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WEBINAR

A POLICY AGENDA FOR BLACK AMERICANS IN 2022

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. BUSETTE: Good morning everybody. Thanks for joining us for this event on Black Policy Agenda for 2022. We are thrilled to have all of you here this morning. We're going to be talking about a variety of really interesting and important topics.

I wanted to start by saying that race has been central to the national conversation over the last two years, and of course this year it is continuing. It's been central to social, political, national security, economic discussions and action, and all of that has been happening against a backdrop of continuing racism, discrimination, police violence, and a yawning racial wealth gap, as well as a continuing pandemic that has been devastating for black families.

So we have a very meaty agenda today and we're going to be delving into a range of those issues, everything from the Supreme Court pick to the NFL.

So before we start, let me briefly introduce our panelists. We have Dr. Rashawn Ray, who is a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies. Dr. Keon Gilbert, who's a David L. Rubenstein Fellow in Governance Studies. Dr. Nicol Turner Lee, Senior Fellow and Director of Center for Technology Innovation in Governance Studies, and Dr. Andre Perry, Senior Fellow in the Metro program.

So we're going to get started with the news that President Biden will have the opportunity to nominate a black woman for the Supreme Court. There are several eminently qualified candidates, as we all know, and this moment is really interesting because this issue is highly political, it's highly gender, and in so many ways raises questions about employment equity and the importance of the judiciary in a very unequal and discriminatory U.S.

So, Rashawn, I'd like you to give us your thoughts about, you know, what does, you know, what does this particular moment, you know, the choice of a Supreme

Court pick, what does the national conversation on this choice tell us about the challenges and the opportunities of pursuing anti-race policies at the Federal level? So what's the importance of this pick to an overall discussion in the U.S.?

DR. RAY: Well, thanks, Camille, it's always great to be with you and our Brookings colleagues here. I can't wait to hear what all they have to say about a range of topics that we're going to discuss today.

So I think when it comes to this SCOTUS pick, there are a few side to this. First there is the political side, there's the racial side, and the intersectional side, race and gender, as you noted. And then the continuous and equitable side of society.

When it comes to the political side, we've been here before. If we go back to the 1980s, one of the things that was written in the Washington Post was about then President Ronald Reagan, who was striving to actually refute charges of his insensitive nature related to women's rights.

And of course there was some history here because previously Reagan had appointed three people to the State Supreme Court during his eight years of Governor of California, all of whom were men. So one of his kind of chief advisors said, this will be a quote "Good political move for you to nominate a woman." And of course that woman was Sandra Day O'Connor who was highly qualified and should have been in that position. And of course there should have been women in those positions before.

So accordingly that political side, we've been here before. We know that when it come to President Biden, that he's made a series of promises for black Americans and people who care deeply about racial equality. They talked about, they being Democrats primarily, even Republicans on this front talked about getting police reform done, the House did its job, Biden tried to push it. It never even came up in the Senate, it simply failed.

And then of course we have voting rights, which is yet to be something that

we see. And we also know that there was a recent Supreme Court decision about Alabama gerrymandering, so we're continuously seeing across the board the way that predominately black and also low income, and predominately Latino districts are being welded together across the country.

And then again, not to mention with gerrymandering, we know there are Republicans and Democrats engaged in that. But when it comes to certain states, particularly those in the south, we know that there is a track record there.

When it comes to the direct racial side, people, primarily some conservatives, are aiming to claim that this is not affirmative action hire. Now when people hear affirmative action, as a scholar when I hear affirmative action it's very much in line with the way that I think about Historian Ira Katz Nelson talked about it. Which the way that he framed it is that affirmative action consists of a set of policies and programs that seek to redress discrimination through active measures to ensure equal opportunity. Those active measures is part of what Biden is trying to do. But a lot of people, when they hear affirmative action, what they actually hear is oh, this is going to be a tokenized selection and this selection is under qualified.

Which when it comes to the Supreme Court selections that have been noted, at least in the media, we haven't heard much from the Biden Administration yet, but kind of the consensus front runner is Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson who is in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. Of course that is viewed as pretty much the elite status right behind SCOTUS in terms of that. And of course she was a former Brier clerk and also a Biden selection for that. I mean there are others as well that have been noted, such as California Supreme Court Justice Leondra Kruger.

And then also Michelle Childs, who is a big one because this person is being promoted out of South Carolina by Representative Clyburn, and we all know what

South Carolina has meant to President Biden. It could be argued without South Carolina and particularly black Democrats in South Carolina, he would not be President because during the primaries he had lost the previous two states and then went to South Carolina, won, and kept that going.

But see there's a broader framework here that's important. I just want to take two more minutes and highlight this.

When we talk about the Supreme Court pick, again it's the perception that these people are under qualified. And when you can look at their track records, and of course we could have listed a laundry list of names of specifically black women, noting that all of them are highly qualified for this selection. But it extends to other parts of the government as well.

Take Dr. Lisa Cook who is up for the Federal Reserve. She has been framed as being "Unqualified" by some Republications. When you look at her track record not only as an economics professor, but also her pedigree coming from Harvard, her time in Federal government. I mean the list could go on and on about how qualified she is.

And then of course with the Super Bowl upcoming I can't help but to mention what is happening in the NFL with Brian Flores. Of course he filed a discrimination lawsuit alleging that NFL teams were not trying to hire a black person. Kind of what was the backlash after that? Well, on one hand you have the Houston Texans which has one of the worse track records when it comes to race. They hired Lovie Smith, who was a former Chicago Bears Coach. And then you also have Mike McDaniels who was selected as the next Dolphins coach. Of course Brian Flores had that position previously. McDaniels is framed as being multi-racial. And it should be noted that the only rule in the NFL, which requires NFL teams to at least interview one minority candidate, that the team where that coach is coming from actually gets picked. So the 49ers got picks for the McDaniels hire.

Now I want to end this by quickly talking about affirmative action more broadly. When it come to affirmative action we know that in 1961 President Kennedy used affirmative action to say that we need to ensure that Federal contractors across race have an equitable opportunity to gain those contract. Affirmative action has helped black people and other minorities, but particularly has been important for increasing gender representation. But we know that it can quickly be reversed, like Proposition 209 in California, which was the affirmative action policy in California for higher education. That was removed in the 90s, and because of that not only did blacks and Latinos, not only were they less likely to go to the University of California system, their wages also suffered.

Researchers documented that by not getting that particular pedigree, their wages suffered. Why would that be the case? Well a recent study, recent sociological study showed that individuals coming from say Ivy League schools compared to state schools, where I've traditionally got all of my degrees, Indiana University and being a professor at the University of Maryland, that there is an Ivy League purchase with that, a level of currency. However that currency does not extend to black people. In fact whites who attend state schools have a similar likelihood of getting called back for jobs as black people who attend Ivy League schools. And black people who attend state schools, like I did, well they are so far down the totem pole that it is clearly inequitable.

And the last point I want to make is about how people frame reverse racism, saying that oh, by Biden saying that this person is going to get this pick that a black person is going to get it, is actually discriminating against others. Well not only do we simply have to look at the Supreme Court or the Senate, but research actually doesn't document that. Research actually says that affirmative action typically only pertains to people who are highly qualified, and the actual percentage of white people who would be impacted by affirmative action is so low that it's oftentimes insignificant in statistic models.

So I think the bottom line is that this is long overdue, but Biden knows that this is going to be large bone politically to try to appease particularly a group of black Americans who have expected more up to this point.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks, Rashawn. There's a lot to unpack there. I know we're going to get into that as we move forward in this discussion and then certainly in the questions and answers Q&A session which will follow our discussion here.

You know you mentioned voting, and so I want to touch a little bit on voting rights, which of course is a perennial civil rights and human rights issue for black Americans. And I want to do it not only to highlight what's happening clearly above the state and Federal levels but, you know, to understand what options black Americans have to continue to advance their own civil rights.

