


STATE OF BLACK MINNESOTA REPORT 2021

Urban League Twin Cities
Center for Social Justice



Urban League
Twin Cities



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FOREWORD

Black Minnesotans witnessed significant and encouraging change in 2021, but also the confounding continuation of historical inequities. Minnesota ranks as the number one state in the nation to raise a family and number six for being the best place to live. Still, Black-white disparities in health, education, employment, income, homeownership and wealth are among the worst in the country.

This State of Black Minnesota 2021 Report is framed by the foregoing context as well as myriad other aggregate and individual challenges. The report presents analysis, commentary and proposals in seven key metrics of Black life. Authored by commissioned experts in arts, business, criminal justice, education, faith, generational wealth, and health, we do not propose these metrics as the sole indicators of Black life, but they are essential and representative for Black Minnesotans in 2021.

Our objective in publishing this report is to illustrate and elevate the obstacles and inequities affecting the nearly 400,000 African descendants who call Minnesota home, and illuminate their intrinsic assets, capacity and resilience. Our expectation is to catalyze policy, programs and investment to advance equity, justice and power for Black people.

There are many people to acknowledge and thank for contributing to the publication of this report beginning with Cynthia Fraction, former Director of ULTC's Center for Social Justice. Cynthia served as curator, editor, artistic director, publisher and in various other capacities in service of this project. Leah Reinert, Everyone Needs an Editor, provided editorial assistance. James Wade, 2110 Design Group, supplied graphic design services. Ashley Burris, Barbara Doyle and Marquita Stephens from the ULTC staff served as proofreaders. We are grateful to each of them for their contributions.

Finally, we extend our admiration and appreciation to the subject matter experts who authored the seven sections of the report: David Grant (arts and culture), Bruce Corrie (business), Artika Tyner (criminal justice), Aura Wharton-Beck (education), Jon Robinson (faith), Shanea Turner-Smith (generational wealth) and Rachel Hardeman (health). We are indebted to their service and enriched by their scholarship. Thank you one and all.

Without further ado, the Urban League Twin Cities' Center for Social Justice is pleased to present this State of Black Minnesota 2021 Report.

Steven L. Belton, JD
President and Chief Executive Officer
Urban League Twin Cities



S T A T E O F B L A C K M I N N E S O T A

BLACK HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Health & Wellness in Black Minnesota

DR. RACHEL HARDEMAN, PHD, MPH

MINNESOTA'S RACIAL HEALTH INEQUITIES

According to the World Health Organization, “**Health** is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Health flourishes when all facets of human life—economic, social, biological, and behavioral—are optimized. **Health equity** means all people have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Social determinants of health are the conditions where we are born, live, learn, work, and play. Our age, race, and gender all influence our health outcomes and shape our daily lives.¹ Research shows these **Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)** can be even more impactful to our health than our biology or lifestyle choices. In Minnesota, where Black residents are more than twice as likely to be unemployed, 11 times more likely to be incarcerated, and half as likely to own property, social determinants play a profound role in widening disparities. SDOH, including economic stability, level of education, neighborhood and environment, and social relationships and interactions are predisposing factors that influence health outcomes. The impact of SDOHs is heightened in the Black community, and they play a crucial role in maternal and infant health outcomes.²

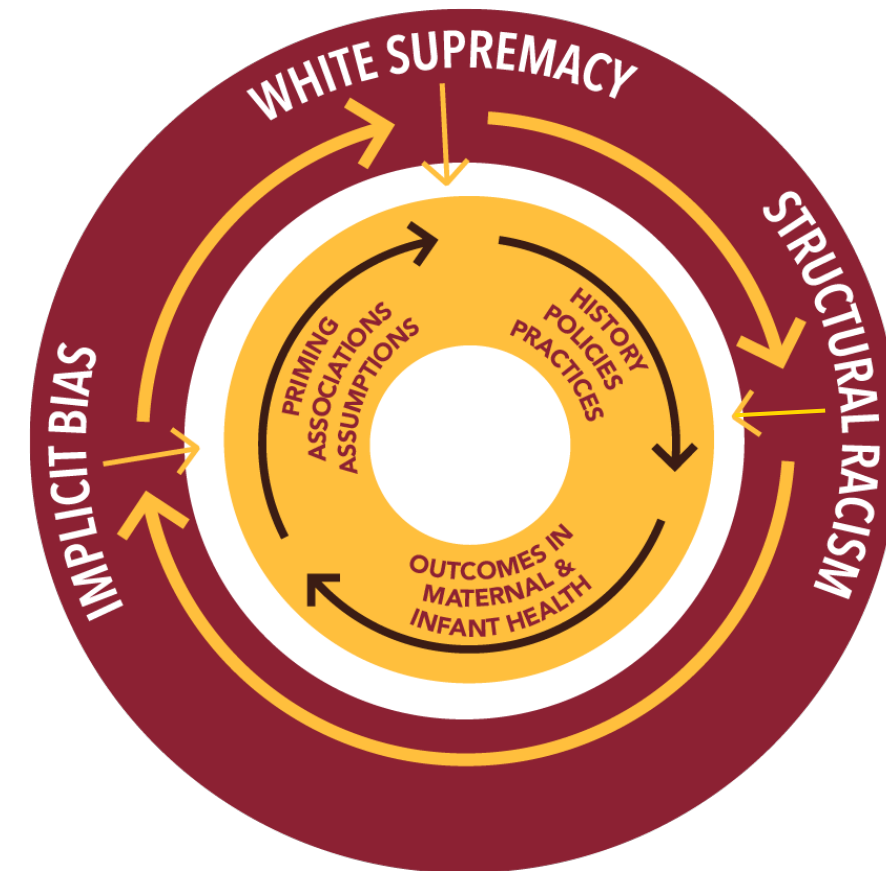
Minnesota consistently ranks among the healthiest states in the nation; however, those averages do not tell the whole story. Minnesota has some of the most significant health inequities in the country between its white and Black residents. At the **root of racial health inequities in Minnesota** is racism.

RACISM IS A FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE OF HEALTH INEQUITIES IN MINNESOTA

Racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call “race”), that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources.³ Race (the social interpretation of how one looks) is a social construct created to support racist ideas that upheld the enslavement of Black people and promulgated white supremacy—the ideology that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to Black people and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions.³ Racism and white supremacy were adopted as a means of justifying slavery and for over 400 years supremacist ideologies have shaped the cultural beliefs, institutional and systemwide policies, and interpersonal rules and behaviors creating advantage for white people while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for Black communities. Racism enabled the enslavement of Black people for 60% of the history of the United States and enforced segregation for another 20% of our nation’s history. Racism and

white supremacy kept Black people from citizenship until 1868 and barred them from the right to vote until 1870. However, voting rights were functionally denied until 1965, and remain contemporarily depressed through a variety of means today. Over centuries and decades, racism has taken on many shapes and forms in the United States ranging from racial inequities in mass incarceration, voter ID laws, underfunded schools, zoning restrictions, access to healthcare and in many more important domains integral to daily life.

Figure 1
Structural Racism, Implicit Bias, and White Supremacy Interact in a Feedback Loop, Constantly Perpetuating One Another



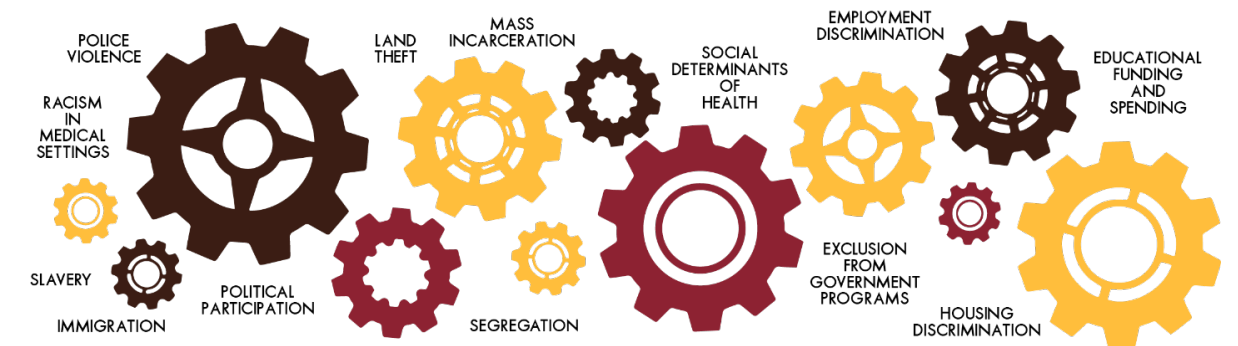
Health & Wellness in Black Minnesota

Structural racism can take on many shapes and forms and shows up in myriad of ways in our society thus affecting the day-to-day life of Black Minnesotans. Figure 2 depicts just a few of the ways structural racism shows up across our society, with each domain undergirding and maintaining the existence of the others. The ultimate impact of this pervasive racism in our policies and practices is inequities in the social determinants of health, as evidenced by wide variations in life expectancy between zip codes and racial groups.

