

2015

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3/26/2015



## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank The Moriah Fund, Ford Foundation and AARP for their support of this work. We thank the contributors of the second edition of the BWR Report for your willingness to embark on this endeavor.

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*Black Women in the United States, 2015, continues the Black Women’s Roundtable’s (BWR) annual inquiry into the challenges and triumphs of Black women across the U.S. This year’s report, however, provides an even more nuanced examination of Black women’s experiences, not only uncovering broad, national trends, but also taking a specific deep dive into the conditions of Black women in key states. To that aim, we’ve included a special “Voices” section which shares the experiences and personal narratives of state-based BWR leaders who are on the front lines, addressing every day issues that are central to the Black woman’s experience across the nation. As such, this report is unique. It provides a broad perspective on the conditions of Black women throughout the nation while also giving a more refined view that allows an authentic reflection of the varied conditions of Black women. From the most remote rural areas of this nation to bustling urban centers, this report shares a three dimensional representation of the lives of Black women throughout these United States.*

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

### ***The Economic Recovery Has Left Black Women Behind***

- ❖ In recent years, as the recovery has taken hold, Black women have continued to trail behind others in reaping the benefits of an improved economy. As of February, 2015, the nation’s overall jobless rate fell to its lowest point in seven years (5.5%), while women’s unemployment fell to a six-year low (4.9%) and white women’s unemployment hit a seven-year low (4.2%). Completely counter to that trend, Black women’s unemployment actually ticked up, reaching 8.9%.
- ❖ While overall, Black women’s unemployment is less than it was a year ago, it still remains significantly higher than all other women in America.

### ***Black Women’s Work Still Undervalued in Parts of the Deep South***

- ❖ Black women’s earnings are not uniformly distributed across the nation. Instead, there are specific states that are clear winners and losers when it comes to the wages associated with Black women’s work. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the worst states in the nation are primarily clustered in the Deep South, with Mississippi carrying the dubious distinction of being the worst state in the nation for Black women’s earnings. Mississippi is followed closely by Louisiana, South Carolina, and Alabama.
- ❖ The best states for Black women’s earnings are geographically diverse. Leading the pack is Maryland, followed by California, New Jersey, and New York.

### ***Black Women Can't Educate Their Way to Fair Pay***

- ❖ While it is true that educational advancement provides an important pathway to opportunity in America, it is also critical to understand that wage differentials persist across every level of education. In other words, education is not a conduit to fair pay.
- ❖ A Black woman high school graduate fails to earn as much as a white male dropout with a 9th grade education or less (\$30,450 vs. \$32,675).
- ❖ Black women with Bachelor's degrees, on average, earn about \$10,000 less than White men with an Associate's degree (\$49,882 vs. \$59,014). In fact, it would take nearly two Black women college graduates to earn what the average White male college graduate earns by himself (\$55,804 vs. \$100,620).
- ❖ Compared to other women, Black women fall at or near the bottom in earnings across every level of education. Among college degree holders specifically, Black women take home the lowest earnings across the board.

### ***Black Women Significantly Overrepresented among the Nation's Poor***

- ❖ In spite of consistently leading all women in labor market participation, Black women are among the most likely in America to be poor. In fact, the poverty rate of Black women (25.1%) more than doubles that of White women (10.3%) and Asian women (11.5%), and slightly eclipses that of Latinas (24.8%).
- ❖ Among single mother households, nearly half of such families headed by Black women are poor (46.7%), just below the proportion attributed to Latina-headed households (48.6%), but significantly more than is the case among single white (33.1%) and Asian mothers (26.3%).

### ***The Health Care Coverage of Black Women is Being Held Hostage by States that Reject Medicaid Expansion***

- ❖ Black women who live in states that have accepted Medicaid expansion are much less likely to be uninsured than those who don't. Fully 9 out of the top 10 states that boast the lowest percentage of uninsured Black women are states that have adopted Medicaid expansion.
- ❖ Black Women who live in states that have failed to accept Medicaid expansion stand a much greater likelihood of going without health insurance. In fact, 9 of the 10 lowest ranked states when it comes to health insurance coverage for Black women have each failed to adopt the expansion of Medicaid.
- ❖ Among states that have Black populations that exceed 20% of their total population, only Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia rank among the top states when it comes to Black women's health insurance coverage. All of the remaining states with high Black populations are located in the Deep South, and each of these states rejected Medicaid expansion. In addition, all are among the worst in the nation when it comes to Black women's health insurance coverage (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana).

### ***Strikingly High Black Women's Maternal Mortality Rate Gets Even Higher***

- ❖ Black women are facing a maternal mortality crisis in America, and the silence is deafening. Black maternal mortality rose from a rate of 36 deaths to 42.8 deaths per 100,000 live births between 2009 and 2011. Maternal mortality for white women remained virtually unchanged during the same time period (12 to 12.5 per 100,000 live births).
- ❖ Black women's maternal mortality rate is more than 10 times that of women in most other industrialized nations. In fact, a Black woman in America would more than double her chance of surviving childbirth if she lived in places like Lebanon, Libya, Albania, or Serbia.

### ***Black Women Face Greater Risk of Exposure to Violence***

- ❖ Black women are more than three times as likely to be murdered as are white women and are in fact, the most likely group of women in America to become a victim of homicide.

- ❖ Nearly 15 times as many Black women were murdered by a man she knew rather than a stranger.
- ❖ 52 % of Black women who knew their offenders were wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the person who murdered them.

### ***Black Women are Making Political Gains in Congress and as Mayors***

- ❖ Black women picked up four seats in Congress following the 2014 election cycle. Included in those gains were Mia Love, who made history as the first Black woman elected to Congress as a Republican and as the first Black woman elected as a representative of Utah.
- ❖ Democrat, Bonnie Watson Coleman also made political history as the first Black woman elected to Congress from the state of New Jersey.
- ❖ Black women saw gains in Mayor's offices last year as Ivy Taylor of San Antonio, Texas and Muriel Bowser of Washington, DC joined Stephanie Rawlings-Blake as Mayor of a Top 100 City.

### ***When it Comes to State Politics, Challenges Still Abound for Black Women***

- ❖ Although several Black women made historic runs for statewide offices in 2014, including stand-out Ohio State Senator, Nina Turner's bid for Secretary of State as well as the highly qualified "Georgia Five," each running for a statewide office in Georgia. None of those bids were fully supported by the state parties which contributed to these races being unsuccessful. Each, however, garnered more than one million votes, a solid foundation to build upon for future efforts.
- ❖ When it comes to Black women's political representation in state legislatures, Georgia leads the nation followed by Maryland, New York, and Mississippi.

### ***At the Federal Level, Bright Future on the Horizon for Black Women***

- ❖ Loretta Lynch, Attorney General nominee is poised to become President Obama's first Black woman constitutional cabinet appointment.
- ❖ After a 17-year absence from the U.S. Senate, two Black women have announced their 2016 candidacy for a Senate seat; Attorney General Kamala Harris of California, and Congresswoman Donna Edwards of Maryland.

## **What Black Women Want**

- ❖ According to a Black Women’s Roundtable post-election survey in 2014, the top priority issues of Black voters are: earning a living wage (23%), affordable health care (19%), and quality public education (18%). Other areas of concern include retirement security (9%), college affordability (8%), and the expansion of voting rights (7%).

## **Voices from the States**

*“The citizens of Birmingham are being left holding the bag for the criminal acts of elected officials. A community that is 70% Black, and mostly headed by impoverished single mothers are now saddled with the burden of paying \$8.6 billion in sewer fees for a system that’s only valued at \$1.15 billion. Due to the corrupt activities of former elected officials, a bankruptcy agreement was made that left the city owing some 3.25 times more than they did pre-bankruptcy and twelve times more than the asset was worth in the first place. Now a community that has a median income of only \$30,000 is forced to pay 60% of the refinancing cost for the area’s sewer system, either directly or indirectly as a result of pass-throughs from commercial businesses that service the area. So the 21% of sewer users who are poor and mostly Black women are paying 60% of the total \$14.4 billion to be collect by the federal court. That works out to an average sewer bill of \$3,538 per person per year, more than 10% of their annual income when the “high end” of EPA guidelines is only 2%. That’s abusive. That’s criminal. And that’s wrong.”*

--Honorable Sheila Tyson, Alabama

*“During this past midterm election we had the opportunity to historically elect five African American women as Constitutional officers – this would have been a first for the state of Georgia and I believe any state. We have to look at some of the reasons why this didn’t happen. The “Fabulous Five,” as they were dubbed, each received over one million votes (only one other Black women statewide candidate had gotten one million votes in Georgia’s history). They had no major campaign funds, no political signs such as yard signs/billboards, no major media advertising nor support from the major campaigns/parties. Only during the last month of the election were they included in some of the major candidates’/parties advertising and activities -- only to be mentioned as part of a six woman ticket – no individual attention. They were able to garner the million plus votes through a grassroots campaign of going city to city, county to county with the fact that they represented an opportunity to make history.”*

--Helen Butler, Georgia



*“The 2013 and 2014 legislative sessions were particularly brutal. In addition to passing Monster Voting Laws, the new majority passed a number of regressive laws that restricted women’s access to healthcare, slashed unemployment assistance, refused to expand Medicaid, required drug-testing of some people in public assistance, declined to increase funding for education and teacher’s salaries, eliminated statewide public commissions, and worked to consolidate its power by reducing the authority of local elected bodies. The impact of these changes were fought long and hard. In addition to weakening the power of African American voters, many were also harmed by mean-spirited policies that cut unemployment insurance and the refusal to expand Medicaid. These policies have had a negative economic impact on working families.”*

--Erin Byrd, North Carolina

*“As I travel and work across the state of Florida as a Community Organizer and Convener, I find that as a Black woman, people are interested in my work or want me to be a part of their team because of my passion, dedication, and the commitment I bring to the table. As I work with other Black women in the state I find it to be true for them as well. But what I see from the lens of a Black woman is that people, programs, and organizations profit from and talk about empowering the Black community and Black women, but they only do so on paper, or in talk. When it comes to putting Black women in leadership roles, where they are decision-makers or lifting them up for the good work that they do, this becomes problematic. Black women have always been one of the main ingredients of the progressive movement in the South, yet we do not profit from the progressive movement at the level of dedication or commitment that we give.”*

--Salandra Benton, Florida

*“Detroit saw a greater proportion of babies die before their first birthday than any other American city. For every 1,000 babies born in Michigan, almost 7 die by age one. The outcomes are even direr for Black babies. The infant mortality rate for Black babies is more than twice that for white ones. Also, pregnancy related deaths in Michigan puts our state in the bottom fifth for maternal mortality. Detroit women, specifically, are dying from pregnancy related causes at a rate three times greater than the nation. Data from the Department of Community Health show that at least six Detroit moms die yearly, on average, as a direct result of pregnancy or childbirth. That translates to a maternal death rate of 58.7 per 100,000 babies ---higher than in Libya, Uruguay or Vietnam.”*

--Danielle Atkins, Michigan

*“As Michigan continues to make its way out of the worst economy the state has seen in decades, the issues that particularly affect Black women remain consistent with national issues. Specifically, recent legislative burdens related to women accessing female related healthcare, continues to be debated. Most women of color in Michigan use non-traditional health clinics such as Planned Parenthood for women’s health including cancer screenings, after miscarriage care, etc. HB4145, if passed, will prohibit Michigan from giving funds to any organization that either provides abortions or even refers women to places that do, even if the referral is for something other than an abortion. HB4146 would require an abortion performed after 19 weeks to only be done in hospitals that have a neonatal unit (in Kalamazoo County/Southwest Michigan, there would only be two hospitals with NICU’s. Neither of those hospitals perform elective abortions unless there are medical reasons). For all Michigan women, these two legislative bills would create an increased burden to accessing care. Especially for poor women, who, in Michigan, are also more than likely to be women of color or more specifically, Black.”*

--Honorable Stephanie Moore, Michigan

*“I look at the faces of Black women every day. I see their pain and wonder, what can we collectively contribute to reduce their stress? I hear them say, “I’m good!” But I know they are hurting. I hear them ponder, “Why am I here?” How can they overcome the systems that keep them weighed down so low? Their energy is snatched from them, yet we expect them to thrive. How? Further, Black women in Pittsburgh have the lowest life expectancy in the United States and domestic violence is a real danger for Black women in Pittsburgh. We must do more to protect the lives of Black women.*

--Rev. Dr. Judith Moore, Pennsylvania

*“The issues of economic justice, environmental justice and social justice intersect with reproductive justice. We understand that young people care about comprehensive sex education; that migrant farm workers and native women exposed to uranium mining care about poor reproductive health outcomes because of exposure to environmental toxins. Reproductive justice is an environmental justice issue. There are few things that make a bigger dent in a woman’s paycheck than the expense of having and caring for a child. Equal pay for the same work, a living wage, paid sick leave and paid family leave are economic issues that are reproductive justice issues. Women cannot have reproductive justice without economic justice. The ability to earn a living wage to be able to take care of the children you have or deciding to whether or if you can afford to have another child is a reproductive justice issue. The right to safe, affordable housing and living free from fear of domestic abuse, staying in relationships because there is nowhere else to go, are reproductive justice issues. Social justice is a reproductive justice issue.”*

-- Letetia Daniels Jackson, California

If there is one constant in the lives of Black women, it is the ever-presence of work. It took no women's movement to insert Black women into America's labor force. And no *Feminine Mystique* defined for us, an existence of complacency wrapped in the limits of familial responsibility. Rather, in this country, ours has been an existence always intricately connected to our ability to contribute to the bottom line.