So I'm going to do a round robin starting with Nicol. Just talk a little bit about voting rights. What is it that we need to be doing to continue this long, decades long slough to, you know, be able to show up at the voting booth and have our votes taken seriously?

DR. LEE: Well thank you, Camille, and thank you to my colleagues and to all of you who are watching today. Black History Month is not just a month, it's actually every day, and so we should always remember that it is a 365-day affair.

Camille, before you ask about voting rights I want to just tag along with my esteemed colleague who talked a little bit about the history of affirmative action as well as where we are today with the Supreme Court pick. And I think Dr. Ray was somewhat tied as he actually outline that argument. The bottom line is to attack black women right now.

We have to be really clear that this attack on black woman is a residual effect of the polarization that we have experienced in this country. And as Dr. Ray has mentioned, these additive effects, no passage of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act,

the fact that we're still debating whether or not black people in this country should have voting rights, the fact that we still basically what I work on, a digital divider that is systematically oppressing people of color, that's a problem.

And so now we stand as a Socialist like Dr. Ray, where we're seeing these cold words of quota and not qualified enough. And that's really disturbing in a society where black women have been an essential part and spine in the history of this country, dating back to Harriet Tubman and others who actually were responsible for our freedom. But I needed to put that out there, Dr. Ray, because I think you were being a little bit kind on that.

There is an attack on black women right now that needs to be addressed. I think President Biden is going to do the right thing. He did the right thing with Vice President Harris. The bottom line is there's got to be somewhere that we can get some progress where it's not debatable when it comes to race.

With that being the case, I think voting rights is a big problem right now. I think on the one hand, as Rashawn has mentioned, the fact that we actually get a SCOTUS of color, a woman of color, in fact a black woman in that position is sort of a peeve, you know, on the fact that we don't have voting rights legislation that is actually in action right now.

And that's problematic because as we approach the big term it's going to be very important that we have these rules ironed out and straight. There should not be ambiguity and confusion, and on top of that if you lay out the fact that we don't have voting rights legislation, we still have disinformation, and disinformation is moving people away from the polls.

So I do think that this is a pivotal point and a pivotal moment, particularly as we're seeing redistricting happening right before the Supreme Court, even if we were to place a black woman in that position she wouldn't have majority, she'd have more to say,

that she probably would write versus anything else. But these cases are coming before the Supreme Court in a meaningful way. And I think if anything that we learned from the *Shelby* case is that if we don't get this right we actually deter or regress all the progress that black Americans have made since the Voting Rights Act was initially installed.

It's so interesting, and I'll kind of stop here because I know we have a lot of other questions. That we continue to debate what used to be a bipartisan issue. And that to me sounds like we're still in the abyss of something that is very unique to society right now, that is very much tethered to the political and racial climate that we're in.

As Rashawn said, I was telling my daughter, who's 15, the other day, I just can't believe the number of times that I could actually code how race is actually constructed and narrated on our televisions and in our media and online. And so I think there's something to be said about how we actually look at these sociological implications of the last four to eight years. I mean look, we just came out of having a president that was black. How did we get here, and the extent to which we're actually going to get moving on voting rights in time for us to not having another attack on black people, which is the gubernatorial race of states in April.

I mean there are some key pivotal races that are happening right now. If we don't get this right we're actually going to see the spiral effect of what Dr. Ray talked about where there's going to be an affront on black people through the course of time. And that's not going to work well for black voters, and it definitely is not going to work well for Democrats where we've actually had our highest alignment and allegiance.

So I'll stop there and curious to hear about what other colleagues say on this as we do this round robin, but good morning America, we're here to talk about black history.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Nicol. Andre, I wanted to get your thoughts on

that.

DR. PERRY: Well, you know, I can't add much on the voting rights issue except for this has been a long, there's been a long history of denying citizens, largely because we are not considered citizens. Membership entails this idea that membership determines largely what kind of rights you receive, what kind of benefits you receive. And when you see these attacks on voting rights, it's really a reflection of we are not considered true authentic members of this community.

No one would enact such ugly and pernicious laws, I mean the voting prohibitions in Georgia are just insane. Unless you don't think I'm a fully human or in specific terms, a full citizen. So for me I can't add much more than what's been added, but there's been a long-standing belief in this country that said black people are not full citizens. And we see that time and time again on the assault of our voting rights.

And the silence, quite frankly, not only from the Republican Party on this issue, but silence from people by in large who don't really see this as a serious issue. This is, you know, gets to the very core of a democracy. And so, but for me it's sad to say this but this is something I grew up knowing, grew up seeing, grew up understanding that many people don't value me as an American itself.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Andre. Keon.

DR. GILBERT: Well thank you all for inviting me to be here. Thank you, Camille, for hosting this.

I'll pick up where Nicol, a couple comments that Nicol mentioned in terms of voting rights used to be a bipartisan effort. And I think the lack of progress or the retrenchment in voting rights is really a signal and marker of really the fragmentation that is happening across the country in many different ways. And also that this is a very clear indicator of the many ways that people are trying to stall or prevent progression in a number

of different ways.

So when we look at the slow rate that many states have expanded Medicaid, because that was viewed as very political, it was viewed as accepting dollars from the Obama Administration, but many of the states that chose to not expand Medicaid or have done it sort of at a slower rate, those are the states with the worst health conditions in many different ways.

And so when we think about that fragmentation and we think about the ways that people are trying to live better lives, not only because of their health, the kind of the health decisions that people need to make, and part of that is having access to quality healthcare, but other issues that relate to economics and education become really important in terms of what we think about why voting rights is a particular important issue and why it's preventing people the right to vote has become important.

As we also think about other implications or indicators of why voting rights becomes important, as we have seen people being purged from the rolls and the number of different ways. I was just watching on the news last night something that's taking place in Florida where there are people who are claiming to represent the Republican Caucus there, are systematically going to houses of color and re-registering people as Republicans. That becomes a very, you know, dangerous sort of pathway in terms of thinking about eroding peoples' rights and peoples' access to voting.

Not only is this sort of an indicator of fragmentation, but it's also really an indicator of the lack of ways that we have been engaging communities in very important ways. And part of that is when we think about the ways that people need to have access to voting, we are also using some of these same strategies to disenfranchise in preventing them from voting.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks very much, Keon. And I'll just say, you know, I

think the retrenchment and the kinds of legislation that we've seen passed at the state level in particular is very, very appalling. Particularly in light of all the work that's been done to try to recognize black Americans over many, many decades. And I agree with all of you to say that that retrenchment really is an indication of the continuing level of discrimination, the continuing thoughts that, you know, essentially that we don't matter and we're not full citizens.

And it's really important for us, for a variety of different reasons, the least of which is that who is voting ends up, you know, ends up selecting the people who create what's possible in public policy. And so when you don't have large numbers of us voting that also curtails what is that public policy blueprint from which policies are selected and that effect all of us.

So I'm going to move on and switch gears a little bit. You know, we all know that there has been a very large endemic gap between household wealth, black household wealth, and white household wealth in the U.S. Andre, I want to start this conversation with you, and I'm sure others will contribute to it, but what are some of the ways in which this gap has been entrenched, and how might we be able to change the sort of long-standing nature of this wealth gap?

DR. PERRY: Well, Camille, I'm glad we talked about voting rights because one of the primary indicators of how resources and opportunities and rights are denied to black people is reflected in the wealth gap. According to the latest Federal Reserve numbers released in 2019, a median net worth of white families was about 188,000 compared to 24,000 for black families. That's about an eight times difference. And we see throughout the various asset classes, this disparity show up in terms of households with checking accounts. We see 95 percent of white American families having a checking account compared to 85 percent. When you're talking about our involvement in the stock

market, we see that about 24 percent of white Americans participate compared to 10 percent of black Americans. And 401Ks those who have it white Americans 48 percent compared to 39 percent, 10 point difference. And I'll just say one more, educational savings accounts of 5.5 percent of white households compared to 1.7 percent of black households.