All Forms of Racism Negatively Impact the Health and Wellbeing of Black Minnesotans

Forms of Racism	Definition	Example
Internalized Racism	When members of a racialized group internalize discriminatory group stereotypes and accept them to be true. The beliefs of these stereotypes may lead to them wanting to dissociate with characteristics and features of the group. ⁴	Black patients exhibiting internalized racism may be less likely to speak up to their physicians or question treatment options, hindering care. ⁵
Interpersonal Racism	Racism based on prejudices and stereotypes of racialized groups developed by larger societal ideologies. ⁴ Often shows up as implicit (unconscious and automatic) bias.	In health care, interpersonal racism can present as a clinician prescribing less pain medication because they believe Black people are less sensitive to pain.
Institutional racism	Legalized racism that creates racialized patterns of disproportionate limited access to services, goods, wealth, knowledge, and opportunities for racially minoritized groups. Due to its invisible nature, it does not require individual animus to reproduce itself, rather it informs the customs or values of the dominant group which is then used to continue the practice even when it is outlawed. ⁴	Institutional racism in a health care setting can occur when leaders fail to provide staff with anti-racist training, or they do not prioritize diversity in hiring clinical workers.
Structural racism	The totality of ways in which societies foster racial discrimination, through mutually reinforcing inequitable systems that in turn reinforce discriminatory beliefs, values, and distribution of resources, which together affect the risk of adverse health outcomes. ⁶	Structural racism can manifest through institutional and public policies both contemporary and historic such as redlining (process by which banks and other institutions refused to offer mortgages or offered worse rates to customers in certain neighborhoods based on their racial and ethnic composition).

Figure 2
Structural Racism Manifests in Many Different, Intersecting Ways Across the Lifecourse and Throughout Society



REDLINING: STRUCTURAL RACISM IMPACTING BLACK HEALTH IN MINNESOTA

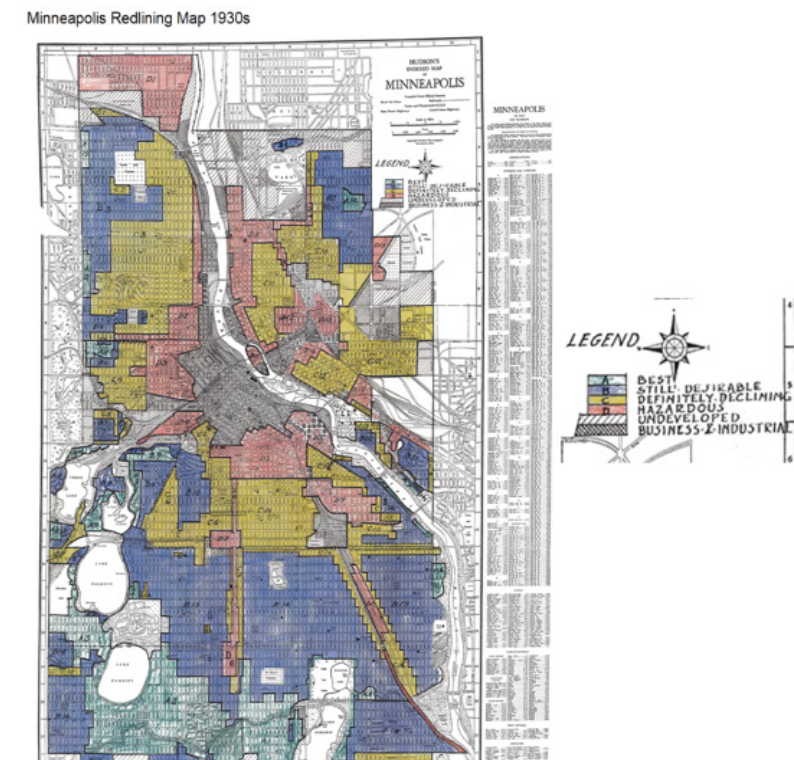
Racial covenants—restrictive deeds that kept people of color, especially Black people, from owning property in specific areas and neighborhoods were first seen in Minneapolis in 1910. The practice of racial covenants soon spread across the Twin Cities. By the time that covenants were abolished, the damage was done. Covenants divided Minneapolis—and many other northern cities—by race. These residential and racial patterns of segregation persist today.⁷

Furthermore, in the 1930s, a new tool was created for keeping Black people from purchasing homes in predominantly white neighborhoods called **redlining**. Created by the new Federal Housing Administration (FHA) as a way to rate risk factors for government-back mortgages, redlining gave favorable scores for neighborhoods with racial covenants in place, and “hazardous” scores for areas where Black people and other people of color lived. This made it nearly impossible for Black Minnesotans to obtain FHA loans classifying them as “too risky.”

Redlining is a form of **structural racism** that has had detrimental effects on health and well-being for Black Minnesotans. Racial segregation channels the flow of resources, thus determining access to community assets. In Minnesota, majority white neighborhoods have more parks and more generous tree cover whereas Black communities have more environmental hazards like landfills and highways. Black redlined communities have less access to medical care, which translates into higher rates of infant mortality and premature births. COVID-19 exposure and mortality rates are directly correlated with redlining such that redlined communities have been hardest hit by COVID-19.

Health & Wellness in Black Minnesota

Figure 3
Minneapolis Redlining Map 1930s



A map of the FHA's redlining in Minneapolis

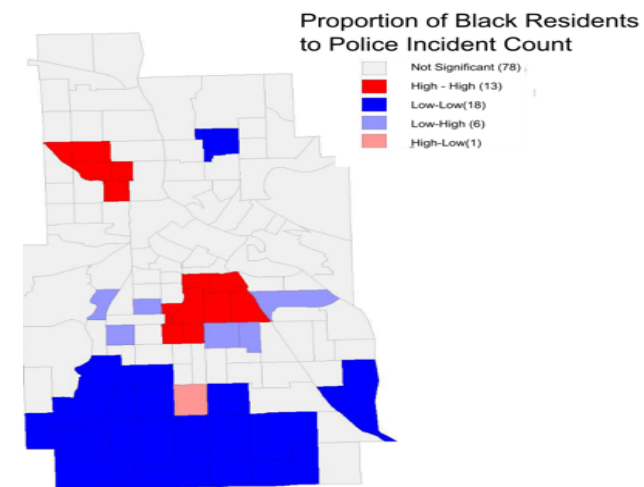
POLICE VIOLENCE: STRUCTURAL RACISM IMPACTING BLACK HEALTH IN MINNESOTA⁹

To reduce racial health inequities for Black Minnesotans, public health must rigorously explore the relationship between police violence and health, and advocate policies that address racist oppression.¹⁰ Several recent high-profile cases of racialized police violence targeting unarmed Black civilians have laid bare deep-seated racism in communities across the US and particularly here in Minnesota. These events of racialized police violence—**targeting Black people at disproportionately higher rates**—have made the issue highly visible in public discourse. This heightened awareness is elevated by growing social movements and fueled by repeated protests and uprisings in the aftermath of racialized police violence. While racialized police violence is not a new problem, data from 1960-2010 show more than twice the rate of death in the US due to legal intervention (persons killed by law enforcement) among young Black men compared to young white men every year for five decades.¹¹ And while sociological literature has documented

racial bias in police shootings for decades, **public health research has failed to engage in efforts to understand how police violence shapes population health disparities.** This oversight is concerning in that racialized police violence is a systemic issue with roots deeper than the individual, isolated acts by single officers, and one that represents the functioning and maintenance of our racially-stratified society. As such, the ubiquity of its impact suggests its critical role as a broad, societal-level stressor that may impact birth outcomes at the population level.

