

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
WEBINAR
IMPROVING RACIAL EQUITY THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY
WASHINGTON, D.C.
Thursday, June 8, 2023

UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT – CHECK AGAINST RECORDING

PANEL 1:

DARRELL M. WEST (Moderator)
Senior Fellow and Douglas Dillon Chair in Governmental Studies, Brookings

CAMILLE BUSETTE
Interim Vice President and Director, Governance Studies, Director, Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative, Brookings

KEON L. GILBERT
David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Governance Studies, Brookings

PANEL 2:

DARRELL M. WEST (Moderator)
Senior Fellow and Douglas Dillon Chair in Governmental Studies, Brookings

NICOL TURNER LEE
Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Technology Innovation, Brookings

ANDRE M. PERRY
Senior Fellow, Brookings Metro

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DARRELL M. WEST: Good morning. I'm Darrell West, senior fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution. And I'm pleased to welcome you to our 14th annual Alfred Taubman Forum on Improving Racial Equity through Public Policy. This forum was established in the generosity of Mr. Taubman in 2009, and over the years we've addressed a number of different topics, such as technology, integration, education policy, health care and democracy, among other subjects. We appreciate the generosity of the Taubman family in supporting this forum and helping us to inform important public debates over major issues. One of the most important subjects is the issue of racial inequity and injustice. Systemic inequities continue to plague the United States in housing, education, employment and wealth, among other areas. There have been many efforts over the past several decades to address these issues, and there has been progress in some areas, but there remains much that needs to get done. We see persistent inequities in many areas, and it has been difficult to narrow the gaps that exist along racial lines. There remain important and enduring variations in life outcomes based on race in our country. What we want to do today is to gain a better understanding of why these inequities persist and what we can do to improve the situation. To help us do that, we're delighted to have two sets of panelists on this forum. For our first panel, we are pleased to have two distinguished experts with us. Dr. Camille Busette is the interim vice president of Governance Studies at Brookings and director of our Race, Prosperity and Inclusion Initiative. She writes on barriers to economic prosperity and the role of social capital in promoting opportunity. Dr. Keon Gilbert is the David Rubenstein fellow in Governance Studies, where he focuses on racial disparities in health care, among other areas. Later, we will have another panel featuring Dr. Nicol Turner Lee and Dr. Andre Perry, and I will introduce them at that time. I should note that those wishing to submit questions can do so by emailing events@brookings.edu or through Twitter at BrookingsGov by using hashtag Brookings Racial Equity. So I want to start with Camille. You have focused for a number of years on barriers to economic prosperity, especially for black men and boys. What do you see as the greatest obstacles for those individuals?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: Well, Darrell, it's such a pleasure to be here and just want to welcome everybody who is joining us for this really important conversation. And a huge thanks to the top independent family for continuing to support our work here in governance studies. So what's very interesting about the economic mobility picture for black men in the United States is that it is largely unchanged and has been largely unchanged for at least the last five decades. And what that still does suggest is that despite a variety of different kinds of policies and obviously a range of programmatic initiatives over that time, that there is some kind of enduring factor that makes it very challenging for many black men to be able to gain a level of economic success that is sustainable throughout generations. So that that factor is clearly racism. And there's lots of, you know, very well considered research. Raj Chetty my own work and several blocks of work that really demonstrates that there is an X factor that can't be explained away by anything else and that that the way in which that works for black men and black boys is that they are not in a position as because of that kind of discrimination, they are not in a position to be able to be considered for roles, to be able to take advantage of educational opportunities, to be placed in positions where they really can be successful. And that has the corollary kind of impact of creating a more constrained set of social networks for them. And those social networks that particularly are much more important to getting a job or obtaining an education, etc.. So the net result is that because of so many years of discrimination, is that you have black men and black boys who, for the good portion of U.S. history, have not been well attached to the job market. And as a result, there are a variety of different negative impacts economically as well as slightly psychologically and physically, etc.. And those those are the things that make it very difficult for them to move forward.

DARRELL M. WEST: Thank you. That is disheartening that for 50 years there has been little progress in many different areas. I'm just wondering, are there areas where there has been some progress and then what areas do you think are the most important ones to address?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: So a couple of things I want to say there. The first is that I just in the last year and maybe even the last six months, we have actually reached a really interesting milestone for black male unemployment and that it has dropped extremely significant way. And I has is probably approaching one of the lowest levels we've ever had historically in the U.S. That is largely due to the tightness of the job market. And so that is a real change, but that is not the result of any particular policy or programmatic emphasis. So that's an important thing to say. The second thing is that there are places and very, very few of them, but there are places in the U.S., in Montgomery County, Maryland, would be one of them where black men do extremely well. And the reason that is the case is that there is a really low level of discrimination. There's

really high support in the educational system for them. And they live in communities which are characterized by people who are who have good jobs and are able to generate a significant, I would say, kind of mind cherry cushion for their families. So those there are places like that. And so a lot of the work that we do is really focused on how do we take lessons from those places and ensure that we can distill what's most important there and have conversations with communities and other places to have similar kinds of results.

DARRELL M. WEST: It's nice to hear the example of Montgomery County, which is just outside of D.C. And I think you're right that that could provide some basis for trying to figure out, okay, why have we seen progress there and what are the possible lessons for elsewhere. So Keon I want to bring you into the conversation. And I know you've done considerable research on racial disparities in health care. What are the greatest disparities out there and what are the sources of those disparities?

KEON L. GILBERT: Thank you, Darrell, for for having me this morning. And thank you all for for tuning in. So when we think about health in health care disparities, it's important to really think about not only what happens in our clinical encounters, in our routine health care screenings, but what's happening in in in our world when we spend so much time outside of those settings. So what's happening in our neighborhoods and as we are experiencing currently air quality as a result of the Canadian wildfires. So those things become very important to consider and have a direct and long term effect on on health and in particular, health disparities. One of the things that I think that becomes really important as we sort of continue to move through different stages of of the pandemic, is to realize that what it helped to highlight was that there were significant inequalities and just sort of picking up on on that or using sort of that COVID lens. A number about 30 over 30% of Americans who had COVID are experiencing long term COVID or still experiencing some symptoms months and even years later. And as you can imagine, the breakdown in terms of who's experiencing those bi racial ethnic groups. So Hispanics, African-Americans, older Americans, those with lower levels of education attainment, those are the ones who are also reporting or more likely to report symptoms as a result of long COVID. And so what that really continues to highlight and show and document to us is that we have many broken systems, not just in health care or public health, but also how those interact or intersect with other broken systems. And so as we talk about sort of broader social and structural determinants, we really have to investigate what's happening in in within and across our social systems. Another big piece of this is to recognize that health in health care and even public health policies are really social policies as as much as public health has tried to do over the last two decades to recognize that there should be held in all policies. There also needs to be a social aspect in terms of thinking about health and health care policies that can really help us to fix big some of these broken systems and to integrate services across them. I'll make one one last point, and that's around community engagement as we sort of look towards this goal of achieving health equity, community engagement becomes really important and really critical to achieving that as we make continue to make biomedical advances and as the public health infrastructure tries to continue to rebound after the pandemic, we have to recognize that communities have had the ability, have the capacity to articulate their needs, but our services are not meeting their needs. And when we think about health equity, it's not just also meeting those needs, but exceeding them as well. And so we need to make sure that we're paying attention to what's happening in our social and our physical environments and how they affect health and health care.

DARRELL M. WEST: Keon, It's interesting you mention that COVID in our broken system. So I'm just curious, how did COVID worsen those disparities? And as we come out of the pandemic, like what are the continuing challenges that we see in terms of public health?

KEON L. GILBERT: Great question and thank you for asking. And so I think when we think about or consider, you know, the biological risk factors for people who are more susceptible to COVID, those were people who had chronic diseases or who are at a higher, higher risk of having or developing a chronic disease. People who smoke, people who were obese, people who are less physically active. And so all those all those health behaviors that we tend to focus on became primary risk factors. What that tells us is that there was already a very high prevalence of these health conditions in our community that we have not solved. And so we further highlighted the high numbers of chronic diseases that we have across across the country and also the high percentage of people who had risk factors that made them more susceptible to to these chronic conditions. And so what that what that tells us is that we have a number of issues that sort of really center around access, not just access to health care. And so meaning you have insurance, Medicare,

Medicaid, whatever it may be, but you're also being able to you also have the capacity to access those services. And so one four, as an example, we have a lot of issues in rural communities where there are hospitals closing. And so that is going to present a new challenge to rural communities in their ability to access health care. What also happens is not only accessing health care but accessing social services. We tend to punish people, unfortunately, for having a need for social services, and we continue to do that. And I think Coby also highlighted some of that stigma that is associated with both health care and social services that we have to continue to address. And so as we sort of continue along this line of thinking about what Kobin sort of unveiled or revealed for us is really the reality of these broken systems in our and the broken infrastructure that we have and our inability to focus on prevention and only on treatment. And so as we continue to sort of move through, we really have to focus more energy and efforts on prevention strategies that are community based, community led and focused on local environments to make sure that they're healthy and in tapping into anchor institutions and communities and various community groups.