You know, and so as a measure of the total assets minus all of the things you owe, wealth is that indicator of opportunity extended or not extended to black Americans. But it doesn't just show up in material goods. This wealth divide is also reflected in the attacks on critical race theory, our knowledge production. Yes, and we know that the attack on CRT is somewhat of a sham in that you don't see schools per se, most schools don't teach critical race theory instead of theories that are largely taught in graduate school. However, this did give cover for the Republican Party to again attack black cultural production, books, 1619 project in particular.

But there's always been an effort to delegate what is true American History or not. But it's also obviously this attack on CRT a tool to rally the Republican base as well. But I say all that to say that if we're going to rectify it at some point you either have to eliminate some of the debt that is incurred because of racism or provide assets. And there's no way around that.

And so when people talk about, you know, should we have race based politics. Well we got here because of race-based policies. And if we're ever going to improve home ownership rates, participation in stock markets, and other participation in various assets, we're going to have to be targeted in delivering those.

And likewise, and this is something I'm very passionate about, there's a big conversation internally at Brookings about cancelling student debt. And this is where I've always felt the ultimate solution is to have some form of free college at the two-year and four-year level, particularly for public institutions. But for a significant period of time when

higher rent was largely white, it was mostly subsidized. It really looked close to what we see at the K-12 education where people could very well afford it or it was subsidized. As soon as black people, brown people, started going to college at higher rates, which we are, we've started to depend on a more loan-financed system of higher education.

And we have being penalized as a result for not being able to own homes, not being able to pass on assets to our families. So we have to take out loans. And then we are penalized. So for me when people spout that student debt cancellation is regressive, it is to bury their heads in the sand to the historic, systemic discrimination that black people face and to continuously center white people as the reason why or why not we should receive or should enact policy.

So for me, yes, we need to figure out ways to restore the value of assets that's been extracted from racism, we need to remove the drags of racism that prevent us from collecting asset. But for me, which is as important, we've got to stop burying our heads in the sand to the reason why we have the wealth divide today. It's not because black people aren't pulling up their pants on saving well, not knowing how to manage properly, it's because black people were denied assets. So I'll leave it there.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Andre. So I just want to check in with the audience and let you know that we are looking forward to a very vibrant Q&A. You can submit a question, you can do so via Twitter @BrookingsGov with hashtag Black History Month, or you can do so via email at Eventsatbrookings.edu. So Twitter is @BrookingsGov with the hashtag #BlackHistoryMonth, or email at Events@brookings.edu.

DR. LEE: My response to Andre which I think is pertinent and it goes back to Rashawn's comment about the NFL. So as Andre was speaking I was actually thinking about how these system stratifications have to show up, and at the core of it is asset building, as Andre has, you know, really worked for family on to actually show us what these

equity divides are.

When you think about the NFL and the situation that they're going through today, as Rashawn had talked about, it goes deeper than the representation of how many coaches are black. It actually goes to the systems of stratification that are actually embedded in the NFL system.

The players, which are everyday people if you were to equate them with the folks that Andre's talking about, have money, but they don't have potentially the wealth, the ownership, the equity, the stake, that allows them to actually define their own destiny. Carter G. Woodson, the famous sociologist, said "If you don't control your thinking, somebody else will do it for you."

But I think that's the roof of it, and it's so important to actually address, and Andre, I just love the way that you actually expressed that, this equity debate has to be at the center when it comes to equitable wealth. Because these systems of stratification actually show up in all aspects of our lives.

It's no secret that there are no owners in the NFL of color, or who are black, but there are players. And it's no secret in society that as Andre said, and Rashawn and Keon could probably attest to, that we have not seen the climbing black engagement in the labor force. Nor have we seen a decline in the number of black men and women who have been actively educated or credentialed. But what we have not seen is this growth due to the stagnation that Dr. Perry talked about of wealth acquisition.

And for a sociologist, I think for people who are listening today, that is a pivotal distinction to make between, and it kind of goes back to the conversation about voting rights, Supreme Court pick and everything else. When you do not have access to assets it's very hard for you to have access to decisions. And that also aligns with the inability to have rights like voting, which in many respects is an asset that engages you in

the democratic process.

So I think, Andre, as I was thinking about you, I see a blog there because there's something to be said around ownership, which in many verticals of society we're not seeing equitable ownership, which in many respects also translates into closing the wealth gap.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Nicol. Go ahead, Andre.

DR. PERRY: You know, you got me started, Nicol. Because I always remind people when in conversations about business ownership or any home ownership. It means much more to a black American than others in this country. We were once the assets that were mortgaged, traded, used to build other peoples' wealth.

And for me it is a personal issue that when people talk about oh, we shouldn't talk about reparation, or we shouldn't talk about affirmative action of the like. We've had centuries of affirmative action for white people. We've had centuries of reparations for white people. But yet when we have these discussions about black people become oh, no, I didn't own any slaves, I don't know how to pay for that. I mean this is absolutely ridiculous. And so for me we've got to get past this intellectual barrier that somehow removes this history, this deep history from this current state of affairs.

We lack ownership because we were once owned and there's a lot of people who want to maintain that power. Wealth is important and it's a central indicator, but it's about power more so than anything.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks, Andre. Rashawn, I'm sure you have a couple of words to add to this, so, you know, feel free to contribute.

DR. RAY: Yeah, I mean most definitely. I mean this is an important conversation. I think the big thing that Andre and Nicol are highlighting is that we are currently in a critical thinking crisis. And part of it is linked to education, the other part is

linked to how we consume media in small sound bites and how cognitively we are getting programmed, and have been, to receive information, to not necessarily think about it.

And when it comes to thinking about critical race theory, I think that's one of them. You know, last year it was defund the police, this year it's critical race theory. And look, no one can ever say that in this case, in this time period, that Republicans are not great at creating these sound bites, creating more or less the smoke screens and actually having a way of framing an issue that is not about the issue at all.

And when we talk about critical race theory, for example, critical race theory, and Andre noted this, I mean overall this is a legal doctrine, it's a theory that a framework by which we understand society, and part of what it simply says is that our social institutions are laced with racism that's embedded in our policies, our rules, our laws and regulations. And those are simply empirical facts.

Accordingly, what has happened though, and Alexander Gibbons and I did an analysis at Brookings showing that across the country when we look at legislation related to critical race theory or supposedly about critical race theory, and we keep updating this every month because they're just coming out of the wazoo. But what we found was that overwhelmingly they weren't about critical race theory at all.

Now of late some of them are starting to mention the 1619 Project which, I should also note on this critical thinking front, is important because I was having a discussion on a media platform with a politician in Texas who, I made a statement, I said "Well look, of the 1619 Project, some of the scholars who wrote for that I know them actually personally, I said they are some of the top scholars we have in the world. Their pedigree and where they're currently professors at, from Harvard to Princeton are endless." And she said "That's not true." I was like, no, that's just like their names are listed and where they work at. So I say if that's what we're arguing about. Think about how far we have to go, like

this is their place of employment. This is where they're actually employed at.

Accordingly, the other part about the critical race theory legislation is not only do many of them not mention critical race theory, then the question becomes what do they mention? Well what they are doing is they are framing any discussions about diversity, equity, and inclusion, as being something that should not occur. And as Andre noted, overwhelming in schools this isn't occurring.

And I will even tell you at the university level, at the undergraduate level, this isn't occurring. But I'll tell you what is happening. Because of this critical race theory broader framework that's got out into the public sphere, students come to me at the University of Maryland and say can we have discussion about critical race theory, I'm trying to make sense of it. And I'm thinking, well if you take my graduate course that's something that we'll talk about. But now I am having discussions about it at the undergraduate level and I've talked to some high school teachers who are doing the same thing. So we have to be clear about what it's actually doing.