Figure 4
Proportion of Black Residents to Police Incident Count

A recent study in Minneapolis found that neighborhoods with more Black residents had more community-level police contact. Community-level police contact was found to be associated with significantly higher risk of preterm birth (birth before 37 weeks gestation) for Black women living in those neighborhoods.⁸



In Minnesota, the impact of George Floyd's murder on health and wellbeing is palpable. Research being led by the Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health has found, for both Black and white mothers living in Minneapolis communities, the odds of preterm birth for mothers living in a neighborhood with high police presence is significantly higher compared to the odds for their racial counterparts in the low-presence neighborhoods (90% increase for white, 100% increase for US-born Black, and 10% for foreign-born Black women).⁹

Health & Wellness in Black Minnesota

THE STATE OF BLACK HEALTH IN MINNESOTA

The health effects due to racism are not isolated incidents; they occur throughout a person's lifetime, beginning with the challenges a mother faces before she gives birth. The data below reflect a failure of our society for more than 400 years to ensure health and well-being for Black people.

- **Overall Life Expectancy.** Minnesota is often lauded for having one of the longest life expectancies of all US states, but when the data are broken down by race, we see Black Minnesotans do not share in this high ranking. Black residents of the Twin Cities live, on average, seven years less than their white neighbors.¹²

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Minnesotans live longer and healthier lives than residents of nearly any other state — if they are white.

Life expectancy in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN¹



- **COVID-19** has exacerbated health inequities that have been prevalent for Black people for generations. Minnesota's minority populations have higher poverty rates and contend daily with interpersonal and structural racism, which lead to higher odds of having chronic diseases, yet less access to healthcare. Black people have been disproportionately exposed to COVID and tend to work jobs that cannot be done from home. Disparities persist across age groups 20-64 and older as Black people continue to test positive for COVID-19 at higher rates than the overall population. As events of 2020 made painfully clear, racism, not race, is the critical factor leading to massive Black/White health inequities. In 2020, the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism disproportionately claimed Black lives. The novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has—because of racism—killed a disproportionate number of Black people. According to the CDC, Black Americans are hospitalized with COVID-19 at 2.9 times the rate of white Americans and die at 1.9 times the rate.
 - ◆ In March 2021, Black Minnesotans accounted for 6% of the population but only 3.5% of those vaccinated¹⁴

COVID-19 DEATH RATES

For people of color, compared to non-Hispanic white people



Maternal and Infant Health

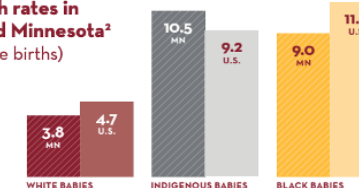
Black mothers in the United States suffer from disproportionately high rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity. Maternal mortality refers to the death of a woman during pregnancy or within one year of the end of pregnancy from a pregnancy complication. Maternal morbidity refers to the unexpected outcomes of labor and delivery that result in significant short- or long-term consequences to a birthing woman's health. Furthermore, the infants of Black mothers are at greater risk of experiencing mortality (death before their first birthday), preterm birth (birth before 37 weeks gestation), and low birth weight (an infant weighing 5.5 pounds or less) in comparison to their white counterparts. Both societal and health system factors contribute to high rates of poor maternal and infant outcomes for Black families, who are more likely to experience barriers to obtaining quality care and often face racism throughout their lives which in turn ages the body.

- US-born Black mothers in Minnesota are nearly 3 times as likely to die during or after pregnancy than their white counterparts regardless of education levels and socioeconomic status.¹⁵
- Black infants are more than twice as likely as white infants to die before reaching their first birthday.¹⁶
- In Hennepin County, the county with the largest concentration of Black Minnesotans, the infant mortality rate among US-born Black infants is 3.4 times higher than that of whites¹⁷

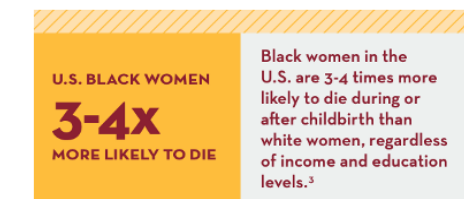
INFANT DEATHS

Black and Indigenous infants in Minnesota are less likely to celebrate their first birthday.

Infant death rates in the U.S. and Minnesota² (per 1,000 live births)



MATERNAL DEATHS



SEVERE MATERNAL ILLNESS

2x HIGHER
IN BLACK WOMEN

For every maternal death, 70 women suffer severe illnesses or incidents that are considered "near misses." Black women experience these threats at a rate 2.1 times greater than that of white women.⁴



Health & Wellness in Black Minnesota

Bold and Comprehensive Policy Solutions to Improve the State of Black Minnesota's Health

Where we live, work, learn, play, and age has a deterministic effect on our health. This framework—the Social Determinants of Health—accentuates the profound effect structural racism has on health via its effect on the material determinants of health that we all experience. As such, focusing on policy initiatives that engage with the principles of population health and the intersection of structural racism and the social determinants of health must be a priority. We can begin to address structural racism and the social determinants of health with bold policy.^{18,19}

- **Policy that supports the SDOH:**

- ◆ **Education:** Minnesota's opportunity gap is the worst in the nation. We must dismantle the clear structural inequities that have long existed in our K-12 system, beginning with the application of a race equity lens to all education policy development.
- ◆ **Housing:** The ability to access high-quality affordable housing is critical for the intergenerational wealth building and financial well-being that undergird the social determinants of health. State and local policy should prioritize the expansion and supply of affordable housing while simultaneously dismantling exclusionary zoning practices.
- ◆ **Universal Basic Income:** In an effort to begin to account for the centuries of disinvestment and discrimination Black communities and communities of color have faced, we must consider allocating a fixed monthly sum to each eligible household, no strings attached, with the goal of providing recipients with enough cash to meet their needs.
- ◆ **Employment:** COVID-19 has exacerbated economic disparities that have been prevalent for Black people for generations. Future policy should include direct relief of \$2000 recurring cash payments, which will provide real economic support to families and individuals, allowing them to put money back into the economy. Black workers are particularly disproportionately employed in many of the jobs such as those working in nursing homes, bus drivers, and shipping and logistics. These jobs are considered "essential," suggesting Black workers may experience less drastic job losses than would be expected. These jobs are indeed essential, but many pay relatively low wages and are held primarily by people of color, and especially by Black workers. The pay and protection of essential workers should be a primary concern for policymakers. Policy solutions should focus on continued expansion of unemployment insurance benefits, which also have a significant impact on alleviating poverty—all with the understanding that these are a starting point while more long-term solutions are developed.²⁰
- ◆ **Policing policy:** Police brutality is the leading cause of death for young Black men in the United States and therefore a public health issue. In Minnesota, the murder of George Floyd sparked protest and widespread condemnation; however, comprehensive policy based on research that has determined police violence has a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of Black communities is lacking.
- ◆ **Universal healthcare:** By providing consistent universal access to high quality healthcare, Minnesota can promote racial equity and reduce the racial health equity gap.

