

## THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

## WEBINAR

## TRANSCENDING AND THRIVING: CIVIL RIGHTS IN BLACK AMERICA

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**Camille Busette:** Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you for joining us for the Brookings Institution Black History Month event, "Transcending and Thriving: Civil Rights in Black America." There's certainly a lot to talk about, and I'm very much looking forward to the conversation we're going to have here first with our panelists and then, of course, to the questions we're going to get from the audience. But before we start, let me, let me invite you to think about questions and to send them in as we are having our panelists discuss some of the issues. You can, you can send us questions at hashtag black resistance or events at Brookings dot edu.

So our panelists are a very distinguished group, starting with Nicole Austin-Hillery, who is the president and CEO of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. In this role, Nicole Austin-Hillery leads and inspires a team of high performing leaders and staff as they create and implement plans to carry out the organization's mission and achieve strategic goals. We also have Yvette Badu-Nimako, who is an attorney and lecturer with extensive experience working to advance civil rights, civil rights, human rights, economic empowerment and equity in both the public and private sectors through legal analysis, policy strategy, oversight and investigations and program implementation. She currently serves as the interim executive director and vice president of policy at the National Urban League, where she leads the Washington bureau and provides expertise on civil rights, social justice, federal courts and constitutional issues on behalf of the organization.

We are also joined by Dr. Keon Gilbert, who is a David M. Rubenstein fellow at the Brookings Institution. He's an associate professor in the Department of Behavioral Science and Health Education at the College for Public Health and Social Justice at St. Louis University and is a co-founding director of the Institute for Healing, Justice and Equity, a center focused on eliminating disparities in health costs, in health caused by systemic oppression. Dr. Nicol Turner Lee also joins us. She's a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution, the director of the Center for Technology Innovation and serves as a coeditor in chief of TechTank. Dr. Lee researches public policy designed to enable equitable access to technology across the U.S. and to harness its power to create change in communities across the world. Her work also explores global and domestic broadband deployment and Internet governance issues. She's an expert on the intersection of race, wealth and technology within the context of civil engagement, criminal justice and economic development.

Thank you all and welcome and welcome to our entire audience joining us online today. So as I mentioned, we really have a lot of ground to cover. Civil rights is always a very vibrant issue for the Black community. And this year and this year is certainly not any different. So what I wanted to do was focus a little bit on some of the key issues facing, facing the Black community, civil rights issues. Talk a bit about particularly voting rights and some of the things that have happened in open voting rights since the 2020 election. And to start us off, I'm going to ask Nicole A to take us through sort of what's the status of voting rights for Black Americans currently. What are some of the opportunities that we have in front of us right now right before we get into the 2024 election cycle?

**Nicole Austin-Hillery:** Well, good afternoon, Camille, and good afternoon to everyone joining us. Thank you all so much for inviting me to be a part of this critically important discussion. I'm so glad that we're starting with the issue of voting rights, because I like to remind people that when we're talking about a democracy, voting is at the heart of a democracy, no matter what issues we're dealing with, whether it be education, housing, infrastructure, voting is what gives voice to every single person within a democracy. Now, you know, we all know that ever since 2013, voting rights has been under even more attack than in our last 20 to 30 years. And that's when the Supreme Court struck down Section four of the Voting Rights Act. And ever since then, we have seen many states attack voting rights by having state legislatures try to implement new voting laws and regulations that, frankly, make it harder for people to vote. And that has fallen predominantly on Black and brown communities and on poor communities, the changes to those voting laws.

And frankly, we have seen those attacks continue. It has not stopped since 2013. And so as we are in 2023, we are finding that states are continuing these efforts. In fact, if you look at some of the most recent research, it shows that there are over, over 100 new laws that are pending in state legislatures across the country. And that is because there continues to be efforts to make changes to things such as voter ID laws, to play to, to place, placement of voting booths and voting locations, changes with respect to early voting and so on and so on. And we know that these are mechanisms that have simply made it easier for people to engage in our democracy. And that's really what the history of voting rights in this country since the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, that's what it's been about. It has been about a progression towards opening up the franchise, not diminishing and closing the franchise.

So what voters need to do right now is to remain diligent, because one of the things that I like to point out as a bright spot is that despite these attacks, we have seen voters become much more knowledgeable and much more engaged in not just going to the voting booth on Election Day, but in understanding the rules and regulations and changes in their states. And that's what they must continue to do because it is an ever-evolving process. And if you are not aware of the changes that are pending and the changes that have actually been codified in your local jurisdiction, you may be in trouble. You may find yourself at a voting at a voting poll one day and thinking you're about to cast your ballot and you're going to be stopped for, for one reason or another, because you haven't been able to adhere to these new rules and regulations.

But I like to say that as a bright spot that we have far more voter engagement and awareness than we've had in decades. And I think we have to continue to encourage people and communities to be engaged at this level. You know, I've worked on voting rights issues for a long time. And at the, at the foundation, voting rights is a key part of what we focus on in our Center for Policy Analysis and Research, and particularly as we focus on racial justice and racial equity, we know that ensuring fairness and equity when it comes to the voting franchise in this country is, is, is very, very important to ensuring that the Black community is empowered. And that's part of our mission. Our mission is— and it says exactly— is to empower the global Black community.

