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WEBINAR

HOW WILL BLACK VOTERS INFLUENCE THE 2020 ELECTION?

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. COATES: Good afternoon, everyone. And I am so excited to be here today moderating this very exciting panel between so many thought-provoking thought leaders today as part of the Brookings Institution's Policy 2020 discussions.

And today is a day like no other. We are the day after a monumental presidential debate, the first one really of its kind, certainly in this particular cycle, but in so many ways the first one of its kind in general. It left people with their jaws to their chests and their eyebrows raised and a lot of questions still left unanswered. And for many people tuning in today, they're wondering what these individuals thought about the debate, but, more broadly, about what the role that Black voters will have in this upcoming election.

About 30 or so days away from now there'll be an opportunity for people to cast their votes if they have not already done so or in a state where you can do so early, and they will actually have a hand in this democratic process the way it's intended to be. But the question is, in a world where we're often hearing about the coveted so-called Black vote, we're aware that it's not a monolith. We are more than aware that there are so many nuances and facets to every single human being, let alone the experiences quite varied among African Americans in this country. And yet still, we know the power collectively of Black voters in this country.

So, the real question for everyone today is, how will Black voters influence the 2020 election? And I'm going to begin by introducing this panel, this very highly esteemed panel. And I'm telling you right now, I will not be able to give justice to each and every one of these individuals' extraordinary biographies. I encourage you to read more about them on the Brookings website, as well, to get more information about their wholistic professional journey. But I will introduce them now to you and will invite them into the conversation.

We'll begin here with Andre Perry, who we see on the screen, as well. He is a fellow in the Metropolitan Policy at Brookings, a scholar in residence at American University, and a columnist for The Hechinger Report. He is the author of the new book, "Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Property in America's Black Cities." His recent scholarship at Brookings has included the analysis of Black majority cities and institutions in America, focusing on valuable assets worthy of increased

investment.

We're also joined by Ian Rowe, who is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where he focuses on education and upward mobility, family formation, and adoption. He is also the co-founder of Vertex Partnership Academies, a new network of character-based international baccalaureate high schools opening in the Bronx in 2022; the chairman of the board of Spence-Chapin, a nonprofit adoption service; and also a senior visiting fellow at the Woodson Center; and writer for the 1776 Unites campaign.

Rashawn Ray, he is a David M. Rubenstein fellow joining us here and he is a professor of sociology and executive director for the Lab for Applied Social Science Research at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is one of the co-editors of *Contexts* magazine, sociology for the public.

And last but not least, Chryl Laird, who is an assistant professor of government and legal studies at Bowdoin College. And she has taught courses including race, ethnicity, and politics; urban politics; women of color in politics; and public opinion and voting.

A formidable lineup that we have here and one that I am excited to hear from today. I know you all are, as well.

A couple housekeeping reminders. If I can remind you, this is meant to be a shared platform. You will have an opportunity to weigh in. Many of you have already given questions in advance, but you'll have an opportunity to do so, as well. Just join the conversation either by emailing events@brookings.edu or use Twitter and use the hashtag #Policy2020.

So, without further ado, because I am waiting on baited breath to hear from each and every one with you, let me begin with the question on the tip of everyone's tongue right now, and that is what did you make of this experience we all had last night that was called a presidential debate? What were your immediate takeaways before we launch into a discussion about how Black voters in general will influence the upcoming election?

Let me begin with you, Chryl, because you were the last to be introduced. I'd love to hear from you. What was your thought about what you experienced last night?

MS. LAIRD: It was an experience, I'll say that. You know, I think one of the things that became clear in this debate is that the president is struggling to make an argument about what he is

doing and what he plans to do going forward with an economy that has been affected by COVID-19. And so his response to this has been one in which he has kind of decidedly gone about trying to not explicitly speak about the pandemic that we're dealing with. Right?

And so what does that mean. Well, that means then that now when you are being confronted with questions about the amount of people who have died because of COVID-19, the impact it's had on the economy, he seemed to be struggling, and so he was on the defensive significantly. I think he was dealing with difficulties of trying to articulate exactly what he plans to do going forward. And I think Biden was able to, at least in the moments when you could hear him, put out where he is in his policy position and how he differentiates himself from the president. But a lot of it was just listening to the President go back and forth about where he thought people were saying things that were incorrect about him or wrong about him, but not necessarily putting forth clear directives on what he's going to do.

And for something like this, where a debate is supposed to be really appealing to potentially undecided voters or people who want to become more informed about the candidates, I am not sure that you became any more informed about the president from what was being said in this debate except that he seemed to be quite upset and that he seemed to be very defensive about what it is that he has done and also not very clear about what he is going to do.

MS. COATES: Ian, what were your thoughts on the president's debate last night between himself and Vice President Joe Biden?

MR. ROWE: Yeah, thank you, Laura, and thanks for the opportunity to participate in this great, hopefully true debate. Because I think what we saw last night wasn't a debate. It's actually hard to describe what it was.

But I agree with Chryl in that it was seemingly more about grievance than it was laying out a vision for what the country would get if it's another four years for President Trump, and Joe Biden was trying to. And I think neither really had an opportunity to articulate for the entire country, but explicitly for Black people, what is it that we're going to get over the next four years?

We know that this next presidency is a one-term presidency. Right? Biden has already said that. And in my old life, I was at MTV, running our Choose or Lose campaign back in 2008. And I remember a quote that Barack Obama said on Super Tuesday. And he said, "Change will not come if we

wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

And I've always found that empowering because no group of people can be totally free if you place your destiny in the hands of others, especially if you think it was the others who are holding you down in the first place.

And so I think that's really important because after watching that debacle last night, not debate, no matter your politics, you know, in my view, last night was a disaster. And I think for in the Black community, we have to think about how do we hold whomever is elected accountable? And how do we control our destiny to make sure they support the things that we believe can actually advance our community?