DARRELL M. WEST: Great. Thank you, Keon. So, Camille, in your writings, you've talked about the importance of what you call a culture of care for black men and black boys. What do you mean by that notion? And how are we doing that?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: Great. Well, thanks for that question, Darrell. I think maybe to give the audience some context, it's helpful to just note that black boys in particular, I have a pretty in general have a rougher time of making it through school without being shunted into the criminal justice system or the juvenile justice system. I and are generally there have been there's also been a lot of research around this, have generally been treated much more like adults, even though they're very young, starting from the preschool age. And so it's just a very, very a very challenging environment where black boys are considered mature beyond their years and are not, you know, allowed to be children. So I that context has given rise to a lot of work on what is called the school to prison pipeline and also just more generally to an observation that black boys are not well supported in the school environment when they are there and and then outside of the school environment also face challenges that are much more related to the legacy of of racism and the lack of reparations and the racial wealth gap that we, you know, that we experience today. So with that kind of introduction, I think now it probably makes more sense to talk about what I mean by a culture of care. And the culture of care really means accepting black boys. And I just want to make it make this statement as well, which is that we don't have a lot of statistical data for Native American boys, but where we do have that statistical data they track, then their and their experiences track pretty much in the same way that you would see that for black boys. So I think it's important to to say that the kinds of things that I'm recommending here would also be relevant for Native American boys as well. So creating a culture of care really is about allowing them to be boys, understanding that they are children and providing the kinds of supports that we would want to have, the best kinds of sports. We would want to have children across the U.S. experience. And that means really having the kind of emotional, social kind of physical environments that not only are supportive of their mental and physical health, but also allow them to grow intellectually and and to grow as and grow socially as well. And that kind of culture of care is usually something that you see on a local level when it's done well. So the Seattle Public Schools has an office for the initiative, and Office for the Advancement of African-American Males is really focused on this specific kind of culture of care. And there are a couple of other initiatives across the country that are really focused, but mostly these tend to be in school systems, and that kind of local focus is helpful. But I think it's also important that we not only have more of them, but that we also have a range of other kinds of supports as young men transition from schools into jobs or into universities or other places that they have the same a similar kind of support system and a similar kind of goodwill extended to them to be young people, to make mistakes, be able to bounce back from that, to have the kind of support that we would expect others to have. So I'll just stop there. But I'm certainly happy in our Q&A to provide a little bit more texture around that.

DARRELL M. WEST: It's nice. There are some examples of places around the country that I guess are doing better in some of these areas, and it's great that we can draw some of the lessons from those places. So as we come out of the pandemic, what are the lessons that you learned about COVID and health care? Are there lessons to be learned there?

KEON L. GILBERT: Well, great question. Yeah, there's there's a lot of lessons that that I think we have to continue to learn. One of them really helps us to think about, again, the integration of our systems in our

structures and recognizing that everyone has a role in public health. I've been working on a project in Missouri that is focused on vulnerable populations and how COVID affected vulnerable populations in two areas, two geographic areas in Missouri, the Saint Louis metropolitan area, and a rural area called the Blue Hill, which is southeastern Missouri. And in this work, what we really tried to do is to sort of have our community define what vulnerable populations are and what health equity is. And in part of that, they really highlighted the role again of broken systems, the lack of integration across systems and structures that are supposed to be, you know, also set up to care for us and to take care of people who have less resources. And also, we learned that part of this integration or lack of integration, is that our infrastructure, our public information infrastructure is really poor. And so that really affects our ability or inability to monitor and assess and track not only epidemics, pandemics, but other types of diseases that are occurring in our communities. And also, again, highlighting the role that communities in community organizations want to have a role in informing and what those data infrastructures look like and to receive reports and to have access to that data in a number of different ways. And so not only sort of just thinking about it from that perspective, but also recognizing that we really need to think about what does health and health care continue to look like after the pandemic. Again, what is it? What are we thinking about in terms of what are prevention strategies to ensure that we have healthy communities, healthy neighborhoods, healthy schools, and recognizing that public health can take place in various settings, whether that's a school, a church or a barbershop, but also recognizing that we have to tie it to the needs and into the strategies that communities want to see happen in their neighborhoods. And so I think those are the two main things that I'm continuing to learn. And I hope that our public health infrastructure continues to adopt. And then, you know, the third point, and I think you'll also make this as well about destigmatizing resources, the stigma, destigmatizing need and recognizing what we can learn from some of the communities that you mentioned in noted where people are doing really well, where well-being is high, where people are able to be employed, children are able to go to school and help get clean environments. So I think those are those are important things to think about in these communities, continuing to talk about what's happening in their neighborhoods and communities for us to adopt those across the country.

DARRELL M. WEST: What's nice that community investment and community engagement matter and seem to improve prospects. So that could provide some lessons of things that we could do going forward. So coming back to you, what do you see as the most promising initiatives that we've seen in terms of promoting greater economic prosperity for African-Americans?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: So I'm going to answer that in a couple of different ways. And one is that given the scale of the scale of the of the wealth gap and the the historical legacy of that, I would say we are not doing enough and haven't met the demand. We haven't met the moment in terms of the scale of the of the racial wealth gap and the history behind that. So I just want to, I think, lay that out. Having said that, however, I think recently there have been a number of initiatives to address specifically the racial wealth gap and that I'm sure Andre will talk a lot about this in his session, that those initiatives largely focus on making sure that there is access to credit for low income populations so that these folks can actually afford to buy homes and that they can stay in those homes at a, you know, sustainable interest rates, etc.. So that's a set of initiatives that I think is certainly has been very important, continues to grow. Those initiatives are part government and they're part private sector. So that and some of them are also include nonprofit partners to those. That's a share of total sectoral approach as that the home ownership a piece of that. I do think that there are opportunities, however, for us to do a lot more on the education side, particularly involving community colleges and HBCU's and other minority serving institutions where we can actually start building a pipeline for those institutions, making sure that high schools and junior highs and students in those in those high schools and junior highs understand what their options are. So that's what I think an opportunity for us to continue to build on existing efforts there. And then finally, I think there is, in my view, we have a very myopic approach to how we allow people to thrive in a variety of different contexts. And that means that we do housing separately, we do education separately, and we do you know, these various efforts are really separate. And I think one of the important parts of a role for government is to be able to link those efforts and make sure that there is a multiplier effect from whatever is happening. And then the last thing I'll say, just echoing what Keon said, is none of these initiatives, none of these programs, none of these policies should really be taking place without significant community leadership and involvement.

DARRELL M. WEST: If I could ask a follow up on that. And that just concerns the nature of evidence. Like when researchers are studying these issues, how do we know that something is working? Like what are indicators that people can be tracking? Like, how do we actually think about evidence on these initiatives?

CAMILLE Busette: That's a great question, and I'm going to tell you how I think we should be thinking about it. And then I'll also talk about how we do think about it currently. So when we think about focusing on racial equity today, those measures are outcome measures. Typically, you know how kids do in school, their reading level, their reading levels, their math levels, etc.. There's not a lot there's not a lot about their social networks, for instance. So that's an opportunity. When we think about attachment to the labor market, we look at labor participation, we look at unemployment rates, we don't really talk about how difficult it is to find a job. If you are of a if you're, you know, a person of color because of the kind of social network issues, because of the racism, etc., we don't talk about how difficult those statistics don't talk about how difficult it really is to find something. So and when we think about and, you know, Keon can weigh in here, but when we think about health, we think about the outcomes for individuals, you know, diabetes or hypertension or whatever we should really be thinking about in this community. How are people doing? And so one of the things that I would advocate for is that when we think about equity, the ultimate measure is well-being. How do you know? How are people thriving? And I we can and that's and we can take those well-being measures and compare community to community by community. See, regardless of the demographic profile, and we should be in the business of trying to create the measures that are comparable across communities for well-being. So I don't think we're there yet, but we certainly should be getting there. We should be asking communities what's important to them when we think about well-being as a measure of equity.

DARRELL M. WEST: Now Keon, I'd love to get your thoughts on the question of evidence as well. Like we all know, we need to improve health access and our health care infrastructure. How do we measure those things? What are researchers looking for? Like what are the indicators that that would indicate success in those areas?

KEON L. GILBERT: So great question and thank you for including me. So, you know, the ways we traditionally approach research, you know, we have a question and we, you know, select the right study design and the appropriate method to to try to answer that question. And then we enter into this sort of vicious cycle of continue to answer other parts of of that question, likely because we really haven't found, you know, many, many answers. And unfortunately, this does not serve us as academics, as researchers, and it doesn't serve the community very well either. And so this movement, after the death of George Floyd and as we declared COVID as a global pandemic, there were many municipalities, counties and states, over 200, I believe, at this point, maybe more, that declared racism as a public health crisis. So I mentioned this as a a way of it is now a way that we can begin to challenge our traditional ways of documenting and providing evidence. And part of that is recognizing that our traditional ways and approaches have failed us in many different ways with this attaching sort of anti-racism to achieving a vision of health equity that really should cause us to reimagine how we think about research, how we reimagine our our research questions, how do we make sure that those are inclusive of communities, that they are involved in developing the questions, that they are involved in, developing the the research methods and approaches so that the research actually goes directly to the communities that that we're intending to serve. When I teach classes at Saint Louis University, often tell students, it's really nice that you want to study diabetes, but if you go into a black community that has high rates of chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease or diabetes. And those communities tell you that the issue and challenge that is most important to them is community violence. If you begin to unpack that, would there probably tell you are a number of things that are happening in their neighborhood that could mean that there are that there are not playgrounds, that there are not sidewalks. Maybe they don't even have street lights where they are safe, where they can use those spaces to be physically active. Maybe they're also telling you that because there's a high proportion of cigarette stands of liquor stores, they're also telling you that there's lots of examples of community decline or or businesses that are not serving their community very well. And so if you go in with one particular way, but as you talk to communities and they identify other other strategies or other approaches to addressing diabetes, you have to be really in tune to that. And I think anti-racism strategies in public health help us to think about how do we reimagine our methods and approaches in research.