So one of the things that I like to tell people is that our biggest problem in this country actually is not that we have these attacks against voting, it still remains that we just don't have enough people actually going to the voting booth to vote. I know that can seem a little hard to understand because on voting day, we see these long lines, we see people standing for hours, and it looks like pretty much everybody in the country is voting. But when researchers look at the actual numbers, we still don't have the majority of people in this country who are actually registered to vote, who can be registered and who are actually voting.

So I think it is up to those of us who are fighting for and who are focused on civil rights, who are focused on racial justice and who are focused on empowering the Black community to continue to encourage people to engage in the process one, but two, to be vigilant about being educated about and aware of the changes that are taking place. Because, frankly, I don't think we're going to see this let up. I know there is a fight in Congress for a push to restore the Voting Rights Act and really not just

to restore it, but actually make it stronger, to make it better than it was before. And that fight will continue, and it should continue.

But in the meantime, voters have to remain diligent, and they have to become citizen activists, if you will, to make sure that they are doing what they need to do to educate themselves, but not only themselves, but to educate their community members. Each one teach one. Each one share information. That is how we're going to ensure that everyday citizens are aware and are empowered and know what they need to do to protect this precious right to vote.

**Camille Busette:** Thank you, Nicole. Yvette, I want to continue the conversation with you. I think it's such a, Nicole gives such an excellent message, a great message around activism. And I want to shift the conversation a little bit away from voting for the for the moment and talk about policing. And, you know, we are all aware that since 2020, there's been a heightened kind of sensitivity towards policing, and we've seen some progress there. But we've also seen some pretty harrowing and heartbreaking brutalizations most, most recently, Tyre Nichols, but certainly he's not the only one. I want you to comment a little bit on where we are in policing. What, what seems to be the, the opportunities we might be looking at. Where do we go from here?

**Yvette Badu-Nimako:** Well, thank you, Camille and Brookings, for bringing us together today to discuss such important issues. We continue to see so many tragedies, like you've mentioned, tragic killing of Tyre Nichols in Memphis is really just the latest in a string of Black lives that have been lost to police violence and solutions have been sort of starting to pop up across the country as well as on the federal level. We're seeing some really, really exciting new response models in states that acknowledge really what the president said in the, in his State of the Union address last week, that we expect police to be mental health experts. We expect them to be social workers. We expect them to be medical professionals. And we're seeing these new alternative response models that are really designed to reduce fatal police encounters and reduce the scope of what police are tasked with doing in our society.

We are also seeing on the federal level the policing executive order that was passed last summer. The president implemented the policing executive order to really get started on the critical reforms that we need. However, we're seeing some limitations there. We still need to implement some pieces of the executive order, and we also need comprehensive policing reform. Nothing can replace the comprehensive policing reform that's needed on the federal level.

So, you know, we're thinking about how do we move the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which is a comprehensive policing reform measure that's currently being considered in Congress, was considered last Congress has passed in the, in the past two sessions, congressional sessions in the House. So how do we sort of further that in this new political environment and how do we ensure that there are critical accountability provisions, use of force standards that are in place to really ensure that our communities are no longer facing these losses of Black lives?

**Camille Busette:** Great. Thank you very much, Yvette. We'll definitely come back to that. We know and all, you know, and voting rights as well. Keon, I want you to sort of set the stage for us on public health, and the backdrop to that is of course that, you know, while it wasn't a surprise to many of us, the COVID moment in particularly the most intensive point of the COVID moment really underscored the tremendous disparities and the impact of the structural discrimination on Black communities and communities of color more generally. So I want you to take us through sort of where we are in public health. What are some of the opportunities that have presented themselves? How have we started to deal with those and then we can continue the conversation when we come back to talk about the next couple of years.

**Keon Gilbert:** Sure. Thank you all for the invitation to be part of this discussion and very happy to discuss the role of public health in a lot of different ways. And so generally, when we think about public health or the public health infrastructure, I think it's important for us to remember that it includes not only your local, county, state health department, but it also includes health care facilities, clinics and the like and sort of the range of health professionals and public health professionals sort of in that in that broader workforce.

So one of the things that's, you know, sort of really prominent as a result of COVID is that life expectancy for all and in particular non-Black communities has declined. And for Black communities, that life expectancy has dropped anywhere between 2 to 3 years as a result of COVID. And so what that means is, is we have to really sort of double down, if not quadruple down on many of our public health efforts and strategies to promote health in a number of different ways, thinking about preventative health screenings, also making sure that people participate in other types of public health programs, whether that's in their churches, their barbershops, which includes some of my work, and also the things that are taking place in community centers and other health care facilities.

And so a couple of things that becomes really important, there was a survey released last year that talked about that, where Black Americans responded to a number of questions about health. And so about 47% of Black people suggested that they think that health care has improved over the last 20 years, it's a little bit better, while 20% suggest that it's worse. A number of issues related to that. People are also reporting a number of negative experiences in, in receiving health care. And there's a little bit of a difference in that when we think about both sort of age, age and gender. So Black men over the age of 50 are reporting more negative health, more negative experiences in health care. And about, about 52% of Black women who are less than 50 are reporting a number of significant negative health, negative experiences in health care settings.