Two more quick points. One related to reparations. I want to fill in some of the things that our colleagues are saying because it's so, so important to stress this point.

Oftentimes when we talk about reparations we're talking about enslavement. That's important to do. Why? Because in 1860, as Andre and I wrote in our piece on reparations. In 1860 the physical bodies of black people was worth \$3 billion, just the physical body. That was worth more than the railroads and the factories. We haven't even got to the products they produced, we haven't even got to the way that their bodies were leased to purchase land to get loans from banks. That is the asset that Andre is describing. But when Andre and Nicol noted that affirmative action was under a different guise in the past, Irakatz Nelson, who I mentioned earlier, the historian, wrote a classic book, an instant classic that everyone should read called "*When Affirmative Action was*

White."

And, yes, he talked about enslavement, but he also talked about what was happening during the New Deal. Quickly to mention this, what happened during the New Deal was you had eight out of 10 men born during the 1920s get drafted to go to war, white and black and otherwise. So that means in the 1950s and 60s they were in their 30s and 40s. This is just putting this in context, it's not that long ago.

When they came back from war, part of the GI Bill, Veterans received a series of benefits. Down payment assistance for homes, which were in the form of grants, small business grants for the small businesses that happens in middle of America, in downtowns across the country, and also tuition grants, and money to send their children to college. Well see that money was mandated Federally and distributed locally. So black Veterans, who were serving beside their white counterparts in the war, when they came back they did not receive that money. And that's the reason why we have such a surplus of historically black colleges and universities to this day.

And on that front we have to note that HBCUs are beacons of hope and success that we have to stress and highlight because they were not structured to survive. And yet and still, here we are decades later, they are still thriving. Why is that? Because they actually fill a gap and also because that's what black people have always done has been resilient in the face of adversity.

So when it comes to reparations, the point on that topic, Andre talked about the broader wealth gap, education does little to close that gap. Like college educated black people have about seven times less wealth than college educated white people. Education does little to actually address that.

And then when it comes to student loans, I mentioned HBCUs. A study documented that students who attend an HBCUs actually were more likely to receive

subprime education loans. Like this is baked into our society, in banking, in housing, in education. And then we haven't even gotten to talking about the criminal justice system and policing yet.

The whole point is that as we think about celebrating Black History Month, it's important to note that these inequities exist, but the way that black people have been resilient to persevere, is something that is part of the legacy. And I'll tell you, part of this critical thinking crisis that we are in is because there's some people in this country who are more likely to be conservative based on what we know statistically, do not want the current generation to learn the truth. Because if they do, it's going to change the way they vote, it's going to change the way they behave, and it's going to change the way they view their own legacy. There's some people in America who actually don't want that to happen.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Rashawn. We're going to shift gears a little bit because there is a topic we haven't discussed, which is incredibly important and of, you know, very current urgency.

So although we never would have imagined that we would still be in the midst of a global pandemic in 2022, we are. The two-year experience with the Coronavirus has unmasked some of what we know to be glaring inequities, both in opportunity and in the public health infrastructure. And even in the assumptions under which public health advisories and public health is conducted.

So, Keon, I want you to kind of take us through what we've learned about public health opportunities, what that has meant for black communities, what we've learned in general about the way the public health infrastructure has approached the health of blacks and the health of communities of color.

DR. GILBERT: Thank you for that question. As you already mentioned, you know, COVID-19 has unmasked, unearthed, unveiled many of the existing challenges

that my colleagues have already talked about. And really the problem and challenges have been our inability to link these social and structural determinates to help outcomes. Whether that's health behaviors, whether that's systems and structures that are there to support health and to help us be very healthy and all those kinds of things. They really go down to sort of really very basic things that we need to be healthy on a day-to-day basis. And that's not only access to healthcare, but access to healthy food sources, housing, high quality neighborhoods that even being, you know, neighborhoods that have, you know, that are safe, that are walkable.

You know when we talk about, you know, making changes to health, a lot of people tend to focus on those day-to-day behaviors. But what we really understood or not understood well so far is how to structures and systems operate in a way to prevent people from making those decisions on a day-to-day basis.

And I think as we continue through this pandemic we've seen incredible inequities, incredible gaps in the ways that some people have been able to protect themselves and to prevent contracting COVID-19 when we look at data that suggests that people who live in suburban neighborhoods or live in neighborhoods where they were able to social distance not only within their houses but within their neighborhoods, those people tended to be healthy.

And when we look at those who had economic resources, in particular savings, when those folks lost their jobs, their high paying jobs or jobs in certain industries, they were able to tap into their savings as a way of being able to survive and mitigate through the pandemic.

When we talk about sort of the larger sort of scheme of what the public health infrastructure looks like, we've learned that we've not been able to adequately monitor and track this disease because we weren't adequately monitoring and tracking other

diseases. Our public health systems were inept and inadequate in any different ways. And so we actually had to rely on private entities and on universities to do a much better job of tracking these than what the Federal government was able to do. And so we also know that there is considerable underreporting even when it comes to that.

Also when we think about sort of what the public health structure looks like, it is actually sort of undermined itself with its inability to control and to manage and to think about prevention strategies for COVID-19. The CDC is going to have an incredible challenge over the next few years of repairing a lot of the damage that it's done in terms of its reporting, its framing of the disease, the ways that it has articulated prevention strategies. Week to week we have, you know, changes, and it confuses people. There is a lack of coordination across government entities and agencies in terms of the way that they communicate and talk about not only COVID-19 itself but the various ways of preventing it.

Early during the pandemic the Federal government was really sort of terrible, for lack of a better way of saying it, in being able to coordinate efforts. And it really caused another level or another layer of fragmentation in terms of the resources that it deployed to states, the ways that states then deployed resources to local and county public health departments. And as a result of that many local and county public health departments were left to their own devices to figure out how they were going to manage the pandemic.

And that also sort of seeded other levels in other ways that people distrust or mistrust public health largely by county and local public health departments and officials.

And so as we sort of continue to think about what the implications of that are, that certainly means that there is going to be a deepening of health disparities, not only as we've seen disparities as it relates to infections of COVID-19, but also because of COVID-19 sort of taking presence in many communities, we're also going to see a

deepening of chronic diseases. And so we're going to see a rise in many of the risk factors that contributed to the way the people contracted COVID-19 when we look at data and you look at co-morbidities of COVID-19 mortality, influenza, asthma, hypertension, diabetes, were some of the leading chronic disease comorbidities.

We already know that those issues and challenges exist within black communities and in low-income communities already. And we know that many people delayed seeking healthcare because they couldn't access healthcare. Many people didn't have access to telehealth opportunities to, you know, stay in touch with their physicians or other primary care providers so we're going to see a delay in diagnosis or the onset of some of those diseases. We've already started to see that in some cancers, like colorectal cancer, as a result of the pandemic.

And also what we've seen is sort of a reduction in life expectancy as a result of COVID-19 as well. Life expectancy was already starting to take a very, very small dip, starting in 2020, and we'll concede to probably see some of that decline over the next couple of years as a result of COVID-19. Also when we think about comorbidity from the delays that we've seen in a number of different ways.

And so as we think about sort of what needs to happen in the public health infrastructure, we need better monitoring systems to be able to address, to track and monitor disease, we need better opportunities for engaging communities in ways that's meaningful to them and sort of really reaches people on a day to day basis of thinking about how do we engage them in prevention efforts to ensure that they're healthy.

We also really need to think about how are we really going to use this moment as we discussed many of the inequities, to really sort of repair not only the public health infrastructure itself but many of the factors that contribute to what allows you to be healthy. And so part of that has certainly been how do we improve our social and our

physical environments as ways and opportunities to improve health so we have a lot of people that still live in low quality housing that contribute to respiratory diseases. We have many people that still are unable to access healthcare as a result of policy changes that have not occurred. And we also have in opportunities in many different ways of sort of the ways we engage communities, to talk to them or engage them in the solutions that are important in terms of improving public health.

