology in Alpharetta, Georgia, a position she held for over five years.

Tiffany served as Director of Clinical Nursing for Samuel U. Rodgers Healthcare Center (SURHC) in Kansas City, Missouri, from 2015 to 2019. At SURHC, Tiffany managed five medical clinics as well as a school-based clinic and supported over 50 clinical staff.

Tiffany later served as the Chief Operations Officer for Heartland Community Health Center in Lawrence, Kansas. In this role, Tiffany was responsible for the organization's day-to-day operations. Currently, Tiffany serves as Chief of Staff at the Urban League of Greater Kansas City and Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Legacy Work Consulting LLC in Lawrence, Kansas. Her area of expertise is to provide insight as it relates to clinical and equitable operational policies, procedures, and strategic initiatives. She is committed to ensuring that organizations are equipped with tools to shift culture, enhance financial stability, and provide ongoing training.

Michael Lieberman is the Senior Policy Counsel, Hate and Extremism, for the Southern Poverty Law Center. Lieberman has invested over 20 years in the effort to expand federal hate crimes laws. He served as the Washington counsel and director of the Civil Rights Policy Planning Center for the Anti-Defamation League. He was instrumental in the development and passage of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009, giving federal authorities the right to prosecute hate crimes motivated by a victim's gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability, and expanding resources for investigations and prosecutions. Lieberman received the Attorney General's Award for Meritorious Public Service, the top public service honor granted by the U.S. Department of Justice, designed to recognize a citizen's significant contributions to the department's accomplishment of its goals. He majored in Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan and obtained his J.D. from Duke University.

Madison Lyman is a senior at Lincoln College Prep. She is an IB Diploma candidate and the Community Service Chair in the Student Council. She is also a community organizer for The Kansas City Defender, the student representative for Kansas City's Reparations Commission, and a founder of the Black Student Solidarity network. As a poet, artist, and writer, Madison is passionate about the arts. She also sings and performs in theatre. Her most notable performance is Velma in the musical Chicago. She plans to pursue degrees in Urban Studies/Planning and Anthropology. Her goal is to help design cities in a way that allows the people and communities that call them home to thrive and be celebrated. She also plans to pursue her passion for the arts and community organizing.

Marc H. Morial, J.D., is President and CEO of the National Urban League, the nation's largest historic civil rights and urban advocacy organization. As Mayor of New Orleans from 1994 to 2002, Morial led New Orleans' renaissance and left office with a 70% approval rating. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Economics and African American Studies, he also holds a law degree from Georgetown University.

As President of the National Urban League since 2003, Marc Morial has been the primary catalyst for an era of change and a transformation for the 100-plus-year-old civil rights organization. His energetic and skilled leadership has expanded the League's work around an empowerment agenda, redefining civil rights in the 21st century with a renewed emphasis on closing the economic gaps between Whites and Blacks and rich and poor Americans.

Nasir Anthony Montalvo is the Managing Editor for The Kansas City Defender. They began their work for The Defender pursuing an archival project unearthing Black LGBTQIA2S+ Kansas City history entitled {B/qKC}, supported by a plethora of community partners including the Gay and Lesbian Archives of Mid-America, Vivent Health, BlaqOut, Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Kansas. Montalvo graduated from Stevens Institute of Technology in May 2021, where they had an extensive history as a student organizer—founding the university's first and only space for marginalized community members, starting a Black writers' column in the student newspaper, and leading protest efforts against Gianforte Family Hall (named after racist and anti-trans Governor of Montana, Greg Gianforte). Montalvo and their work have been featured in The Advocate, GLAAD, Teen Vogue, Cosmopolitan, NPR, HelloGiggles, Flatland KC, and various other local and national outlets.

Janet Murguía has served as President and CEO of UnidosUS (formerly known as National Council of La Raza)—the nation's largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization—since 2005. In that role, Murguía has sought to strengthen UnidosUS's work and enhance its record of impact as a vital American institution. Murguía has also worked to amplify the Latino voice on issues affecting the Hispanic community such as education, healthcare, immigration, civil rights, and the economy. Murguía

began her career in Washington, DC as legislative counsel to former Congressman Jim Slattery from her home state, Kansas. She worked with Congressman Slattery for seven years before joining the Clinton administration, where she served for six years as a deputy assistant to President Clinton, including deputy director of legislative affairs.