From our earliest days on these shores, Black women's labor, interpreted in the broadest possible sense of the word, has been key to the economic birth, growth, and success of America. We participated not only in the production of goods during America's original agricultural economy, but since in this nation, the institution of slavery was passed down maternally, it was literally Black women's labor, as part of the birthing process, that provided the ultimate means of production for American prosperity for centuries to come.

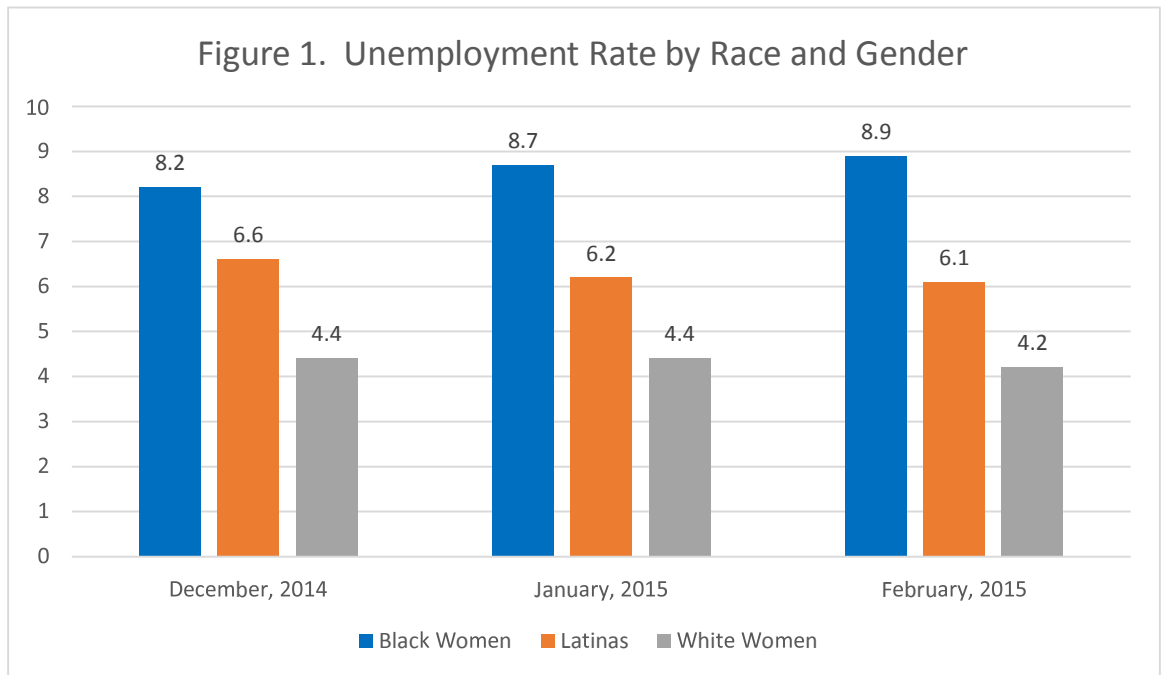
Today, the normalcy of Black women's contributions to the American economy remains. We continue to outpace all other women in America when it comes to labor force participation, and even maintain that distinction after acquiring the responsibility of motherhood.<sup>1</sup> But once in the workforce, our experience is distinct. We find ourselves over-represented in low-wage work, and are in fact, the most likely demographic group in America to work for poverty-level wages.<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite our continued strong commitment to the workforce, we find ourselves largely left behind in the recovery.

Although overall, the nation enjoys unemployment rates that have now hit a seven-year low, and White women specifically, are experiencing their lowest unemployment rate since June, 2008, Black women's recovery has yet to gain traction. Even those among us who have been able to acquire and maintain employment, still fall behind others specifically when it comes to wages; a fate from which no amount of education is apparently able to save us.

Yes, Black women work. But to make our work-ethic pay it is critical that the nation place a priority on paycheck fairness, public sector job creation, and the guarantee of at minimum, a living wage so that the labor we so freely produce is met with the full compensation it rightfully deserves.

## 1. An Economic Recovery that Left Black Women Behind

- ❖ From the onset of the recovery period, Black women have been left behind. We accounted for fully 42% all jobs lost by women in the first two years of the recovery, even though we made up only 12% of all women workers.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ In fact, Black women actually lost more jobs at the onset of the recovery (258,000) than they did during the entire Great Recession (233,000).<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ In recent years, as the recovery has taken hold, Black women have continued to trail others in reaping the benefits of an improved economy. As of February, 2015, the nation's overall jobless rate fell to its lowest point in seven years (5.5%), while women's unemployment fell to a six-year low (4.9%) and white women's unemployment hit a seven-year low (4.2%). Completely counter to that trend, Black women's unemployment actually ticked up, reaching 8.9%.
- ❖ While overall, Black women's unemployment is less than it was a year ago, it still remains significantly higher than all other women in America.



Source: U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, TableA-2.

## 2. Black Women’s Work Still Undervalued in Parts of The Deep South

- ❖ Black women’s earnings are not uniformly distributed across the nation. Instead, there are specific states that are clear winners and losers when it comes to the wages associated with Black women’s work.
- ❖ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the worst states are primarily clustered in the Deep South, with Mississippi carrying the dubious distinction of the worst state in the nation for Black women’s earnings. Mississippi is followed closely by Louisiana, South Carolina, and Alabama.
- ❖ The best states for Black women when it comes to earnings are more geographically diverse. Leading the pack is Maryland, followed by California, New Jersey, and New York.

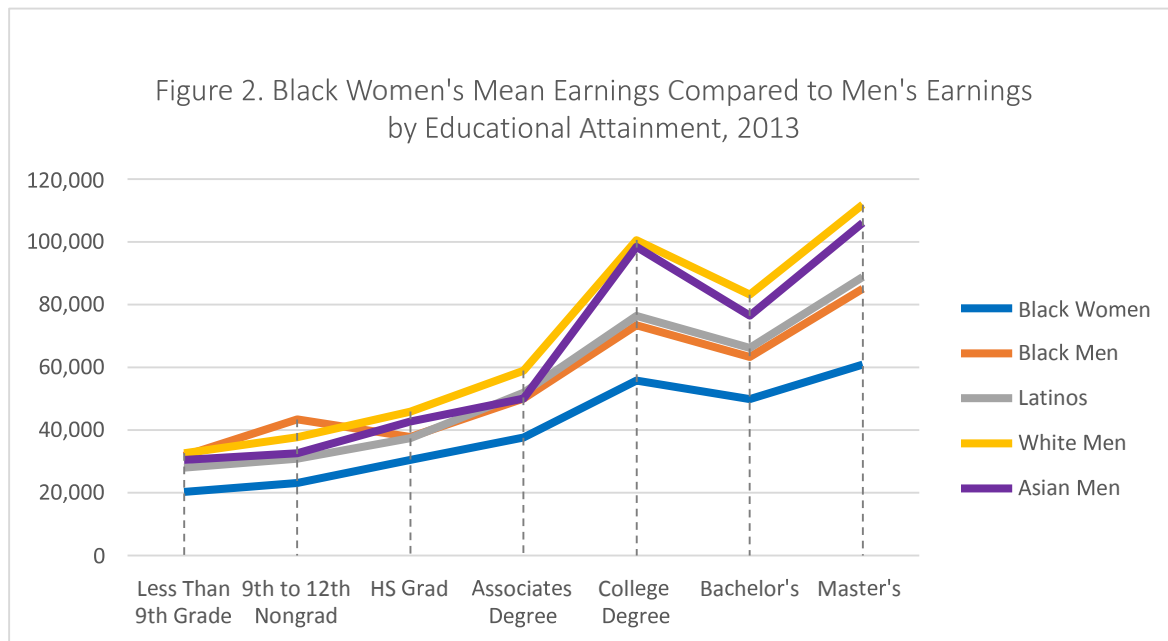
Table 1. Rankings of Black Women’s Median Earnings in the Nation’s Top 20 States with the Highest Number of Black Women Workers

State	Black Women’s Median Earnings	State Ranking
Maryland	\$45,616	1
California	\$42,939	2
New Jersey	\$41,522	3
New York	\$39,587	4
Illinois	\$37,279	5
Virginia	\$35,171	6
Michigan	\$34,690	7
Texas	\$33,491	8
Pennsylvania	\$34,401	9
Ohio	\$31,739	10
Georgia	\$31,731	11
Missouri	\$31,436	12
Indiana	\$30,959	13
Tennessee	\$30,611	14
North Carolina	\$30,409	15
Florida	\$29,880	16
Alabama	\$27,561	17
South Carolina	\$26,692	18
Louisiana	\$25,485	19
Mississippi	\$24,572	20

Source: U. S. Census Bureau (2012) American Community Survey.

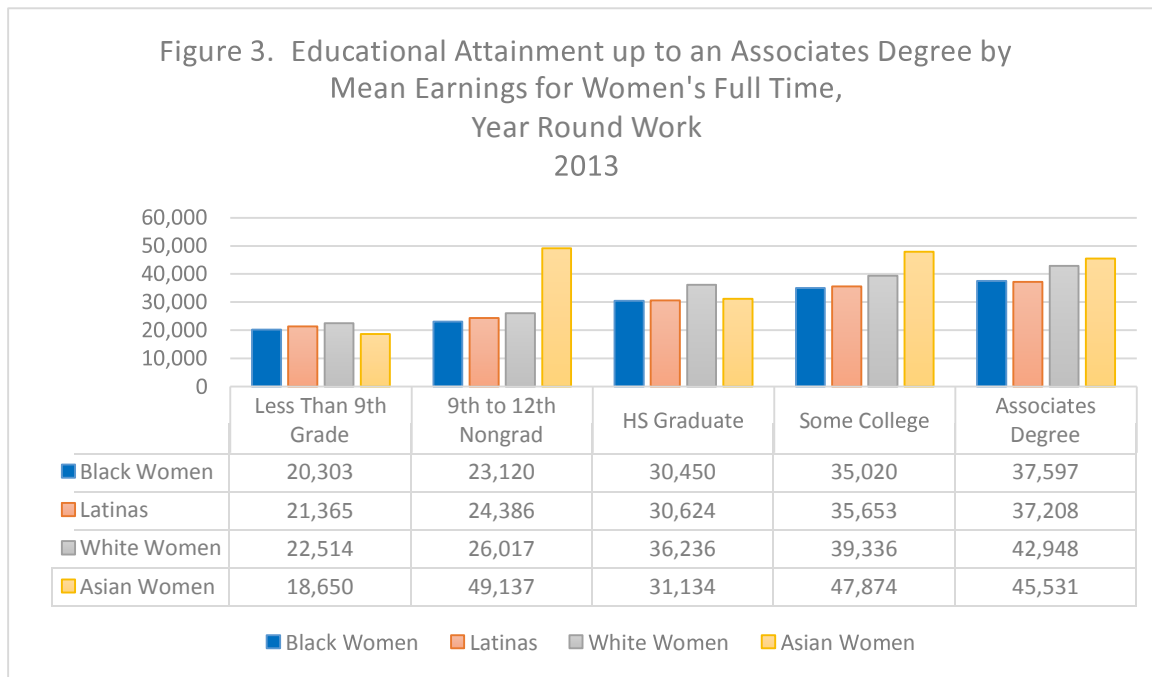
### 3. Black Women Can't Educate their way to Fair Pay.

- ❖ While it is true that educational advancement provides an important pathway to opportunity in America, it is also critical to understand that wage differentials persist across every level of education. In other words, education is not a conduit to fair pay.
- ❖ A Black woman high school graduate fails to earn as much as a white male drop-out with a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education or less (\$30,450 vs. \$32,675).
- ❖ Black women Bachelor's degree holders, on average, earn about \$10,000 less than White men with an Associate's degree (\$49,882 vs. \$59,014). In fact, it would take nearly two Black women college graduates to earn what the average White male college graduate earns by himself (\$55,804 vs. \$100,620).
- ❖ Black women also trail Black men's earnings at every level of education. Interestingly, among High School drop-outs, Black men earn nearly twice as much as Black women (\$43,407 vs. \$23,120).
- ❖ Overall, Black women's earnings not only trail the earnings of all men at every level of education, but the disparity actually increases as educational attainment increases.