So when I think about sort of the public health infrastructure, those are the things I think are really important moving forward.

MS. BUSETTE: I appreciate that, Keon. And just a follow up question. So, you know, it seems to me that certainly the level of COVID-19 deaths among the black community were preventable. Many of them were very preventable. But we just didn't have the infrastructure, we didn't have the outreach to be able to make sure that people, you know, did not get COVID and were thriving and had the right information, etcetera.

One of the things that I think is interesting when you think about the public health infrastructure is that it does in many ways depend upon or in some ways it operates with a lot of the similar assumptions to the medical profession. And we know that the medical profession has had a very, very hard time disengaging from racism and racist assumptions.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are about that.

DR. RAY: That was directed to me?

MS. BUSETTE: Yes.

DR. GILBERT: So it's really interesting when we think about what racism has done in sort of, or the ways that we've been able to frame racism in public health sort of largely and sort of when we think about the representation even of black physicians, black public health workers, all those things sort of taken together. And so, you know, in 2020

many places declare racism as a public health crisis, as a public health challenge. But they actually really didn't know what that meant. They just knew sort of that racism was out there, people have linked it to health in some kind of way, but there was really sort of no very clear strategy of what to do or how to respond to that.

So many people sort of started thinking about well what are the ways that we can try to understand this. And so in some of the work that I've done with some of my colleagues at St. Louis University, we actually sort of studied the ways that racial equity tools can be used to actually address racism in public health, or actually changing policies and laws to increase health equity in a number of different ways.

When we think about sort of the link sort of framing of public health as it relates to sort of the medical profession, that's been a very sort of clear challenge. I link them sort of all within sort of the public health infrastructure largely because our goals really are to try to prevent people from becoming sick.

Unfortunately, we really sort of rely on people being sick to then figure out how do we respond to that. And that's really sort of the inappropriate strategy or the inappropriate mechanisms in terms of how do we prevent people from being healthy. We're much more interested in sick care than we are in prevention, prevention efforts. And that becomes a real challenge. And unfortunately our medical professionals are not very well trained in terms of thinking about health at a population level, which public health tries to do.

And so they're really sort of focused on sort of individual changes. That's important, but we really sort of have to think about what happens at community levels, what happens when that patient goes home to a neighborhood that's crime ridden or a neighborhood that's unsafe, neighborhoods that don't have, you know, street lights, neighborhoods that don't have sidewalks, neighborhoods that don't have full service grocery stores, neighborhoods that when young people are afraid to go to school because of fear of

violence. Or even young people that when they have to go to white neighborhoods they fear being discriminated against.

And so when we think about sort of what public health means in sort of a larger scheme and sort of the various disciplines that fall under that, that becomes very important in terms of how do we frame our population level approaches to health, and how do we include all these various actors and stakeholder.

And so also part of that means we need to start having conversations with business owners, as well as in terms of thinking about what's their role in contributing to public health. So as people even sort of think about well how do they make changes to ensure that their workforce is healthy? That becomes a public health question in a number of different ways. And also sort of they become engaged in the conversations about how do we improve not only access to high quality healthcare, but also how do we change healthcare systems so that they are equitable and also sort of the ways that we sort of reach people in their communities.

So sort of when we take all of that together we really have to realize and recognize what are our individual roles in improving the health and wellbeing of black Americans, but also sort of what's the totality of that of us all working together and making sure that there are policies that exist that ensure the people can have equal access not only to healthcare but making healthy decisions on a day to day basis.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Keon, for that. Nicol, I know you wanted to add something, you know, relative to the public health infrastructure.

DR. LEE: Yeah. Thank you, Camille. Keon, I love the way you just outlined that because I think what you've actually talked about is some of the crisis that we've been in in this country, particularly with the public health infrastructure.

I just wanted to tag on to what you said though and this is work that I'm

doing with colleagues at Brookings. We're actually coming out with a paper on this, which is the role of telehealth in the public health infrastructure as well, right? Because what that did over the course of the pandemic, we saw 100 percent increase in telehealth use for any type of remote interaction with your doctor, and particularly among black Americans, right? Those who had not had adequate access to medical providers were able to hop on their Smartphone or some other instrument that is able to actually get online.

Now there are digital equity problems that I'll talk about later, but in particular basic access into get action where you weren't necessarily live with your doctor. In some cases when you turn on your video it allows you to get some care. I just wanted to put that out there because, Keon, to your point, I think we need to start adding that into the equation because what we also saw with the government over COVID is that you couldn't schedule your vaccination or get your test kit or actually update your records without Internet access.

So we're going to make Internet access part of the public health infrastructure overall. It's important that we also sort of blend care equity, health equity, and digital equity so that people can get online to transact in those matters.

But I wanted to put that out there because oftentimes we're sort of seen telehealth as ancillary to the public health infrastructure. But really what my colleagues and I are doing is to set up a technology to basically sort of think through how do you actually make telehealth something that's more permanent post-pandemic because it can actually squeeze into those crevices that we have not been able to address, you know, sufficiently to help equity concerns.

MS. BUSETTE: Great, thanks, Nicol.

DR. GILBERT: Can I offer one other thing. You know, we must separate the connection between healthcare and employment. You know one of the long-standing

legacies of slavery is that in many business models they extract as much from labor as possible without providing benefits. One of the reasons why we have a higher incidents of death is because we work in jobs that don't provide proper healthcare.

And in addition, we are overrepresented in a central frontline work that puts us at greater risk. We are also represented in higher rates and in inner generational housing, as Keon mentioned. And so for me if we talk about advancements in public health, we really do need to make healthcare public. We need a public option, a single payer system, because as long as there are people who will take advantage of this growth model that extracts wealth from people, we will be in this situation because over time people have shown that they don't care about black peoples' voting rights, our health, where we work, how hard we work, or how we die.

And so for me, at some point we have got to have a move forward ACA to a single payer system that separates healthcare by employment.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thanks, Andre. Keon, I know there are several things you wanted to respond to, so please go ahead.

DR. PERRY: Okay. I'll try to make it very quick. Andre, you mentioned something about single payer, and I'm going to link this to Camille's earlier question to me about, you know, things we've learned about COVID-19.

COVID-19 actually taught us that we have elements or we can implement elements of a single payer system. The idea that we can, you know, get the government to pay for testing, imagine that. That we can get the government to pay for vaccines, imagine that. And then sort of figure out ways that we can distribute them to states. Seems like elements of a single payer system.

Unfortunately though, you know, earlier in the pandemic, you know, states had to compete, you know, for PPE, states had to compete for, you know, testing supplies.

But the government started to actually try to work some of that out and being able to negotiate that as sort of time, you know, time went.

The challenges that will remain are there are significant barriers, you know, from state to state, but not only government involvement or government intervention, but even sort of business interventions really started to think about well how can we actually work together to make sure that people are somewhat safe at some level.

So I actually think that's a very important thing that we need to sort of point to and to talk about a little bit more in terms of being able to push various mechanisms and pathways to thinking about what the single payer looks like. And I think there are some very important lessons learned from COVID-19 to help maybe sort of point us in that direction moving forward.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks, Keon. I want to move to a topic which I think is so incredibly important for black communities, and that is about the digital divide. And I know that Dr. Turner Lee has been working on this topic for a long time and has been, you know, a leading voice nationally on this topic.

But certainly COVID-19 pointed out all the ways in which we have many, many disconnected communities. So, Nicol, I wanted to ask you about that and, you know, what have we learned about the digital divide in the U.S. and what options do we have to eliminate that and bring everyone in the U.S. to parity.

DR. LEE: Yeah. Well, Camille, I promise I'm not going to sound like a black Baptist preacher because that's what I am when you actually ask me to talk about the digital divide. It's an area that I've been doing for 30 years pretty much working in the communities as a digital evangelist all the way to here at Brookings.