DARRELL M. WEST: So I want to remind our audience, if you have questions for our panelists, you can email events@brookings.edu or through Twitter at BrookingsGov by using hashtag Brookings Racial Equity. So Camille I have one more question for each of you and then we'll move to answer questions. We can imagine a situation where government, business and civil society need to play a role in promoting racial equity, but the role that each of those entities can play probably differs a little bit. So I'm just curious from each of your standpoints, how do you see the role of government, business and civil society? What are the things that each of those sectors can be doing? Can we start with you?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: Right. Thank you. So I think this is an area where so racial equity is an area that affects everyone. So everybody has a role to play with respect to civil society and government. I think that's the main partnership, civil society, government, government, trying to develop solutions to address the scale of the issues that racial inequities present, but communities actually coming up with those solutions and governments figuring out how best to scale that either with resources or regulation or other kinds of incentives across the country. So I think that those are probably those are those are co-equal partners. I do think business has a very significant role to play, a one on the innovation side. So there are many, many ways in which not only on technology but also process innovation, where I think businesses can be really in the forefront of working with government and civil society to address to create some efficient processes that can help address some some process issues. I also think that businesses in general are the ones who feel most deeply the fact that we have a highly inequitable society. When you have a consumer base that isn't fully activated, that's a problem. If you want to you know, if you're in a consumer driven economy. And I if also if you want to be competitive with other kinds of companies across the globe, you also have to maximize the potential at home. Again, something that we don't currently do uniformly. So businesses should be really in the business not only of providing opportunities, but also advocating for better schools or better resources across the pipeline of the workforce and should be really advocating for closing the racial wealth gap and a set of policies and approaches that really address equity inequities head on because they also benefit almost directly from really successful policies in those areas.

DARRELL M. WEST: Great answer. It certainly shows how everyone, regardless of what sector in which they're operating, can play a constructive role here. Keon I'd like to get your thoughts on that very same question. And then we will move to some questions from our audience.

KEON L. GILBERT: Sure. Thank you again for the question. So I'll start my answer with some work that was done by Cintas a number of years ago that looked at the highest number of segregated cities are the cities with the highest percentage of racial segregation. And, you know, cities, rust belt cities, blue collar cities like Saint Louis, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Detroit, all of those places were or at the top of the list, as you can imagine, Chicago, Los Angeles. And one of the interesting things about some characteristics of some of those cities that not only were where there deep racial inequalities, but there also seem to be economic lags as a result. And also, those places had high, high concentrations of health inequalities and health disparities. And so when we think about sort of what that looks like or what that means, it really sort of does speak to the role. And many of the examples that Camille gave in terms of there really needs to be a multisector multi-stakeholder approach to achieving racial equity, not only in social policies, but but other related policies, health and health care. I had a conversation several months ago with those involved in insurance agency, and they recognized that a number of their employees did not have a \$1,000 in case they experienced a medical emergency. And they recognized that that was a problem. So my questions to them were, well, have you really investigated with your with your employees what your insurance plans and your benefits actually are doing for them? Do they have various needs? Are they taking care of young children? Are some of them caring for elderly people? And so when you engage them in these conversations that then allowed them to think about, well, we can actually create different types of benefit packages, we can engage with an insurance company very differently to make sure that we're meeting some unique needs of of our employees. And these are just a couple of examples. I think COVID also continues to highlight and realize that everyone has a role in public health. Everyone has a role in in making sure that our populations, our workforces are healthy. There was a movement about 15 or so years ago where there were a number of workplace initiatives that that whether they developed wellness centers onsite or they created as part of the benefit package to access gyms, or they built gyms on their on their campuses. Is that just even that? But making sure that people have paid sick leave to be able to go to the doctor or to take their children to the doctor or take another loved one to the doctor? Making sure that people have vacation time, to be able to

relax and enjoy and to reset themselves. And so when we when we talk about who needs to be involved in racial equity. Everyone has has a particular role. And I think what needs to happen within each sector is them identifying, well, what could be their role in achieving racial equity, not just for policies, but also as it relates to health in health care.

DARRELL M. WEST: Perfect, Keon. So now we're going to move to some questions from our audience. And the first question asks you to speak to the narrative work involved in policy change. So each of you have got several specific policy ideas on the table, things that you think would improve the situation. But what about the overall narrative on policy change? Like how do we put together a narrative that's going to persuade people to actually do what many people haven't been doing, according to Camille, for the last 50 years?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: Well, I'll start off, but I would love to get Keon's input on this as well. So what I what I think is really pretty fascinating about the U.S. is that we continue to hold on to this idea that everything that we've achieved in life is a result of individual effort. And I think if we look at the most successful people, you know, even they, if you ask them, would say that, yes, they got help from a range of friends, family, mentors, etc.. And I think the myth is very different from the reality of the way in which this shows up in this discussion about racial equity is that we we assume that the reason that people aren't doing well has to do with their lack of individual effort. And I think we just as a in general, as an as a as a country, we need to really embrace the fact that we do not do well if we don't have a community behind us. And that doesn't make it doesn't make any difference whether you're black or white, you're Latino, you're, you know, Native American or Asian. You always need a community behind you. And I think creating a narrative around how did I how was I uplifted by my community and how did I you know, how did that put me on the path to success? Having more discussions about that, particularly around people who are really influential, I think would open the policy aperture a little bit so that it becomes clear that policies that are trying to support people to, you know, get on a path to economic prosperity are policies which are grounded in the notion that it takes a lot of community effort to get the individual moving forward.

DARRELL M. WEST: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I mean, certainly when I think about my own life and the role that mentors have played kind of throughout my education, in my adult profession, they were absolutely crucial. So thank you for highlighting that fact. I would love to get your thoughts as well on the broader narrative involved in policy change.

KEON L. GILBERT: Yeah, I will agree with with Camille in terms of our American stronghold on individual, you know, pull your pull yourself up by the bootstraps and we really have to debunk and dismiss these notions of meritocracy where the exception becomes this model for what everyone should achieve and instead replace that with a narrative that supports equity, supports that not just equal access, but equitable access for for all. And that really sort of does change, begin to change the narrative and change the idea of sort of dismissing and getting rid of the idea that we have to have a group of have and have nots. There's always going to be a continuum of people who have a lot of money, who don't have a lot of money, who who live in really, really nice houses, etc., etc.. But I think it becomes really important for us to think about, well, how do we understand what truly are the needs of various communities, various neighborhoods, and making sure that we try to meet and exceed those needs. And that's really sort of the part of equity. Your question even earlier about, you know, our research methods and our process, that's one way of addressing it, but also making sure that communities take charge and really lead some of those efforts in terms of defining what needs to happen and what needs to change in their communities. And that sort of really gets into some some work that one of my colleagues at St Louis University and our Institute for Healing, Justice and Equity, who talks about the role of humanizing equity, where we really start to understand the human condition in all of our work, but we really start to understand the human condition in policymaking and not just sort of identifying one example here, one example there of something that worked or didn't work, and recognizing that there's sort of a broader population or community behind that and understanding and drawing out those narratives not only in qualitative form but also in quantitative form, becomes really important for us to think about.

DARRELL M. WEST: Okay. We have a question about the role of corporations. I know earlier each of you mentioned the positive role that businesses can play. The question is what steps can corporations take to

advance racial equity in states that have political leadership that is diametrically opposed to them engaging in those very initiatives?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: Do you want to start or.

KEON L. GILBERT: Sure, I'll. I'll be. I'll begin with an answer. And thank you for the question to whoever posed the question. So we both talk about the role, that positive role that corporation corporations can have in shaping policy, in shaping health and health care and health outcomes in a number of different ways. And really ask because they are at the center of so much of what is happening. They they benefit from policies that allow them to not pay taxes. But communities do not benefit from from them not paying taxes. And so we really have to sort of think about what what is economic growth or challenge what economic growth in a particular community looks like. Also, I believe corporations really need to be invited into the conversations more about how do you change policy, How do you think about policy? How does policy affect you so that their employees are more positively affected? I think part of the challenge is, is that especially what's happening in some in some states is that we have to recognize again, and this is part of I think the role of humanizing equity is that people have many identities that work at these corporations and it doesn't necessarily benefit them to participate in policies or participate in in roles that may negatively affect their employees, which ultimately affects their bottom line.

CAMILLE BUSETTE: So I would just add to that there are there are several different ways in which I think companies can can get involved in supporting equity. The first is you can actually have an office that focuses on equity initiatives, and I would just pick an outcome. Some places have picked, you know, home ownership, other places have picked investment in small business. I mean, I would pick one thing, make sure that it's supported at the board level, get the proper resourcing for it. And this is not a PR initiative. This is you're actually driving towards an outcome whether or not it is completely aligned with your products and services. So that's one way to manage it. Then there's inside the organization itself, you want to make sure that you have really strong diversity. Equity and inclusion are a really strong program. What that the hallmarks of that are that you have a exceptionally robust way of bringing in people of color into your organization, training them, supporting them, creating succession plans and career ladders for them, having affinity groups for them, and that they lead on and making sure that at every level of executive leadership as well as at the board level, that there are people of color from diverse backgrounds who are in each of those echelons. So I think that's another way. And then, you know, every corporation can show leadership, whether you're a small, a smaller business or a larger business. You can you can you can aspire to be a leader in equity. And there are many, many ways to do that. But you want I think, one of the important ways of demonstrating that you are in it for the long haul is actually trying to be a leader and bring your peers in along with you.