MS. COATES: Well, Rashawn, I'd love for you to weigh in on what you took from that debate last night. And, of course, we do have a 3,000-pound elephant in the room of the President rather than condemning White supremacy, issued a command, a directive of sorts, that sounds like, "Stand back and stand by." What were your takeaways?

MR. RAY: Well, Laura, that's exactly right. It's so exciting to have you here at Brookings moderating this event and being here with the others.

I mean, I think one of your colleagues on CNN, Jake Tapper, said it best. He had the quote of the night for me. He said that the debate was "a hot mess inside of a dumpster fire inside of a train wreck." (Laughter) And that's literally how I think about the debate. I mean, it was devoid of policy. Chris Wallace, who is typically very good at being able to maintain a certain type of order or at least be respected and garner that particular deference, that did not happen last night.

And then to your point, Trump literally sent not just a dog whistle, but a loud bullhorn, as you've heard me say on your show, to the Proud Boys, shouting loudly about stand by. Right? We're going to ride. Like that's what I heard. It's like it's time for my boys to ride if something happens.

And I also think about the pause that happened before that when Chris Wallace asked Trump directly will you denounce white supremacy? Trump paused. That was literally the only time during the debate where he seemed to be stumped for words. And it speaks to who we are dealing with in this moment.

You know, I mean, you've heard me say this before, Laura. I love the Denny Green quote that people are who we thought they were. And Trump showed that last night in that moment where he had an opportunity to come out and denounce White supremacy, but instead he literally called out the Proud Boys, who is very reminiscent of what happened a few years ago when other White supremacists came out from the South in particular who were really saying, look, Trump is our guy. He is the person who is going to help us get to the White House. And we see this type of dog whistle rhetoric and a lot of bullhorns from Trump once again.

MS. COATES: Andre, I'd love to hear your thoughts on what happened at the debate last night, although I have to agree with my colleague, Ian, that perhaps we shouldn't be calling it a debate, but maybe debacle is far more of an applicable term here. But even that sounds generous.

MR. PERRY: Well, I will say this, that we should take his words seriously. Too often we dismiss, particularly Trump, his words as a distraction. Remember early on people said that his words are more of a distraction than substantive. But rhetoric is a preview into policy. And if there was any question about the policies and whether or not they are positive for Black Americans, you got a glimpse of what is the motivation behind them.

And so for me, while I was certainly disgusted, appalled, but not surprised by all of his rhetoric, it made clear what his policies, and we'll talk about them a little bit later on, but it made clear that many of his policies that he touts that is beneficial for Black Americans are really not; that it's more of a cover for his true intentions in that he does not care about Black people. He is violent towards Black people during a segment where you're talking about violence in urban America. He actually displayed it on stage, put it on full blast.

And so now we see the source of many of the problems in Black America: a policymaker that is racist and angry and unhinged.

MS. COATES: So, I want to go right to that particular aspect that you mentioned, the idea of rhetoric as policy. Because so often people compartmentalize the things that elected officials say either on the campaign trail or even on a legislative floor. And they say, oh, no, don't take that literally. Here's what they really meant. And they almost search with these microscopes looking for some semblance of a hidden message or a silver lining. And oftentimes, we want people to actually understand

what they're saying and hear what they've actually said.

And each of you specializes in fields that really speak about the intersectionality of so many things. The idea of understanding that you can't have a discussion simply about race or the influence of Black voters or COVID-19 or housing or the economy or any issue in a vacuum because we have all of this intersectionality here. And I'm wondering from each of you if you could help us to understand from your perspective what are those policies that you find the most impactful or the one that will be most influential in bringing Black voters back to the polls, to have people feel as though the rhetoric they're hearing and the policies that have been implemented or even oftentimes reversed will have the biggest influence on their day-to-day lives?

I'll start with you, Ian. You're nodding your head. Do you have an idea in your mind about what is that sort of policy position or area that you think is the most impactful or influential for Black voters?

MR. ROWE: Right. So, thanks for the question.

So, first of all, I run schools. Right? So, I'm always going to go straight to education. But you're right, the rhetoric, especially in an election year, right, because once again the Black vote is up for grabs, Republicans and Democrats. There's a lot of pandering. Somebody wins, but the governing doesn't seem to actually reflect the rhetoric that we all have heard. Right?

And so my thing is how do we use this power? How do we hold -- how does the Black community hold the next President, again, who's only in there for one term, and future Presidents accountable, right? I would submit that as a country we are going through this national reckoning on race, but it's equally important for us as a Black community to have our own real debate about what are the policies going forward? Right?

So, you could say right now within the Black community there's a real discussion around the original vision of America. Were the founding ideals false when they were written? Is anti-racist or anti-Black racism in the DNA of the country? Or are the founding ideals of faith, family, free enterprise, hard work, are those things that the Black community should embrace to move from persecution to prosperity?

And then that goes to what are we teaching the next generation? Should parents have

the ability to choose the schools that would teach them the history of America and the opportunities for young Black people in our country?

And so, for me, everything starts with education. Everything starts with the power of an individual parent, the 2,000 parents that I led in the South Bronx, who want the best for their child. And they know their child is going to face racial discrimination in their life, but they're in communities where the schools have not worked for them. So do we agree that choice in education should be a key policy? And for me, that's the kind of thing where we want to hold the next president accountable to ensure every low-income parent, regardless of race or class, has the power to choose a great public school for their child.

MS. COATES: I see your arm was writing a lot, Rashawn. I know what that means. The sociologist is saying we're talking about education. Let's educate the public, as well, about the history of America. So, Rashawn, what is your take on what you see as one of the issues or the policy proposals or initiatives that you think really are illustrative of what is most important to Black voters?

MR. RAY: Well, I mean, I think obviously it's race relations more broadly. And Chris Wallace did have a segment where he asked a series of poignant questions, not only the why should people trust you as it relates to race, and the hearing Trump's response.