And I have a book coming out. It's a shameless plug, it is finally coming out y'all, just telling you right now. It's taken some time but it is digitally invincible how the

Internet has created the new under class to be able to get it at Brookings Press in the fall.

So this is a really complicated issue but it's one that I think that I've really come to grips with in my book which is related to this conversation that we're having right now.

The digital divide is actually symptomatic of poverty, it's symptomatic of racism, it's symptomatic of geographic isolation. Before the pandemic we had millions of people that were actually not connected to the Internet, and the majority of those people, who I call digitally invisible, looked like the people we are talking about today. Add it to being Latina and elderly and disabled and very poor in rural and urban areas.

And what we have now seen in the pandemic is not only what we write that the digital divide existed when my dear friend Larry Irvin came out with the term while he was at the Department of Commerce, but that it actually effects the economic competence and the social competence for where people actually landed up, particularly black and brown kids.

And I think that's a very glaring revelation that, yes, we all need to be connected to the Internet, but as we see the death of analog where the things that we used to do in person no longer become valid, like banking, like being able to talk to our doctors, like being able to learn in the elementary or secondary school system and higher education. The fact that we have people digitally disconnected and digitally invisible, it's telling.

And I'll give you a great example of this. I mean I always go back to the schools because I'm a parent myself. At the beginning of the pandemic 50 million kids were actually shown to not have access to the Internet. And that was across the board from the 195,000 school districts across this county.

Out of that we found from my friends at Common Sense Media, that 15 to 16 million of those kids didn't have either home Broadband or a device. Then we found out

9 million didn't have either. Then we later found out that the majority of those 9 million more kids that came from black and brown populations and very poor urban and rural areas, and we soon found out later that some of those kids had to teach themselves because, as Andre said, their parents had to go to work.

And so when you put all of that together and we look at what we're experiencing now, which are the predicted learning losses of black and Latina students. I just read a study the other day, third grade students are going to be way behind, six months behind when it comes to base topics because of their white counterparts. To me it sounds very similar to the conversations that we're having today.

But we're not talking about bits and bytes and all the technological hardware that we can actually see and touch, but we're talking about the quality of lives that people actually live.

As Keon and others have said, where people live also matters. If you lived in public housing in this country, 1.2 million units of public housing, less than a quarter of them have access to Broadband. And if people congregate in those areas and their quality of life depends on their housing, the fact that they were not connected during the pandemic, suggests that we left a whole lot more people behind.

So I just share that because I think in the end we actually have to capture the digital divide as a civil right and problem associated with racial outcomes and inequity. If we don't do that we're going to continue to make this a conversation about companies. And, yeah, they got their problems, don't get me wrong. I got a piece coming out on equity, racial equity and anti-trust and racial equity on platforms, but what we're dealing with now is this fundamental right. I love the way that my colleagues have said it. There are too many people whose bodies and minds and lands have been leased for the purpose of their generation of workers and society. And now we see a technology we're actually going to

same route because we think, and I'll close here, that by giving people a device of Broadband service is going to change the projector they'll be able to get online and do the things that everybody else could do.

But if they don't own the companies that they're actually using for those applications or they're not engaged in producing in their own community startups, like an employee of people of color, black people in particular, we have actually created another gateway. As Carnegie Woods has said, that door in the back that we've trained people to go through versus giving them a door in the front.

And so I think this is some really important issues that we have to continue to talk about. My colleagues, all of you know that I'm not going to stop talking about it, I'm going to talk about it any time you ask me to. But I think it's important that we correlate this conversation with the systems of oppression and stratification that exists.

I want to say one more thing, Camille, for people who don't know. I also run Brookings Allorhythmia Bias and Discrimination work. And if we think that we're in the beginning of a digital divide, the digital future is even worse because it allows us with even greater precision to actually impart the type of discrimination and surveillance that lends itself to these types of inequities that we're talking about today. Like knowing what your social media profile says about you to deny you a loan. Or knowing where you sit in your classroom to suggest that you're not a great learner. These are realities of technology.

And I commonly tell folks in my work, yes, we need to actually employ the same type of critical thinking. I love that that's come out of this panel, in digital spaces. And we need more people who are listening to actually take these issues on so that we move beyond just simple conversations, I believe, around, you know, where are we going to deploy infrastructure and how much fiber we're going to use.

We need to be talking about how are we using the technology to solve these

types of problems. And until we get to that space, I think, as we're talked about in our new article, technology has become a change agent but it can become more repressive if not actually position and structured to finding a way that it helps us with healthier outcomes.

So I'll stop there because I know we got questions. You all know me, I'm an evangelist for this side. I could keep on talking for people who want to know more. Just get my book. I just ask, get my book, it's coming now. I want to be like Andre when I grow up. So it's coming out soon.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks, Nicol, I knew, you know, AI better watch out because they're going to have to tangle, AI's going to have to tangle with Dr. Turner Lee.

So I think this is a good point to kind of move back into some of the conversations that were so relevant over the last year. We've talked a lot about voting rights, we've talked a lot about COVID. I do want to make sure that we have an opportunity to get a bit of an update on what is happening in police reform. And the reason I ask that is that we continue to see and, you know, black news continue to experience police terrorism. And I think it's really, really important for us to understand what the options are, where we are, what has gone well, hasn't gone well in that realm. And, Rashawn, I hope you can take us through that.

DR. RAY: Yeah. So we know that over the past couple of years, one big flash point was obviously the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. And if people don't know how far we have not come in that city and around the country, all we have to do is look over the past week. Just a few days ago when Amir Locke was asleep on a couch, police get a key, sneak into the apartment and shoot him up.

And so as we think about that context, that is important to note as Bankcroft always says. He had a legally owned firearm. See, just let me make this slight pivot because it's so important how the media covers stories related to black people.

All they've been showing is the video and then zooming in on the gun. Last time I checked the Second Amendment says that people have a right to bear arms, particularly in their home when someone sneaks in with guns and starts yelling at you. His firearm was legally owned.

You know what's going to happen in Minneapolis again? There's going to be a large civil settlement that's going to speak to the broader context of this particular question. And there's a couple of stats that I really want people to take home as I pivot to talking about local legislation and what's happening at the state level.

I say this all the time. Black people are 3.5 times more likely than whites to be killed by police when they're not attacking and do not have a weapon. And even if those things are not the case, they are still three times more likely. What that means is when black people and white people behave exactly the same, black people are more likely to be killed. And in fact when they aren't attacking and don't have a weapon, black people are even more likely to be killed.

That is called racism. That's what it is.

What we know at the Federal level is that the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which came on the heels of the murder of George Floyd. There was a lot of momentum. Democrats leveraged that momentum, Republicans also levered that momentum, really playing up defund the police narratives and framing that in a way that it's not. Defund the police is simply about reallocating funding. Abolishing the police is something else. But even there's a very small percentage, including a very small percentage of black people who actually want that to happen in its kind of natural form.

Often times what people want is something to be rebuilt. Accordingly, this leveraging happened. And the House of Representatives, Democrats in particular, did what they were supposed to do. They passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act twice.

They passed it two times. Congresswoman Karen Bass and Senator Cory Booker were really forging with this, supposedly they were working with Senator Tim Scott on the Republican side, and all of a sudden that just went, went out the wazoo. And now Congresswoman Bass is running for mayor of L.A.

Accordingly when we think of what's happening on a local level, I have a couple of projects. One is taking a deep dive with some colleagues at the University of North Carolina, Andy Andrews and Neil Carren, where we are looking at the impact the Black Lives Matter protest had on police reform legislation in cities that are 250,000 people or more. So roughly about 90 cities. And then I have a project here at Brookings that's looking at what's happening at the state level.

What we know is we know what isn't working. I think when it comes to what is working there are some states that took the legislation in the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which in my view overwhelmingly Democrats and Republications agreed on, things like banning no-knock warrant. Well you know what, that would have saved Amir Locke's life.