KEON L. GILBERT: Darrell, if I could add just a couple of couple of things in. So Camille mentioned at least two processes. One that sort of helps to shape and reframe what corporations are doing internally in terms of their policies around the eye, but also even what corporations can do through their DEI structures outside of, you know, in the communities that where their businesses are located in this this example sort of fits very much in your wheelhouse in terms of technology, policy, technology, infrastructure. And so in this project that I mentioned, where we're looking at how vulnerable populations have been affected by COVID-19, we've been having a lot of conversations about digital divide, digital inequities, and it makes a lot of sense, for example, and just picks up on Camille's idea of there are a lot of corporations involved and in technology, there are a lot of corporations that are set up to socially connect people through various apps. They should have a role in helping to expand the the technology infrastructure in states where it's expanding very slowly. I mean, it affects them in many different ways. And so those are the kinds of things that and projects I think communities want to see corporations take in support and to really sort of push government to fix.

DARRELL M. WEST: Thank you for mentioning the tech angle, at Brookings we do spend a lot of time thinking about that and there are interesting intersections between problems of tech access and issues of racial equity. And in fact, 10 minutes. And I want to move to our second panel. Nicol Turner Lee will be talking about technology as well. We have a question. Someone wants to know, I think, about the role of young people or younger people. What is the one action step that early to mid-career people can take to improve racial equity?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: Go ahead, Keon.

KEON L. GILBERT: Well, it's always a good question because I think younger people always feel that they are not heard and not invited to the party. And I think it's becomes really important for younger people, early career mid-career folks to think about, Well, you don't always have to be invited to the party where you can create your own party. So that's sort of one thing to think about. And some of my work in in St Louis in particular, many young people, teenagers in particular, expressed to us in a project where I mean that they felt that they were not being listened to, that the policies at the local level were not really helping them to become economically more mobile. To to sort of advance through education in a number of different ways. And they felt that they needed to have a voice. And so and they were struggling with ways that they could organize themselves. And so maybe if you are in an early career or mid-career, maybe you can start to partner in work with younger folks because you're experiencing or sort of having some of the same issues in different spaces and places. But there may also be a really a really great way to build some partnerships and relationships.

CAMILLE BUSETTE: I would just agree with that. I think, you know, take the you know, if you can take the initiative, I mean, I've worked with a lot of younger folks who started their own foundations who do something on the side on weekends or in evenings, you know, maybe have really demanding jobs, but still try to figure out how how do I make sure I make it to a city council meeting where I can have my views shared? How do I, you know, how do I participate in the Board of Education? How do I support my neighbors who are advocating for something that's really important? So I think there are many, many ways. I mean, the main thing is find the thing that fits with your passion, but definitely do something that is outside. That is where you're connecting with other people in person in addition to social media. But make sure you have a physical presence in what you're doing. And I think that that also makes it very rewarding.

DARRELL M. WEST: I love that idea of finding something that fits with your passion. That's a great way to put it. We have a questioner who wants to know which of your recommendations has the most evidence based research to back it up in the person that elaborates of all the different things have been tried to achieve equitable outcomes in the areas that you've talked about? What affords the most promise as measured by research and what is ready for scale?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: So I love this question. It's something that it's a question I think we all are asked on a pretty regular basis. So I have a comment on the question and then I'm going to actually answer it. So and I notice that the question comes from a good place. It's like, what? What are the things we can do now that are working that will help us kind of really quickly cover some ground and and create some momentum. So one of the things about the research evidence I'm just going to say is that we do want to have evidence based policies in programing. However, I think it's pretty clear that we are at a point where we also need innovation. And innovation sometimes means you're going to assemble the best evidence, which may not be, you know, extremely germane to what you're doing, which you're going to do the best, and you're going to also take a risk. And so sometimes innovation requires taking that risk without, you know, a plethora of research evidence. And the idea of scaling is one that I know is really popular. When I think about scaling, I don't think about taking Initiative X and then multiplying it by, you know, 350,000 communities. I think about Initiative X, what are the key assumptions behind Initiative X and how do we go to communities and determine whether those assumptions work for those individual communities and figure out what works there as opposed to just transplanting something and scaling it? So with that in mind, let me just say that I think there's been a lot of really interesting work done on reasoning that I think does show evidence that when you rezone for a particularly for and for residential zoning, you have more multifamily housing in addition to single family housing, that that actually does have an impact on how families, how whether families continue to thrive or not. So I think there's a lot of evidence on that. There is also a lot of evidence that types of school initiatives which are very holistic, which think think about the student as existing both in and outside of the school and needing and interrogating where the support needs to be and how parents also need to be supported. There's a lot of evidence that that kind of approach to education also has tremendous benefits for students as well as for families. And then we also know that places where people are very, very connected to their communities are places where they people tend to do extremely well and places where there are lots and lots of jobs. Great education and the lack of discrimination are places where people of color also do well.

So the kinds of policies that would be needed, there are policies that really focus on breaking down discriminatory barriers to homeownership, to getting a job, to transportation, to health, etc., that, you know, plethora of policies. Those are the kinds of things that evidence has shown work really well to get people on the path to economic prosperity.

DARRELL M. WEST: Keon, Your thoughts on that?

KEON L. GILBERT: Yeah. I'll echo everything that Camille has already mentioned. And part of that is Camille mentioned this also in her last response about people being passionate about their work, as is making sure that there is a number of community champions or champions for particular initiatives around racial equity, racial healing, racial justice, and making sure that they are not alone. And part of that process helps to ensure that initiatives become sustainable and they may even be able to be replicated elsewhere. One sort of successful strategy or strategy that I think that has been successful in terms of the process that they took to address trauma and stress after Michael Brown died was in Saint Louis, in the Saint Louis metropolitan area, where they received a large grant and they brought together a number of community agencies and community partners to minimize competition for the award. So they all joined together and supported one initiative that allowed them to actually be successful in getting and getting this particular grant. And they developed a process that allowed them to engage communities in a number of different ways. The communities helped identify what the needs and priorities were. The community helped to review grant proposals they even supported, provided technical assistance to grantees, and then the community actually selected which projects were going to be funded through. And all of that was sort of viewed through a process called participatory budgeting. And what happened as an outgrowth of that is that there were politicians, local politicians in particular, who were interested in thinking about how could they use some funds and resources that they had for their wards, and using participatory budgeting as a way of asking communities and their wards to develop some some strategies or how they may use those funds for some particular needs. So overall, I think that process by which they engaged communities to identify both problems and solutions was really successful in terms of how it operated. We may not see the outcomes really change for quite a while as a result of that work that that 4 to 5 year initiative. But I think in terms of the process and what it did for building a sense of community was really successful.

DARRELL M. WEST: Great. Thank you, Keon. So one last question for each of you. A question wants to know whether you've thought about strategies for curtailing biased news coverage of violent crime. This person argues that those kinds of biases have been shown to contribute to racial animus and that that has made it difficult to make progress on the whole issue of racial equity. So any thoughts on that subject?

CAMILLE BUSETTE: So I would just quickly say that I completely agree that that is very clearly an area that influences perceptions and narratives. And it's an area where if there are changes made, we could really make a big difference. There are journalists who specialize in training other journalists to remove those kinds of barriers from their reporting, to humanize whoever they are talking about in a way that typically we humanize victims. And we in the past have humanized victims, particularly if they're white, and we have not humanized that the potential of potential perpetrators. But we need to be able to do that across the board. There are lots of other techniques, the way in which you describe the environment, etc.. But there are there are specific trainings around that. There are journalists who are really in the forefront of rethinking how it is we communicate, you know, crime and communicate incidents and in the way in which we communicate how communities operate. And I would urge whoever is in the journalism field to identify themselves and to be maybe even in the chat, identify the organizations that are in the forefront of this area.

DARRELL M. WEST: Three. Keon, any thoughts you have on that topic?

KEON L. GILBERT: So I'll just add a couple of things. There's there's been a number of studies that have looked at the ways of racially biased reporting. And part of that and part of what's included in some of that work is the lack of follow up of some stories. And so let's say someone is accused of something one month and the story sort of maybe never follows up or, you know, sort of ties, ties and ties it to an end. And in many cases, some of those people were either sort of not arrested eventually or not convicted. A number of different outcomes. But what happened sometimes with that initial story is that people are stigmatized. And that sort of has a lot of implications sort of after that. So there needs to be a very clear responsibility for for

media to follow up and follow up equitably in a way that makes sure that people are not stigmatized because of their reporting. The other thing that I'll mention in note is that there's a challenge and again, this is part of your work, Darrell, and also part of Nicol's work on the next panel where the way that people get media is quite different. And so just pointing so again, to world examples, now that we can actively select what we see and what we view through through cable, through streaming services, there's also sort of the bias in terms of the consumer that happens. And so that does also speak to sort of there needs to be writ large changes in the media industry to really sort of in a way adopt anti-racism practices that help to reduce and minimize and eliminate bias in reporting.

DARRELL M. WEST: Well, terrific. Thank you, Dr. Camille Busette and Dr. Keon Gilbert for sharing your insights with us. We'll look forward to seeing your continuing research in this area. You can read their writings at [Brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu). We have a blog called *How We Rise*, which features writing from a number of different scholars on issues of racial equity and racial justice. So I thank you very much for joining us, and we appreciate you taking the time to share your insights with this major.