But I think the other part of this is about representation. So, one of the big things that Trump touts is what he's done with federal judges. And, of course, when you look at this compared to other places, of course he's making up a large percentage of federal judges. Obama would have been able to potentially do more except for he had more federal judges blocked by the Senate than I think all U.S. Presidents combined before him. So that representation matters.

Only about 4 percent of all of Trump's federal judges have been Black. And I think as much as he likes to make this statement where he says I've done more for Black people, potentially even more than Abraham Lincoln, than any other President, we didn't see a lot of that.

I think obviously policing and wealth are two other big issues that Black people care about. Black people want to know -- and, of course, we cannot outclass racism. Supposedly, our status and class does something to reduce our exposure and at times it can heighten it. And what Black people expected to hear was support for Black Lives Matter. They expected to hear that, yes, there are racial disparities in policing, but there are things that we can do about it and this is what I think. But instead,

Biden doubled down on a bad apples narrative. Trump didn't even really bring that up at all. That was kind of when he just kept barking on about law and order.

But then when it comes to wealth, it's Black people knowing that some of the things that's happened, particularly during COVID, with the fact that we haven't been able to get PPP funding in the same way, the fact that Black small businesses have overwhelmingly closed during COVID-19, we expected to hear responses to those things about investments in our community. And instead, we heard nothing about that. That, honestly, on either side of the aisle, whether they be Republicans or Democrats, didn't do a good job of encouraging those Black people who are sitting on the sidelines right now thinking about whether or not they want to vote.

MS. COATES: I mean, Rashawn, did you want them to have a debate about substantive issues? Is that what you're alluding to? (Laughter) I'm not sure what TV program or subscription you were reading, but I thought we were at a UFC fight. We were in the Octagon for some reason. But I'm glad you have expectations and hopes. That's wonderful.

Andre, I saw you nodding along there. And, of course, speaking about the ideas of wealth, I mean, you're somebody who has studied a great deal about the valuation of life, about wealth, about intergenerational wealth, about the ideas of the influence of the economy, particularly on Black Americans. What do you see as the critical issue that you would have liked them to focus on as opposed to what we saw and going forward?

MR. PERRY: Yeah. I'll name a few policies that I thought that Trump really revealed his intention. Since ACA, better known as Obamacare, the insurance coverage gap has shrunk. But you saw that Trump basically doubled down on reversing Obamacare, eliminating the benefits packages that we enjoy currently.

And by the way, when you talk about debt and bad debt, a debt that is not collateralized, Black people have a higher percentage of that bad debt. So, ACA would reduce -- or a reduction in ACA would reduce the amount of wealth in the Black community.

Let's talk about Opportunity Zones. He touts that as being a boon for Black America. But as it has gone thus far, it has mainly been a boon for the real estate industry because if you invest in place or brick-and-mortar and not people, you essentially price people out of their communities.

And let's talk about the Tax Cuts and Job Act of 2017. According to the Center for Public Integrity, that law will actually increase taxes for American households making below 30,000. Now, that's not inherently racist, but Black people are disproportionately poorer than everyone else, so that tax bill will actually hurt Black people in the long run.

And on education, by the way, he talks a big game, a good game about choice and its benefits, but you really see his motivation behind choice and his Choice Neighborhoods program basically saying we're going to protect suburban White folks from urban people coming in.

So, again, there were significant policy issues on the table and I actually think he just revealed his true intentions.

MS. COATES: So, Chryl, I mean, when you think about that, the intention, and looking -- you know, obviously you are somebody who has taught many courses about the intersectionality and also the idea of race and ethnicity in politics and their relation to one another. And these gentlemen have outlined, and I know you have one, as well, have outlined really a broad spectrum of issues that are relevant to the Black community, but also in general to people who are living and breathing in the United States of America. And yet race and its correlation to politics still oftentimes is an area that politicians don't get right. They don't know somehow how to either capitalize or implement the things that are needed.

When you look at just the range of issues just mentioned today briefly, what do you see as a critical component to having these things realized on the political stage?

MS. LAIRD: I mean, I think for it to be realized, one, is for people to speak them like out loud. Like, they need to be able to discuss them and have very solid policy discussions around how they're going to address these issues. Because I think the COVID-19 issue is one that cannot be underestimated. Like, all of the issues that have been raised by Rashawn and Ian and Andre all point back to what we are dealing with right now in the pandemic. Right?

A recent report that came out from Robert Wood Johnson and NPR on the public health did a survey just to ask households about what they're finding in terms of what's happening because of COVID and they say that more than 60 percent of households with children in the United States report serious financial problems, including struggle with medical care and depletion of household savings and

credit cards and debts, and that Black and Latino households with children bear the brunt of those hardships. And of Latino households, 86 responded that they're -- 86 percent said they're dealing with difficulties; 66 percent of Black households said that they're dealing with difficulties.

So, in addressing any of these things a clear response to how the pandemic is going to be addressed, how they are going to deal with the inequality that is happening as a consequence of the pandemic, that is being exacerbated because of the pandemic. And so people have to be very comfortable to have these discussions and become very aware of how these are having different impacts to different communities.

And I think the fear of being seen as racist, the fear of being seen as racially insensitive, the fear of stepping on the wrong thing or saying the wrong thing is going to make people more likely to avoid those conversations, but it is essential for us to actually be able to get any groundwork. Because for the issue of education, for instance, I mean, you're dealing with it right now, I'm dealing with it. Like, your children are at home. If you are a woman of color, this is particularly challenging at this moment. And no one is speaking to what impact that's having on the economics of households of color where women are often the matriarchs in those households, carry the household in terms of the financial stability and are now dealing with losses, promotional opportunities that will be lost, job opportunities that will be lost, homelessness, evictions.