- ◆ **Healthcare workforce desegregation and training:** The segregation of the healthcare workforce—most notably the dearth of Black clinicians—is a likely driver of racial health inequities. A truly equitable healthcare delivery system would provide the option for all Black people to have care providers who share their racial, ethnic, and/or cultural background if they would choose that option. This could increase trust and decrease the impact of outgroup biases and discrimination in patient-provider relationships. When provider-patient racial concordance is not possible, it is critical that providers be cognizant of and equipped to mitigate their implicit biases and the role of racism in their patients' lives. In 2021, Minnesota lawmakers acknowledged this necessity by passing the Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act, authored by State Representative Ruth Richardson. This new law takes steps to expand access to doulas and midwives of color and requires Minnesota hospitals to provide antiracism and implicit bias training to maternity care providers.
- ◆ **Reparations:** The policies that uplifted slavery and Jim Crow still have an effect today. Reparations—direct payment to Black Americans with enslaved ancestors—would work to: 1) expand access to the resources that create health, 2) decrease chronic stress, and 3) support the health and stability of the next generation. Ensuring access to racially concordant care will take much more than scholarships and mentorship programs in medical schools. The root cause of our disproportionately white-led medical system begins long before medical school admissions, starting with the disparate access to early childhood education programs between children of color and white children. True "medical reparations" should begin with the funding of high-quality, culturally-centered early childhood education for children of color, and then continue through to full scholarships to college and post-baccalaureate health science degrees. This should include training programs for all Black and Brown students who desire to become healthcare providers.



Any solution to eliminate racial health inequities in Minnesota must be rooted in the material conditions in which those inequities thrive. Therefore, we insist that for the health and well-being of Black communities and, in turn, the health of the nation, we address the social, economic, political, legal, educational, and healthcare systems that uphold structural racism and white supremacy.¹⁸

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Shannon Stapleton, Reuters

S T A T E O F B L A C K M I N N E S O T A

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Criminal Justice in Black Minnesota

DR. ARTIKA R. TYNER

OVERVIEW

Minnesota can be characterized as a tale of two cities. In the first paradigm, the state is ranked at the top of the index when assessing livability indicators from access to a high-quality educational system to financial prosperity evidenced by low unemployment rates (Myers, 2021). Minnesota is the headquarters of 18 Fortune 500 companies (Niepow, 2021) and an outdoor oasis in the land of 10,000+ lakes. Minnesota is ranked the #1 state to raise a family, the happiest state, and the #6 best place to live. Despite these great economic strides and positive outlook, the Black community experiences another Minnesota. This Minnesota can be characterized by a pervasively high concentration of poverty and disproportionate rates of incarceration.

According to the most recent census data, the black poverty rate in the Twin Cities area was 25.4%, which is over four times the white poverty rate of 5.9%. In 2019, the incarceration rate of blacks in the Twin Cities area was 11 times that of whites. (Rosalsky, 2020)

In Minnesota, Blacks have become engulfed in the tangled web of mass incarceration. This web has far too many entry points evidenced by the emergence of the school-to-prison pipeline and the far-reaching impact of felon disenfranchisement. In contrast, there are far fewer exit points on the pathway to rehabilitation and upward economic mobility. Collateral consequences serve as active roadblocks while race bias from initial police contact to the disposition of a sentence creates another impasse. Policy reform efforts in the arena of criminal justice can be used to create new inroads to equal rights and justice for all.

MASS INCARCERATION

The emergence of the phenomenon of mass incarceration can be identified with a certain time period and drastic shifts in policies. Over a two-decade timespan (1970-1990), there was a dramatic increase in incarceration rates within the United States (U.S.). The spark of this national crisis was President Richard Nixon's declaration of a war on drugs and the identification of drug abuse as the number one public enemy of the nation (History.com Editors, 2019). These policies shaped the trajectory of criminal justice policies for future administrations and impacted the lives of many generations to come. Subsequently, President Ronald Reagan continued this legacy with a "tough on crime" approach to a public health crisis. At the beginning of his presidential term, there were 329,000 individuals incarcerated; at the end of his second term, the prison population had nearly doubled to 627,000 behind bars (Cullen, 2018). "The impact of the drug war has been astounding. In less than thirty years, the U.S. penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than 2 million with drug convictions accounting for the majority of the increase" (Alexander, 2010, p. 7) An estimated "70 million Americans—one in three adults—have a criminal record" (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017). The U.S. represents 5% of the world population but nearly a quarter of the world's prisoners (Ye Hee Lee, 2015).

African Americans are 13.4% of the United States population (U.S. Census, 2019)

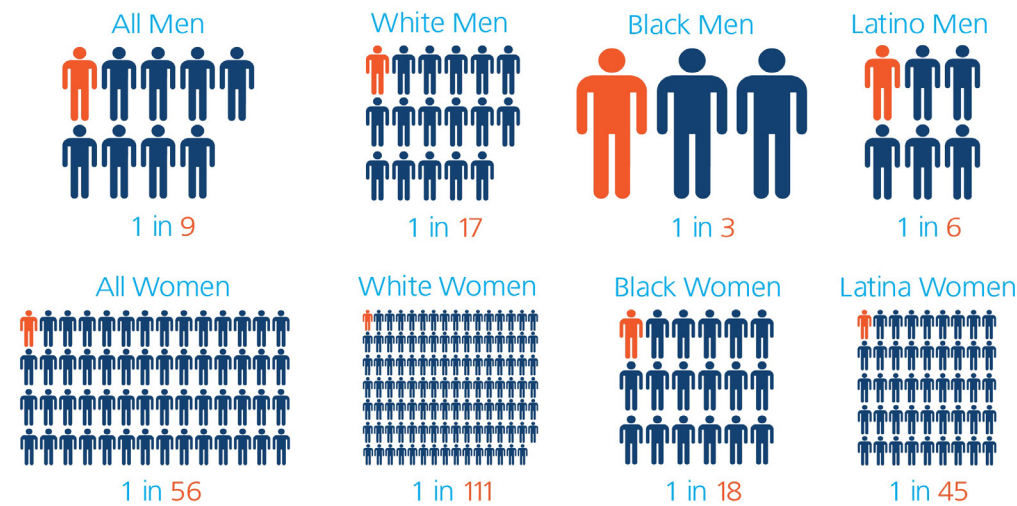
yet account for **over a third of**
the U.S. prison population (38.2%)
-Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2021

In 2019, the incarceration rate of blacks in the Twin Cities area was
11 times that of whites.

Criminal Justice in Black Minnesota

African Americans are 13.4% of the United States population (U.S. Census, 2019) yet account for over a third of the U.S. prison population (38.2%; Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2021). The U.S. imprisons a larger percentage of its Black population than South Africa during the height of Apartheid (Coates, 2014). As seen in Figure 1, a Black man has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime compared to a white man who has a 1 in 17 chance. A Black woman has a 1 in 18 chance of going to prison while a white woman has a 1 in 111 chance.

Figure 1



Source: Bonczar, T. (2003). *Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974–2001*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics



Minnesota's Criminal Justice System

As of January 2021, there are currently 7,593 people incarcerated in Minnesota correctional facilities (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2012). Minnesota has one of the lowest incarceration rates in the nation. It is ranked fifth lowest according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS; Minnesota Department of Corrections [MNDOC], 2021). However, the state has an exceedingly high number of people under the control of the corrections system. “As of the end of 2015, nearly 100,00 people in the state were under probation—the fifth-highest rate in the nation, according to BJS” (MNDOC, 2021). Nearly a quarter of Minnesota’s prison population have not obtained a high school diploma or GED:

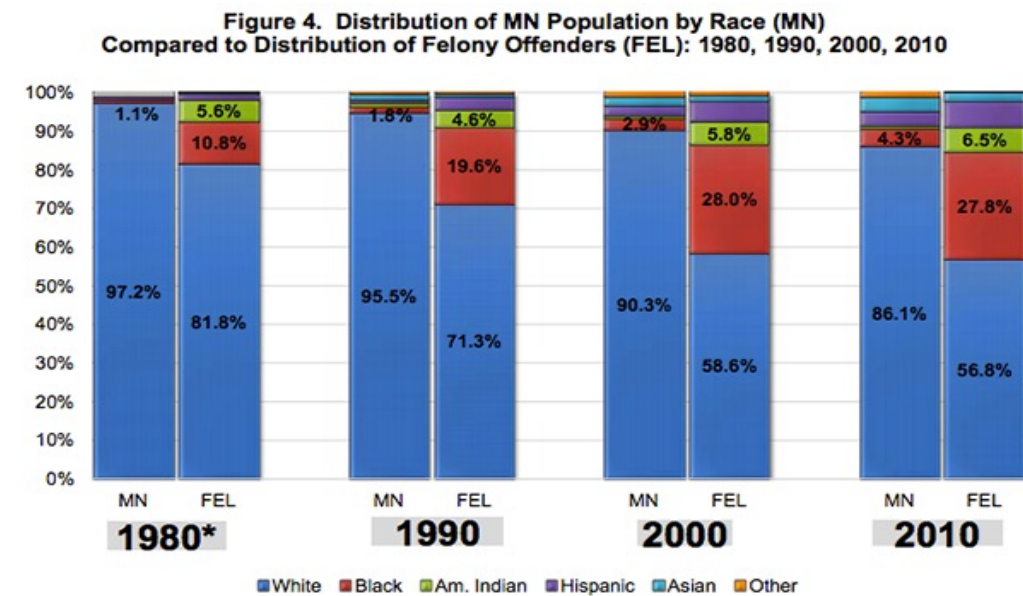
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL: Grades 0 – 8	212	2.8%
Grades 9 – 11	1,699	22.4%

In Minnesota, the average annual cost to incarcerate a prisoner is \$41,366 (per 2015 data; Vera, 2015).

RACE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Race matters when critically analyzing and examining the data related to criminal justice. In Minnesota, “White people make up the vast majority of the state population—86 percent—but only 53 percent of the inmate population” (Mannix, 2015). Black people represent 37.7% (2,865) of the prison population (MNDOC, 2021) however they are only 6% of the population in Minnesota (Mannix, 2015). See Figure 2 for data on the distribution of the prison population by race in Minnesota.

Figure 2



* In 1980, the census information for people 18 years of age and older was broken into three racial categories: white, black, and Hispanic. The grey block at the top indicates people who were not in one of these three racial categories.

Despite the fact that racial discrimination in the courts is often subtle, its ultimate effects are anything but.

- 1993 Minnesota Supreme Court Task Force on Race Bias in the Courts

The Minnesota Supreme Court Task Force on Race Bias in the Courts was convened to address racial bias and offer recommendations for change. The task force examined relevant data to help create practical solutions for eliminating racial disparities in the criminal justice system. For instance, “the Fourth Judicial District has 53% of all black felony drug defendants compared to 12% of all white defendants in 2008. The conviction rate for black defendants is more than 20% higher than the rate for white defendants in the Fourth District” (Task Force, 1993). These data warranted further analysis to address the associated racial disparities.

Criminal Justice in Black Minnesota

The group identified 87 actionable items to address racial bias. For instance, bail was being set based on economic factors like employment and housing; instead of evaluating the predictive factors associated with the likelihood of one returning for a court hearing (Shortal, 2018). Therefore, the task force's recommendation focused on an objective evaluation of bail considerations.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

School-to-Prison Pipeline

This funneling of students out of school and into the streets and the juvenile correction system perpetuates a cycle known as the "School-to-Prison-Pipeline," depriving children and youth of meaningful opportunities for education, future employment, and participation in our democracy.
-NAACP Legal Defense Fund

The path from the classroom to the courtroom increases the likelihood of future incarceration. Incarceration as a child is one of the biggest predictors of future incarceration in adult corrections. Youth are referred from the classroom into the juvenile justice in one of two ways: 1) school disciplinary practices or 2) zero-tolerance policies.

African American children are disproportionately impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline. African American students are 3.5 times more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled, or arrested for the same kind of conduct at school. Further, 40% of all students expelled from schools each year are African American.

In Minnesota, "for every 100 Black students enrolled in the public schools, there were 14.4 suspensions" (Children's Defense Fund [CDF], 2009). Compared to "for every 100 White students enrolled in the public schools, there were 2.4 suspensions" (CDF, 2009). Previous studies have shown that even a single suspension can double the odds of that student later dropping out. When students drop out of school, they are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested during their lifetime (Hanson & Stipek, 2014).

Collateral Consequences

Parallel Universe: One that promises a form of punishment that is often more difficult to bear than prison time: a lifetime of shame, contempt, scorn, and exclusion.
-Michelle Alexander

Collateral consequences are often referred to as hidden sanctions since they are not formally quantifiable in one's sentence or associated penalties (Benson, 2013). "Collateral consequences are legal and regulatory restrictions that limit or prohibit people convicted of crimes from accessing employment, business and occupational licensing, housing, voting, education, and other rights, benefits, and opportunities" (National Inventory, n.d.). There are over 40,000

documented collateral consequences in the National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction created by the American Bar Association (National Inventory, 2021). The disproportionate rate of incarceration of African Americans has led to a widespread number of individuals experiencing a civil disability as a result of a criminal conviction. Hence, job prospects and wealth creation possibilities are limited.

In Minnesota, there are a number of collateral sanctions outlined in the law; many restrict access to employment opportunities for those with a criminal record (Minnesota Statutes, 2021). "Nearly 75 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals are still unemployed a year after release" (ACLU, 2017, p. 4). "Gross Domestic Product is reduced by \$78-87 billion as a result of excluding formerly incarcerated job seekers from the workforce" (Buknor & Barber, 2016, p. 1). Policy reform efforts should focus on creating fair and inclusive hiring practices.

Voter Restoration

Felon disenfranchisement restricts access to the ballot box. Indeed, 5.2 million Americans are prohibited from voting due to laws that disenfranchise citizens convicted of felony offenses (Chung, 2021). In most states, individuals who are incarcerated or serving the terms of probation or parole are barred from voting. Some states have a lifetime voting ban for those convicted of a felony. Only Maine, Vermont, Washington D.C., and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico do not restrict the voting rights of anyone with a felony conviction, including those in prison.

In Minnesota, community members who are incarcerated in a secure detention facility along with those who are on probation/parole are not able to exercise the right to vote. Over 40,000 Minnesotans living in our community are unable to vote (ACLU Minnesota, 2021). Voting serves as a prosocial activity that reduces recidivism and promotes community engagement. Restore the Vote MN focuses on advancing policy reform to create access to voting for those on probation or parole.

Prison Gerrymandering

Billions of dollars are distributed to communities based upon U.S. Census data. These funds cover essential services from the fire department to access to healthcare programs like Medicaid. Prisoners are counted as residents of the city/town where they are incarcerated and not where their home is located. This creates an inaccurate account of community needs for funding and research purposes. In addition, being counted determines how many representatives each state gets in the U.S. House of Representatives.

In Minnesota, prison gerrymandering restricts access to valuable financial community resources and fair and accurate political representation. This issue can be addressed by changing the Census policies (before the next count in 2030) and counting offenders in the community where they were last domiciled instead of being counted as residents in the city where they are incarcerated.

Criminal Justice in Black Minnesota

CALL TO ACTION

When people collectively come together and strategize and plan, working together and acting together, they create a power that they can effectively use in their situation to effect change.

-Rev. Dr. James Lawson, Jr.



The future of a more prosperous and vibrant Minnesota is predicated upon equal rights and justice. Strategic action and policy reform are needed to achieve this vision. This would include incorporating restorative practices in school disciplinary practices, implementing fair hiring practices, restoring voting rights, and fostering community development.

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S T A T E O F B L A C K M I N N E S O T A

GENERATIONAL WEALTH



Wealth & Housing in Black Minnesota

THE AFTERMATH OF THE GREAT LOCKDOWN: THE WIDENING OF THE BLACK-WHITE GENERATIONAL WEALTH GAP IN MINNESOTA

SHANEA TURNER-SMITH, MSW, LGSW

BACK IN THE DAY HISTORY

According to the Center for American Progress (2021), “the importance of household wealth has become abundantly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet wealth is vastly unequally distributed across the United States. In fact, Black households have a fraction of the wealth of white households leaving them in a much more precarious financial situation when a crisis strikes and leaves them with fewer economic opportunities to recover.”