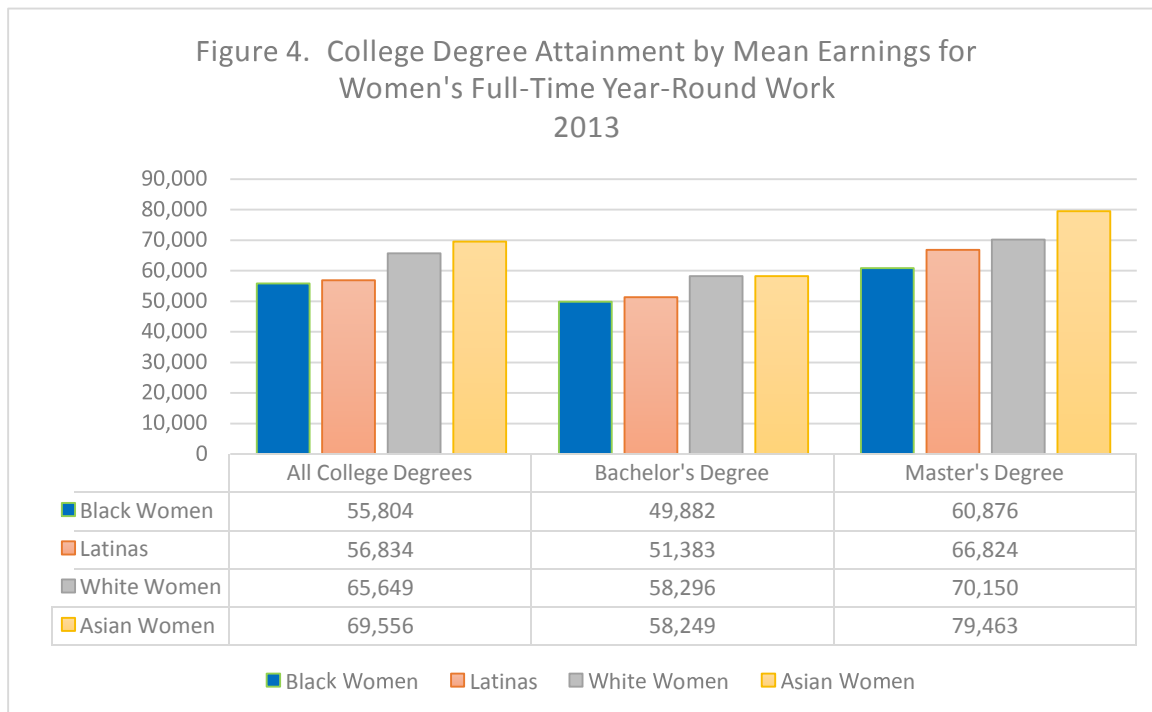


Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2013.

- ❖ Compared to other women, Black women fall at or near the bottom in earnings across every level of education
- ❖ Among college degree holders specifically, Black women take home the lowest earnings across the board.



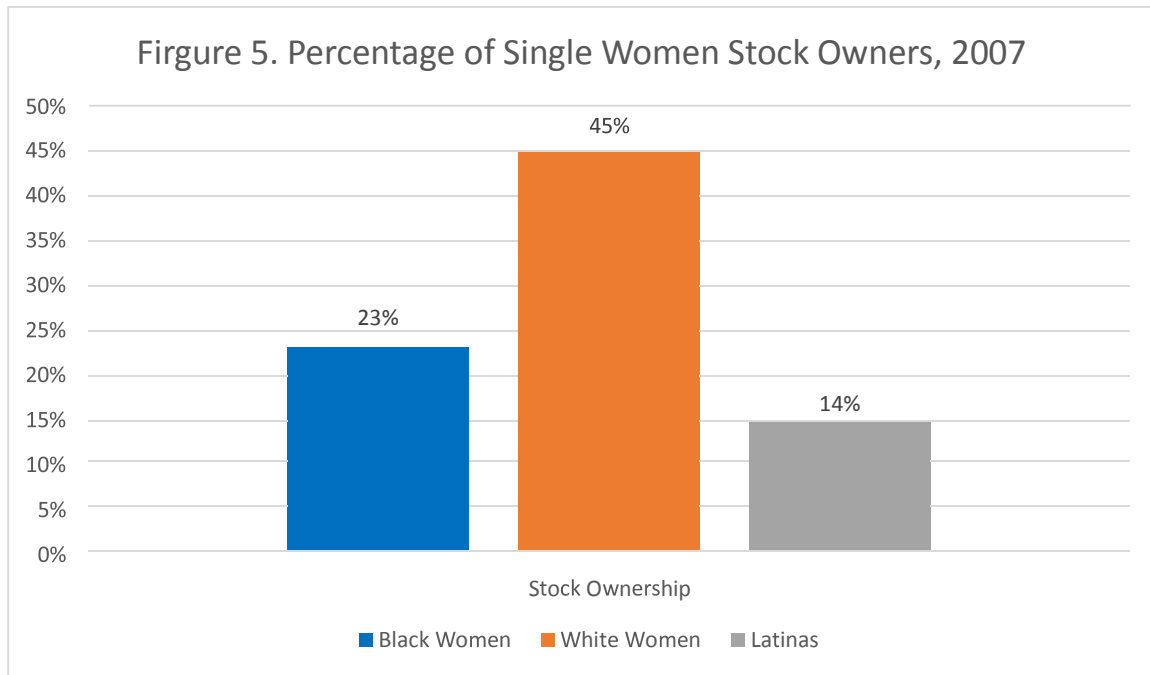
Source: U.S. Census. Current Population Survey, 2013.



Source: U.S. Census. Current Population Survey, 2013.

#### 4. Many Black Women Go Without Critical Wealth-Building Tools

- ❖ With severe earnings disadvantages across the spectrum, it's no wonder that many Black women go without critical wealth-building assets. For example, in spite of the fact that home equity accounts for the largest proportion of wealth for most middle-class families, only about a third of single Black women (33%) are homeowners compared to a slight majority of single white women (57%).<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ Among those whom are homeowners, Black women trail far behind white women when it comes to equity (\$47,000 vs. \$74,000).<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ As it relates to financial assets, such as stocks, less than a quarter of single Black women are stock-owners (23%) as compared to nearly half of single White women (45%) and just 14% of Latinas.<sup>7</sup>

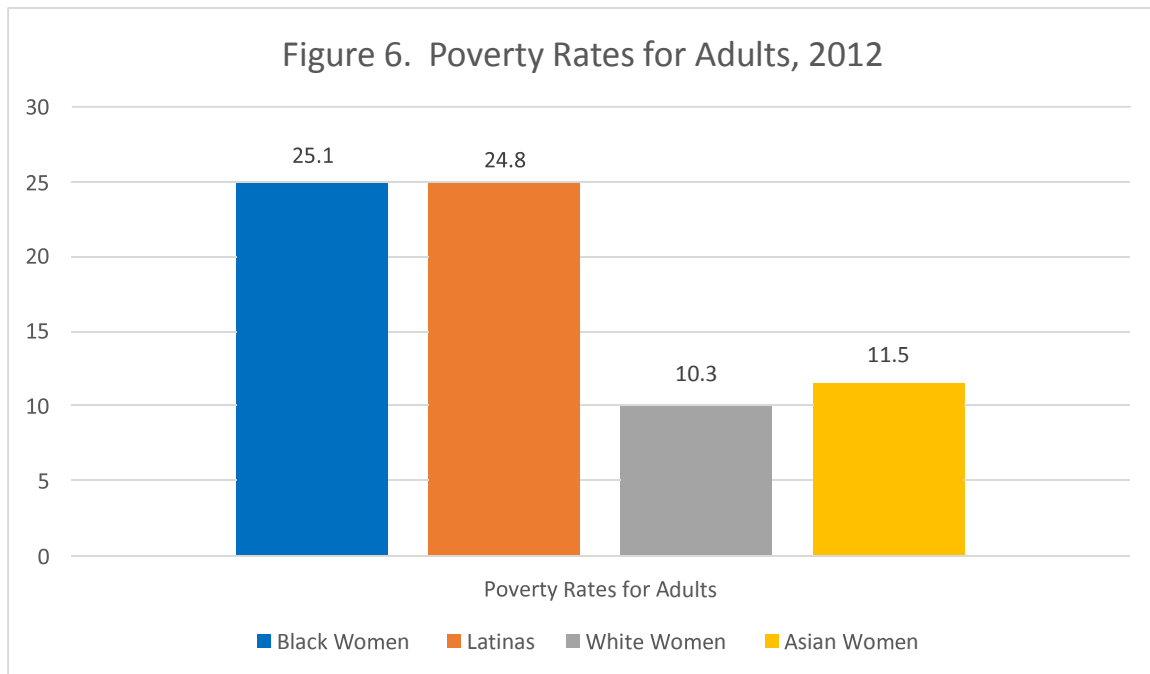


Source: Center for Global Policy Solutions. *The Wealth Gap for Women of Color*, October, 2014.

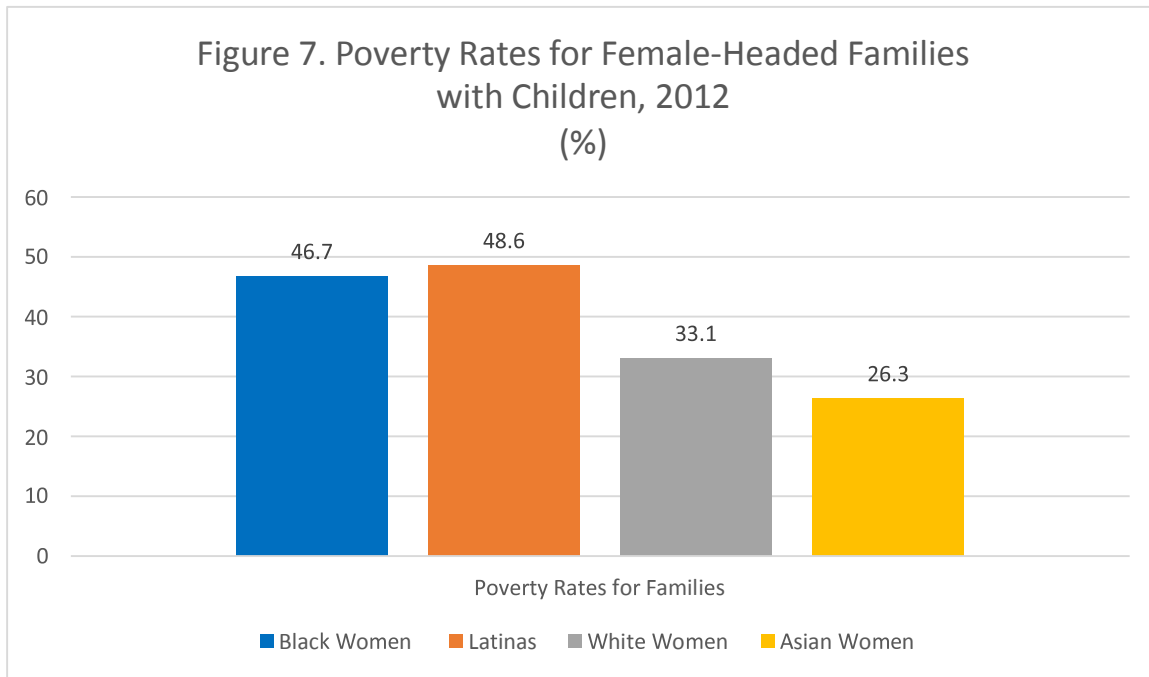


## 5. Black Women Significantly Overrepresented Among the Nation's Poor

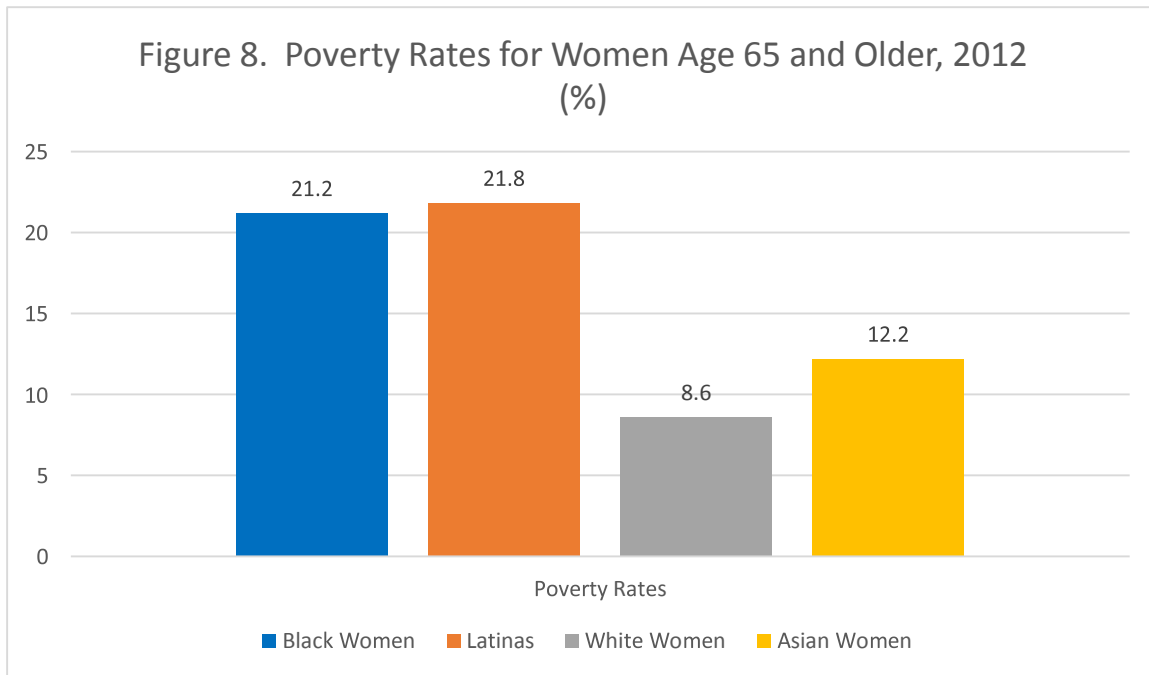
- ❖ In spite of consistently leading all women in labor market participation, Black women are among the most likely in America to be poor. In fact, the poverty rate of Black women (25.1%) more than doubles that of White women (10.3%) and Asian women (11.5%), and slightly eclipses that of Latinas (24.8%).
- ❖ Among single mother households, nearly half of such families headed by Black women are poor (46.7%), just below the proportion attributed to Latina-headed households (48.6%), but significantly more than is the case among single white (33.1%) and Asian mothers (26.3%).
- ❖ As it relates to the experience of Seniors, 1 out of every 5 Black women are poor, compared to less than 1 in 10 white women aged 65 or older (21.2% vs. 8.6%)



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012.