Andre M. Perry, Ph.D., is a Senior Fellow at Brookings Metro, a scholar-in-residence at American University, and a professor of practice of economics at Washington University. A nationally known and respected commentator on race, structural inequality, and education, Perry is the author of the book, *Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Property in America's Black Cities*. Perry is a regular contributor to MSNBC and has been published by numerous national media outlets, including The New York Times, The Nation, The Washington Post, TheRoot.com and CNN.com. Perry has also made appearances on HBO, CNN, PBS, National Public Radio, NBC, and ABC. Perry's research focuses on race and structural inequality, education, and economic inclusion. Perry's recent scholarship at Brookings has analyzed Black-majority cities and institutions in America, focusing on valuable assets worthy of increased investment. Perry's pioneering work on asset devaluation has made him a go-to researcher for policymakers, community development professionals, and civil rights groups. A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Perry earned his Ph.D. in Education Policy and Leadership from the University of Maryland College Park.

Ebony Reed is a national media executive and journalist. She serves as the Chief Strategy Officer of The Marshall Project, which reports on the criminal justice system. She also co-teaches an MBA class at the Yale School of Management. Ebony is co-reporting and co-writing a book for HarperCollins (publication release 2024) on the Black-White wealth gap in America with a lens on Black Americans under 50. She formerly was a chief for the Associated Press and The Wall Street Journal. Ebony is based in Kansas City, Missouri, and sits on the board of United WE (formerly the Women's Foundation of Kansas City).

Melissa Robinson is City Councilwoman for Kansas City's Third District. Her vision for the Third District is to be a place where there is hope and prosperity. During her tenure on the City Council, Robinson has sponsored and led landmark legislation including zip code-based funding; establishing the Office of Racial Justice and Reconciliation; declaring racism as a public health crisis; securing funding for affordable housing; climate justice; economic development reform; resident property tax abatement to protect against displacement; establishing a Mayor's Commission for Reparations; local control of the Kansas City Police Department; making Juneteenth a City holiday; increasing access for minority and women-owned businesses; violence prevention; addressing opportunity gaps for those experiencing unemployment; building support to remediate trash, illegal dumping, and blight; and increasing protections for historically marginalized groups.

Robinson, a Robert Woods Johnson Fellow, also serves as President of the Black Health Care Coalition. She is responsible for leading the organization to fulfill strategic goals, maintain sustainable community partnerships, and play a major role in community efforts that create health equity. She is the co-host of "Voices from Midtown and Beyond," a radio program that airs weekly on KPRT 1590 AM. Robinson obtained a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a Master of Business Administration from Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Shawn D. Rochester is President, CEO, and Chairman of Minority Equality Opportunities Acquisitions Inc. (MEOA), a Special Purpose Acquisition Company (SPAC) valued at $126.5 million. MEOA aims to merge companies that are minority-owned, founded, or led, and execute services for taking the merged companies public.

In addition to his corporate role, Rochester is the author of the well-received book, *The Black Tax: The Cost of Being Black in America*. The book uses data and evidence to detail the significant financial burdens that Black Americans have faced since the early 17th century.

He is a sought-after speaker, an economic development advocate who has advised Fortune 100 C-suite executives and given presentations before state legislatures, county executives, and the United Nations on how his PHD economic framework leads to inclusive and equitable economic strategies that drive jobs and business and capital strategies that spur a stronger U.S. and international eco-system. In addition to his work in the private sector, Mr. Rochester has received citations from the New York State Assembly and the New York City Council for his work in economic development, has been featured as a Black History Maker by Amazon Corporation, and is a recipient of the Pinehurst Invitational Leadership Award. Mr. Rochester is also the Managing Director of Trident Capital Fund I, which invests in growth companies that have the potential to help create a more robust business infrastructure in Black and other economically disadvantaged communities.

Mr. Rochester holds a Master's in Business Administration from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, with a concentration in Accounting and Finance, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Rochester.