CAMILLE BUSETTE: It's been a pleasure. And thanks to everybody who joined us this morning.

KEON L. GILBERT: Thank you so much.

DARRELL M. WEST: Okay. We now are going to make our transition to our second panel, and we are pleased to have to distinguish experts with us. We're going to address some other aspects of the racial equity and racial injustice topic. We have Dr. Nicol Turner Lee, who is a senior fellow in governance studies, and she also is the director of our Center for Technology Innovation at Brookings. She writes on issues of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies and the digital divide that holds many people back. We're also really delighted to have Dr. Andre Perry with us. Dr. Perry is a senior fellow in the Metro program at Brookings. He's done terrific research in a lot of different topics, but he writes in particular about racial disparities in housing and wealth accumulation and how we can do a better job in each of those areas. So I want to start with Nicol. I know there's been a lot of discussion in recent months about AI and emerging technologies, and you've written extensively about the risk of bias in algorithms. What are your biggest concerns about A.I. algorithms?

NICOL TURNER LEE: Well, thank you, Darrell, and so happy to be alongside my colleagues, including Andre and that first panel who were just amazing, sort of laying out the issues. You know, one of the things that I think is driving the conversation we hear about it every day is artificial intelligence. And as you said, we spent a lot of time at Brookings. Do my work and the work that you do on governance, thinking about bias and its mitigation. And it's no secret that if we were to have this conversation a couple of years ago, I think the bias we probably would have seen is really encased in that example of a criminal justice algorithm. We found that black defendants were more likely to be detained or have higher bail just because judges used an algorithm that was based on the training data that was reflective of our criminal justice system. That algorithm that was used by judges led to more black and brown people being detained, having higher sentences and higher bail limits. When we actually thought about this, it was due to the fact that the training data was much more reliant on the people who actually interface or have encounters with law enforcement or other aid entities as such. My point is we've come a long way from that one model, meaning that artificial intelligence now not only takes what we see in this traumatic training data, but it also does things like do it finds itself embedded in pre hiring tools that are not just looking at your resume, but they're looking at whether or not you smile or make eye contact in the preselection process before you even make it to the application process. Some of the research is telling us that some of that neurological A.I. that has embedded these signals is actually reducing opportunities for application for black and Hispanic applicants. My point is, as artificial intelligence begins to evolve, it's not just something that we have seen based on machine learning algorithms like whether or not someone should be detained or released, like whether or not somebody should get a be approved for credit or not. It actually now is entangled with these other behavioral aspects that have greater implications for people of color. And I would just share a couple and then I'll be quiet because, you know, I'm just like a black Baptist preacher when you give me talking about it AI. The problem is, is when we start to overlay these systems of domination and integrate a greater embedded in embodiment of these systems to the place where they're baked in and surveilling communities of color, it becomes harder for us to have agency over those systems. So my work right now is really about a couple of

things. One, who's at the table when these systems are designed? Unfortunately, equity is not necessarily part of permissionless innovation, and we're not seeing representation of people who look like many folks who have become the commodities of these systems at the table designing to what are the contexts and what bodies of data are we using, and are we thinking of those data? As my friend Renee Cummings says, as dramatically steer where they actually have all the historical legacies baked into them, that there's no way that those training data can be pure or without interrogation? And three, what are the context in which we're deploying A.I. and we're now at State Zero that you and I talk a lot about generative AI, which I think is actually has the potential to be interesting when it comes to things like education, where we're able to use it to raise critical inquiry skills among kids who have traditionally been marginalized in education, giving them a tool to level the playing field, but those same tools in law. Large language models have the potential to also surveil or, if misused, penalize students who may not speak the king's English when they're actually working through and utilizing these tools for educational resources. My point is we've got a long way to go. And these computers do not necessarily discriminate by themselves. We do. And we bring those values, norms and assumptions into these machines.

DARRELL M. WEST: Now, those are all great points, Nicol. Especially in terms of hiring and employment and some of the biases that algorithms contribute, which then have consequences for lack of economic opportunity, which is directly relevant to what we're talking about. So I want to bring Dr. Andre Perry into the conversation in the call. I know Andre can talk like a Baptist minister as well, so I'm sure he's going to be able to hold his own in this conversation around.

NICOL TURNER LEE: You put the wrong people on the same panel.

DARRELL M. WEST: It's going to be a great panel. I'm not worried about that at all. But Andre, I know you've written a lot about racial disparities in wealth accumulation. So what are the sources of these disparities and what can we do about them?

ANDRE M. PERRY: Well, well, first of all, thank you for having me. It's always a pleasure to be alongside Nicol Turner Lee. I mean, at its roots, we've baked in bias in our policies and practices throughout the United States. I mean, without question, slavery and Jim Crow racism made it legal to discriminate against black people, prohibiting wealth accumulation for generations. But we don't have to look that far back to see how housing policy, education policy, transportation policy literally extracted wealth from black communities while providing benefits to others. And so, at its core, our belief that white people are superior to other people. And it's and that beliefs sort of being baked and manifested into policy are the sources of the reason why we see a wealth gap in which white family median wealth is eight times as much as Blackwell. This is not by coincidence. I talk a lot about redlining and it gets a lot of press, but it should because I mean, come from an educational perspective. It's amazing that a lot of people don't understand the history of redlining. And of course, during the New Deal, the the federally backed Homeowners Loan Corporation drew red lines around predominantly black neighborhoods, determining them unworthy of various federal investments. And because of that, the people who lived in those areas could not pass on wealth to their children or or I should say could not, but had less wealth to pass on to their children and their children had less wealth to pass on to their children. So these practices really created conditions in which we find ourselves in today. So at its core, it's still and this is why algorithmic bias is so important. Programmers have the same biases as appraisers, have the same biases as teachers, as police officers were people. And so if we don't get at these these really sort of ingrained beliefs about worthiness in our country, we're not going to close these wealth gaps in a in a at a speed in which we need to.

DARRELL M. WEST: That's a very important point about redlining. And of course, in a world of emerging technologies, we are now seeing digital redlining. If anything, you know, we have to worry about whether digital technology is going to perpetuate and exacerbate these types of things. So, Andre, if I could ask a quick follow up on that. I mean, you talk about the sources of the disparities. What can we do about them? I know you've written extensively about ways that we can help narrow that racial gap in wealth.

ANDRE M. PERRY: Yeah, a lot of people know me for my work on housing and a research project we did in 2018 that had significant policy implications. We looked at the the value differences between homes in black neighborhoods, in homes and white neighborhoods, and after controlling for education, crime, walkability, all

those fancy Zillow metrics, we found that homes in black neighborhoods are under-priced by 48,000 per home. Cumulatively, that's about 156 billion and loss of equity. And of course, that hundred and 56 billion is the the money we use to build roads, help built roads, supply resources to school districts. It's the money that individual families use to send their kids to college or start a business. But I think at its core, we're not going to wave a magic wand and raise home prices. So we have to figure out ways to restore value iteratively to families that and in which that value has been extracted by racism. And so for me, it really does come down to cutting the check. Figuring out ways to provide down payment assistance to to families who live in areas where homes are devalued. It means providing grants and loans for entrepreneurs who are trying to start businesses. It means providing tax credits in in areas in those in those areas. And so at its core, you have to figure out ways to restore value to individuals. Now, of course, we also need to restore value to places. Now, devaluation robs places of the ability to fund infrastructure. But I always start off with individuals because if we effectively restore value to brick and mortar structures, the two non-human things, those property values will increase and people won't keep pace with those increases and they'll be pushed out, sort of classic gentrification dynamics. And then finally and so you invest in people, you invest in place, but you have to divest from racism. I bring up I mentioned a lot of them. I work on a lot of appraisal work as a result of the housing devaluation work. But I say this all the time that if we diversified all the appraisers, if they still use the same practices, you're going to get pretty much the same result. So you have to divest from these systems that are inherently biased. Many people are familiar with the price comparison model in which you compare one home to another and then in the neighborhood to establish the average price of a home. But that practice is is fraught because if you compare one home to another in a neighborhood that's been discriminated against, you effectively just recycle discrimination over and over again. So you have to figure out ways to invest in people, invest in place, but divest from the practices that are extracting racism.

DARRELL M. WEST: Thank you. And those of you who are interested in Andre's study on housing and racial variations in them, you can check that out at Brookings.edu. So going back to Nicol, I know you've written a lot about racial equity in terms of access to the latest technologies. How can we ensure greater equity in access to the latest technologies?