But it doesn't matter a whole lot in a city like Minneapolis where they say they banned them, and you know what? The judge that presided over the trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd is the same judge that gave the no-knock warrant to go into the home where Amir Locke was shot up. See that is the combination here. And in the words of Ida B. Wells, those who commit the murders, write the reports. We see these links together.

When we think about what's happening at the state level, I always say, there's a lot bad here, what's good? Well, there are some states that are forging ahead. Maryland, Colorado, New Mexico, Connecticut. Not only has the State of Maryland repealed the Law Enforcement Bill of Rights which was a package of kind of processes and legal

doctrine that allowed for police officers to essentially be above the law where particularly if they commit crimes when they are off duty, oftentimes they don't face a penalty on their jobs for those particular actions. So the Law Enforcement Bill of Rights is a big deal to get rid of. Maryland was the first state to institute it in the '70s. I hope that other states follow suit.

When it comes to qualified immunity, which supposedly was the big flash point in the point of the Senate, is that states like Colorado and New Mexico and Connecticut and then the City of New York has moved forward with repealing of qualified immunity.

Qualified immunity allows for police officers and other government officials to not face any civil culpability. Meaning they don't have to pay for financial settlements. Why is that a big deal? That's a big deal because if we look to say over the past five year, a five-year period 2015 to 2019, roughly \$2 billion, with a B, \$2 billion of taxpayer money was paid out nationally in civilian settlement for police misconduct. And as much as we focus on the New Yorks and the Chicagos and Minneapolis of the United States, these settlements were more likely to happen in small areas with populations of 50,000 or fewer. And those areas did not have the money to pay them. What happened? There are places like in Ensign, Michigan, places in East Tennessee, where they have lost school systems, where they have had their taxes raised, like in Nebraska. So what's happening at the local level, there is some state legislatures that are saying we need to move forward with this. Maryland is one.

The Maryland Police Accountability Act should be a blueprint for the nation. I testified on that legislation. Even in Virginia where they banned no-knock warrants after what happened with Breonna Taylor in Kentucky. Virginia has moved the needle a lot.

I think a lot of people are worried under the new Governor, Glen Yunkin, if some of those things will continue or either roll back for example. Under the former

governor of course we talk about the black face and the KKK role. But since that time there were a series of progress made on the front of policing and in the State of Virginia they actually created a Diversity and Equity Inclusion Commission and kind of a state agency. Governor Youngkin has already reframed that to remove a focus on race and equality and frame it around social class.

Look, we should focus on social class, particularly in a state like Virginia. But acting as if race and class are the same thing is a fallacy, although they are highly linked.

The last point I'll make is what's happening locally in cities. And I think that Nicol as well as Keon made this point related to technology and health. Is that we are seeing huge divides between people living in urban areas and people living in rural areas. Policing is one of those. Where we are seeing progress in cities like Atlanta, which makes sense in a lot of regards, and in other cities around the country. But at the state level we are not seeing that same level of progress.

So what that will mean for people, particularly for black people who are disproportionately likely to be killed by police or have use of force put upon them, is when they're in a city there'll be certain laws and policies in place. But the minute they go to the county, like in St. Louis, going from St. Louis City to the county, will all of a sudden change and increase their likelihood.

And I think that these are some of the things to be looking forward. I'm very curious about the factors that explain the differences in states and cities that are moving forward on police reform and those that aren't. So stay tuned, I'm sure I'll have a lot of answers about that.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks very much, Rashawn, for that update and your perspectives. We are in the Q&A period now so we've gotten a lot of really interesting

questions.

I want to start, Andre, with a discussion about black assets and how we value black assets. You have made a really strong and moving sort of point for moving from being seen as an asset to figuring out how we value all the assets and everything, all our contributions that we have brought to this country. So I want you to talk a little bit about your work in this area.

DR. PERRY: Yeah. First and foremost I want to acknowledge my colleagues here. And I always like to remind myself and others that people are the most important asset that you can have. And when you hear the elocution, the policy initiatives, the impact of my colleagues, you see what adding black voices can do to an institution.

And so I just want to uplift my colleagues here, and there are several who are not with us on this panel, but they're doing incredible work. And this is not a slight to my employer, I just want to be clear about that. But many of these issues would not be tackled without this representation. So I just want to be clear about that.

And when I came in one of the things I wanted to do is add value to my program, Metro, and I started looking up black cities and the assets in them. And one of the most important asset are our homes, is a home. And so we started looking at those assets, my colleagues, John Trothwell of Gallop, my then RA, Research Assistant David Harshberger. We compared homes in black neighborhoods where the share of the black population was 50 percent or higher. And we compared them to areas where the share of the black population was less than a percent. And we controlled for education, crime, walkability, all those fancy phylometrics, and what we found is that homes in black neighborhoods are underpriced by 23 percent, about 48,000 per home. Cumulative there's about 156 billion in lost equity.

And we know that that lost equity, that 156 would have paid for more than 4

million black owned businesses based on the average amount that black people use to start their firms. It would have paid for more than 8 million four-year degrees based on the average amount of a four-year public education, covered all of Hurricane Katrina damage, replaced the pipes in Flynt, Michigan 3,000 times over.

And I always bring that up because when things go wrong in black communities we blame black people. And this is why I always say all the time that there's nothing wrong with black people that ending racism can't solve.

That issue of housing, that devaluation of housing is a metaphor for technological assets, it's a metaphor for the criminal justice system, it's a metaphor for our businesses in communities, that our goods are priced much more lower than they are actually worth.

And so for me, this research has been evolved, you know, Biden has taken on a lot of this research, his Inner Agency Taskforce on Pay they're about to release a report to the President later this month on appraisal or fixes to the appraisal area, let's hope.

I've worked alongside my colleagues, and I just want to uplift Makada Henry-Nickie, who is not on this panel today. She helped me in this Ashoka collaboration that we're doing and where we're looking at solutions. But part of that outgrowth we helped Delegate Nick Childs of Prince George County develop an entire housing agenda for the State of Maryland. And this is happening all over the country. People are using our research to institute new policies and practices and procedures. The appraisal industry is changing as a result.

But I just go back to my first point. A lot of these issues would not have been brought to the fore without black people bringing it there. And we need to continue to diversify, to have the representation among all groups or we're going to miss out on good rigorous policy.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Andre. Thank you very much for that. We've been getting a lot of questions from people and essentially the question is, I live in a community where white people don't want to talk about racism. And it's obvious in my community that, you know, kind of the way the community is laid out physically, the kind of opportunities that are available, the ways in which people conduct themselves in public and private it's very clear that racism continues to be an important issue.

So the question is, how do I or how do we in this community start this conversation about racism and get moving on policies that could help create much greater equity in these communities. This is kind of a general thing.

So I am going to start off with Nicol and then, you know, please jump in as you see fit.

MS. LEE: So I'm probably the worst person to ask the first part of this question in terms of how you talk about racism with white people and should people of color be the first one to talk about it. I don't think so. Because I didn't create the problem and I think it's really important that communities that are not black actually confront the problem of racism itself.

You have to actually have that conversation at your dinner tables, you have to have that conversation with your auntie and uncle, you have to have that conversation at your family reunion. Because people who have been affected or put in a position of being discriminated cannot solve their own problem.

I think that's been the purpose of this whole conversation. How do you actually start talking about race? Well you are a person of color, if you're a black person like me you know you start talking about race? You just be you and you live your authentic self. I think what Andre is actually talking about is when I was in graduate school finishing my Ph.D., it was actually on the black middle class, it was about the collected memory that black

middle class people actually held. And what I found in my interviews is that black peoples' collected memory was not necessarily about their rich experiences that we celebrate every Black History Month. The people that invented the cotton gin, the people that invented and helped us, guided us out of slavery. We actually defined our existence on our ability in suburban neighborhoods among white peers and to go to certain schools and to have the type of economic liberation that we felt came along with being black. Well guess what, we're finding, you know, almost decades after the Civil Rights movement that that's not the case. That's the same types of freedoms that we thought we had when we marched on Washington had actually been regressed.