And so when you think about sort of that and those differences, you start to see why maybe some people may want to not engage in health care. People may be seeking alternative strategies to take care of their health. And certainly COVID exacerbated that in a number of different ways. Also, I think what's important in, in what people are talking about in terms of what's contributing to health care, people are talking about their, their occupational status, how where they work is increasing their risk for, for particular diseases. Also, people are talking about where they live a little bit more in terms of that being a contributing factor where there are a number of environmental exposures that are increasing their risk for health. And so when sort of we take all of this together, we really need to think about what are the community-based strategies that need to be implemented.

A number of communities are recognizing that they have a very important role in addressing their health, and I think it's important for us to provide resources. And I think the Biden administration has some particular strategies or tools that can help with that in terms of making sure that we reach out to communities, whether again, it's churches, it's barbershops, it's local community, community centers, other community-based organizations, even excuse me, neighborhood associations are also becoming very much aware of what their particular role can be in promoting health.

And I'll just add one more final thing. One of the, another sort of important lesson learned from COVID is that we need to include all stakeholders, all businesses, a range of various stakeholders who have not seen their role in health become partners in health. And I think in that way we can really sort of broaden our definition about what public health is and to really begin to focus on strategies to promote equity.

**Camille Busette:** Great. Thank you very much, Keon. I am going to come back to you when we do our second round. I want you to comment a little bit on the most recent study that was released yesterday, which showed that even wealthy Black women have higher rates of maternal mortality than poor white women in this country, there was a California study, large in sample so want to get your thoughts on that as well when we come back. But before we do that, Nicole, I think this is a great segue, Nicol T. I, you know, you study broadband deployment and access. And as we know, during the COVID epidemic, there was a kind of an increase in telehealth and telehealth provision. And as we all know, you know, in order to be able to participate in a telehealth visit, you certainly have to have access to broadband.

Where are we in with, with respect to broadband access for Black communities across the U.S., whether they be urban or rural? So maybe you can take us through that first. And then I know because of your role at Brookings, you certainly cover a range of other issues. If there's anything here that we've talked about, but you also want to address, please feel free to do that as well.

**Nicol Turner Lee:** Well, thank you so much, Camille. And thank you to my colleagues who are actually on this call. So, Camille, I'm going to do a flip of your question and sort of land up with broadband, because I think it's really important, as we've heard from all the other panelists, to sort of discuss the state of crisis that Black America is in right now. I mean, one of the things that I think we have to talk about before we start talking about communications infrastructure is some of the attacks that we've actually seen on critical race theory and African American studies and how that's correlated with what journalist, author, historian and the founder of the Study of American, African-American Life in History, Carter G. Woodson, said that if you control a man's thinking, you actually control his destiny. You don't have to make a back door because you basically have suggested that the only way through is through that back door, and you can make him do what you want.

Why I think that's important, particularly before I delve into the communications ecosystem, is that these attacks have significant policy implications. They implicate if we actually strip out African American culture, implicate the need for reparations, which a recent report I just read just yesterday suggested about 100 million is owed, 200 trillion is owed to Black Americans, when you start to add up the type of personal injury, the post effects of slavery, the foregone earnings, the gender based violence, when you start to strip away the fact that African Americans and Black Americans of the diaspora have a lived experience in this country, you begin to take away the credibility for that.



And I think going back to what Yvette said, you also lend yourselves where we see increased violence done against ourselves because you've indoctrinated us to believe that our history was not important. I think that that's something that I want to say before I talk about the digital divide, because getting history is not just happening within our classrooms. You know, some of us can remember, myself included, when we actually had African American studies departments. This debate that we're having now is no different than the debates in 1968, when they formed the first African American Studies program at San Francisco State University, which was then San Francisco College. Back then, it took protests and activism to get people to actually want to move towards justifying and bring credibility to our lived experiences.

And here we are today, if I may add, in a communications ecosystem that not only suffers from a digital divide that I'll speak about in a moment but has a lack of depth when it comes to media ownership by Black Americans in this country. Less than 3% of Black Americans in this country own assets to television broadcast stations. Less than 3% of African-Americans in this country have major roles in tech companies which are constantly defining and redefining and misinforming many of these messages. Less than 3% of African Americans, particularly women, are involved in startups. And let me put it like this, less than 0.35% of those startups founded by Black women actually received VC capital funding.

So we have a dearth in our communications ecosystem that allows for this messaging, allows for this new contemporary attack on our storytelling to actually occur, which I think is worth talking about when you begin to look at the digital divide. Not only have we foreclosed in the communications ecosystem, but we've also foreclosed the ability of Black folks to get online and do the things that everyday Americans do. In my research, we had a digital divide before COVID: one in 14 million, in some cases, some have reported 100 million people were not connected before the pandemic. And that that number not only got worse, but for K through 12 students who did not have access, Black and brown children, we are now seeing regressions in learning losses, we are seeing a de-enrollment of those students based on the fact that they could not participate in distance learning.

And among what you're talking about, Camille, telehealth, what we see most people able to get online with tele-health, that is not a finite or infinite opportunity. At some point it's going to end and the chronic disparities that people like Keon are working with are going to continue because people cannot get online to actually engage doctors, let alone have the quality health insurance to do so. I'm

not here to sound like a Black Baptist preacher, though. Those who know me know that I actually will stand here on my soapbox and talk about the need for equity, racial equity, digital equity and care equity, voting rights equity.