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012.



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012.

March 23, 2015 marked the fifth anniversary of the Affordable Care Act. This historic legislation expanded access to medical care for millions across the country, including 2.3 million specifically within the Black community.<sup>8</sup> However, not all have had full benefit of this game-changing piece of legislation. Still today, five years since its inception, 22 states continue to refuse to take advantage of Medicaid expansion, thereby leaving millions unnecessarily uninsured. Many of these same states, have engaged in political maneuvering restricting access to women's reproductive health care services. While the target of their maneuvering was most keenly designed to restrict abortion access, in practice, the impacts of reducing health care services for women, particularly in rural areas appear to be much more far-reaching.<sup>9</sup> One indicator in particular, which is moving in the wrong direction is that of maternal mortality. Black women in America have historically suffered ridiculously high maternal mortality rates. In fact, our chances of dying in pregnancy or during childbirth is unlike any other group of women in the industrialized world. But as bad as it has been, recent statistics suggest, the problem is now intensifying precisely as access to reproductive health care services dwindle across the country.

Taken together, these two circumstances have led to a reality that unnecessarily endangers not only the health of Black women, but their very lives. How ironic, that in many instances, the same states that continue to reject Medicaid expansion, are also the states that have mounted an all-out war against women's reproductive health care access, and in many instances, are the very states that are home to large segments of the Black community. The result is somewhat of a tragic perfect storm that makes receiving health care not only unnecessarily difficult, but in some circumstances, practically impossible. As a result, Black women find themselves disproportionately among those negatively impacted by political agendas that seem bent on putting one hurdle after the other between American citizens and the health care that they need.

In this section, we take a deeper looker at the implications of on-going political battles around access to Obamacare and women's reproductive health services on the lives of Black women; lives which are quite literally, left hanging in the balance.

**1. The Health Care Coverage of Black Women is Being Held Hostage by States who Reject Medicaid Expansion.**

- ❖ Black women who live in states that have accepted Medicaid expansion are much less likely to be uninsured than those who don't. Fully 9 out of the top 10 states that boast the lowest percentage of uninsured Black women are states that have adopted Medicaid expansion.
- ❖ Overall, Massachusetts is the best state in America for Black women's health care coverage, followed by the District of Columbia, Hawaii and Vermont.

**Table 2: Ranking of the Percentage of Uninsured Black Women Under 65 in All States Plus the District of Columbia**

State	% Uninsured	Ranking
Massachusetts	4.6	1
DC	6.7	2
Hawaii	7	3
Vermont	9.4	4
Delaware	9.9	5
New York	10.8	6
Maryland	11	7
Iowa	11.4	8
Connecticut	11.9	9
Wisconsin	12.5	10
Minnesota	12.7	11
Maine	13.4	12
Ohio	13.7	13
Pennsylvania	13.7	13
California	14.6	14
Michigan	14.7	15
New Hampshire	14.8	16
Colorado	14.9	17
South Dakota	14.9	17
Rhode Island	15	18
Tennessee	15	18
Oregon	15.2	19
Nebraska	15.4	20
New Jersey	15.5	21
Kansas	15.6	22

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 Small Area Health Insurance Estimates

Note: Shaded Areas Denote States that Have Not Adopted Medicaid Expansion or Medicaid Expansion is Still Under Discussion in that State.

- ❖ Black Women who live in states that have failed to accept Medicaid expansions stand a much greater likelihood of going without health insurance. In fact, 9 of the 10 lowest ranked states when it comes to health insurance coverage for Black women have each failed to adopt the expansion of Medicaid.
- ❖ Among states that have Black populations that exceed 20% of their total population, only Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia rank among the top states when it comes to Black women’s health insurance coverage. All the remaining states with high Black populations are in the Deep South, and each of these states have rejected Medicaid expansion. In addition, all are among the worst in the nation when it comes to Black women’s health insurance coverage (NC, SC, GA, AL, MS, LA).

**Table 2: Ranking of the Percentage of Uninsured Black Women Under 65 in All States Plus the District of Columbia (Continued)**

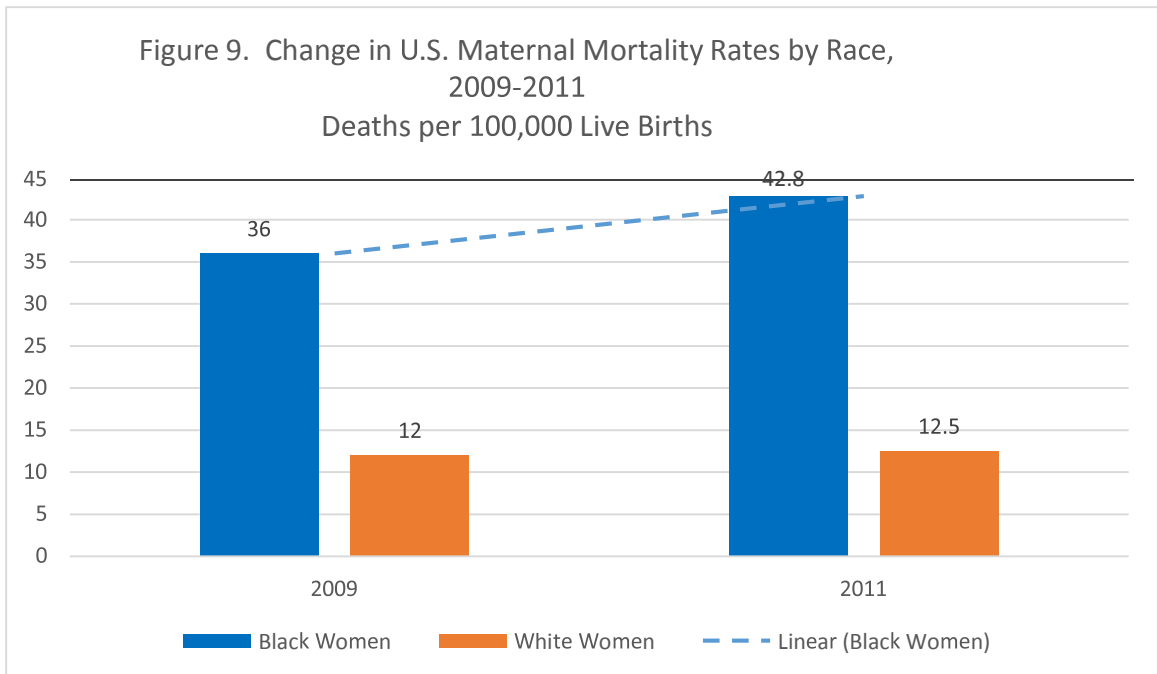
State	% Uninsured	Ranking
Utah	15.6	22
Virginia	15.8	23
Arizona	15.9	24
Illinois	15.9	24
North Dakota	16.1	25
Washington	16.4	26
Alabama	17.7	27
Idaho	17.7	27
Wyoming	17.7	27
West Virginia	17.9	28
New Mexico	18.1	29
Indiana	18.2	30
Missouri	18.4	31
South Carolina	18.8	32
Arkansas	19.1	33
Kentucky	19.2	34
North Carolina	19.6	35
Texas	20.4	36
Oklahoma	21	37
Nevada	21.1	38
Mississippi	21.4	39
Alaska	21.5	40
Georgia	21.8	41
Louisiana	21.8	41
Montana	22.8	42
Florida	23.3	43

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 Small Area Health Insurance Estimates

Note: Shaded Areas Denote States that Have Not Adopted Medicaid Expansion or Medicaid Expansion is Still Under Discussion in that State.

## 2. Shockingly High Black Women’s Maternal Mortality Rate Gets Even Higher.

- ❖ Black women are facing a maternal mortality crisis in America, and the silence is deafening. Unlike most nations around the world, America’s maternal mortality rate is actually increasing instead of decreasing. Maternal death rates have grown from 14.5 to 17.8 per 100,000 between 2007 and 2011. And as of 2014, they’ve skyrocketed to 28 per 100,000.<sup>10</sup>
- ❖ The rise in America’s maternal mortality rate can be attributed almost entirely to increases in maternal mortality among Black women. The most recent publically available data on the matter shows a rise in Black maternal mortality from a rate of 36 deaths to 42.8 deaths per 100,000 live births between 2009 and 2011. Maternal mortality for white women remained virtually unchanged during that time period (12 to 12.5 per 100,000).<sup>11</sup>
- ❖ Black Women’s maternal mortality rate is more than 10 times that of women in other industrialized nations. In fact, Black women in America would more than double their chance of surviving childbirth if they lived in Lebanon or Libya.<sup>12</sup>



Source: CDC Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Child Health, USA 2013.

The stunning frequency with which violence intersects the lives of Black men is an often-acknowledged and tragic fact. But less well known is the frequency with which Black women too must navigate unsafe spaces. Sadly, statistics suggest that one of our greatest dangers is found within what at least should be the sanctity of our own homes. Too often the private hell of domestic violence invades the lives of Black women. And though this issue made national headlines in 2014 as a result of the brutal and disturbing video of Ray Rice punching his then fiancé unconscious and the resulting cascade of errors made by the NFL in the wake of the release of the full footage of the incident; the reality is, for most Black women, domestic violence never makes the nightly news. Instead, it is a horror suffered in silent shame, faced in isolation, and bathed in fear. And for far too many, it is a nightmare they will fail to escape with their lives.

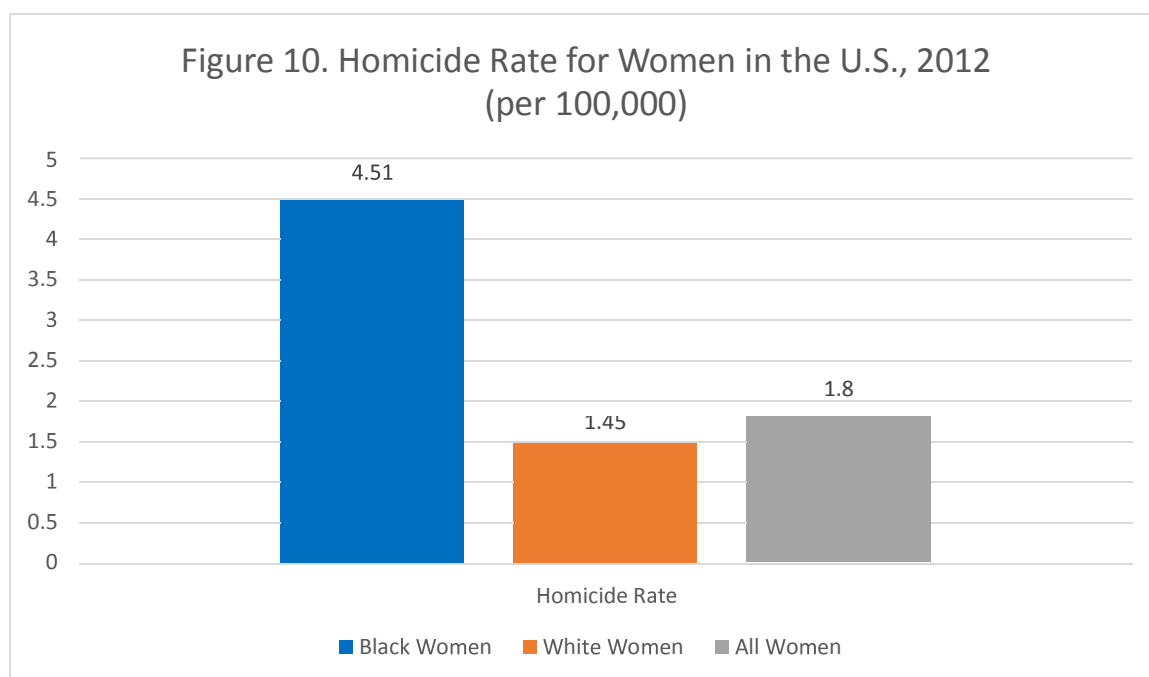
While it is true that domestic violence is a tragedy that knows no bounds, impacting both men and women of all races, all socio-economic positions, and all sexual orientations, the reality is, this is a horror that is overwhelmingly experienced by women and disproportionately, Black women. Yet, we face quite distinct challenges when it comes to negotiating this reality in our lives. Navigating a cultural context that is itself, bathed in both racism and sexism, Black women often feel the need to protect their abusers from police involvement which may escalate to the use of lethal force.