NICOL TURNER LEE: Well, it's interesting, Darrell, and you know this, and for those of you who've been following me, my book will be out next year, early part of next year. And I do talk about digital redlining and Andre very much the way you speak about it with regards to where do we find broadband assets and we primarily find them correlated with space and place. And a lot of the places that we do not see broadband happens to be in places and not so much unintentional, but more deliberate in places where black people have been redlined, whether it's in an affordable housing complex. I visited those in Syracuse and Hartford, Connecticut, where people tend to live in communities that have been basically blighted out of the right housing options and choices that create, as Andre was talking about, safe and viable communities. We also see this correlation where they don't have broadband access, where they live in communities, where not having broadband is pretty comparable to not having a grocery store or not having viable work. And that continues this process where we see the technology that has been the lowest barrier to entry for small businesses and startups and other brick and mortar stores. We saw that in the pandemic when it came to resiliency. Essentially, we're seeing that in communities that have experienced the ramifications of racism and classism, essentially placed in these buckets where digital redlining is real. And we're seeing, down to your point, I think, a huge infusion of money to actually close the digital divide. But I think that there is something wrong in that paradigm of closing the digital divide. I mean, what we're talking about when we commonly talk about closing the digital divide is this binary construction of giving poor people computers and access to the Internet. It's a supply demand model that we've historically seen when it comes to trying to address some of the wealth gaps, trying to address educational and health care gaps. But that's not what technology is solely about, giving people access to computers. It's about people being allowed to ride some of the very amplified benefits of being connected. What does that mean? It means addressing telehealth health disparities through telehealth, giving people the option to be able to partake in health care when they are not in close proximity to a clinic or a hospital. We saw a 100% increase in the number of black and Hispanic patients who were actually affected by health disparities during the pandemic simply because they had the power of a smartphone in their pocket to be able to talk to their doctor. We didn't do too well when it came to education, and we're seeing the ramifications of learning losses as a result of having a very poorly designed strategy when it came to giving kids computers, not necessarily, again, to give them a computer so that they have access, but embolden them to use that technology to become producers and to engage in a

new digital economy. My point is, closing the digital divide is not about whether or not we're going to give people computers so they can partake in what everybody else is partaking in for people of color in historically disadvantaged groups. This is about closing a competitive gap globally so that we're relying upon the nation's populace to do what Andre said we've been doing for years, creating that versus extracting it. And for me, that's what the Internet is able to do. And so, Darrell, I think going forward we see the \$65 billion investment in broadband, but I'm not too confident that this is going to be an investment that's going to change the trajectory of what we need when we say equal and civil and universal access to these resources to do a plethora of other things. The people that we're trying to connect live in the most impoverished, most geographically isolated in communities of urban dense senses, where even if you live in downtown D.C., you may not have access to competitive broadband. So we have a larger question that we're tackling. And we also have, as my friend here, has suggested, environments that have years and decades of being blighted or affected by other discriminatory practices that now, you know, you overlay again a supply and demand model to closing the divide. We're not going to always address those concerns. And so, again, I think when we talk about racial equity, we have to talk about technology access and we have to talk about it not from just this consumption perspective, but we have to talk about it from the perspective and embolden communities to be a part of this new economy that is no longer analog and dictating where we fit in, how we. Grow and how we live quality life going forward.

DARRELL M. WEST: So, Andre, this spring you organized a Brookings event with singer John Legend. And I have to say, in the 15 years I've been at Brookings, that has to be one of the best events that I've seen, not just for the star power of John Legend, but, you know, you announced new research, But there's something you said at that event that struck me. I've been thinking about it over the last couple of months. You said we cannot nonprofit our way out of racial disparities. And I think what you meant by that, I'm going to ask you what you did mean by it is that nonprofits can certainly play an important role in addressing some of the problems that we're talking about. The problems are so comprehensive that we also need comprehensive policy solutions to deal with them. So what did you mean by that statement? And then how do you see the role of government versus nonprofits?

ANDRE M. PERRY: You know, you know, and and I will say that it was a pleasure opening up for John Legend. I could I can make that claim. But yeah.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Yeah.

ANDRE M. PERRY: But I say this all the time that we're not going to nonprofit our way out of these problems. These are structural issues. And and certainly nonprofits play a role in address addressing what we call downstream problems. They provide direct services to help the poor, help the hungry, and help the homeless help all these mental mental health issues. But if we're really going to address them, we have to get to causal factors and we have to have investments that largely come from the federal government and corporations. There needs to be structural change because those are the areas in which caused the problem in the first place. In those in governance studies know this conundrum, Beth, that the federal government caused many of the problems we see today. It was their biases. But while they may have caused many of the problems, they were an undeniable part of the solution that we're not going to move forward without significant federal investment in workforce training and in education and infrastructure and housing, that the reason why we have housing disparities that federal government created, we can the same kind of. And I brought this up also in that that session, the same way that we created redlining at a local level that and scaled it up by resourcing it and codifying it into law. We can do so with inclusive policies at the local level. So when we find policies and practice are more inclusive in nature, that that help close wealth gaps, that help provide job quality jobs to individuals, we need to figure out ways to scale them up at the federal level, figure out ways corporations can support entrepreneurs and families really making a difference in our lives. But again, I'm not I don't try to say nonprofits are bad, but if we're really going to change is not going to because the good the good hearts of philanthropic organization it all come because our structures have to change.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Right. Can I.

DARRELL M. WEST: Andre, If I could ask a follow up on that? So I know you're talking about the important role that government can play. Which policy solutions do you think offer the greatest potential for mitigating racial disparities in wealth or housing?

ANDRE M. PERRY: Oh man, without question. Tax for we tax policy might be the most important set of policies in terms of really changing the wealth profiles of individuals. I mean, every Christmas we see this situation where wealthy individuals start doing are paying for people's layaway and are or will see people clearing their student loans. Well, you know, there's a more effective way to do all of these things is to pay your taxes. Our tax code, I mean, in the policies, what are the most important now? That's not the area I speak to quickly speak to an area that I'm passionate about, and that's homeownership. Now, it is the most common way that people accumulate wealth. It should not, which should not be considered the only way. We certainly need to look at other ways to increase wealth. But right now, about a year and a half ago, maybe two years ago, the government sponsored enterprise enterprises. Freddie and Fannie essentially started to incorporate rental payments in their underwriting practices and why that is important. It enables now banks who now who still are in the mortgage business to offer mortgages without a down payment. And we see this through special purpose credit programs and the like. Recently, Bank of America announced a special expansion of a special purpose credit programs in five markets around the United States. And why is it important? Well, the most significant barrier to entry into homeownership has been the down payment, because people whose grandfathers and great grandfather's could not own a home could not pass down that well. And so they don't have that intergenerational wealth transfer to then purchase a home. But they're doing everything else correctly. They're paying their bills on time in markets and in very easily they could pay for a mortgage. So this is the kind of structural change that if we expanded these special purpose credit programs, changed our underwriting practices, you could see a now an entire new generation of homeowners. And then they can pass on wealth to their children in the future.

DARRELL M. WEST: Perfect. Thank you for that. And, Nicol, speaking of policy ideas, the Biden administration is spending billions on improving broadband access, which we know based on your work, is a key to getting the benefits of digital innovation. How is the administration spending that money and are officials spending it in the right way?

NICOL TURNER LEE: So, Darrell, if you don't mind, I want to respond to Andre real quick on asking about homeownership, because I do want to bring this up as well. Before I talk about broad, because I think it's related. I do think that, yes, the federal government should play a role, but I don't think that we should be highly dependent on the federal government to change the trajectory of what it looks like for racial equity. And I say that as a sociologist, because I think that the groundswell of change has come from social movements and the fact that we need to close these wealth gaps, because at the heart of this is an economic capitalist system that we're sort of trying to make sure that we can partake in many of the greatest innovations that we've seen as civil rights history have come from people either challenging that or creating their own pathway to entry within community capitalism, etc., which is a lot of your work as well. But I want us to be very careful because the same, like you said, government that has created these problems the federal government will play in are. But my particular fear today are states that are actually not the federal government that are creating some of the most abrasive and egregious policies that are actually moving us away from racial equity. When we start to talk about educational curricula. We talk about gun reform. We talk about the state of violence that is actually being waged on black communities and Latino communities and Asian-American communities. It's important for us to actually think about the extent to which the federal government has to do more to do a behavioral and ideological shift in this country for us to get to greater equity. We see Biden try to do that with the racial equity money and his proposition of racial equity and the changing of systems and structures that reflect the government leaning in that direction. But there has to be more, because I think what we saw the most change effectuate is when people got out in the streets and put their hands up and said, no more. My, my, there. I think that's the same thing when it comes to broadband access. I tell people for a long time I was like the girl at the prom in high school that nobody wanted to dance with because I'm talking about digital divide on my life. And then the pandemic hit, and now all of a sudden, everybody wants to talk about the digital divide. I think, again, the federal government will provide them the grandest investment and digital access that we have, access that we've ever seen since the American Recovery Act under President Obama. But money alone is not going to change the behavioral implications of what happens to communities when they don't have a true access to a communications ecosystem that's

universal. So down to your point is sort of tagging on to Andre. Certainly one of the challenges that I experience is that having digital access is not necessarily seen as a civil right in this country. We have civil rights laws that sort of say that you have to have access. We don't really think about it as a precursor to having effective home ownership. We sort of see digital access as an edge tool that allows you to gain all the things that we're talking about today political participation, educational access, etc.. But it's more than that because it is a pathway into jobs today that are digitally. Oriented as well as into education opportunities, health care opportunities and others opportunities where technology is a basis. It is a necessary foundation that builds upon every asset and every tool that you need. So, Darrell what I think we just have to be careful and mindful of the fact that in this huge investment that we have had, the infrastructure investment and jobs that that one were hitting communities that need it most. And we're doing it in a way that honors how they use technology. We do have one challenge in this particular federal investment that it preferences fiber over wireless. 97% of African-Americans and Latinos actually use wireless, which means that they may not be great beneficiaries of funding if you live in urban areas. We also know from research that we've done that people of color live in the rural south, the Deep South. In fact, a study that we just put out, those people are using hotels to actually access broadband because they don't have it in their towns. So we need to be very conscious that when we bring fiber assets to rural communities, that it's hitting everybody, particularly in places where there are more cows and people and more people than jobs. And I think, third, it's important for people of color, particularly who are interested in racial equity, to sort of it's a man that we think about an equity commission. We've got this looming deadline of the end of June where various states and localities will deliver to the National Telecommunications Information Administration their plans on digital equity. Who left the table? Who's making them accountable? What projects are being funded and to what degree are we seeing? Many of the people that were on a recent panel that we just held that Brookings members of black Churches for Digital Equity or people who are representing tribal sovereign nations? My point is, I think this investment is greater than we've ever seen it. But I think without the deliberate and institutional interventions that make sure that it's sustainable, that we're not only getting people on, but we're keeping them on. I'm not sure when this is actually going to land.