But I think at the heart of this when we begin to look at the digital divide, and I'm writing about this in my new forthcoming book, that it's not a digital divide of bits and bytes. This is a divide that is actually determining first class residency in a digital democracy, the ability to know where your polling place is, the ability to know more about candidates that's not misinformed and misaligned. The ability to take your phone and record rogue police officers and post that so people actually see you and the ability to share messages that validate the full lived experiences that do not permit a backdoor I think are conversations that we need to have that match what we're seeing in the communications ecosystem and the digital divide with these pressing issues affecting Black Americans across the diaspora.

**Camille Busette:** Great. Thank you so much, Nicole. Very, very invigorating, as always. I want to kind of step back into this discussion about opportunities, particularly as we head into the election season for 2024. And here I want all of you to think about what are some of the, what's the playbook for advancing Black civil rights between now and the beginning of that, of the election, so November 2024. Yvette and Nicole, I'd be happy if you could both comment on, on voting and policing, Keon if you can comment on policing. I also want to talk about this new study that I mentioned about maternal mortality. And Nicol, I really want you to spend some time taking us through what is the role of local and state activists as we kind of round this corner into 2024. So I'm going to actually start with Yvette, go to Nicole, Keon and then Nicole, Nicole, Yvette, Nicole A, Keon and then Nicol T.

**Yvette Badu-Nimako:** Thanks, Camille. And a note about voting rights. We're also seeing an attack when it comes to the disenfranchisement of Black communities across the country when it comes to partisan gerrymandering and racially discriminatory maps. It clearly leads to the consistent disenfranchisement of Black communities, we've seen in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, across the country. And, you know, of course, we have the Voting Rights Act, but of course, Voting Rights Act is under attack. So it's extremely important, like Nicole A said, we need to mobilize, we need to vote, because the state legislatures in different states, they determine the maps. They determine our representation, they determine, you know, who gets fair representation when it comes to our vote. It

determines our representatives in Congress as a result, and it determines the judges that get nominated and confirmed and uphold our, our voting rights, the state of our democracy and the like.

So I would also like to emphasize that because it ties into everything that we've been talking about, like Nicol Turner Lee said. So, you know, and when it comes to policing, as I mentioned before, you know, we have, you know, as I mentioned earlier, we have our policing executive order that the Biden administration rolled out last year that talks about different provisions from the George Floyd bill that applies to federal law enforcement. It talks about creating a database of police misconduct database. It talks about a lot of provisions such as the ban on chokeholds, no knock warrants that are extremely important to the provisions of the George Floyd Bill.

However, there are limitations there, and there does need to be, if we're going to talk about comprehensive policing reform, there needs to be a different measure that requires, you know, state and local law enforcement entities to comply with these sort of standards that are needed if we're going to stop seeing, you know, tragedies such as the killing of Breonna Taylor or Tyre Nichols, etc. So, you know, that is obviously a key point.

On the state and local level, as I mentioned, we're seeing so many exciting models. You know, we're seeing the CAHOOTS program in Oregon that many, many individuals now are using across the country as models for their own programs when it comes to different types of responses, mental health response, if there's a mental health crisis and the like. When it comes to community violence response, we're seeing Newark Street teams that are, you know, on the ground really making an effort to prevent unnecessary police interactions that lead to tragedies.

So, you know, these are concrete measures. We're seeing them pop up throughout the country in different states. And the more states explore it, that's really a key metric in the next two years to see how we change sort of our state of public safety, both when it comes to police interaction as well as expanded and more accurate response when we're thinking about mental health as well.

**Camille Busette:** Okay, great. Thank you very much, Yvette. Nicole A.

**Nicole Austin-Hillery:** So, Camille, I want to step back for a second because as I was listening to Nicol T speak, it, it reminded me that this conversation really has to make clear to people that we are not, these issues are not siloed issues. When you were talking about civil and human rights and racial justice, you have to understand that all of these issues are interconnected. You know, in my years of working as a civil and human rights attorney, you know, I'd run into colleagues

who would say, well, I'm a specialist in voting rights or I'm a specialist in housing, I'm a specialist in education. Those days are gone. We cannot afford to say we specialize in one racial injustice over another. We have to understand that there are a panoply of issues, and the dots are all interconnected. You can't talk about one without talking about the other.

When we're talking about health inequities, the report that, as you mentioned, that, that just came out and I'm so glad you brought it up because I was planning to bring it up, that was released in The New York Times about the study in California, that is about race, that is about class, that is about gender. It's not about one versus the other. It's about geography. It's about all of those things, it's about state governments and funding and where money goes and where research dollars go. So we have to understand that we do not, we do not have the leisure of just working on one issue at a time, I'm sorry, everybody. We don't. And I know, I know it's work, but we have to keep our eye on the full prize. Okay. So that's the first thing I wanted to say.

Now, I know you asked me to drill down a little bit on, on voting and the policing issues, so I will do that. Let me say this about voting. You know, my home state is the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. And there was just a story on NPR about a week ago because they just did a special election in Pennsylvania, but they were also just talking about how there is still a fight underway in Pennsylvania, because it is, it is a state, I will tell you, when I grew up, I thought I lived in a very liberal state. So watching the changes in states like Pennsylvania has, has been enormously jarring to me. But it is a state right now, like so many others, where there are fights that are underway right now, court battles.