Additionally, because of the economic fragility of Black women, the very practical realities of life on her own may seem fully out of reach. And strong religious cultural leanings may ultimately send mixed messages, making some Black women believe it is a sin to leave, particularly when her husband is her abuser. Because of these and other cultural distinctions, Black women live in elevated danger when faced with this deeply personal horror.

Domestic violence is not the only violence that intersects the lives of Black women. Senseless police killings across the nation has spawned a call to action that now lives as the “Black Lives Matter” movement. But what too often goes unacknowledged in this space is the degree to which Black women too have been the victims of fatal police force. Within this section we lift up some of the names of our sisters who have died unnecessary due to police violence. In doing so, we recognize that yes, Black Lives Matter. And that sentiment includes the lives of Black women too.

## 1. Black women are the most likely women in America to be murdered.

- ❖ Overall, Black women are more than 3 times as likely to be murdered than are white women.<sup>13</sup>
- ❖ Nearly 15 times as many Black women were killed by a man they knew than by strangers.
- ❖ 52% of Black women who knew their murderers were wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the person who murdered them.



Source: The Violence Policy Center. January, 2015. *Black Homicide Victimization in the United States*.

## 2. Black women face an increased risk of exposure to domestic violence, but are less likely to seek help.

- ❖ Though Black women make up only about 8% of the population, we comprise 29% of women who experience domestic violence.<sup>14</sup>
- ❖ In spite of the increased exposure to domestic violence, Black women are less likely than white women to use social services, battered women's programs, or go to the hospital for treatment of their injuries.<sup>15</sup>



**3. The tragic deaths of unarmed Black men and boys at the hands of police have become an all too common reality across America. And while Black women mourn and act on behalf of our sons, husbands and brothers, we too acknowledge the lives of unarmed Black women and girls who have died as a result of lethal police force. The following represents a partial list of Black women and girls, killed at the hands of police.**

- ❖ Aiyana Jones, 7
- ❖ Tyisha Miller, 19
- ❖ Gabriella Nevarez, 22
- ❖ Rekia Boyd, 22
- ❖ Tarika Wilson, 26
- ❖ Miriam Carey, 34
- ❖ Yvette Smith, 48
- ❖ Eleanor Bumpurs, 66
- ❖ Pearlie Smith, 93
- ❖ Katheryn Johnson, 92

Fifty years since brave men and women made the dangerous choice to cross a Bridge in Selma in search of their voting rights, Black women continue to make strides as a result of that revolutionary act and many more from decades before. As a testament to our voting power and the quality of our own candidacy, we made political history in 2014 and are well-positioned to do so again in 2016. Today there are a record number of Black women serving in Congress, including Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-New Jersey) and Mia Love (R-Utah) who each became the first Black women from their respective states to ever hold a Congressional seat, with Mia Love making history again by being the first Black woman ever elected to Congress as a Republican.

Alma Adams (D-North Carolina) made history too as she held the distinction of being the 100<sup>th</sup> woman to serve in Congress. And now Black women make up fully a third of all new Congressional women. Yet, our history-making is far from over.

With 2016 on the horizon, Black women are poised to end our 17-year drought when it comes to representation in the U.S. Senate, as not one, but two Black women have announced their intentions to run for a Senate seat, including California Attorney General, Kamala Harris (D) and Maryland Congresswoman Donna Edwards (D).

In order to capture the perspectives of voters during this historic time, the Black Women's Roundtable engaged in a massive, multi-state survey following the 2014 mid-term elections. Through this effort we were able to determine those issues that were most central to the concerns and daily needs of Black voters in several key states.<sup>1</sup> This section provides a brief overview of survey results as well as a synopsis of where Black women stand in the political space at the state, local and federal levels.

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<sup>1</sup> For a full reporting of survey results, see the section entitled, "2014 NBCP Exit Poll Results."

## **1. Black Women Made History in Congress in 2014**

- ❖ Of the 104 women serving in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, 18 are Black women, representing a gain of 4 Black Congresswomen as a result of the 2014 election cycle.<sup>16</sup>
- ❖ The daughter of Haitian immigrants, Mia Love made history as the first Black woman elected to Congress as a Republican and the first Black woman ever to be elected as a representative of the state of Utah.
- ❖ Democrat, Bonnie Watson Coleman also made political history as the first Black woman elected to Congress from the state of New Jersey.

## **2. Black Women Making Strides in the Mayor's Office**

- ❖ Black women saw gains in Mayor's offices last year, with Ivy Taylor of San Antonio, Texas and Muriel Bowser of Washington, DC joining Stephanie Rawlings-Blake as Mayor of a Top 100 City.

## **3. Political Representation at the State Level Remains Challenging.**

- ❖ There remains only two Black women serving in statewide office, Denise Nappier (D), Connecticut State Treasurer and California Attorney General Kamala Harris (D).
- ❖ Several Black women made historic runs for state-wide offices in 2014, including stand-out Ohio State Senator, Nina Turner's bid for Secretary of State as well as the highly qualified "Georgia Five," five Black women who each ran for statewide office in Georgia. None of these bids were fully supported by the state democratic parties with contributed to these races being unsuccessful. Each candidate garnered more than one million votes at the state level, an amazing foundation to build upon for future efforts.
- ❖ In state legislatures Black women remain underrepresented, making up only 3.4% of all state legislators nationwide and 14% of all women legislators in 2015. Though there is much room for improvement, these numbers do represent slight gains in representation from the previous year (3.3% to 3.4% in state legislator representation and from 13.5% to 14% of all women legislators).<sup>17</sup>
- ❖ Georgia carries the distinction as the state with the greatest representation of Black women state legislators, followed by Maryland, New York, and Mississippi.

- ❖ Maine, North Dakota, and South Dakota have never had a Black woman elected to their state legislatures, and although each of these states have Black populations of less than 2%, the same is true for New Mexico, Idaho, Oregon, Vermont, and Utah, each of which have Black women currently sitting in their respective legislative bodies.

**Table 3. Black Women’s State Legislative Political Representation, 2015**

State	Number of Black Women in State Legislature
Georgia	27
Maryland	20
New York	15
Mississippi	15
Illinois	13
North Carolina	12
Alabama	12
Missouri	10
Virginia	10
Florida	10
Louisiana	9
Ohio	8
Texas	8
New Jersey	8
Pennsylvania	7
Tennessee	7
Indiana	6
South Carolina	6
Michigan	5
California	4
Connecticut	4
Iowa	4
Kansas	4
Arkansas	3
Colorado	2
Delaware	2
Maine	2
New Mexico	2
Nevada	2
Wisconsin	2
Utah	1
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West Virginia	1
Nebraska	1
New Hampshire	1
Rhode Island	1
Oregon	1
Oklahoma	1
Minnesota	1
Idaho	1

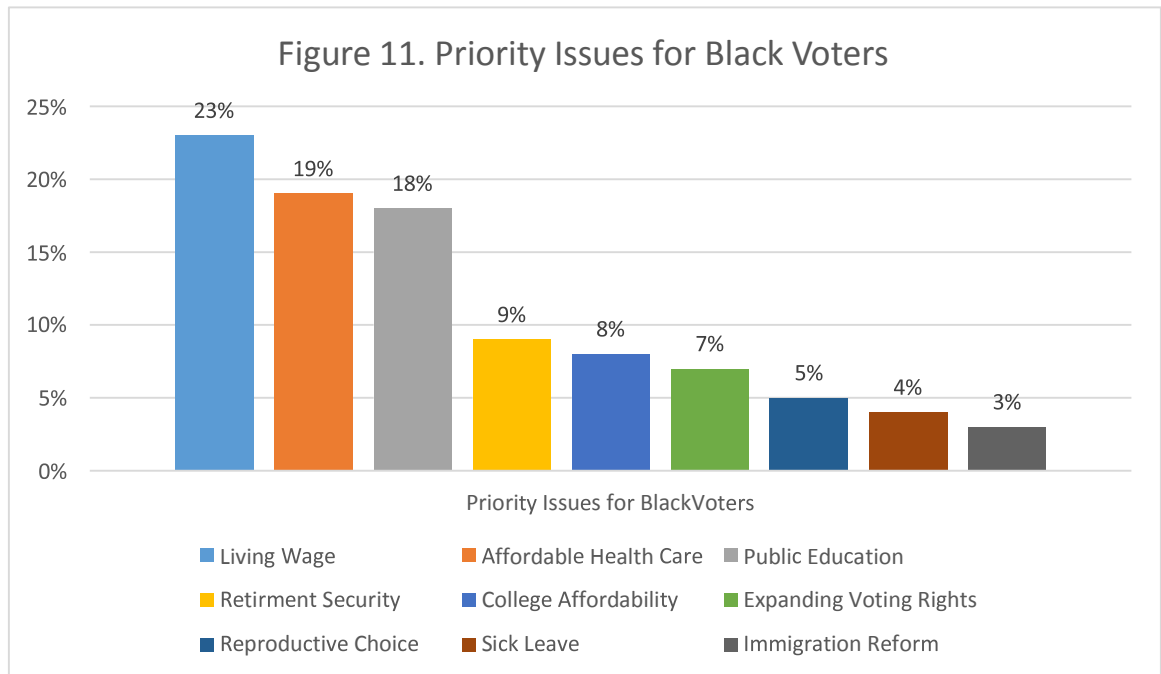
Source: Rutgers University Center for American Women and Politics.

#### 4. Bright Future on the Horizon for Black Women in Politics

- ❖ Loretta Lynch, Attorney General nominee is poised to become President Obama’s first Black woman constitutional cabinet appointment.
- ❖ After a 17-year absence in the U.S. Senate, two Black women have announced their 2016 candidacy for Senate, Attorney General Kamala Harris of California and Congresswoman Donna Edwards of Maryland.

#### 5. What Black Women Want

- ❖ The Black Women’s Roundtable conducted a survey of over 1500 voters, roughly two-thirds of which were Black women, immediately following the 2014 mid-term elections. As we look towards 2016, the issues they’ve identified as key for earning their vote provide instructive insight for future candidates across the political divide.
- ❖ Most important to Black voters are the ability to earn a living wage (23%), followed by affordable health care (19%), and access to quality public education (18%). Other areas of particular concern included retirement security (9%), college affordability (8%), and the expansion of voting rights (7%).