So I would suggest to somebody that the issue of solving this problem has to start with you. If those of us who sit on the side, we have to redefine it. This is the part that I think is so interesting now that I actually do live in Virginia and our governor is trying to retract critical race theory, whatever that means. But the challenge is that the attacks on critical race theory have a lot to do with the attacks on who we think we are. And so I would say to that person that actually asked that question, it's not your responsibility to talk about race. Your responsibility is to be proud. And if you start there that allows you to actually express yourself and to engage in productive conversation where people recognize that this is not your supremacy or your, and some people don't understand the definition of race. That this is not your way to actually be bigoted, it's your way of actually celebrating your history and yourself.

With that being the case I think Andre is right, Camille, I'll just end here. That I think that the stage that we're in and what we do about this is we do need to go back to some tools. I applaud the Biden/Harris Administration for placing equity at the center. It's a Congressional initiative, an initiative to the Federal agencies, it's one in which fairness and equity is actually permeating this whole Administration.

But what we don't have, and I know you've written about this too, is a Carter Commission. Some kind of comprehensive approach of looking at all of the things that we discussed today and coming up with a body of solutions that will help us get there.

We already know, for example, in the digital space the civil rights of the 60s and a combination law do not actually apply to a digital universe where you can be tracked without anybody knowing. So we've got to go back and really have these conversations much like we tried to do with the Carter Commission. It wasn't a complete success, but it actually allowed us to be critical.

Now if anybody leaves this conversation, the biggest word that should stick out is critical thinking. It allowed us to be intellectual about our policies, about our circumstances, and about our future. And I think again, one thing I'm realizing and I have kids and I share this with them all the time. That the loss of your presence in a room or in a conversation or in the intellectual discovery is the loss of this nation. And until we blacks understand that we are contributors in that matter, I think it's important that a Carter Commission might actually, you know, sort of suggest to people that the things that we're talking about have been long historical, have not been solved, and if you're going to actually value equity you have to put a comprehensive framework around it.

Andre, I don't know the work that you're doing right now at Brookings is an attempt to actually get us back to that state of understanding, the work you do with the NAACP, I don't know if you want to talk about that. But we definitely need something comprehensive that will allow us to really put the large post it note before us in solving these problems.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks, Nicol. So, Andre, your name was invoked.

MR. PERRY: I'll just add that we just entered a relationship with the NAACP where we will be producing data that will drive much of their campaigns. You have

two historic organizations founded within seven years of each other in the early 20th Century. And I brought this up at the announcement. That at the time, the NAACP was fighting segregation and housing issues. For the most part that was it. Until The Birth of the Nation was premiered in the early 20th Century, and then they got on their first national campaign. Now it ultimately failed, that campaign, but it elevated the NAACP as a national leader.

But I posited that one of the reasons why it failed is because there were several research institutions that supported segregation, that supported racial bias. Remember, eugenics was the method of the time. And I don't want Brookings or any other think tank to be on the wrong side of history again.

And so for me we do need to work together in this time with organizations that we have not worked with in the past. That adds the value. We can no longer go into situation around policy, and I bring this up about the Moynihan Report. Can you imagine if black women were present when the Moynihan Report came out? It would not have come out the way that it did, it would not have.

And so we cannot continue to operate in these silos that do not include world views, that are central to the policies that we're discussing. But one of the reasons why we have an achievement gap in this regard, we talk about the black/white achievement gap, but there's truly an achievement gap around history in this country.

We would know how to talk about race if people actually understood about slavery, Jim Crow racism, redlining, the criminal justice system, things that they should be getting in school. But you have this willful ignorance, literally in Florida they're trying to pass a law that says if my feelings are hurt, you cannot teach that. This is the kind of willful ignorance that only goes towards a white supremacist exclusive society.

And so for me, why we don't know how to talk about race, because people,

and I'm not trying to like be mean spirited, but people are ignorant around these issues, and they should not be. So for me it's about demand quality education, and that mean having curricula that speaks to the nature of this country and the facts behind it.

MS. LEE: Yeah, but I know we too, we also, I mean we're in the company of friends here, but we also have to talk about our history with our kids as well. We have to make that a priority in our own home.

As I mentioned in my extensive research, we weren't prioritizing that because it was actually the goal that many of us wanted to have. We can talk about what it meant to be in existence before slavery, to debunk for our own family that we have to do that.

As a parent I'm constantly reminding my own kids who they are, because that's the world in which we live. Though I think Rashawn said it earlier, but we have to also remind ourselves as black people, of our own resilience. We're still here. And that actually also helps us to better talk about race because the attacks that affront us and come before us are ones that we, yes, we take it personal every day. But we also know that we can get through this.

So I decided to put this out there because I cannot rely upon history to go back and retrain my kids on things that they are not capable of doing.

MS. BUSETTE: Okay. Thanks, Nicol, thanks Andre. I want to move really quickly to a range of questions we've gotten on reparations. And the general nature of the question is, you know, why aren't we moving forward on this, and what can we do to move forward on the question of reparations.

Rashawn, I'm going to start with you. This is going to be a quick round, Keon, you're going to be next, and if we run out of time, then we run out of time, as all good conversations often do.

MR. RAY: Okay, I'll be real quick. I mean look, we know that there's been a lot of work with HR 40, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee has been advancing that when it comes to thinking about restorative justice. Barbara Lee has been working on that in terms of true reconciliation. Andre and I, we've laid out a package. Essential it's a New Deal version for black people to deal with tuition, to deal with housing, rents, and to also deal with business ownership. We also think that cash payments are wrapped up in that but focusing on wealth building strategies becomes really, really important in this juncture.

Now, on the front of why it's failing, I want to make, there's three quick points. First, my grandfather always taught me that our silence is our acceptance. So what we need for the people we're saying what do I do, we need for you to speak up, we need for you to create what I call gray spaces, is what other people would call gray spaces, these spaces where you are willing to actually work as an accomplice and be willing to put your own privilege at risk in order to disrupt racism and discrimination.

Part of that is a three-part system. First is to engage in what we're doing here, become a racial equity learner. To utilize academic research and policy reports, and then you're able to become a racial equity advocate and a racial equity broker to hold your friends, family member, and coworkers accountable, and then to advocate for equitable policies, which includes restitution.

If we want to pay for reparations, the way we do it is through Federally owned land. Twenty-five percent of the land in the United States is Federally owned. That gets back to the original 40 acres and a mule that black people never got. That land can be sold, it can be leased, and then you could take that money to actually fund a reparations program. We have a platform for it, we just need people in Washington to actually have the courage to do something about it.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Rashawn. Keon, you have the last word, three

seconds.

MR. GILBERT: I'll try to make it quick. I mean part of the, you know, our conversation has really been focusing on not only conditions and challenges but ways that black people are going to need to resist. So as black people sort of both see themselves as the tax and paying the tax of racial inequity, we really sort of have to think about the strategies that become important in terms of what black people need to do not only to continue to uplift themselves, but also to sort of continue to figure out what are we going to participate in and what we are not going to participate in.

Our earlier conversation about education, one of the things that I think we've seen or trend is that black people are deciding to not go to some of these large PWIs. They're making the decision to go to HBCUs or they're making decisions to go to community colleges first to try to save money.

And so I think the more of those kinds of strategies that become important, black people are starting to understand, you know, not only their bodies but sort of what they bring to the table and what they're willing and not willing to pay for. And I think those become where we start to really start to enforce and engage people in terms of really thinking about what are the strategies for change.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Keon. And with that I want to thank all of my fantastic panelists. And I also want to thank the really engaged audience for tremendous questions and for joining us today. We really, really welcome any comments that you will have on this or other issues, and we look forward to seeing you here again at Brookings.edu.

Thank you.

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