You know, it was someone mentioned earlier, I believe it was, Yvette who talked about how we have to watch the judges and what's happening in terms of appointments. There are battles going on in Pennsylvania right now in the courts because there are, a war is waging between the parties dealing with gerrymandering, dealing with mapping and dealing with various voting implementations that will be put in place in the state. Those are the things we have to continue to watch. Everyone needs to become, frankly, an armchair expert on all of these issues. Folks, read your news, watch what is happening, go to community meetings.

We, in fact, at the foundation, we've been doing something called community conversations around the country. We have one coming up in fact, in two weeks, we are going to be on the ground in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And as so many know, Tulsa, Oklahoma, is the place where in 1921, there was

an horrendous race massacre. There used to be the Black Wall Street, there was so much wealth and businesses that were in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and it was burned down by a white mob due to racism. And we have to make sure that we are in these communities having these conversations. We did one in Detroit last year where we talked about public safety. There, there goes the policing issue and how do we keep our communities safe.

So we have to make sure that we as experts, quote unquote, are not just sitting in our nice lofty offices in Washington and other places, though we are blessed to have these positions and be able to talk and be able to do this work, but we have to be on the ground with our folks, arm in arm, in the communities, having these conversations and giving them the resources and the tools that they need so that when we say get educated on voting, we are giving them those materials. That's what we're doing at the foundation. Again, our Center for Policy Analysis and Research and our National Racial Equity Initiative for Social Justice. That's what we are doing. We have fellows that are with us, they work with us for two years and they are doing research on a plethora of issues, the very issues that we're talking about now and even then some.

And we want to give those tools to people in communities so that they know themselves how to mobilize, how to organize and how to put certain mechanisms in place that will make their community stronger, that will give them more voice and give them power to make the changes they want to make in their communities. So that's, that's how we have to, again, dig deep when it comes to voting and it comes to that, when it comes to the policing and the criminal justice issues, that deals with safety. You know, I tell people all the time, I don't know who said that Black folks don't want safe communities. Somebody somewhere told that lie because it gets confused when, when you listen to the messaging and the talk, somebody got that confused.

Look, I grew up in public housing, and I tell people all the time my community was so safe, we left our doors and windows open. I love my community. I didn't know my community was considered an unsafe one until somebody on the outside told me that it was unsafe only because it was public housing. We kept our community safe because that was important to us. It was important to our parents. It was important to all the kids who were living there. We all want safe communities, but we want communities that are safe but that also respect us and that also give voice to us and put us first. Not a politician, not policy makers, but that put what the people in those communities want and feel like they need.

So as we are focusing on policing, we have to make sure that we are bringing community voices to the table, that we are bringing community voices to these policy discussions. That's where it has to start, because then that's when you build upon camaraderieship, that's when you build upon inclusion and making sure that these policies that we're talking about are not these erudite things, but are things that people really are saying work for them in their communities and are what they need to feel safe and are what they need to ensure that they are having the right relationships with the law, the law enforcement officers and the policy makers who are making decisions that impact their lives on a daily basis. So as we continue this conversation, I want to make sure that, that we that we keep all of that in mind. This is not about one or two offset issues, that this is all about a contingent and collective set of issues that are impacting the future of Black America and the future of our power.

**Camille Busette:** Thank you, Nicole. Keon, I'm going to move to you.

**Keon Gilbert:** All righty. I don't know why you put me after Nicole A there, but I appreciate it. Well, I'll just actually pick up on several points that Nicole A has, has mentioned. And before I get to a few more details about the particular study that that you mentioned, because I think they're relevant to the understanding of Black, Black maternal mortality and morbidity. And so, you know, as a student and scholar of public health, when we talk about sort of chronic issues, maternal mortality is one of those, one of those topics. And certainly researchers have spent a lot of time trying to figure out, well, what's the right pathway in terms of trying to understand what's the contributing factor? Is it stress? Is it housing? Is it the neighborhood conditions? Is it unemployment issues? Is it access to health care? And it's all of those. And as, as others have mentioned, it's the intersection of all of those compounding against Black women.

And in this particular study that looks at 100,000 births, it shows that not only is it a disparity, it is a systemic inequality. When you look at the number of, of, of babies that are dying to Black mothers, whether they are rich or poor in California, it really shows how stark that disparity and inequality is. And we can't just related to interpersonal issues between a patient and the physician. That certainly happens. When I talked about the study looking at Black Americans in their responses to a number of health questions, Black women under the age of 50 are the ones who have reported more negative experiences in health, in the health care setting. And some of those issues relate to having to advocate, having to speak up a number of times to get the care that they deserve, to get quality care.

Those women are also saying that they are also not believed when they talk, when, when they complain about issues related to pain or how to manage their pain. Women are also talking about just being sort of dismissed in other, other kinds of ways. And we also saw this during, during COVID, where a number of Black women died because they were not being heard by health care professionals, in particular their physicians. And so it is in some ways really wonderful that we can sort of document this, this inequality. But we really need to sort of think about, well, what are the root causes and what are we going to do?