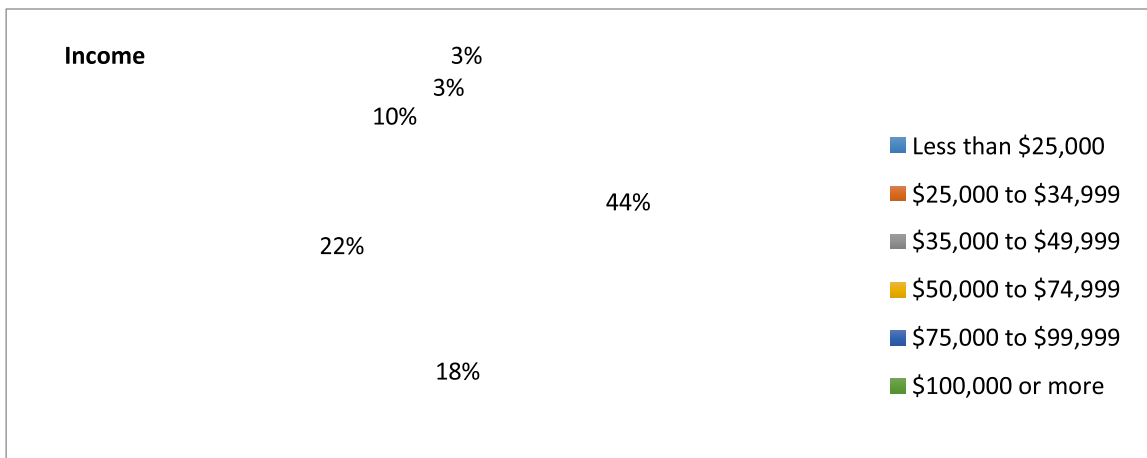
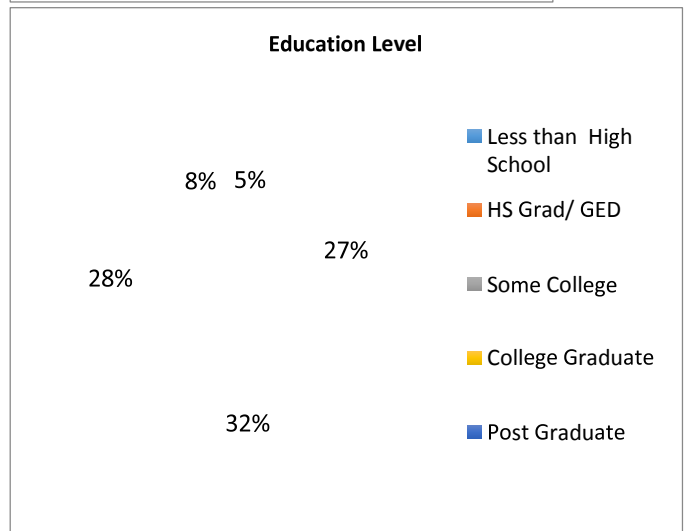
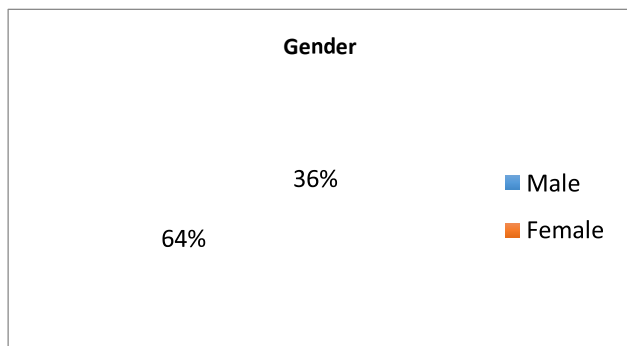
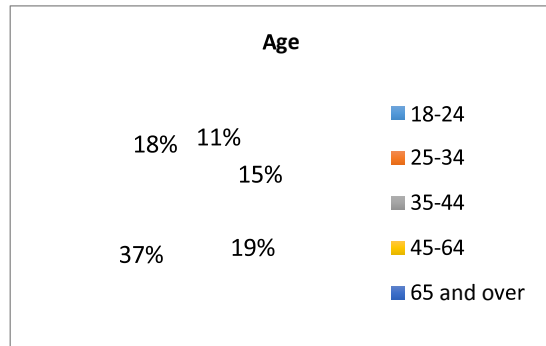
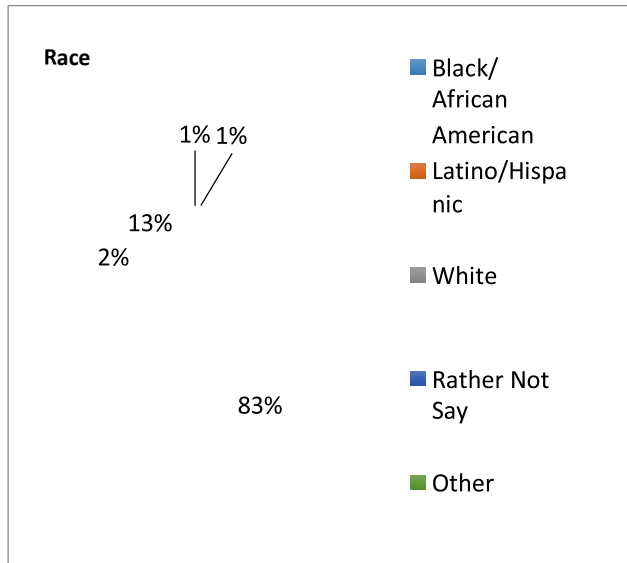
Source: 2014 NCBCP Exit Poll Results

In 2014, the National Coalition of Black Civic Participation (NCBCP) conducted exit poll surveys in five states – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Ohio and Michigan. The purpose of this survey was to capture the demography of the voters served through our partners and programs and to understand the issue priority of the actual community we serve. While we have a history of conducting exit polls around voting and voter experiences, this poll not only addressed this question but it asked the voters we serve to prioritize issues. In addition, NCBCP wants to share information learned with the rest of the community. It is our hope to begin a dialogue to help interest groups, community organizers and others interested in speaking to our community understand the perspective and priorities of Black voters. In this way, we hope that these organizations will engage and involve black voters in the conversation.

It is the goal of NCBCP, through its Black Women’s Roundtable (BWR), Black Youth Vote! and its key partners, to increase the amount of data and information collected about the communities and people we serve. In this way, we seek understand the people that our state and local affiliates and partners serve and empower every day. We believe that African American voters matter and this survey, originally developed by Dr. Ronald Walters and revised by Dr. Elsie Scott, Executive Director of the Ronald W. Walters Leadership & Public Policy Center at Howard University, and the NCBCP/Black Women’s Roundtable Research Team, is designed to ensure that Black people’s voices are heard. This work could not have been done without the hard work and collaborative efforts of the following people and organizations:

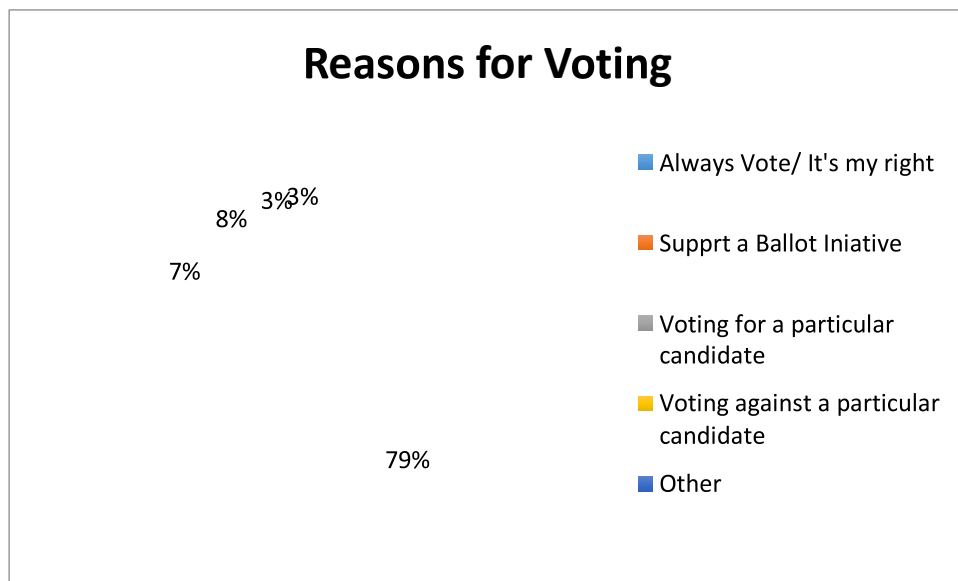
Salandra Benton Helen Butler  
Avis Jones-DeWeever, Ph.D.  
Alabama Coalition on Black Civic Participation  
Florida Coalition on Black Civic Participation  
Holliday Advisors  
Hon. Stephanie Moore Mothers of  
Hope  
Ohio Coalition on Black Civic Participation Georgia  
Coalition of the Peoples’ Agenda René Redwood  
Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy Center at Howard University Elsie Scott,  
Ph.D.  
Hon. Shelia Tyson Petee  
Talley

# Demographics of Voters Surveyed



NCBCP volunteers collected over 1500 surveys, through our affiliates and partners, who in turn, gathered information from voters at the polls on Election Day. Surveys were collected from mostly African Americans (over 83%). Black women represent about 64% of surveys. While all ages were surveyed, most fell between the ages of 25-64. Most had completed some college, but nearly 45% reported making \$25,000 or less.

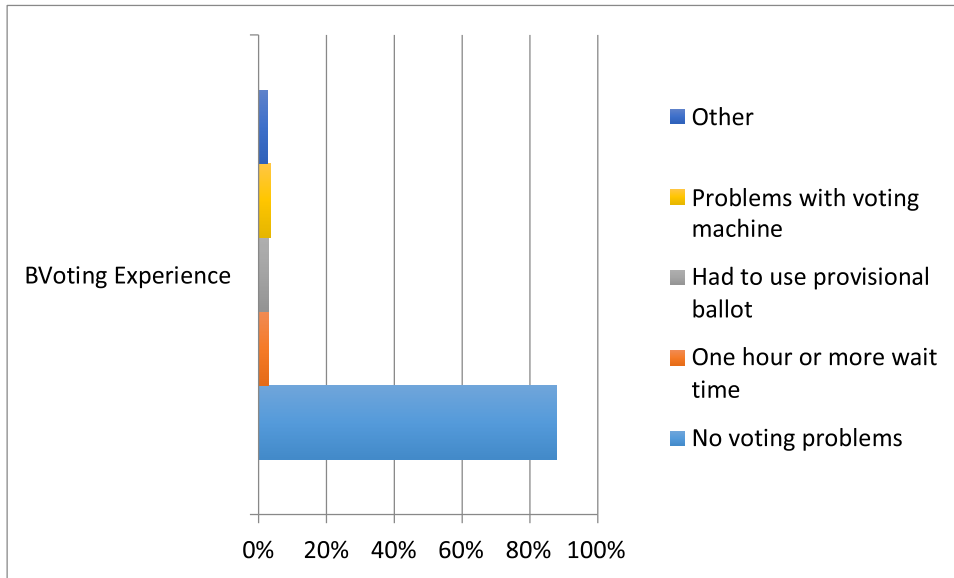
### Voting Experience



In an election the New York Times dubbed “The Worst Voter Turnout In 72 Years”<sup>18</sup>, it is no surprise that among black voters, most voted out of a sense of obligation and responsibility. Despite the historic opportunity to elect six Black women to statewide office (5 in Georgia and 1 in Ohio) or the hotly contested Senate race in Florida, Black voters, like the rest of the electorate saw only the most stalwart voters come to the polls.

First-time voters represented less than 10% of those surveyed, and like the rest of the sample, they too primarily voted out of a duty to vote, rather than to support a particular candidate or specific ballot measure. While candidates and organizations seeking to persuade generally invest money for outreach to black voters, our survey showed the importance of promoting voter education and connecting black voters to their sense of duty and responsibility to vote.



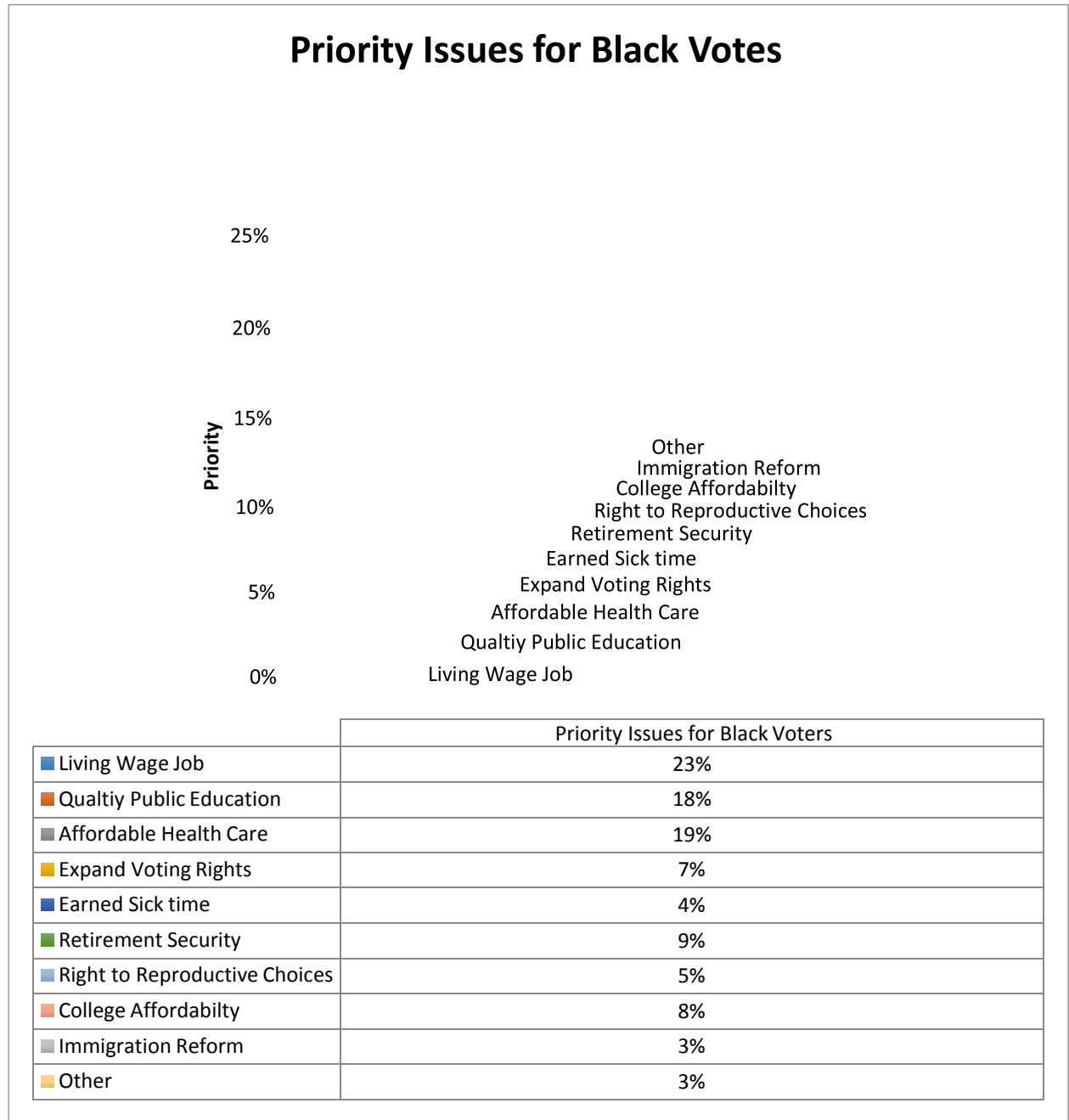


Overwhelmingly more than 90% of voters were asked for ID, which is not a surprise given that all states that we surveyed have some type of voter ID law, either voter ID requested or strict voter ID. While generally, controversy at the polls was limited, we did see a measurable percentage of voters in Florida reported running into difficulty with registration and documentation concerns. Overall, about 12% of voters surveyed experienced some issues at the polls. The most common included:

- Wait time of more than 1 hour;
- Having to cast a provisional ballot;
- Problems with the voting machine;
- Wrong precinct being written on their voter registration card,
- Name not appearing on the voting system, and
- Inadequate help or direction when trying to locate polling place.