The stability of our economy is key and people aren't really having that conversation. And I think that was exhibited in that debate, as well, that it just wasn't on the table. But people are struggling and it's a large amount of people. And I think there is a distance that is between right now the White House and the administration and their true depth of understanding of how important that is and how much that needs to be realized in these conversations because it is our day-to-day impact.

MS. COATES: So, on that notion, I mean, the idea of -- and I want you to weigh in, Ian, on this, as well, and all of you, in fact, is this idea of we know that in order to even get to statements like Black Lives Matter, livelihoods need to be considered. The idea of actual breath, respiration, the idea of being able to thrive, to have even a prospective trajectory, all of these things are part of the discussion we're talking about, what's important for people.

And so I'm wondering, well, given the climate that we're in right now, whether it be social

justice or political or a combination of both, including, of course, the pandemic that has exacerbated and exploited existing vulnerabilities within our system, has highlighted all of the existing inequities that have been a part, frankly, of the American so-called dream for so long, has any of this had an impact on people's likelihood to turn out to vote? Because we can talk about changing things. We can talk about a policy being implemented. We can talk about a disconnect in Washington, D.C., with other parts of the country. However, if people are not inspired to vote or simply don't do it, then where are we?

So, do you see these issues, everyone, I'll start with you, Ian, as an opportunity for people, a galvanizing opportunity? Or is this still not enough for people to understand the power of their vote?

MR. ROWE: Right. I mean, it's hard to fathom how people could not think that their vote matters given the current context. I mean, just take one data point that I know many of us know. The average wealth of the average White family is approximately 10 times that of the average Black family. Right? That is a massive difference. And neither candidate last night talked about how are we going to address that? What are the kinds of policies, investments that are going to change that situation?

And so, for me, in the absence of leadership coming from these two candidates, what's the role of we as a Black community to have our own internal debate? If that is not happening at that level, maybe the debate needs to happen and we need to inform the leadership what are the ideas.

So, again, for example, for some people they look at that gap and they say it's so huge, it is evidence of the history of racial oppression in this country, and there's no other solution than reparations to descendants of Black slaves to solve that problem. Others take a look at that same data and say, well, actually if you take into account things like family structure, then that relationship is reversed where the average Black married, two-parent household has nearly twice the wealth of the average White, single parent household.

Okay. So, that means maybe there are factors outside of race that are within our control. And so what set of policies should go down that path?

And for me, we as a Black community should take ownership of those issues, not get frustrated by the fact that these leaders and potential leaders aren't talking about it. What is it that we believe? Let's have that W.E.B. Du Bois versus Booker T. Washington type engagement about what is

our path forward? Because that should then inform the people who are advocating to lead our country.

MS. COATES: Rashawn Ray, I'd love to hear from you on this because you think about the idea of it often seems that there's no shortage of conversation. There often can be a shortage of action. And that even when there's conversation, unless the recipients of the information are in a position of power, you are spinning your wheels. And here we are at a critical election point where the conversations that Ian is speaking about certainly need to happen, but we are, for many people, thinking about, well, who is the audience? And is there an opportunity for the conversation to translate into action?

And we, of course, know on the Democratic side there is an opportunity for an African-American woman to be at the helm in the Vice President role. Will that have an impact, do you think, in the way that Ian's speaking about, about these sort of internal conversations getting to the level where they to and in the rooms where it happens? And will this be a galvanizing thing for Black voters to return in a way they didn't show up necessarily in 2016 as in prior years when President Obama was on the ticket?

MR. RAY: I mean, I think that's a great question and I think the jury is out on that. And I think in particular the jury is probably going to be in the mailbox. Because the way that Trump has attacked the United States Postal Service is something that is not only detrimental to this election and also down ballot elections, not just the presidential election, but it's also a detriment to Black jobs, to Latino jobs, to jobs for veterans. I mean, the United States Postal Service really fulfills that void and it is one of the few bipartisan, really nonpartisan issues across the board for Democrats or Republicans because they value what USPS brings to the table.

I think your point about what Kamala Harris is going to do, I think it's going to be interesting. I think it could bring some people out, but I still don't think that people were as enthusiastic about her as potentially the Biden campaign had hoped for. But I definitely don't think it's going to stop people from going out to the polls.

And we definitely know that when Obama ran, that Black voter turnout was just as high, if not higher, than for Whites. But it's important to note that in a normal election season that Black voter turnout is still higher than Latinos and Asians.

And also, I tend to think that if it wasn't for voter suppression tactics, such as voter ID laws, such as removing polling places, really doing things the day of the election that makes it difficult for people to vote, that we would see an even higher number. So, I'm worried about voter suppression tactics at this particular time. But we definitely have to state that Black people's voter turnout is much higher than people think. Should it be higher? Of course. But we can't sit up here and act as though there aren't real barriers to doing that.

At the end of the day, we have to be the change. We have to be sitting at the table. And part of that means building a farm team at the local and state level that then builds up to the federal level. And I do think that there is a lot of mobilization for that in states that are purple, whether that be Georgia, whether that be Texas, whether that be North Carolina. I think we're going to start to see shifts at a local level in who's running for City Council, who's running for the House of Delegates, who's running for the State Senate that will start to make up a viable representation of Black politicians and then the Black electorate, as well.

MS. COATES: You know, Chryl, I see you want to weight in and I'd love to hear from you. And I'm thinking when you were talking, Rashawn, one, I'd love for you, Chryl, to weigh in on whether you think that he's accurate about the level of excitement towards Senator Kamala Harris was not as high as the Biden campaign hoped and what impact that might have on voters.

And also, I remember from the debate last night as one talking point President Trump went after Joe Biden and President Obama by saying, look, you left me with all of these open judicial vacancies here. You just left them for me, a hundred or more of them, without realizing, of course, that he didn't leave them open. The last two years of President Obama's administration, he had a Republican Senate majority and that blocked the confirmation process Rashawn talked about for more than -- a higher number than the last six decades combined.