And this is really a call to action to Black America. This is really a call to action for collective action organizing within Black communities that allow those organizations that are working on, whether it's housing, whether it's food insecurity, to come together to say we are going to be at the forefront of solving this particular issue because we cannot be left up to health care professionals alone. It cannot be left up to the public health professionals, and it cannot be left up to people who are working in these silos. We really do need collective action in organizing in order to address this.

And again, this is one of those things that people in public health and even health care talk about a lot. But we've yet to see systemic solutions to really fix the challenge. And so we often think about social mobility as being one of those factors that allows everyone to sort of escape certain certain conditions and health experiences. And this study points out that that is not the case. There are other examples as well that we could talk about, but this is sort of one of those really, really just historic problems that really points to systemic racism and oppression in a number of different systems. And again, how that systemic oppression intersects to continue to lead to these, these inequalities.

**Camille Busette:** Thank you, Keon. Dr. Turner Lee, I'm going to let you just move us into the online question moment, so I'm sure you will have a lot to comment on. So please just start us out and then you'll be followed with online questions.

**Nicol Turner Lee:** Yeah, you know, Camille, I think it was really nice the way you sort of captured this panel, because at the end of the day, it's around, you know, transcending and thriving. So I think that there is much to be said around the fact that we see, and I love the way Nicole A has framed it, you know, we do see this plethora of issues that are now much more intersectional than they have been before. The question is, how does Black resistance show up in these scenarios where we're trying to actually change the equation on how we deal with these things?

As a sociologist, obviously a large part of this is structural, and I think under the Biden administration, we have seen this acknowledgment of racial equity as a policy imperative, and it's shown up in how the Biden administration is trying to get various federal agencies to do their work, but also the type of culture that they're trying to impress among federal government spending and the the regular traditional bureaucratic work. I mean, the attention that we've seen in certain areas, I know, for example, even in the space of broadband, where we're now seeing terms like digital discrimination or we're starting to talk about policing equity, ways that we haven't talked about before.

But one of the things that I want to again impress upon what the panel has been talking about is that getting to racial equity, yes, it involves a structural solution. We've seen that, Camille, you know that in your work with the Moynihan report, where we actually countered that, we've seen that in the Kerner Commission, where we tried to actually figure out what worked out of that. But this is the challenge. We need state and local mobilization to solve many of these problems. You know, I'm thinking about what happened to Tyre Nichols and how we all were stunned but not necessarily surprised. But I'm actually heartened by the reaction by the Memphis police chief to do something about it quickly.

I'm also thinking about local politics when it comes to how we deal with some of the voting concerns and issues. On the one hand, we have certain governors and certain mayors that are taking this on head on, and they're trying to actually move away from the polarization and provide equity. On the other hand, we see governors like in Florida that are trying to erase our history or sometimes in Virginia, where I live, where equity is not a concern. My point is for the next level of activism, we need to actually approach it at the state and local level, because that's where these chess games are actually being played and impressing upon our communications ecosystems in ways that people are taking those messages and sort of translating them as federal initiatives or for federal good. It's blocking our ability to make movements.

So I'm like many people on this call, you know, I'm all about ways in which we actually impress action locally to actually get out to vote. So we determine our local leaders, but more importantly, that we get from my grandmother all the way down to my daughter and others, to the polls, to these conversations so that they're actually having a say and their lived experiences are being reflected. I would also say one other thing, Camille, just on the side of policing as well as education, employment, etc. You know, we have to deal with this technology piece from the



standpoint of misinformation and disinformation. And we also have to deal with it on the standpoint of surveillance technologies and how they've actually impressed upon some of these other outcomes that continue to keep us in a state of, of isolation or a state of apartheid.

I think is really important for us to take on these technological issues as the next civil rights. It's very hard, as McCoy pointed out, to talk about election integrity without talking about misinformation. It's very hard to talk about policing without talking about the oversurveillance of people of color, particularly Black people in their communities. It's hard to talk about health care if you actually don't look at how, you know, pharmaceutical industries and health care industries are actually exploiting the bodies of Black women and Black men. So I think it's really important for us to make these intersectional and, you know, invite people like me to the party. Technology is becoming much more, I think, much more dangerous to Black communities when we begin to look at things like algorithmic bias, data privacy. I know at Brookings, we're going to be instituting an anti-racist framework to A.I..

For me, having those conversations on top of the layers of other conversations that we're having as Nicole A pointed out are important because the technology enables a greater precision of discrimination, because not only do they see you physically, but they see you online and everything that you do and have the ability to pry into the intimate moments of your digital profile to oppress you. We saw that in the 2016 election by foreign operatives.

So I think again, going forward, Camille, when you say the playbook, I think there's a playbook out there. But I think it's local and I think it's important for us to sort of take the political will that we have now at the White House, figure out how to impress upon a lot of these repressive acts that are happening at the state and local level and get people to react to that as well, so we're not just waiting for it to trickle down in terms of what equity or how equity will be mitigated resolved.

**Camille Busette:** Great, thanks for that Nicol. I want to, we've gotten some excellent questions from the audience, and I want to start off just building on what you were saying, Nicol T about local level action and local acts, activism in general. As we all know, there has been a movement over the last couple of years to think about reparations at the local level. So I want us to just kind of think about that for a second and discuss whether or not that seems like a viable strategy. Obviously, it is not, you know, a substitute for a larger scale reparations. But let's think about that and talk about a little bit about what the playbook might look like there, what has been accomplished in

that area. What do you see as some of the insights of moving in the local direction on reparations? I'm going to start with Nicole A.