These experiences continue to validate the need to have independent voter support and education to assist voters. Further, the promotion of voter assistance, in conjunction with the right to vote messages, is vital to engaging black voters.

## Issues and Reasons for Voting



In the last ten years, America has experienced radical changes across the country in the areas of wages, public education and healthcare. The Federal Minimum Wage has been increased to \$7.25 per hour, with 29 states and DC having minimum wages higher than the federal level. Further, new efforts are now underfoot in Congress to raise the minimum wage, yet again. Additionally, public education has experienced reforms

through No Child Left Behind, Adoption of Common Core and the Expansion of Charter Schools. In healthcare, under the Affordable Healthcare Act, approximately 25% of uninsured Americans, now have health insurance. In spite of these changes, for Black voters, priority issues remain largely unchanged, indicating that there is a great deal more work to do in each of these areas. Simply put, Black voters care about the following:

- Living Wage Jobs
- Quality Public Education
- Affordable Health Care

These issues are even more of a priority for Black women voters. Dr. Elsie Scott, Founding Director of the Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy Center at Howard University, sums it up best, “The most universal concern for Black women are economic issues including income equality, job creation, and unemployment, benefits. Other key issues are health care and education—affordable quality education.”<sup>19</sup>

Data available on race and gender gaps in these key areas continue to paint the picture of why black voters stay connected to these bread and butter issues. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Black households in general made less than white ones. Specifically, white households reported median earnings of \$58,270 a year, while black households reported median earnings of only \$34,598.<sup>20</sup>

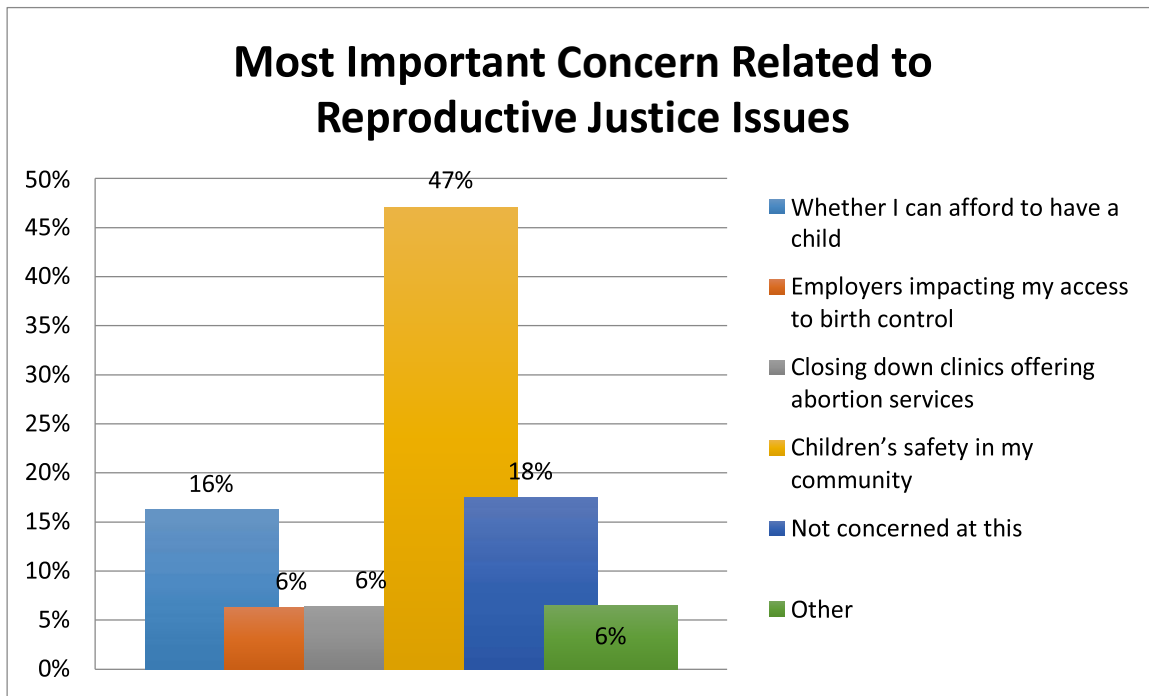
In addition, the two communities have widely disparate outcomes when it comes to experiences within the labor market. This results in Blacks typically experiencing double the unemployment rate of whites. Unfortunately, this tradition of high unemployment will likely persist as public sector jobs continue to shrink and private sector employers are half as likely to offer call backs to Black job applicants, as their white counterparts.<sup>21</sup> Over 50 years of consistent high unemployment,<sup>22</sup> lack of opportunity and growing wage disparity have created a legacy of chronic economic disparity that keeps living wages a primary concern for Black voters.

Education disparity for Black students is a well-documented fact, but new reports show how this gap continues to widen as it reveals that Blacks have less access to pre-school. In addition, the rate of discipline for Black children surpasses white children almost 2:1, starting as early as kindergarten. <sup>23</sup> These studies also showed that Blacks are less likely to have access to advanced classes, which help prepare students for higher education. Unfortunately, as black families, we also have to manage the widening gap between Black girls and boys in education as Black women attain higher education success at a rate more than double that of Black men.<sup>24</sup>

While affordable healthcare is firmly in the top three of concerns for Black voters, it is the one category that we saw a differential between age groups surveyed. Among voters 24-

64, affordable Healthcare ranked in the top three concerns. However, young voters 18-24 were much more concerned about college affordability and expanding the right to vote.

There has been much discussion within the black community and even within the Black Women’s Roundtable about the true priority black voters have regarding reproductive justice. Thus, it was important that we included this issue on the survey. Survey results revealed what Black voters consider the most important aspects of reproductive justice. Their top concern is for the safety of their children, followed closely by the ability to afford to have a child. Roughly 14% of voters surveyed are not concerned about reproductive justice issues at all and even fewer are concerned about birth control and clinics closing that perform abortion services.





Black Women started the reproductive justice movement over 20 years ago because they recognized the intersection of reproductive justice, economic justice and social justice. Black Women do not live monolithic, single-issue lives and we needed to frame reproductive health and reproductive rights with reproductive justice. The reproductive justice movement addresses the vast inequities that existed within the narrow focus on legal access to abortion and individual choice.

Today, reproductive justice is the leading movement in the U.S. engaging the Rising American Electorate, women of color, low-income women and transgender women as grassroots organizers and activist on a range of reproductive issues. Four basic pillars characterize the reproductive justice movement.

First, is the diversity of the leadership and base of this movement; 85% of Groundswell's grantees are led by women of color, nearly half by young people under the age of 30. This type of diversity of leadership is absolutely critical for building power, the ability to achieve racial healing, and to advance transformative policy and systems change.

Second, reproductive justice is multi-issue. Unlike the traditional choice movement that offers one or two entry points – around abortion access and family planning – reproductive justice is so much more. It is the right to decide to have a child or not – safe, affordable access to abortion and contraception – not just legal access; the right to parent the children you have; the rights of women impacted by the criminal justice system and drug policy – for incarcerated women, the right not to be shackled during labor and

delivery; the right to protection from mass deportation disrupting the right to parent; birthing rights – where/how you choose to deliver – access to doulas and pre-natal care; the right to quality, affordable reproductive health care that doesn't discriminate. All of these are reproductive justice issues.

Third, reproductive justice is multi-sector. The issues of economic justice, environmental justice and social justice intersect with reproductive justice. We understand that young people care about comprehensive sex education; that migrant farm workers and native women exposed to uranium mining care about poor reproductive health outcomes because of exposure to environmental toxins. Reproductive justice is an environmental justice issue. There are few things that make a bigger dent in a woman's paycheck than the expense of having and caring for a child. Equal pay for the same work, a living wage, paid sick leave and paid family leave are economic issues that are reproductive justice issues. Women cannot have reproductive justice without economic justice. The ability to earn a living wage to be able to take care of the children you have or deciding to whether or if you can afford to have another child is a reproductive justice issue. The right to safe, affordable housing and living free from fear of domestic abuse, staying in relationships because there is nowhere else to go, are reproductive justice issues. Social justice is a reproductive justice issue.

Fourth and finally, reproductive justice places an emphasis on grassroots organizing – we cannot win reproductive justice policies and systems change without it. Women's rights are under attack in this country and we must work collectively to realize policy and system changes necessary to transform the systems that impact our lives. We must unite across all the issues plaguing women in the U.S. We are fighting a common enemy – one that would take away a women's right to have autonomy over her body also fight to keep wages low, workers without paid sick leave . . . all economic justice and social justice issues.

At Groundswell, we envision a reproductive justice movement whose grassroots leadership and base receive the resources necessary to become well organized; racially, economically and generationally diverse; and powerful enough to win transformational policy and systems change. That is the crux of our Integrated Voter Engagement Program (IVE). Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) is an innovative new approach to grassroots power building used by many of the most effective grassroots organizing groups in the U.S. IVE blends community organizing and voter engagement in an ongoing and sustained way to boost the scale and power of grassroots organizations to win systems change.

Groundswell's IVE program offers grantees the opportunity to access cutting edge IVE tools, technologies and coaching. IVE is designed to build determinative political power around a plethora of reproductive issues. A sign that the movement has achieved determinative political power will be when a majority of public officials of all stripes and at all levels of government know that it will cost them public support every time they fail to stand up for reproductive justice, and conversely win them public support everytime they do. Groundswell's grantees work on issues including but not limited to removing toxic chemicals from children's toys; educating beauty salon workers of the hazards chemical toxins have on their reproductive health; advocating for comprehensive sex education for young people so they can be equipped with information to make informed, smart decisions about their reproductive lives; fighting for a living wage so women can provide safe communities and child care for their families; and access to health care and expansion of Medicaid.

Reproductive justice is uniting women, especially women of color and specifically Black Women, to fight collectively against those who oppose our ability to lead healthy lives.

Reproductive justice will be achieve when all people have the social, political, and economic power necessary to make healthy decisions about their bodies, sexuality, gender and reproduction. *(Adapted from Forward Together's definition of reproductive justice.)*

*Letetia Jackson is program manager for Groundswell Fund and manages their Integrated Voter Engagement Program. Groundswell Fund supports a stronger, more effective U.S. movement for reproductive justice by mobilizing new funding and capacity building resources to grassroots organizing and policy change efforts led by low income women, women of color and transgender people.*



The citizens of Birmingham have been left holding the bag as a result of a toxic mix of Wall Street greed and political corruption that have landed 22 lawmakers in prison, but has also left poor communities struggling with exorbitant sewer bills that they can't afford to pay. So today, a community that is 70% Black, and mostly headed by impoverished single mothers are now saddled with the burden of paying \$8.6 billion in sewer fees for a system that is only valued at \$1.15 billion dollars. Due to the corrupt activities of former elected officials, a bankruptcy agreement was made that left the city owing 3.25 times more than they did pre-bankruptcy and twelve times more than the asset was worth in the first place. Now a community that has a median income of only \$30,000 a year is forced to pay 60% of the refinancing cost for the area's sewer system, either directly or indirectly as a result of pass-throughs from commercial businesses that service the area. So the 21% of sewer users who are poor and mostly Black women are paying 60% of the total \$14.4 billion to be collect by the federal court. That works out to an average sewer bill of \$3,538 per person per year, more than 10% of their annual income when the "high end" of EPA guidelines is only 2%. That's abusive. That's criminal. And that's wrong.

So what does this mean in the lives of real people? It means families, right here in Birmingham, can't afford to make use of their indoor plumbing. Similar to families in Detroit, here in Birmingham many have to live without running water as a regular and necessary part of life because they can't afford to pay skyrocketing sewer fees. And if they can't afford their bill, when the sewer is cut off, their water is cut off too. That means carrying jugs of water to your home on a regular basis just to have something to bathe with, to wash dishes with, to cook with, and if no porta potty is nearby, to flush with. This, in one of the richest nations in the world, it is nothing short of an absolute travesty. But for far too many, it's also a daily reality.

As we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of “Bloody Sunday” and the impact it had on securing the 1965 Voting Rights Act, we reflect on the role of Black Women in the movement then and now, as well as, the powerful voting block that they represent here in the State of Georgia. While the 1965 movement was about voter suppression and lack of access to the ballot, those battles have changed but haven’t changed – we still battle lack of access, photo ID laws, reduction in early voting, felon voting laws, citizenship rules, redrawing of district lines, annexation and other suppression techniques. Yet despite these disenfranchising policies and procedures, Black women have been able to be a strong voting demographic in their communities.