Members of the “Committee to End Discrimination against Fourth Class Whites” protesting fair housing in St. Paul on December 19, 1962. St. Paul Pioneer Press. Minneapolis and St. Paul Newspaper Negatives Collection.

Photo Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

However, this should come as no surprise if you are well-versed in the history that has led up to this point. Efforts by Black Americans to build generational wealth can be traced back throughout American history, but “these efforts have been impeded in a host of ways” including but not limited to: chattel slavery, the mismanagement of Freedman’s Savings Bank, the bombing of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma, destroying thriving Black communities with Federal highway projects, discriminatory policies riddled through the Jim Crow Era, limiting opportunity by excluding Black veterans from the GI bill, redlining, and restrictive covenants on home deeds, so on and so forth (Brookings, 2020).

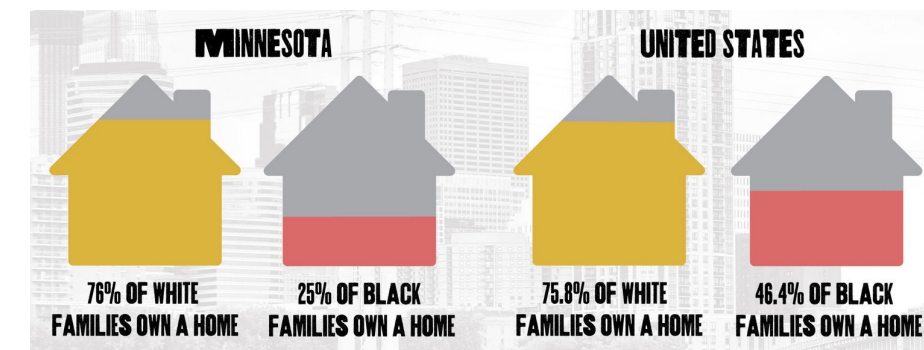
This long history of racism within the housing market has left Black Americans with a weakened foundation to build generational wealth on, and when state of emergencies are declared such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Black communities are hit harder than the rest and reminded of all the obstacles intentionally put in their path to ensure they have nothing to pass down to their grandchildren.

“American society was never designed for the Black community to thrive and now many households are left giving their rent money to the white man on the first of the month each and every month.”

“The Black homeownership rate peaked in MN in 1950...” The Great Lockdown has cost many Black Minnesotans their lives, jobs, and potentially their homes will be gone too. However, let us take a look at the state of Black Minnesotans before and after the COVID-19 pandemic looking closely at the housing sector, as that has always been one way to build generational wealth in America.

According to the Homeless Management System, in 2019, 1 in 262 Minnesotans experienced homelessness and 42 percent of those individuals identified their race as Black or African American compared to 35 percent being white. However, only 6.41 percent of Minnesota’s population is Black, compared to 82.85 percent being white, leaving a huge disparity in who is overrepresented in experiencing homelessness. Further, according to MN Housing’s 10 Trends in Housing in 2020 report, Minnesota has a 51.6 percent disparity between white and Black homeownership, which is the fourth worst in the country (see more in Figure 1). However, on a slightly more positive note, out of 61,000 households of color, Black households account for the highest percentage of individuals between ages 24 and 44 who are potentially income-ready to buy a home (MN Housing, 2020).

Figure 1
Disparities in Homeownership



Source: Twin Cities PBS Racism Unveiled

Wealth & Housing in Black Minnesota

The question we then need to ask ourselves is, is Minnesota doing enough on a large-scale to close the homeownership disparities amongst white residents and communities of color. In 2018, only 16 percent of all the home-purchase mortgage market in Minnesota went to households of color (MN Housing, 2020). Arguably, the answer is no, Minnesota is not doing enough to provide homeownership opportunities to communities of color that will help these communities build generational wealth.

WHERE ARE WE RIGHT NOW?

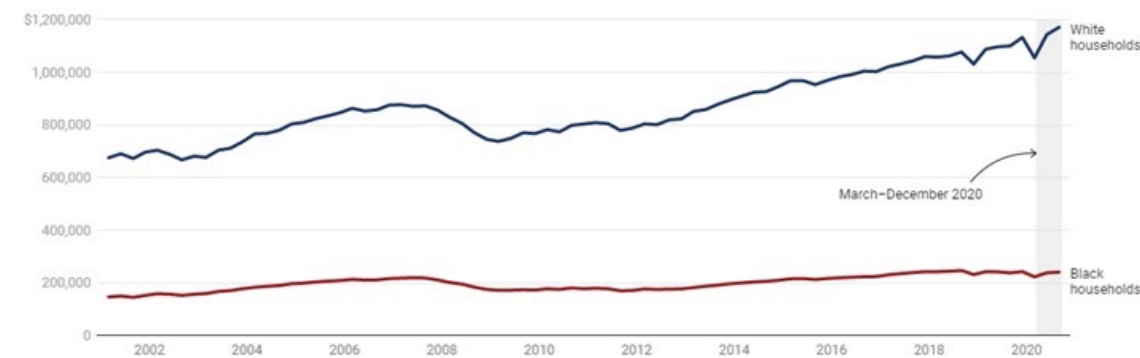
Understanding the Economic Impact of COVID-19 on the Black Households

“Black households faced more obstacles to becoming and staying homeowners during 2020 because they had less money to fall back on...” (Center for American Progress, 2021). According to the Center for American Progress (2021), a much larger share of Black homeowners than white homeowners—17.6 percent compared to 6.9 percent—fell behind on their mortgage from August 2020 to March 2021. This has further widened the wealth gap for Black Americans putting them further back from their goal of passing down generational wealth to their loved ones (see Figure 2 for an illustration of the current Black-white wealth gap overall in the United States).

Figure 2

The U.S. Black-white wealth gap widened again during the pandemic

Average household wealth for Black and white households, 1989 to 2020



Source. Center for American Progress (2021)

“In Minnesota, the median net worth of white households is \$211,000, compared to the median net worth of \$0 for Black households.”

If you are a Black homeowner, you continue to face inequities that furthers you from creating generational wealth as more people of color pay a third of their income on housing than white residents (Jackson, 2021). According to the Brookings (2020) research study on the Devaluation of Assets, Black homeowners in Minnesota, who live in majority Black neighborhoods, homes

are devalued by 20.5 percent to comparable homes in majority white neighborhoods where less than 1 percent of the residents are Black. “This comes out to be a \$33,138 price difference in the home value” (Brookings, 2020). Furthermore, the study found homeowners of color pay a 10 percent to 13 percent higher tax rate on average within the same local property tax jurisdiction. This means, for the median Black homeowner in the United States, this translates to an extra \$300 to \$400 annually in additional property taxes (Brookings, 2020).

When the pandemic hit and many people lost their jobs or were unable to work due to their health and caregiving needs, more white households than Black ones were able to use their emergency savings to pay for household expenses. As a result of not having the same healthy savings white households have been able to accumulate over many generations, Black households fell behind



Deborah and Rickie Cotton speak about their struggles with housing stability and caring for their three children at a “Home To Stay” news conference in Minneapolis, July 21, 2021.

Photo Credit: Ben Hovland, Sahan Journal

on their mortgage payments compared to white households, and they also experienced additional financial hardships. These hardships included but were not limited to: not having enough food to eat, falling behind on other bills, and not being able to afford other household necessities.

Additionally, knowing the Black community is at greater risk of dying from COVID-19, a surge occurred of Black households struggling with not only job loss, but also the loss of loved ones and shifts in the primary head of the household. “When it rains, it pours....” Black households already behind on their rent payments are no longer protected by the Eviction Moratorium established during the first year and a half of the pandemic that helped to keep a roof over many family’s heads. Since the National Eviction Moratorium was lifted on July 31, 2021, it should be assumed that we will continue to see more single adults and families become homeless and/or experience housing instability. The only way individuals may be unscathed and not evicted from their homes is if they have an outstanding rental assistance claim, a protection Minnesota lawmakers put in place until June 1, 2022.