And so you got this idea now of saying, well, hold on. It's not that people aren't turning out to vote perhaps because there is some slough involved or electoral fatigue. There are actually suppressive tactics that are being used. And with the gutting of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Department of Justice can no longer offer the pre-clearance that they need to provide to jurisdictions with a history of systemic oppression in their jurisdictions at the polls.

So, Chryl, I'd love for you to weigh in on what Rashawn Ray had to say and generally about the idea of what it's going to take for people to be internally motivated to vote, but also to be able to actually perform the function of voting in spite of the suppression.

MS. LAIRD: Sure. And, I mean, this is something that the Black community and other communities of color are up against all the time and have been historically. Right? So, in recent work that I had come out, a book called "Steadfast Democrats," we talk about this with partisan mobilization and particularly the partisan norm of Democratic voting within the Black community. Right? And that a lot of that is very much dependent on these social networks of communities? Right?

And so I think that that is one of the big areas for how mobilization would be effective. Because we can't compare it to the Obama years, right? Obama in 2008 and 2012 are unique. They are varied. They would be outliers. If we were analyzing this in a data set, you would basically check it out of the data because it would be drawing all of your numbers weird ways and so it wouldn't make sense with your outcomes. Right? So, Obama's election is a very unique circumstance.

So, really we need to be comparing to 2016 and 2004. And what Biden's campaign is going to want to do is to try to at least exceed the numbers that Clinton received in 2016, but under no way, even with Harris on the ticket, should they ever be expecting that they would be able to get the 2008 and 2012 numbers because of the historic nature of what that was.

However, they really need to lean heavily into the local social networks and the things going on on the ground because when you have basically eradication of a lot of the VRA with the pre-clearances, right, this makes it very susceptible for these suppressive tactics to be effective. Right? That it's going to lead to people maybe being confused about Election Day or people viewing efforts to make polling places very inaccessible. The lack of polling machines being easily (inaudible) long lines. Right?

But, again, I think what's great for the Black community and great in a sad way is that we have been here before. So, it is not as if there isn't an apparatus in place. I think, again, the pandemic presents a bigger challenge here. Because typically, the churches and the Black institutions and the Black spaces that would have very important for serving as the thing that would help to deal with the mobilization problem, right, that would help to get people more excited with participating within the election, right, is lacking a lot.

And people are under extreme stress, like very high levels of stress. And so how is that going to play out would rely on the campaign really investing in that.

And I think in 2016, from the reporting that I heard, especially in some of the states that were key for the electoral college losses for Clinton, that is what Black communities were saying, is that they did not feel like the Clinton team had an apparatus on the ground that was really doing that work.

And to the point of those conversations and the Black community about the politics, I would push back a little bit and say I do think that they're happening. And, you know, Melissa Harris-Perry has a book, "Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought." And in that she writes about the everyday conversations in the Black community around what people want. Right? And that those collectives really matter for understanding the diversity of the Black community, the ideological beliefs of the Black community, the various perspectives of how do we get an end to what we want. Like what do we see happening and what does that manifest into?

It may not always be coming from elite structures. And so I think people have to become much more comfortable listening and forming (inaudible) --

MS. COATES: Chryl, your screen paused for a second and I'm -- you paused for a second, Chryl.

MS. LAIRD: -- because really you are mobilization.

MS. COATES: We lost a little bit of what you said at the very end. But every moment that we were able to hear you is profoundly poignant.

And I want to Andre respond. Particularly I saw you nodding your head and the idea of the existing apparatuses. The idea that we have a sense of political déjà vu. Sad as it may be, we have been here before where Black voters have been contemplating which candidate will provide them with the most opportunities for racial justice, the ideas of economic equality, the ideas of healthcare, of education, all of these issues, not the least of which on the backdrop against a pandemic.

How is it and how can politicians right now who are looking to hear from, to galvanize, who covet the so-called Black vote, how did they miss the conversations that we're all talking about are very pervasive? And how do they actually use the conversation to not only make the promises that are needed, but actually follow through?

MR. PERRY: You know, I just really want us to remove this myth, this White supremacist myth, that states the conditions of the Black electorate, the Black cities, Black neighborhoods are a direct result of Black people. We saw on yesterday's stage the extent to which the Republican Party will suppress the Black vote.

So, we do have Black agendas. Every time I look up there is a Black agenda, and it is diverse. We can talk about education and the splits in that. We can talk about healthcare. We can talk about maternal mortality and those issues. We have concrete policy solutions and they are extinguished by people like Donald Trump.

But when we have these conversations, someone always says, well, we have to come together. I mean, that is not true. And we have the apparatuses. We have the political will. We have the motivation. We do not have politicians that value our lives. And that was on pure display last night on both parties, more so on Donald Trump, but there were too many misses from Biden, too many opportunities --

MR. ROWE: I agree.

MR. PERRY: -- to say enough. Enough. And he did not. And I don't think that's because of age or he wasn't prepped or he was "I'm shocked by the situation." It's because we are overlooked.

So, I just really believe that we've got to stop this myth that we don't have an agenda, we don't have conversations, we don't have structure. No.

And just I'll point out, when John Bel Edwards in Louisiana was losing to the Trump-supported candidate, guess who got John Bel Edwards elected. Black women. When you talk about the special election in Alabama, guess who got Doug Jones elected? Black women. When you talk about the suppression in Georgia, you know Stacey Abrams should have won. And including Florida.

This is not about us. And we need to stop this rhetoric because it's false. It's a lie and we need to stop it.

MS. COATES: So, Rashawn, what do we do? I mean, and obviously the idea of Black women being thought of last, I mean, you can think about the feminist versus the womanist movement. You can just look at a prime example of more than 195 days went by -- 194 days went by before there

was an announcement not to prosecute somebody for killing a Black woman, but we will prosecute for shooting at a wall because the idea of the prospective loss of life is far greater than the actual loss of life in certain areas of our country.