DARRELL M. WEST: Those who would like to read more about Nicol's work on broadband access. You can check out our Brookings tech take blog where she and other people. All right. So, Andre, one last question for you then. We're going to switch to some questions from the audience and audience members who have questions. They can email them to events@brookings.edu or we'll try and get to as many of your questions as possible. So, Andre, in which communities do you see progress being made and what are they doing to advance racial equity?

ANDRE M. PERRY: Well, earlier this year or maybe late last year, we released the Black Progress Index. And in anyone can just Google or whatever search engine you like to use. You can Google Black Progress Index. It came about through a partnership with the NAACP where we looked at the life expectancy of black Americans across the country. And instead of doing what a lot of folks do, compare black longevity to white longevity. We compared black people to other black people in places all across the country. Assuming that structural racism is ubiquitous and and there are impacts are relatively similar. We wanted to look at variations in life expectancy because life expectancy somewhat summarizes the social and the biological factors that influence our lives. And what we found pretty much, you know, astound that you could be in what we call the DMV, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia area. And you we see life expectancies in the eighties. And then you can be in parts of Mississippi in their mid-sixties. And so and we say that and you can see the the most and this in this index, you can see the most influential variables on life expectancy and you can see real differences in that. So places where home ownership is higher. Guess what? Life expectancy is higher, places where education is better and more resource life expectancy is better. And but we should assume that these differences aren't because of of didn't occur by chance that that if racism is a given the local action is really for me explains a lot of why there are differences and certainly there's historical differences in the north and the south. But what you find all across the country, there are some places that really break trends, that there are places in the south where people are living longer and it's not by coincidence. There are places and there's places in the north where people aren't living to 80, and it's not by coincidence. So, I mean, there are dozens of places, red in red counties, blue counties, small and large, where you see this variation. And so what it tells me is that civic action matters, that that what people are doing is having an impact on their very lives. So I encourage people just to go to Black Progress index, look

at where they live. Look at where you live and compare it to other places around the country and you'll see why there are different.

DARRELL M. WEST: So you're right, that Black Progress index is amazing work. We encourage people to take a look at that. And you're right, life expectancy is the ultimate outcome measure for all of us. So you found very dramatic differences across a metropolitan area. So I want to move to some questions from our audience. Again, if people have questions, they can email us at events@brookings.edu. I want to ask each of you a question, which is the same question I asked Camille and Keon on the earlier question from the audience, asking about the narrative work involved in policy change. So each of you have mentioned some specific policy ideas that you think would advance things, but how do you think about the broader narrative of persuading people that specific policy actions actually are important and will be effective in addressing the issue?

ANDRE M. PERRY: Well, I what I as a researcher, I have to be mindful of the rhetorical power of numbers all day long. And for and for a lot of a researchers, we contributed to a negative narrative of black Americans by constantly reporting racial disparities in a way that compares or that makes white people the reference group or what we should aspire to be. What I try to do is, is show put the onus on the structures that penalizes black people for doing what they need to do in order to respond. So the research on devaluation, which I mentioned, what I show is that after controlling for all these variables that black homes are much more valuable than they are priced. And it's and while that is real for for homes and businesses and other assets in black communities, it's sort of a metaphor for how we look at the world. We did a study in which we scraped all the Yelp data from businesses all across the country. And and what we found is that black, brown and Asian owned firms actually score as high as high, if not higher, on those scores than their white counterparts. But they the scores go down when those businesses are situated in black neighborhoods. But it gets to this point what our black elders used to say all the time, our ice is just as cold. And so what I love to do is show people that our ice is just as cold. And it's encouraging. It's to say that, hey, my homes matter. My my businesses matter. I matter. And when people can see that, then they can see how much I don't like making a business case all the time. But when you see that penalty, then it becomes clear that we're leaving money and opportunity on the table. If black business employer firms, which is right now about 2% of all employer firms are are black owned firms with more than one employee. Why? If it was equal to the black population, which is about 14%, it would increase the number of businesses by 800,000 firms. Hundreds of billions, trillions added to our economy. And so for me, we should see that equity is stimulus, that that if we have equity, we increase wealth, opportunity, innovation, all these things. And and and and more importantly, we increase dignity and respect. I want to be clear about that. But but researchers need to understand that we can't just show disparity research in this and say that, oh, you need to catch up to white people in order to be good, that that needs to stop. That only contributes to the problem.

DARRELL M. WEST: So these are great points that I know there is a multiplier effect of equity as well, that each advance can then lead to other benefits as well. Nicol, your perspective on narratives and how that contributes to policy change?

NICOL TURNER LEE: Yeah, no, I agree with Andre and you know, we at Brookings we love Andre because he is like our our black banker, so he's giving us the context of what the risks are and what the lay of the land is when it comes to imputing those values for black communities. You know, as a sociologist, I think it's also important to tell stories, right? So I spend a lot of my time with my work, not necessarily convincing policymakers on anecdotes, but either telling the stories and documenting those stories, you know, whether it's in the work that I've done going to rural America, the work in my book that actually takes you through seven cities and rural communities to actually hear from people in terms of their Internet access and taking those folks and bringing them to policymakers. We do that at Brookings. Again, my last panel just a couple of days ago invited people from all across the country who are affected by things like the expiration of broadband subsidy, what that means for their community. And it's also important for me in telling those stories to ensure that those people who I have raised from invisibility stayed visible. And so I'm really proud of the work that we do at researchers in general. I was always trained from an asset based community development perspective that my early days, a sociologist at Northwestern is thinking about how do we allow those people to also grow in their opinion and how they are perceived as experts. Give you a great example. A trip that I took to Marion, Alabama, years ago. So that was the basis for a piece that I have on my expert

page around schools and communities. I met this charismatic principal by the name of Kathy Trimble. Kathy was over a k-through-12 school in Marion, Alabama, where they had a 1 to 1 solution of tablets at the time based on the Connect ad program for President Obama. When the pandemic hit, she said that those tablets were books without papers. And she not only said it to me, but she said it on PBS NewsHour. She sent it to the state superintendent of Alabama. She said it to lawmakers. My point is, how we actually make these things real is to combine the empirical and the statistics and the data with the voices of the folks that are actually shedding light, not just on the problem, but on ways they've actually narrated and navigated through solutions. So I think we're going to see more of that there. I think in this space of racial equity, where it's not just policymakers like ourselves who are just trying to persuade people to hear the message, but it's really the people that live in these communities that daily have to come up with. The solutions are also part of the narrative that policymakers need to hear. Plus, they make it easy, right, for a hard job to explain it, because it's often hard to explain it because these are very complicated issues, but it's easy for those folks to translate it, I think, to policymakers who want to do a good job in actually making a change in racial equity.

DARRELL M. WEST: And Nicol, I love the stories that you tell in your research. I know you've interviewed a number of people in various places around the country and you've integrated that into your research, and it really brings a very powerful human element to the data that I think each of you draw on in your research. So you have a set of questions about equity indicators which basically come down to how do we measure success in this area? Like how do we know when we're doing better?

ANDRE M. PERRY: Well, you know, I've taken a couple of approaches. One, I've mentioned I look at longevity because it's kind of the ultimate measure of well, of of of how we're doing. But I've also then now looked at wellbeing. Wellbeing is sort of one perception of how one is doing in an environment and. And most recently, we we also released a report and that examined wellbeing across race, place and age. Now I will say this, that one of the most stark finding is that, well, while wellbeing has declined among all groups since 2019 2020, wellbeing of the youth of our youth, those between 18 and 24, 25 years old, they have expressed the most significant decline over or over the last few years actually going back before the pandemic. And so I think wellbeing is a good measure. I think life expectancy is a good matter of measure because they are much more fuller set or provide a fuller picture than than sort of an income or or wealth of the sort of traditional socioeconomic variables. But I just want to make one other thing clear, and this is something that Nicol expressed. Sometimes you just have to ask people how they're doing. I mean, that that you learn a lot when you simply go to communities and and ask them, how are you doing? What keeps you here in your community? What sustains you? What are you most proud about? These kind of the responses from those kind of questions yielded a treasure trove of information that we need to hear. I mean, and because I think the coin of the realm in many think tanks is quantitative research. I mean, but we don't live in a explicitly quantitative way, even though we live in much a fuller expression of of of indicators. And so for me, sometimes we got to get at this qualitative. Metrics, they wouldn't be considered metrics. There's qualitative indicators so that we can really get a fuller picture of how people are living.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Yeah, and I would say on that question too, that we need to give ourselves some breathing room to have short and long term metrics, right? So it's always in the digital access space is always a question of what if we give people all this technology, are they going to improve their quality of life? Well, that's a longitudinal question. I'm currently involved with the National Reserve Bank. The National Reserve Bank for one of the cities, I think it's St Louis where they're doing a conference on digital divide research. Right. And part of it is like there are some short come, short term outcomes we can actually measure who got computers, what community, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But it's longer term, the extent to which those people converted it into something that was a sustainable job or a sustainable startup. And I think, you know, unfortunately, this is why I think philanthropy and, you know, the National Science Foundation and others can be very helpful is when we're talking about racial equity research that we really spend time funding researchers who want to put the effort into designing the short and long term metrics and do the work that's involved and really coming up with the right methodologies, whether it's quantitative, qualitative or a mixture of both to get at what those responses are. One other thing to Darrell, I would just say for people who are interested, for example, in the air space, we're about to launch an AI equity lab, which is actually going to come up with what I think are short and long term metrics. But most importantly for the person to ask that question, how do we know we're doing a better job? And I think in the space of technology, which I spend most of my time, it's ensuring that we are also harnessing the best references and

the best people who actually do this work. To me, that's an outcome in and of itself. If you're able to point out several people who are working in this space that you can actually call on to help you interpret some of the technological issues and problems, which is one of the points of our equity lab, is to not only look at model construction, but to also bring an interdisciplinary frame to how we look at technology in general, an artificial intelligence range. So I think there are you know, there's a lot of ways that you can look at it. The bottom line is we do need more funding go to the country for this work because it just turns out that this work becomes something that's more reactive versus something that could be much more proactive and much more situated to help us in the long term with areas for growth in policy interventions.