**Nicole Austin-Hillery:** Thank you, Camille. You know, as I said earlier, we at the foundation are going to be in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in two weeks. Tulsa is a place where the issue of reparations is hot and heavy because of that legacy of racism that emanated from that 1921 race massacre. And we know these conversations are happening. We know that in California, they have commission dealing with reparations. We know what's happened in Illinois with respect to reparations. Here in my county where I live, here in Prince George's County, here in Maryland, they are dealing with these issues. So we have to not be afraid. We have to stop being afraid to have the conversation about reparations, okay.

You all will remember when, when Eric Holder was the attorney general of the United States. One of the things he said is that we as a people, and he didn't, he, he wasn't saying just we as a, as Black people, we as a country of people, are cowards when it comes to talking about race. Well, we have to stop being coward, cowardly. And that means dealing with the issue of reparations. We have to have serious conversations about it on the national level, on the federal level, there has been a piece of legislation that has been introduced every single legislature, every single Congress, and the late great John Conyers was the champion of it. It is now being championed by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, H.R. 40, and it is a bill to do nothing more than study the issue of race in this country, slavery and the issue of reparations. So we have to start with that.

We need to be having those same kinds of conversations on the local level because we have to get people to just wrap their brains around what reparations even means and what it is tied to. And again, you know, as I said earlier, we can't allow silos. We can't allow people to break down these issues and create other messages and stories and co-opt them. People need to understand that you cannot talk about racial injustice in this country and the history of that injustice and how it has impacted the country without talking about repair. And that's what, that is what is at the heart of reparations, the issue of repair. So when we're talking about policing and we're talking about that system, aren't we really having conversations about repair, how do we take a system that's broken and fix it or improve it or create a whole new system? That's what reparations is about.

So we have to start messaging in that way so that people can, you know, I don't care what they have to do, eat your Wheaties, whatever it is you have to do to be bold enough to come to the

table and have this conversation, we need to be encouraging people to have those conversations. And again, when the foundation is in Tulsa in two weeks and we have that community conversation, you can best believe that the issue of reparations and how do we bring about repair is going to be at the heart of what we discuss with folks on the ground there.

**Camille Busette:** Great. Thank you very much, Nicole. Anybody else want to get in on this? We have other questions. So certainly. Yes. Nicol T.

**Nicol Turner Lee:** Yeah. You know, I want to echo what Nicole said. I mean, I think we should stop running away from reparations. It took us many, many, many, many, many years to actually pass an anti-lynching bill. I think we can go ahead and move forward reparations, because I think the country is finally acknowledging that when you don't actually look at those kind of issues, you sustain white supremacy. And I think it's important that we do have some to just sort of address this head on, particularly after the things that we've seen publicly. I think the main thing, too, and I like what Nicole talked about in terms of framing this as a repair. I mean, the challenge that we have reparations, and I think people need to understand, particularly those who are listening who know very little about it, there is a cost of injury to folks that not only, you know, psychologically were damaged because of the transatlantic slave trade, but continue to feel the cost when it comes to economic disparities, social disparities, educational disparities, meaning where people start in the marathon is where they're going to land up.

And if we as a country are thinking about and again, I want to go back to those federal investments, there's political will on the racial equity side, but reparations are very much a part of that because we're dealing with an unevenness when it comes to where people enter this marathon. And if we're truly trying to be a global leader, I think it's really important that we call the bluff the way it is. We make sure that we put our money where our mouth is in this country. It's not a lot, but you just think about the disenfranchisement of certain farmers in this country, what that is done to level the playing field. It's no different than that. So, again, I think, like Nicole said, it's local and it's an issue. And I just read this report after it just came out from the ASIL on the second Symposium on Reparations. But there's a really interesting report that quantifies this. And I think we, again, need more studies to understand how this implicates our ability as a country to be much more equitable.

**Camille Busette:** Great. Thank you, Nicol. I want to move to another question we've gotten from the audience. So the question is, what are the, what are the top policy, policy priorities to

address systemic racism? And I think what this question is acknowledging is that there are a lot of interdependent issues. But if we look at the next two years, we're going to have to prioritize and where can we build the largest coalition? So I'm just going to do a round robin and ask each of you that question. I'm going to start with Yvette.

**Yvette Badu-Nimako:** Thanks, Camille. So, as many mentioned, they're so all-encompassing because they're interconnected. There's so many issues that we have to view, as, you know, not in its silos. We have to view them together, right? So when we're thinking at the National Urban League about our priorities, we're thinking about policing and voting rights like we already mentioned. We're also thinking about the social safety net, right? And it's something that really impacts our communities. We're thinking about the minimum wage, which is a huge priority for us because it impacts how we're able to economically thrive, right, as well as homeownership and reducing discrimination when it comes to, you know, all pathways for homeownership and wealth building, you know, things like how do we combat appraisal bias, how do we combat all these concrete issues that we're seeing pop up as folks try to attain wealth in our communities?