And when I think about this, Rashawn, and the idea that Andre is accurate, of course, and the idea that it's not for want of a plan. It's not for a coming together to figure out, gee, I wonder what we'd like out of this life. I wonder what it is, you know, we should strive for. What is this American dream people are saying? We'll have to think about it on our own and then we'll have a chance to come together.

When it's about not having -- I think I'm paraphrasing what Andre was saying -- when it's about not having a receptive ear or audience or people who want to patronize and condescend as opposed to implement and provide, what are voters to do? Because my concern is, and I think we're listing them, my concern would be, does that realization that it's not me, it's you undermine people's willingness to vote? I certainly hope it doesn't. I certainly hope it still creates an opportunity for people to turn out because it still is very critical.

What do you think, Rashawn?

MR. RAY: Yeah. I mean, I hope that it doesn't either. And this is why I think this might be an election where people can latch on to local candidates. I have heard more Black people across the country, and I've lived heard people across the country talking about local candidates in a way that I have not heard them before.

So, this is one of those elections where we might see local contributes to the federal. People might come out for a local candidate and then end up voting for president, right, because they're in the ballot box, so they have the ballot and they're going to vote their way. Whereas previously, people would be voting for the president and then just go downstream and just unilaterally vote for Democrats or Republicans.

I also think in the presidency, at the end of the day, is diverse. as the presidential candidates -- well, on the Democratic side anyway -- started, and all of us remember the level of excitement about all the various candidates and, of course, Kamala Harris was part of the ticket, but talking about the two presidents, that oftentimes it's which candidate will be least racist instead of which

candidate will provide the biggest path towards racial equity? And we still have that same fundamental question.

Like last night, both candidates -- and granted, I mean, Trump, to Andre's point, Trump was so outlandish with his rhetoric and the rhetoric matters for what becomes policy. And we've seen that from Trump. For example, his Executive Order about bias trainings, which I do a lot of those. So, I'm like, oh, okay, so now all the work that I've done with the Department of Homeland Security -- and I've been telling people this and, Laura, we've even had this conversation -- that that was something that had already been in place before. And then just earlier this week, he sent a memo to government employees saying these are things you should not do. There will be consequences for those.

And then he had the nerve to call people who think about critical race theory, people who embrace racial equity or bias training, he called them racists last night, which means he was calling me a racist. And I'm definitely not a racist. But one of those things is -- that was one of the things that he was doing.

I think the other thing, and this is where Biden and Kamala Harris get into trouble is because both of them have this very sketchy record with Black people on policing. And there are two big things -- well, three if we include healthcare, we include the economy, we include policemen -- that Black people, a lot of Black people and a lot of allies, White allies and what I all racial equity advocates, have been talking about defund the police. Trump and Biden last night once again said that's a non-starter for me. That's a problem for a lot of people. Kamala Harris' record in California doesn't help with that.

So, one of the main issues that people have -- and to Trump's point, I mean, Trump and his platinum plan, I mean, he just acted like all Black people just want to put on a platinum chain and then everything's going to be all right with his \$500 billion plan, despite the fact that Black people have \$1.2 trillion of spending power every single year. That doesn't equate and Black people are smart and know that.

Black people are also diverse. But at the bottom line, what we care about is what everybody else cares about, that when our kids leave out to go to school or work or play with their friends, that they will come home to us safely; that when we go to work that we will be given a fair wage for the work that we do.

And, unfortunately, neither candidate last night -- partly because, to Ian's point, it was just a debacle. And I expected that, I had my popcorn ready. (Laughter) But the point is that people who were coming to hear them for the first time, they did not hear anything that suggested that they should change what they are doing. But what I hope is that what's happening locally, and I think that this is going to happen, will get people out to the polls because they're understanding is just not a one trick pony at the federal level. I have to worry about my state legislature. I have to worry about my city council. I have to worry about my county council. And I can play a role, a direct role, in that process.

MS. COATES: You know, your statement dovetails perfectly to a question that we have from the audience about particularly those voters who may be voting for the first time or voters who are relatively young compared to the demographic range that politicians seek out among the electorate.

And the question is from Tina Fletcher at U. Penn. And I'd love for you to weigh in. I want you to weigh in first, Ian. I want to hear from you, as well. And that is, will young Black voters turn out this year given their vital role in this year's various racial justice protests and rallies? For example, those around the killing of George Floyd or Breonna Taylor.

I mean, Ian, you're somebody who is invested in education, with young people in particular. What do you see as the way to motivate these younger voters? Will they be more motivated? Will we see the same level of interest that we saw all across this summer in the turnout to the polls, as well?

MR. ROWE: Yeah. I mean, when I was at MTV running Choose or Lose, the way to mobilize young voters is to engage young voters on the issues that they care about. And so, unfortunately, again, last night we didn't see that, right, from either candidate. And my fear is that part of the reason that they aren't talking about these issues is that they take our vote for granted. They took the vote from young people for granted. They take the vote from Black people. Either I'm not going to get it or I'm going to get it. And so it's all about just the vote as opposed to the actual governing of the policies that actually improve outcomes over time.

And we have to -- and I hear Rashawn. I think there is a myth about the Black vote. Black people vote. We need to vote even more. Right? I mean, that's just the reality of it.

And the only way we can get on the agenda of these political leaders is that we

demonstrated that there are consequences if they are not actually adopting policies that advance the interests of the groups that they're advocating to lead. And so if young people are sitting on the fence right now, if you've been marching, if you've been protesting, if you've been looking at the protests in anger, whatever your political position, you forfeit your right to really criticize if you absent yourself from the very mechanism that you were given to have your voice be registered.

MS. COATES: And I'm going to paraphrase a couple. We got a couple of questions in advance from a number of people who participated by emailing to events@brookings.org, as well -- .edu, excuse me. Is it .org? Excuse me. That were also weighing in on this discussion. Dot-E-D-U, excuse me.