Wealth & Housing in Black Minnesota

However, for homeowners, it will depend on the type of mortgage loan they have to determine if they qualify for a COVID-19 forbearance. For instance, if an individual's mortgage loan is not federally backed, their servicer is not required to offer forbearance options related to COVID-19 hardships. Unfortunately, given this information, Minnesota will continue to see an upward tick in homelessness as there was already a 10 percent increase in homelessness between 2015 and 2018 before the pandemic hit.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In my role as a single adult shelter advocate, it is not uncommon to speak with an out-of-towner experiencing homelessness on the phone who has decided to put all their eggs in one basket and follow the north star to Minnesota in hopes of a better life. These individuals call the Adult Shelter Connect phoneline and declare to me they have purchased a one-way Greyhound bus ticket to Minnesota leaving their native state behind looking for more stability—seeking both housing and economic opportunity. However, many newcomers soon realize the harsh realities of Minnesota are not limited to the below freezing temperatures the winter months bring—as they are faced with racial inequities upon arrival on many fronts. These inequities include, but are not limited to: housing, employment, education, and health compared to their white counterparts. Little do they know, there is so much more work to be done in Minnesota to help the Black community achieve the American Dream and build generational wealth.

The following policies are recommended to help close the Black-White wealth gap in Minnesota.

1. Strategically target Black residents who are income-ready to purchase their first home.
2. Preserve the naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) we have left in the Twin Cities area before it is too late.
3. Incentivize the private sector to develop more affordable housing, especially, for the aging baby-boomers who are on a fixed-income (i.e., earning \$750 to \$1000/per month).
4. Remove barriers that lock Black households out of the housing market (i.e., credit scores, housing history, criminal history, etc.).
5. Address redlining and other discriminatory housing practices—once and for all—to ensure Black homeowners assets are appreciating and not being devalued because of the neighborhood they live in.

Shanea Turner-Smith, MSW, LGSW earned her BSW from the University of St. Thomas and her MSW with a focus on Social and Economic Development, Policy and Housing and Community Management from Washington University in St. Louis.

She has spent her career advocating for affordable housing and racial justice, as these issues are interconnected in more ways than one. In her former roles, she worked as a Family Advocate/Racial Justice Coordinator at Simpson Housing Services, Housing Support Specialist at Vail Place, and as a Research Associate at ACET Inc.



She served terms both as a Commissioner on the Minneapolis Commission on Civil Rights, and on Mayor Frey's Minneapolis Advisory Committee on Housing. Additionally, she served as committee member on the Cultivate Hopkins 2040 City Planning Committee.

Most recently, Shanea holds the title as the Assistant Director of the Student Diversity & Inclusion Services Office at the University of St. Thomas overseeing key signature programs designed to recruit and retain underrepresented students. She also continues to work at Simpson Housing Services as an Adult Shelter Connect Advocate making shelter reservations for single adults experiencing homelessness in Hennepin County.

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S T A T E O F B L A C K M I N N E S O T A

EDUCATION DISPARITIES

Education in Black Minnesota

THE STATE OF EDUCATION: BLACK SCHOLARS IN MINNESOTA
—A POST-PANDEMIC PERSPECTIVE
 DR. AURA WHARTON-BECK

“I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am also so much more than that. So are we all.” -James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son

For those African American scholars who survived the 2020-2021 global pandemic and the civil unrest following the televised murder of George Floyd, returning to school amidst an unprecedented period of uncertainty opens a door for concerned adults to examine critical issues raised over the past two years. This essay identifies six drivers of revolutionary change for Black students who live in the state of Minnesota. The impact of COVID-19 continues to serve as a measurement to calculate our ability to examine current educational practices, test our resolve, resiliency, and adaptability.



Teacher and students of color engage in remote-learning at Park Brook Elementary School in Brooklyn Park, MN. Photo credit: Christine T. Nguyen, MPR News

For African American scholars who attend Minnesota’s schools (K-8, secondary, and post-secondary schools), returning to school after 18-20 months of distance learning may prove to be a unique experience. It is well documented that the 2020 global pandemic exposed a multitude of social, economic, educational, health, racial disparities, and lack of access to technology across the United States. Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fault lines in educational systems in the

United States. Annually, the Minnesota Department of Education surveys students on critical issues regarding their school experiences of middle and high school students. For over two decades, extensive reports on the academic achievement gap for Black students in the state of Minnesota gained national attention. This achievement gap cannot be ignored by educators, legislators, or politicians. However, for this reflective essay, this writer made an intentional choice to use additional data points which may shed a holistic and perhaps overlooked factor in how we can positively impact the trajectory for success in our African American scholars. For the 2021 edition of the Minnesota Urban League, State of Black Minnesota, most data were collected prior to 2020, either during the 2019–20 academic year or in fall 2019. Consequently, with some exceptions, this year’s report presented findings from prior to the coronavirus pandemic. Please note, within the percentages reported in this essay, the genders are combined to achieve a total data point. The links to the entire reports used in this essay are provided in the reference section.

According to the Search Institute 2021 report, researchers uncovered alarming trends emerged when examining the single item measure of feeling cared about by race/ethnic groups in the Minnesota Student Survey (MMS). Youth who identify as White were more likely to report that their teachers and other school adults care about them than Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students.

Overall, these data are a call for action to any adult who is genuinely concerned about advancing the futures of Black Minnesotans. The remaining data in this essay are taken from the 2019 Search Institute and the Minnesota Student Survey data. Close inspection of the data from the following data sources indicate important trends on the quality of youth and enrichment activities, plans after high school graduation, and who helps them to think about viable post-secondary and employment options.

This essay identifies **six drivers of change** to test our commitment to improve the quality of life for our most vulnerable children. Grounded in data from the Minnesota Department of Education and the Search Institute, there are six drivers of change which became abundantly clear to me as to what is desperately needed to improve the socio-emotional health, leadership potential, and academic skills of K-12 and postsecondary students of African descent in Minnesota. The six drivers of change are: (1) Reimagining and redefining Out of School Programs, (2) building leadership skills through enrichment activities, (3) closing the digital divide, (4) conversations focusing on post-secondary options, (5) higher education for Gen Z scholars in a post pandemic world, and (6) cultivating safe spaces for conversations on race (see Figure 1).

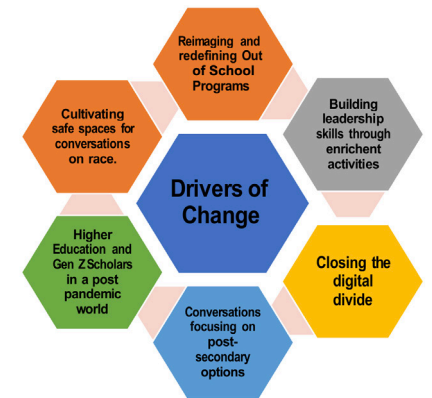


Figure 1
Drivers of Change

Reimagining and Redefining Out of School Programs

The **first driver** focuses on our ability to reimagine and redefine the Out of School programs for our Black students. We must use this time to and the opportunity to cultivate, develop, nurture, and sustain students as they acquire essential 21st century leadership skills. There is a need to create safe places for students to identify their superpowers. Knowing your superpower helps students to navigate the ecological demands of their surroundings. According to the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey, 33% of African American youth reported their school or community offered a variety of programs for people their age to participate in outside of the regular school day. An interesting trend emerges when African American students in the 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade students responded to questions related to the quality of youth activities. Key findings emerged from the data:

- **55%** of 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade African American youth report that they feel safe doing activities outside of the regular school day.
- Across the board, **29%** of African American youth responded to the question that they learn skills like teamwork or leadership **very often**.
- **29%** of African American 11th graders reported that they **very often** learn skills that you can use in a future job.
- **28%** of African American 11th graders reported that they **very often** help make decisions when they spend time doing activities outside of the regular school day.
- **On average, 24%** of 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade African American youth reported that they **very often** develop trusting relationships with adults.