Argun Saatcioglu, Ph.D., received his Doctorate in Organizational Behavior from Case Western Reserve University, specializing in sociology of organizations and education. His scholarship and teaching focus on educational and organizational inequality, educational policy, governance, and quantitative methods. He teaches graduate courses on sociology of organizations and education and quantitative methods at Kansas University. Dr. Saatcioglu serves on department, school, and university committees and actively participates in various functions in academic associations, including the American Educational Research Association, American Sociological Association, and Sociology of Education Association.

Dion Sankar, J.D., is the Chief Deputy Prosecutor for the Jackson County Prosecutor's Offices. He has been a part of the Elected Prosecutor's Executive Staff since 2015, where he previously served as the Program Manager overseeing diversion programs. Prior to joining the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, Dion worked in the litigation division of the Missouri Attorney General's Office, where he defended civil claims filed against various state and governmental entities and the Kansas City Missouri Police Department. He also worked as an associate at the McCallister Law Firm, P.C., where he represented individuals in civil claims, including claims of police misconduct. A native New Yorker, after working as an associate for Weisman & Calderon LLP in New York for several years, Dion moved to Kansas City, Missouri, in 2011.

Ryan Sorrell's diverse background includes working at one of the nation's most esteemed Black think tanks, one of Chicago's top Tech PR agencies, and a top 3 global PR firm, and founding one of Kansas City's largest Black-led Abolitionist direct action groups during the 2020 uprisings. He was a key organizer in the October 2021, 21-day occupation on the grounds of Kansas City's City Hall following the horrific brutalization of a 9-months-pregnant Black woman by a KCPD officer. He was temporarily suspended from his college at Loyola University of Chicago for organizing the largest social justice demonstration in university history, before being pardoned by the President in the university's first-ever pardon resulting from national outcry about the situation.

Ryan has consulted with brands such as Facebook, Samsung, Amazon, and Google. He is a recipient of the Innovator of the Year award by the Local Media Association, and Emerging Leader of the Year from the Institute for Nonprofit News. He has engaged in a number of public talks

as a prison industrial complex Abolitionist thinker including on Democracy Now, NPR, PBS, a Kansas City Art Institute lecture, a lecture at University of the Arts London, as well as the Annual International Symposium.

Most recently he founded the nation's fastest growing Black nonprofit digital news startup, The Kansas City Defender. Under Ryan's leadership, the Black-led organization has broken over 15 national news stories, reaching over 50 million people and is growing a social media following of over 70,000 across platforms since its launch in 2021.

Linwood Tauheed, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a member of the Graduate Faculty at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He teaches courses in Institutional Economics, Political Economy of Race, Class, and Gender, Community Economic Development, History of Economic Thought, and a doctoral seminar in Interdisciplinary Research. He holds an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Economics and Social Sciences, an MA in Economics, and a BS in Computer Science/Mathematics (with the Highest Academic Rank), all from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

He is a past president of the National Economic Association (NEA), which was founded in 1969 as the Caucus of Black Economists. The NEA celebrated its 50th anniversary during the year of his presidency (2000). He is a past president of The Black Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City and is a recipient of the Black Chamber's Small Businessman of the Year award and the Alpha Phi Alpha Entrepreneur of the Year award. Linwood has participated in several Kansas City community economic development projects including the Mayor's New Tools (WEdevelopment™) Task Force. He served as Vice-chair of the Mayor's Economic Development and Incentives Task Force, and as Chief Economist for The Prospect Corridor Initiative. He also served as the Chief Administrative Officer for the Kansas City Missouri School District.

Qiana Thomason, a life-long Kansas Citian, has dedicated her career to the improvement of health and wellness across the region, with a special focus on powerful and resilient communities experiencing health injustices and people living in marginalized conditions. Thomason serves as the president and CEO of Health Forward Foundation, an independent purpose-led foundation with assets just under $1 billion serving urban, suburban, and rural communities in the Kansas City region.

Thomason, a visionary leader and pathfinder, is leading the foundation through a myriad of transformational pursuits, including the establishment of Health Forward's purpose: "Every day, we work to build and support inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems." In this journey, she has led Health Forward to operationalize racial equity in all areas of the foundation, including governance, grantmaking, policy and advocacy, investments, human resources, and procurement. Thomason has also led the staff in cultivating a high-trust culture and authorizing the foundation's work by centering solutions around community voices and the lived experiences of communities served.