And I want to just compile a couple of them because the trend in the questioning was, and I'll ask you, Chryl, to weigh in on this in particular, and that was, is the focus on systemic or institutional racism a clever way to distract poor and middle-class people from the bigger issues of growing income inequality? Is this essentially a distraction tactic to avoid people from looking in the peripheral and a strategy by politicians? Should it be more focused on a wider variety of issues or do you think that people can walk and chew gum at the same time?

I want you to unmute. I want to make sure we hear everything you have to say.

MS. LAIRD: Sorry. We have noise in the background here a little bit. It was windy today.

So, I would say structural inequality is something that has to be talked about to talk about these other things. Like, you can't do one without the other. These are not two separate things, but are very intertwined. Right? Because historically, a scene that was brought up earlier from Ian and others, right, are around wealth inequality, about economic inequality, income inequality, gender inequality when it comes to income and wealth. I mean, like those things are key, especially when it comes to the African-American community because we are typically in a zero to negative wealth space. Right?

So, if you want to have these conversations then about their day-to-day experiences and what they're going on, you have to talk about them both. You have to be able to walk and chew gum because I don't think you can actually address these issues without recognizing the disproportional effects it has on certain communities over others and, also, what that impact has had generationally.

Right? So the intergenerational factors of how this gets passed on from one person to another is something that would have to be understood for one to then be able to address the policies and go back trying to understand what needs to be done.

And if that is not happening, right, then we can't really effectively be coming up with policies. Right? This goes into people making decisions better, kind of universal policies. What we find with universal policies is that if they are not specific, if they do not take into account what's going on for certain communities, then they don't really do the work.

The PPP is a perfect example. We put out a policy that says we're going to help business owners who are dealing with crises as a consequence of COVID-19, but then we do not think about how many businesses operated in communities of color do not have relationships with banks. Banks aren't even present in some of those neighborhoods. The startup money that was used to start up those businesses are often not coming through loans that are operated from banks or offered to these communities. And they aren't going to lend to them even through a federally sanctioned policy.

So, Black communities, Latino communities, and Asian communities did not receive that. So, those are your mom-and-pop shops. And suddenly, people who may be very middle class and stable economically are suddenly also now put into a status of being poor, are suddenly now put into a status of being low income and are struggling. And you have to do both. You cannot do one without the other.

People who are avoiding that, including the two people that we saw last night, right, really need to be willing to really engage that conversation. Because the avoidance isn't going to help them with the mobilization that is going to be needed.

MS. COATES: Our time is starting to wind up and it's gone by so fast, but we have some time obviously to continue the conversation. But I want to give each of you an opportunity to sort of weigh in collectively on this final point. I'm going to conflate a couple of the other questions here because the trend that people have sent out -- and we do appreciate everyone being a part of this, and use the hashtag #Policy2020 to have an ongoing conversation. And Brookings has a whole host of other programs that they've had in the past and prospectively going forward that address all these things.

And we can use the time we have over the next 30+ days to really prepare for the election, to be as informed and remember that, of course, democracy is not just in the voting, it's in the

counting, as well. So, you have to make sure that you are taking care of it from both ends.

But the general theme of some of the questions here has been essentially creating a clear demarcation from the things that we should be demanding prior to the election and then how to hold officials accountable after they have secured your vote. Is there a way for people to ensure the accountability and not just give away what can be the most coveted thing that people have every four years, which is their ability to check a box or go in and vote or fill out a ballot? How do you keep from giving that away and not divulging, you know, giving over your power, as well? How do you retain it and harness it effectively?

I want to begin with you, Andre, and then I want to hear from all of you.

MR. PERRY: Yeah. You know, one of the phrases I can't stand hearing when people say it is protest is nice, but policy, we need policy. That's the real -- that really matters. You know, protests and policy go hand-in-hand. There is no civil rights law on the books that did not come with protests and it should continue thereafter.

Certainly, wealth decreases our ability to hold politicians accountable because in the White community they do that by passing the buck to somebody else. When you don't have the discretionary income, you're less likely to use those resources to do it. So, protest is a viable way, not just marching in the streets, but you see organizations like Color of Change using economic protests as a means to hold people accountable. That has to continue alongside voting. They are not different things that -- in fact, voting is a form of protest.

And so, for me, yes, we need to push people in a direction to get them elected, but use those same tactics to hold them accountable when they're in office.

MS. COATES: Rashawn?

MR. RAY: Yeah. I mean, I agree. I think there are a series of things that happens after the election. I actually view elections like the pledge process. Like, people who are part of Greek organizations always say after you pledge, then the real work starts.

MR. PERRY: Right.

MR. RAY: I think that's what happens. Because part of what we actually have to do is we have to sign petitions. Color of Change is a great place. We need to show up to city council, county

council meetings. We need to go to our statehouse. We need to sit in on meetings, which are oftentimes open forums and public forums, even now virtually for us to be able to participate in and have our voice heard.

We need to call the offices of all of the people who we voted for. Honestly, even the people who we didn't vote for, but who won in our area. We need to hold them accountable, as well, because our taxpayer money is putting them where they are.

We also need to write to them. And oftentimes, when you hear politicians and they say, oh, I heard from my constituents, they're talking about the 10 to 20 people that called their office that day and showed up. They're not talking about a large number of people. So, you have the opportunity to make a big difference.

Last night we didn't hear the sort of -- and actually, I mean, we didn't hear a whole lot and I don't think a lot of us expected that. But moving forward we should expect to hear the candidates be able to translate what's on paper. Because we've got to be real, some of those documents they put together are well written. They didn't write them. Some of them, they don't even know what's in them.

So, when they get up and speak there's a disconnect between what people have read and what is written, but we do need to pay attention to who the staffers are. Staffers also tell us a lot about the diversity of the staffers. We know from the Obama and Biden administration that they had more minorities and more women than any other administration that we had had before. That is significant.