Black women represent the majority of registered voters in 150 cities, 27 counties and 4 Congressional districts. They have had some of the highest turnout rates of all demographics – 77% & 78% for the 2008 & 2012 Presidential election cycles. During the midterm elections the turnout rates were the third highest of all demographics 55% and 51% for 2010 & 2014. In spite of this strong voter participation by Black women, we have not made any gains in representation on a statewide basis. There are no Black women that hold statewide office in Georgia.

During this past midterm election we had the opportunity to historically elect five African American women as Constitutional officers – this would have been a first for the state of Georgia and I believe any state. We have to look at some of the reasons why this didn’t happen. The “Fabulous Five”, as they were dubbed, each received over one million votes (only one other Black women statewide candidate had gotten one million votes in Georgia’s history). They had no major campaign funds, no political signs such as yard signs/billboards, no major media advertising nor support from the major campaigns/parties. Only during the last month of the election were they included in some of the major candidates’/parties advertising and activities -- only to be mentioned as part of a six woman ticket – no individual attention. They were able to garner the million plus votes through a grassroots campaign of going city to city, county to county with the fact that they represented an opportunity to make history as the first African American women to become Constitutional Officers.

The issues that were of concern to Black women such as minimum wage, family care act – sick and family leave, child care, education and jobs were not addressed during the campaign. It is evident that these issues would have driven the 400,000 plus Black women who didn’t vote to turn out. The results of polling we have done bear this out. As

a part of the Black Women's Roundtable Get Out the Vote campaign, we conducted exit polls that show these economic issues drove Black women to show up at the polls.

These economic issues are still relevant to Black women in Georgia as we are pushing during this legislative session for an increase in the minimum wage to \$15/hour; passage of the Family Care Act that would provide paid sick and leave time; minority participation within the transportation bill based upon a disparity study conducted by Department of Transportation to ensure our businesses can compete and provide jobs and economic relief; education equity in terms of standards and funding for schools; protection of voting rights through the development and passage of a State of Georgia Voting Rights Act and vote centers.

We have a challenge to recruit Black women leaders to run for political office despite what happened with the "Fab Five." We can't give up. As the late Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm said, "I am and always will be a catalyst for change. The one thing you got going: your one vote".

I spent much of my early career as a voting rights advocate. My first job was as the coordinator of NC Voters for Clean Elections, a campaign finance reform coalition. We passed the first Judicial Public Financing legislation in the country. I was also the coordinator of the Same Day Voter Registration Coalition which successfully passed a bill to bring early voting/ one stop voting sites to North Carolina. Due to these reforms NC had seen increasingly higher rates of turnout among African American voters. I am now the director of Blueprint NC which is a progressive coalition of organizations that work together to increase participation in the Emerging Majority (people of color, women and youth). I continue to work to increase turnout, but the restrictive voting laws have made that job more challenging.

Increased turnout was aided by progressive voting laws that included same day voter registration and early voting, pre-registration of 16-17 year olds, out of precinct and straight party voting. In 2010, conservative forces won a majority both houses in the General Assembly – for the first time in 100 years - and gained the Governors’ mansion. Their super majority allowed them to pass restrictive voting laws that eliminated same day voter registration, pre-registration, out of precinct voting, cut early voting, and eliminated straight ticket voting. They also had control of the redistricting process. Their strategy packed and stacked African American districts diluting voting strength in communities of color. The results were the harshest roll backs in voting rights in the country and the diluting of the Black vote.

The 2013 and 2014 legislative sessions were also particularly brutal. In addition to passing a Monster Voting law the conservative majority passed a number of regressive laws that restricted women’s access to healthcare, slashed unemployment assistance, refused to expand Medicaid, required drug-testing of some people in public assistance. They also declined to increase funding for education and teachers’ salaries, eliminated statewide public commissions, and worked to consolidate power by reducing the authority of local elected bodies.

Year	% Turnout of African Americans
2006	29%
2008	72%
2010	41%
2012	70%

The impact of these changes were fought long and hard by progressive forces. In addition to weakening the power of African American voters, many were also harmed by mean spirited policies that cut unemployment insurance and the refusal to expand Medicaid. These policies have had a negative economic impact on working families.

Though we worked to get as many people out as possible (Blueprint targeted over 170 voters in 13 counties) the changes in the laws were successful in creating confusion and frustration with the voting process. On Election Day there were significant reports of people going to the wrong polling place, unaware of changes to their polling site or going to early voting sites on Election Day instead of their polling place. A crucial mistake due to the elimination of out of precinct voting. These voters, who would have been able to cast a ballot in previous elections, were turned away.

I volunteered at Precinct 1-26 on Election Day which also serves as an early voting site in my community and with other volunteers counted a total of 317 people who were turned away from Chavis Heights, an early voting site where they would have been able to vote in previous elections.

Our work continues but we are clear that we will not be able to win significant changes in North Carolina unless we organize our communities, in particular Black Women who are 54% percent of the black vote and vote at rates higher than 70%. We have to commit ourselves to organizing black women as a central force in the Black community and the progressive movement at large if we are going to move forward together.

As Michigan continues to make its way out of the worst economy the state has seen in decades, the issues that particularly affect Black women remain consistent with national issues. With a more conservative legislature and state leadership, Michigan will continue to debate the following issues in order to continue to stem the amount of dollars flowing out of the state and hitting the tax payers.

#### Women's Health:

Specifically, recent legislative burdens related to women accessing female related healthcare, continues to be debated. Most women of color in Michigan use non-traditional health clinics such as Planned Parenthood for women's health including cancer screenings, after miscarriage care, etc. HB4145, if passed, will prohibit Michigan from giving funds to any organization that either provides abortions or even refers women to places that do, even if the referral is for something other than an abortion. HB4146 would require an abortion performed after 19 weeks to only be done in hospitals that has a neonatal unit (in Kalamazoo County/Southwest Michigan, there would only be two hospitals with NICU's. Neither of those hospitals perform elective abortions unless there are medical reasons). For all Michigan women, these two legislative bills would create an increased burden to access care. Especially for poor women, who, in Michigan, are also more than likely to be women of color or more specifically, Black.

#### Mergers of Department of Human Services and Department of Community Health:

The impact on communities of color still has not yet been fully projected regarding the merging of the two largest social service departments in the state. The lack of projections causes a sense of nervousness among not only individuals who access services through DHS and DCH but those who provide services and work collaboratively with these two departments. The impact could be positive for Black women who also are typically head of households in Michigan or the impact could be negative in that it would impede the navigation of one large department that is meant to services a plethora of needs. Black women in Michigan would have to keep an eye out for this.

#### Drug screening of Welfare Recipients:

As if other states haven't proven that to drug screen welfare recipients is not only fruitless but also creates an additional cost burden to the state. Black head of households will also have to keep an eye out for unintentional consequences including unfair testing,

inequitable treatment of families, and others that would cause a negative impact on Black families who are already struggling in this Michigan economy.

Common Core Testing for Michigan Children: The anticipation of this type of testing can be a good or bad idea for Michigan children, especially children of color who most reside in areas of the state with also the lowest performing schools.

National issues including equal pay for equal work, the impending Supreme Court's ruling on the ACA, and others will continue to catch the eyes of Black women across this nation.

As I travel and work across the state of Florida, as a Community Organizer and Convener, I find that as a black woman, people are interested in my work or want me to be a part of their team because of my passion, dedication, commitment that I bring to the table. As I work with and have conversations among other Black Women in the state, I find it to be true for them as well, but what I see from the lens of a black woman, I see that people, programs, and organizations profit from and talk about empowering the black community and the black woman only in talk or on paper. But when it comes to putting black women in leadership roles where they are decision makers or lifting them up for the good work they do to help move their organizations and programs in a successful manner this is problematic for organizations and institutions.

If not the one who wrote the recipe for the best cake, Black women has always been one of the main ingredient in the cake in the progressive movement in the south, yet they do not profit from the progressive movement at the level of their dedication and committed that give to this movement.

Moving forward as I encourage more women and girls to get involved at all levels of civic engagement, I hope and pray that Black women know the value that they bring to the table, and the people and organizations they work with not only see their value, but invest in them by creating spaces and a pipeline to real leadership (not a token or merely a talking head) within their organizations and institutions.

We are also dealing with a range of other problems in Florida. For example, closing schools in our neighborhoods causes our children to have to get up earlier than their classmates to travel to school. This causes a range of hardships on families who find it hard to navigate transportation challenges, in order to be involved in the school, pickup a sick child, or even for the child to feel like an authentic part of the broader school community.



By:  
Danielle Atkinson  
Mothering Justice  
Black Women's Roundtable

Black women in Michigan are facing challenges with courage and resolve. They are leading movements to bring about equity in the lives of their fellow sisters.

## Challenges

### *Infant and maternal mortality rates in Michigan*

While infant mortality fell for decades across the U.S., progress bypassed Detroit, which in 2012 saw a greater proportion of babies die before their first birthdays than any American city. For every 1,000 babies born in Michigan, almost 7 die by age one. The outcomes are even more dire when we look at black babies. The infant mortality rate for African American is more than twice that of Caucasian Americans. Causes of infant mortality include serious birth defects, preterm birth before 39 weeks gestation, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), maternal pregnancy complications, and injuries.

Pregnancy-related deaths helped put Michigan's maternal mortality rate in the bottom fifth among states Detroit women are dying from pregnancy-related causes at a rate three times greater than the nation. Data from the state Department of Community Health show at least six Detroit moms died yearly, on average, as a direct result of pregnancy or childbirth from 2008-11 — a total of 26 maternal deaths in that period. That translates to a maternal death rate of 58.7 per 100,000 babies — higher than in Libya, Uruguay or Vietnam.

### *Wages*

Women in Michigan are paid 74 cents for every dollar paid to men, and that gap is only wider among African American. Combine that with the lack of paid leave and lack of savings, and women in Michigan are struggling to make ends meet and provide a better life for their children. According to the National Partnership for Women and Families nearly half a million households are led by women and 35% of those fall below the poverty line. Also, 60% of children in Detroit live at or below the povertyline.

### *Childcare*

Childcare costs continue to be a burden for parents in Michigan. While there are subsidies for low income individuals, the program does nothing for people struggling to stay in the middle class. The state's child care subsidy program has not adequately met the need. According to The Michigan League for Public Policy since 2005, the number of low-income Michigan parents receiving publicly subsidized care has dropped by two-thirds, from nearly 65,000 to only 22,000. Total child care spending fell from \$479 million in 2005 to just \$136 million in 2014—a reduction of over 70%.

### *Schools*

Black parents have unique issues that are in both public and private institutions and urban and suburban schools. A paramount issue mothers speak about is the school to prison pipeline. Some say it begins with the criminalization of learning and cognitive disabilities. More and more children are being labelled with oppositional defiance.

Parents of color with access to transportation and resources often leave Detroit to afford their children greater educational opportunities, but still face unexpected problems. Black children more likely to be labeled with a disability, are less likely to do well on standardized tests and are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school.

The data gathered about black women and girls in Michigan and across the country is largely negative. What we need to truly understand the black community is culturally competent asset mapping. This tool would not only illuminate the lives of black families, it would also bring about more culturally competent policy that would better address the needs of the community.

I look at the faces of Black women every day. I see their pain and wonder, what can we collectively contribute to reduce their stress? I hear them say, “I’m good!” But I know they are hurting. I hear them ponder: “Why Am I Here”. How can they overcome the systems that keep them weighed down so low? Their energy is snatched from them, yet we expect them to thrive, how?

Census data show that 25% of the African American workers in our region rely on public transportation to get to work, the second highest proportion of any major region in the country. Black women want to work but how can they get there? Public bus and rail transportation is significantly reduced or none existent in the neighborhood where Black women live. Cutbacks in transit service will have disproportionately negative impacts on the ability of African American Women to obtain and retain jobs.

Black women in Pittsburgh have the lowest life expectancy in the United States in spite of an impressive health care infrastructure in the city. Many Black women in Pittsburgh forego health care due to cost. They may need to see a doctor, but don’t make an appointment because they just cannot afford the visit.

Poverty too presents a challenge for African American families, and particularly our children. Nearly half of all African American children in Pittsburgh are poor and over half of African American children under age 5 live in households with income below the poverty line. Black babies too are more than twice as likely as white babies to die before the age of 1. Here in Pittsburgh, the infant mortality rate is five times the national average (New York Times: Tackling Infant Mortality Rates among Blacks by Timothy Williams, Oct 2011.)

And finally, domestic violence presents a very real danger to the lives of Black women in Pittsburgh. Ka'Sandra Wade, for example, was a young Pittsburgh woman who was found slain less than a day after she called 911 last New Year's Eve. Two officers were dispatched to her apartment and left after speaking with her boyfriend. He later admitted to killing her and then committed suicide. The day before, a 20-year-old man killed his girlfriend and their unborn child. He had threatened twice to shoot her and then himself, but no preventive action was taken. We must do more to protect the lives of Black women.

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- <sup>19</sup> <http://www.highbrowmagazine.com/4411-midterm-elections-what-issues-are-most-important-african-american-women-voters>
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