So, you know, it's intrinsically tied, and we view them together. And I think it's critically important that we continue to do so. You know, and things that we've seen, you know, obviously, we faced a really tough pandemic in the past couple of years. Certain policies have come up that have shown us that we can do more, right. When we think about expanded Medicaid, we think about the child tax credit, when we think about all of these things that sort of supported, you know, Black communities and other, you know, traditionally underserved communities. It's something that can we explore continuing that in the next two years. So that's definitely a priority for us as well.

**Camille Busette:** Great. Thank you very much, Yvette. Keon, I'm going to move to you.

**Keon Gilbert:** And so I'll just come from a public health perspective. And I think part of it is recognizing that many of the policies that we think about, implement and enact have some health components, have some health implication. And I think it is both sort of the community's responsibility to demand that politicians think about those health implications as well as to figure out important solutions and to work with communities to do that. So I definitely think we need more, more resources, more, more structures as a way of policymakers and other stakeholders to engage with communities. And there's a number of different ways that they can do that. Also demanding that both

our public health infrastructure and the, and the medical or health care infrastructure really focus on prevention.

You know, one of the things that becomes important in even the study that you mentioned in sort of even all of our health issues is that people are just not generally healthy. And so it's not just a matter of whether it's Black or white. People are just not healthy in general, and people don't have access to preventive health services. And I don't mean just screenings, but other types of programs to not only think about health behaviors but also accessing services. One of the things that Yvette mentioned in terms of thinking about bias is that we have incredible bias in all of our systems and systems and structures and services where people are being blamed for having to access these services.

And so we need to really undo those types of policies, in many ways, when I think about public health, we really do need a movement of anti-racism within the public health infrastructure to ensure that people are getting the resources that they need and getting the, the types of services that are important to not only prevention, but if people are sick to be able to promote health so that their life is extended in many different ways and they have a quality of life.

**Camille Busette:** Great. Thank you, Keon. Nicol T.

**Nicol Turner Lee:** Yeah, I mean, I'm not a public health professional and I admire the work of my colleague Keon in what he's doing. And I would add to that we need an initiative for Black mental health. I mean, a lot of what we spoke about has a lot to do with the trauma that we've experienced and the extent to which we can continue to vow or vow to address Black mental health issues I think would be important. I would just say other policy priorities for the sake of time, obviously digital divide, we need to close the divide, ensure equitable access to broadband. We need to stop surveilling technologies that are oppressive and repressive to communities of color, particularly Black people. I think it's important, as Yvette said, to continue to invest in economic development and wealth building strategies, including reducing student debt.

And then I would say finally, you know, place that people find comfort and I really love what Nicole said is where they live and making sure that we have livable communities with sustainable housing and those parts of the ecosystem that just make a better quality of life. The end of day, we can't take back what happened to us, but we can certainly demand that we live in communities that allow us to survive and thrive and transcend a lot of that trauma that we've had experience.

**Camille Busette:** Thank you. Nicol. Nicole A.

**Nicole Austin-Hillery:** So, Camille, I'm going to do what you asked us to do. But it's clearly hard.

**Camille Busette:** I know.

**Nicole Austin-Hillery:** Focus on that one thing. And as I listen to my colleagues, I'm like, yes, yes, absolutely all those things. But I'm going to try to focus in on the one thing that I think is the umbrella that encompasses all of these issues. And you heard bits and pieces of it from Nicol from Yvette and from Keon, and that's economics. Everything stems from economics given this country in which we live, how this country was founded. If we, as we are talking about racism and slavery, our people were brought here because of economics was, it was for nothing more than to make money for a wealthy group of white male landowners who needed free labor. So everything that we are talking about, whether we're talking about the housing, the education, the infrastructure, all of that is about economics.

The work that we're doing that so many of our fellows are doing at the foundation is focused on economic issues in one form or another. And I'll give you a quick example. You know, Keon was talking about the health disparities. There was a report that I heard on the world about two weeks ago, and it was talking about the fact that there are now people who are paying a fee, like a thousand, \$2,000 a year for a telehealth doctor, so that based on their fee and what they pay, they will have access to that doctor at any time of the day. They can email them, text them, they can get appointments without waiting in line. Now, what does that mean for kids who are like me, who grew up in public housing? My parents didn't have \$2,000 to pay for a telehealth appointment so that I could, for the year just be able to access a doctor. What does that say about those communities, as we've been talking about before, who don't have access to broadband? What does that say about health disparities when it comes to race?

So we have to, I will say, Camille, use economics as that overarching issue that we've got to focus on, because everything, everything stems from there, in terms of the decisions that are made, the communities that are served and the people who have voice in this country. And until we can level the playing field when it comes to economics, we won't be able to level the playing field with respect to any of the other critically important issues that we've been talking about today. So as the old adage

goes, follow the money. And so we in civil and human rights communities have to follow the money in order to engage our communities and empower our communities.

**Camille Busette:** Thank you, Nicole. And on that note, I'm going to thank you, Nicole A for joining us, Nicol T, thank you very much, Keon and Yvette. This has been an excellent and really stimulating discussion. I hope everybody who has joined us has found it useful and energizing and, you know, pointing towards a path forward for the important work that we have to do, not just in the next two years, but as we, as we continue to evolve as a society. I also want to thank our audience, and I hope you will join us again for Brookings event and we look forward to having your participation then. Take care. Bye bye.