And so people have to realize that after your vote, that is when the person really, really earns your vote and you have to hold them accountable. And there are structured ways to do that in the political process.

MS. COATES: Ian, I'm being reminded of the idea that President Obama, when he made one of his first speeches, made the comment similar to what Rashawn is talking about, "For those of you who voted for me, thank you. For those of you who didn't, I'll get your vote and earn it next time." And so that's part of the idea of that bookend thing.

MR. ROWE: That's the idea.

MS. COATES: But what are your thoughts, Ian?

MR. ROWE: Yeah. Well, my thought, you know, obviously protest and policy and voting is critical and we have to hold people accountable. But one thing we also should encourage everyone, but especially in the Black community, that it's not all just about policy. How do we seize the opportunities that already exist?

So, for example, Harlem Capital is a new organization started by two Black Harvard Business School MBA graduates that they are creating a new venture fund to change the face of entrepreneurship where 1,000 -- they're going to be investing in 1,000 Black entrepreneurs, people of color and women, over the course of the next 5 to 10 years. Reed Hastings, the CEO of Netflix, just moved 2 percent of the capital of Netflix cash, \$100 million, to Black-owned financial institutions. So, that's going to, hopefully, stimulate a lot more investment loans.

And so I always want to encourage folks in the Black community let's seize the opportunities. Yes, we need to hold policymakers accountable, absolutely. But we have within our own ability self-betterment, self-renewal by embracing the ideals, particularly around entrepreneurship and starting small businesses. There are opportunities out there.

So, let's have the policy discussion, but, also, let's seize the opportunities that exist for our community.

MS. COATES: Do the work and get to the polls and we can have a very wholistic, full circle approach to it. I mean, it only seems fitting that we will end this by going full circle. Chryl, you began the conversation. Why don't you end with the final thoughts of what you see as a way to have accountability at the front and the back end in politics, to sort of have that wholistic approach to being a part of a republic?

MS. LAIRD: Yeah. So, first I would say I think Black people have actually mastered a lot of the art of holding elected officials accountable. And I say that because particularly when we look at, for instance, the Democratic partisanship of the Black community. That is a strategic decision that Black people are making with putting their collective weight behind a Democratic candidate in the federal election. It is one that people kind of have thought about and thought that was just this thing that Black people do. They don't really understand it. Black people just do that.

But in doing that, they have been able to have leverage in a system that typically doesn't

allow for the minority to have much say. Right? So, now they had to have a conversation about race last night. Like, even though it was a problematic conversation, for it to even be on the table, for us to have seen in the primaries discussions around reparations, for us to have to be talking about Black Lives Matter and Breonna Taylor, right, to have these discussions around George Floyd, like that is a signal in my mind that Black people are holding elected officials accountable.

Now, does that mean that that will manifest immediately into what we want? Not necessarily, but I think that that strategy has been one that has led to things in terms of opportunities to be in elected office, individuals being able to have seats at the table, to be able to shape policy in ways that historically we've often been denied.

So, I don't want to diminish that, because I think it is something that has been important and vital for African Americans to have a whole voice and citizenship within the participation and within this nation and the republic, and particularly that it's one that has been chased after very heavily to suppress. Right? People do so much to try to minimize that.

I think other ways where we hold people accountable is through things like demand protest strategy, as well as, you know, we have the midterms that come up. Right? It's not going to be easy as an executive to be able to put forth policy, even if Donald Trump was to be reelected, coming in the second term, if he loses the Senate and the House, right, with the House already being Democratic. And if he loses the Senate, then that is a situation where now he is in a divided government and his ability for him to be able to put forth policy becomes again a problem. Right?

So the midterms serve as another space where we can influence, let alone participating in protests, also contacting elected officials, and also running yourself. You know, I love the big upset that happened in Missouri, right, that went on there when we saw a more progressive candidate be able to come in. And Cori Bush is really going to be a person that is speaking to the issues that are going on, the Ferguson protesters and a long-time Black political family, right, saw themselves no longer being in the position to have influence because people wanted something different.

So, I think we are a community that frequently calls out people when they do things that we don't like. We are ones that hold people accountable regularly. And we just need to continue to do that and do that as much as we can because it has worked for us and it takes time.

MS. COATES: So well said. And all of you, I really enjoyed our conversation. We only scratched the surface, but I think we struck a vein and a chord with a lot of people. And there's so much more to be said about these issue, so please make sure that you realize, of course, you see my banner behind me, Election Day is the last day to vote, not the first. And every single minute you are breathing is an opportunity for you to inform yourself and to hold people accountable who asked for the honor of representing you.

Your choices should not be taken for granted. And your choice of party or candidate is not a coincidence or because you're following a herd. It should be because you believe that this candidate will represent you and they've asked for the opportunity.

And I always say to close, if you don't like what's on the ballot, then get on the ballot because you can be the change you want to see in the world, as well.

I want to thank Brookings for inviting me to moderate this phenomenal panel of people. Chryl Laird, Andre Perry, Ian Rowe, Rashawn Ray, thank you.

And remember, Election Day is coming. It's about 30 or so days away. I'm not going to tell you exactly. I want you to be motivated to go early because you don't know when it's happening. You have to make sure you vote. And when you do so, make sure you take the time to -- the way you track your pizza deliveries, you're tracking to make sure your vote got counted. If it has not been counted for some reason, if there is some hurdle in your path, don't be the person that suppresses your own vote. Take the time right now to understand what you need to do and formulate a plan.

Thank you to all of you for being a part of this and joining the discussion. Please remember to follow the hashtag #Policy2020. Look for Brookings to have more phenomenal programming. And of course, follow each of them on Twitter to make sure you never miss one of their wonderful discussions and dialogues and conversations. It's an opportunity to stay informed. So, thank you.

MR. ROWE: Thank you.

MS. LAIRD: Thanks for having me.

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