DARRELL M. WEST: I love the idea of an equity lab. I think we're going to produce really interesting research are going forward and there will be various public convenings and private roundtables associated with that. So we have several viewers who want some personal advice. They are asking what specific actions can people undertake to change racial inequities?

ANDRE M. PERRY: Well, I will say, you know, what the 2020 taught us is that when you are actively trying to address an issue at a community and an individual level, you can create change. Nicol Turner Lee talked about this, that 2020, while I mean, technically it is the largest mass protest in U.S. in, in some respect, global history that we saw how the reaction to the the killings of of individuals will can spur action. So I say if you can join an organization that is focused on this issue, certainly you have the Urban League, the NAACP, other organizations, but you have to figure out a way to join it, get a crew that which you can actively engage in these issues. And I would like to also say that I'm follow some of the researchers you saw today or you're seeing today, follow our work, give us feedback. Because what really encourages me, to be honest with you, is your response to my work. When I release, say, a study on home values. It's the grandmothers who say, you know, you know, you ain't telling us anything new, baby. And they and and they say, this is how well you can enhance your report. And so for me, it is also this is engaging with us because what we try to do is be responsive to the needs of communities and community leaders. And if we don't hear, what we will be inundated with are the the voices of the muckety mucks in Capitol Hill and and folks who have the resources to get their message across. But we need to hear from just regular, everyday folks. And there are many tools in which you can express your your views on and and give us feedback. So I would I would say, hey, join a crew, get involved, but also get involved with some of the researchers you see today.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Yeah. You know, and I would suggest this, you know, one of the things as a again, a sociologist who studies social movements I've been intrigued by is just the state of social movements over the last decade and more recently in the last five years. And the fact that we're seeing a lot of multiracial multiclass coalitions that are forming in ways that I think are going to be very valuable to the future of how we look at civil rights progress. The same token, I say we've got to make space for people who actually are in the who have the lived experiences of those groups as well. And what do I mean by that? It's one thing to march alongside and be an ally. It's another one place. If you really believe in racial equity, to make safe spaces for people to partake in those conversations, which can be very hard conversations. One area that I see a lot of that in is in the space of emerging technology where there are not a lot of safe spaces for black women in particular. And I think it's important if you're into this area where you want to be a change agent, that you come in with the same vulnerability that many of us have to come into this conversation, we actually can learn from each other. And I think that's one of the things that I found over the years when we address structural racism. I think we can do that from a very well, from a pedantic stance. But when we start to look at ideological and behavior concerns, it requires all of us to address point not only in joining and becoming an ally, but also means we have to challenge all of assertions and assumptions about what life is and create safe spaces that people who are experiencing that can also talk to you about in ways that also allows you to be a better ally. So I put that out there because I think that that's an area that we often do not speak about when it comes to allowing people to come into these conversations, knowing that they'll be heard. And creating spaces where you're actually looking at people who do not come from your same background. And that's why I share all the time in my panels at Brookings. Like Andre, I always bring people that never been Brookings before, right? Or who have never been to Washington, D.C., in some instances, who have never had a degree that would put them on a breaking stage. But I also make them feel safe when they are here to talk about those concerns, because that is something that may be more real to them, to me. So just something I wanted to put out there as we think about racial equity has been on my mind as we progressed into this new state of how we solve some of these policy questions.

ANDRE M. PERRY: There were.

DARRELL M. WEST: Advice there. Yeah, go ahead, Andre.

ANDRE M. PERRY: Real quick, because over the next two. Years, we will be will experience some of the most corrosive discourse exchanges. We will hear some of the meanest things from politicians in this upcoming presidential season, particularly those who are running for president. I think give this advice. You know, don't necessarily engage with the next politician who will find that the clown shoes will fit, that that many of these issues have a long history.

NICOL TURNER LEE: Yep.

ANDRE M. PERRY: You know, a certain President Trump is not the first racist president. DeSantis is the not not the first to go after black education. Texas is not the first to the banned books that there's a long history of this behavior. And so for me, I always say stay focused on policy, that if you if you engage in a intellectual food fight, it's a distraction from actually building coalitions and working with local officials to really get at policy. And I'm by far I'm not saying that these individuals aren't causing harm, but we can't waste time getting in rhetorical nonsensical battles when there is really hard work to be done. So for me, it's the next two years. It's about standing upright, you know, and being very principled in the way we engage with our fellow citizens, and they are our fellow citizens. If you like it or not.

DARRELL M. WEST: That's great. Great advice from each of you on that. I appreciate that. So the last question for each of you is from someone who asks, Given the siloed agencies centric technocratic structure, which currently constitutes our policymaking, governance, and the idea that racial equity progress is at its heart a cross-sector multi institutional endeavor, what can we do to build a more collective, agile, policymaking and governance system?

ANDRE M. PERRY: Well, I'm going to speak to one of the folks on Twitter who's following us is Brother Mike Green. You can see he's sending some great some great tweets and a mike Green to. So you hit that brother. But one of the problems I see all the time is the difference what we can perceive or there's a real difference between community development and economic development. And if you go to economic development, it's mostly white men who are talking about workforce transportation, business attraction. And then if you go to a community development meeting and you see people working on housing and and education and some other community development issues as if these if transportation and education don't go hand in hand, if housing and climate justice don't go hand in hand. You know, while I understand we have to organize ourselves based around certain issues, there has to be room for us to cross-pollinate ideas because we see segregation within these sectors themselves. We see hierarchies being developed within these sectors. So for me, it does require us to sit to have more of a bundle of approaches to solving problems. We're not going to solve this. There was just an infrastructure bill. We're not going to solve this with just a workforce development bill. It will come when these agencies can understand how connected people live. I say this about schools because you would hear business. Business owners. Corporations. Corporate owners. They do this all the time. If we could only fix the schools, everything will be all right. And then housing don't matter about about transportation doesn't matter. And then the bigger point is kids don't live in schools. They live in neighborhoods. They live in communities. And all of these factors matter. So we got to find ways and within our siloed worlds that every once in a while look across the hall and say, How can we work together?

NICOL TURNER LEE: Right. And I'll be quick. I just think from a policy perspective, I do have to give credit to President Biden and Vice President Harris on their racial equity initiative. I mean, in the February 20, 23 order. The president's office has basically come out and in, you know, emboldened agencies to actually have a racial equity approach when it comes to the issues that they tackle. And I think there is some level of inter-agency coordination when it comes to how they're tackling racial equity, which is the key component of this, particularly in spaces where we see these correlations between education policy, labor policy, you know, environment, etc.. The key thing is for the government to tackle this. You cannot make these issues partizan. And I think on the heels of an election next year, the question will be whether or not that that still remains top

of mind and priority as we go forward. The hope is, and Darrell says is, you know, most of the work is done by the agencies because they're career professionals. And I'd have to say, because of these directives that I've been given, I have been seeing on my end, I know about you, Andrew, some progress with there has been some work done to address racial equity, whether it's in the housing department, some of the appraisal work that they've been doing, whether it's in education or about racial equity, whether it's actually in health, where there are CDC directors that are being trained on algorithmic bias. My point is that's one way that policy can sort of embrace the fact that we need to do this together, that it's all hands on deck and then having the next step be some inter-agency coordination so that when you're looking at the divvying up funds, that there's some accountability that comes with that needs. We don't need a government, another George Floyd moment, we all experience an egregious moment and now we're seeing the regression of funding and support in those kinds of issues that are important to communities of color. So just going forward, again, hopefully, as I think I put it, as we go on to the heels of a new election, it's not about filling the clown shoes, but is about making sure that that clown, whoever it is, has a pathway towards directing the right resources into the right buckets that make us a more unified democracy.

DARRELL M. WEST: Well, I want to thank Dr. Andre Perry and Dr. Nicol Turner Lee for sharing your thoughts with us. I found this panel to be a very inspiring and forward looking and lots of great ideas on how we can move forward to improve racial equity in America. And those of you who are interested in reading more about their writings and the research that they have undertaken. You can check them out at [Brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu). And for those of you who enjoy Brookings Webinar Brookings does have a YouTube channel where this as well as other webinars are archived and you can take a look at them at your leisure. So thank you very much for tuning in. We appreciate your interest.