Nationally, Thomason serves on the board of directors for Grantmakers in Health, the National Rural Health Resource Center, and the National Academy for State Health Policy. Regionally, she serves on the boards of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, the Civic Council, and the Urban Neighborhood Initiative, and she is a board trustee for William Jewell College. She received her undergraduate degree in Social Work from Florida A&M University and has a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Kansas.

Patrick Tuohey is co-founder and policy director of the Better Cities Project, a think tank working with elected officials and voters around the country on local-government policy issues. He works to foster understanding of the consequences—often unintended—of local policies regarding economic development, taxation, education, policing, and

transportation. In 2021, Patrick was a fellow of the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas. He is a visiting fellow at the Yorktown Foundation for Public Policy in Virginia. Prior to founding BCP, Patrick served as the director of municipal policy at the Missouri-based Show-Me Institute.

This is Patrick's third appearance in the Greater Kansas City Urban League's *State of Black Kansas City*. His work on the intersection of economic development and education spurred parents and activists to oppose incentive projects where they are not needed, and was a contributor to the KCPT documentary, "Our Divided City" about crime, urban blight, and public policy in Kansas City.

He previously served as an aide to U.S. Rep. John L. Mica (R-Fla.) in Washington, DC, and as director of communications for Frank Luntz's polling shop, representing the firm and its research to members of the U.S. Senate and House. He also ran his own market research company, conducting research for Monsanto, Anheuser-Busch, the National Sheriffs Association, the Christian Coalition, the Center for Alcohol and Substance Abuse, ABC News, and NBC News. Patrick received a bachelor's degree from Boston College in 1993.

Ajamu K. Webster, P.E., has more than 40 years of experience in structural engineering. He has worked in several project areas from water and wastewater to facilities. His areas of emphasis include analysis and inspection, structural design, rehabilitation, and renovation. Mr. Webster's roles have included preliminary and final design, project management, construction management, quality assurance reviews, project scheduling, and business development. He has built long-term relationships with clients in both the public and private sectors. Mr. Webster chairs the WeDevelopment Federal Credit Union Board of Directors. He holds an M.S. in Civil Engineering from the University of Missouri and a B.S. in Civil Engineering from Southern University of Baton Rouge.

Spencer J. Webster J.D., is the Principal Attorney at Webster Law, LLC where he practices civil rights and business law. Much of his work intertwines those two practice areas as he assists individuals, community leaders, and organizations in ensuring people of color have equal access to public contracts and private business. He has drafted multiple letters to the U.S. Department of Justice calling for investigations into municipalities and/or police departments, in partnership with community organizations. Webster grew up in the Kansas City area and began his career practicing business and corporate law at big and medium-sized firms before deciding to pursue his passion of civil rights.

DJ Yearwood has been involved in community engagement, public service, and local leadership since the age of 13. As he began to progress in the public service field at a young age, others around him questioned his ability or competence simply because of his age. DJ has always been aware of his own and his peers' high competence and increasing awareness of community issues. This mischaracterization of all youth helped DJ develop into the Youth Advocate he is today. Now, at age 16, DJ is willing to go to great lengths to uplift youth voices, create real youth representation, and secure youth rights in his community and around the country.

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2023 STATE OF BLACK KANSAS CITY
FROM REDLINING TO CHALK LINES:
THE COSTS OF ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

This edition of the *State of Black Kansas City* spotlights the discriminatory economic policies and practices that spawn high rates of violent crime in inner cities. These disparities are often the result of historic systemic injustices, such as redlining, which have left a legacy of poverty and neglected infrastructure.

The legacy of redlining is pervasive, and the costs of economic injustice remain ever-present. The aftermath of this discriminatory policy has shaped America's inner cities today—from inadequate access to basic needs like education, healthcare, and housing to high rates of crime and violence due to a lack of systemic support. It is time for those in power to take responsibility for the economic injustices of the past and commit to creating a more equitable future for those living in communities that have been disproportionately impacted by them. From redlining to chalk lines, now is the time for real change.