Education in Black Minnesota

Forming meaningful mentorship relationships with adults and acquiring useful skills for future endeavors (e.g., leadership, sharing power, effective communication, conflict resolution strategies, and decision-making skills) are data points that must not be ignored. These results should signal to our community that we should seize this moment and take note of what students are telling us. We reside in a state known for its strong commitment to theatre arts such as Penumbra and the Guthrie Theatres, interactive museums, headquarters of renowned healthcare industries (e.g., Mayo Clinic, Medtronic, United Healthcare, etc.) and other Fortune 500 companies. There are existing opportunities for our Black scholars to connect with affinity groups within these companies. Internships can lead to employment opportunities after graduation.

Building Leadership Skills Through Enrichment Activities

The **second driver** of change focuses on enrichment activities. Using the MDE and Search Institute data, the level of African American students engaged in leadership activities is alarming. On average, 86% of students in 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade report they spend zero days in participating in leadership activities such as student government, youth councils, or committees. Quality of Youth Activities needs to be drastically overhauled to meet the demands of working and living in the 21st century. The graph in Figure 2 below tells a narrative of missed opportunities for us to engage students in meaningful activities.

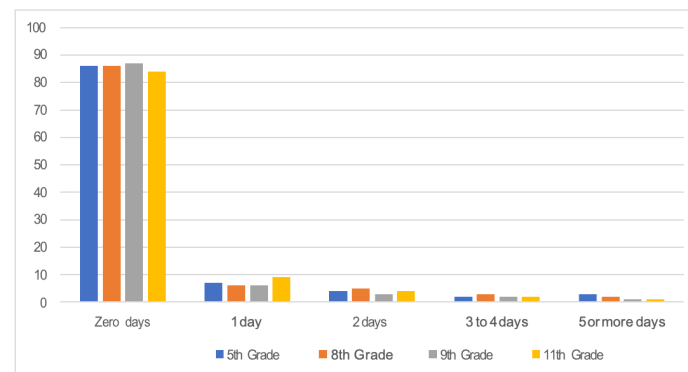


Figure 2
Engagement in Leadership Activities African American Youth in Minnesota 2019 Minnesota Student Survey

Source. Adapted from the Minnesota Student Survey 2019 Minnesota Department of Education's Data Reports

Closing the Digital Divide

The **third driver** that demands our immediate attention is the urgency for us to find sustainable systems for closing the digital divide. Creating systemic change in local and statewide policies on how to ensure that an equitable distribution of technology be in place. Access to reliable and consistent internet ensures that our students are prepared to engage in hybrid and online classes. We must recognize the next coronavirus variant is right around the corner. Returning to school with a sound plan for technology upgrades must be a priority for school administrators. In the 21st century, it is imperative that all children have the necessary tools to engage in the learning process. Policymakers, educators, and key stakeholders should ask the following key question: What is the plan for upgrading the technology for students who received digital devices during the pandemic?

Conversations Focusing on Post-Secondary Options

Examining how adults talk with Black scholars about their post-secondary school plans is the **fourth driver**. Students responded to the following question: **What is the main thing you plan to do Right after high school** (see Table 3 in the MDE report Post-secondary plans College or University)? Overwhelmingly, 65% of 8th grade Black students in Minnesota in reported they plan to attend a four-year college or university. Additionally, 67% of 9th graders reported they intend to attend a college or university at high school and 65% of 11th grade students plan to attend college or university. The data on planning to attend a two-year or technical college are 6% of 8th grade, 8% of 9th grade, and 18% of 11th grade students. The percentage of Black students in Minnesota who intend to earn a GED is 4% of 8th grade, 3% of 9th grade, and 1% of 11th grade students. Across the board, 1% of all students in grades 8th, 9th, and 11th grade do not plan to graduate from high school. The number of Black students who intend to earn a license or certificate in a career field indicates 6% of 8th grade students plan to pursue a license or certificate. The numbers decrease from 4% for 9th graders to 3% for 11th graders. Surprisingly, no students selected apprenticeship programs as an option. Finally, 3% of all students in the 8th, 9th, and 11th grade responded to the question in the affirmative when asked about joining the military.

Conversations with adults appear to be a significant factor as students responded to the following question: Has an adult in your school helped you think about education options for after high school (college or other training program)? In surveying 9th grade students, on the average, 67% of the students surveyed reported an adult in their school helped them think about education options for after high school with 79% of 11th grade students who reported an adult played a significant role in helping them think about educational options after high school. An additional question was: Has an adult in your school helped you find career-focused field experiences (job shadowing, work-based learning, service learning, career camps, apprenticeships)? On the average, 45% 9th grade students and 53% of 11th grade students reported an adult in their school helped them find career-focused field.

Higher Education and the Gen Z Scholar in a Post Pandemic World

I now turn my focus to the **fifth driver**: higher education and the experiences of Black students in the pandemic. My analysis of publicly available studies on Black students included data from the Gallup Poll and a national survey from Arizona State University. According to the **Gallup Poll on State of the Student Experience: Fall 2020 Higher Education During Disruption** study, "Black and Hispanic students are more likely than their White peers to say COVID-19 is 'very likely' or 'likely' to impact their ability to complete their degree." Furthermore, the study also cited another key finding,

Black and first-generation students—two student populations who historically have lower completion rates than their peers—are the least likely to say their school offers many of the services designed to combat the impact of COVID-19 and other challenges, including mental health and financial services. Additionally, the Gallup's poll revealed that students who transitioned from an in-person learning model in the spring of 2020 to fully online learning in the fall of 2020 are also faring worse in their well-being, are less likely to feel their professors care about them as a person and are less likely to have a mentor.

Education in Black Minnesota

Cultivating Safe Spaces for Conversations on Race

Cultivating safe places for Black students to explore, discuss, and research critical issues involving race is the **sixth driver**. Noted New York Times author and Arizona State University professor, Jeffrey J. Selingo (2021) conducted an in-depth study which primarily focused on the impact of the pandemic on Gen Z students. He surveyed Gen Z (students born between 1997 and 2012) to understand the impact of Covid-19 on post-secondary students. Selingo reported 82% of college students believed “safety, well-being, and inclusion are as important as academic rigor.” The two compelling findings in this study must force us to examine the current practices as it relates to educating Black students. First, researchers reported, after the pandemic, not only will students be more attuned to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion but enrollment is also expected to diversify even more quickly over the next decade than the last one—compelling colleges to better ensure that the experiences of their students are reflected in classroom instruction as well as the makeup of the faculty and staff. Additionally, Gen Z students reported “72% of colleges and universities need to do more for the well-being of students.” The most recent mainstream media coverage of Black Wall Street and the Tulsa Riots represent a new era for Black students.

Black scholars must become aware and actively involved in becoming knowledgeable about the critical and time-sensitive social justice issues (e.g., Voting Rights Bill and the arguments surrounding the teaching of critical race theory in schools). As more unspoken narratives of the lived experiences of African Americans surface, historians and scholars must continue to find innovative ways to engage our students in critical discourse. Challenging the status quo is one way to spark an intellectual conversation about race. Now is the time for our Black scholars in higher education to see themselves as public intellectuals who are able to engage in critical conversations centering on race. Engaging in any discussion or intentionally participating in social justice causes (e.g., voter registration drives, etc.) serve as vehicles to hold administrators in higher education accountable for curricular changes. Must it take an existentialist crisis for Black Americans to fight for our right to exist and economically thrive in America? The second key finding revealed that Black Students were most at risk in terms of being “emotionally and mentally prepared to attend college, ability to afford college and get enough credits” (Selingo, 2021). These two issues should sound the alarm and signal a call for action to change the course for these students. Based on the data from Selingo’s (2021) study and the Gallup Poll, the Black students will return to campus with a heightened sense of urgency and agency when it comes to their student experience.

This essay began by identifying six drivers of change that will make it necessary and possible for Black scholars to take advantage of the educational opportunities in a post pandemic world. In the post-pandemic world, the most challenging issue for school leaders and policymakers will be to exercise their political muscle and say “No” to the systems which created gross inequalities for Minnesota’s Black students. What is desperately needed for the village is to channel its energies, resources, and our collective voice to adopt a growth mindset for African America students; a growth mindset that thrives on creativity and stretching their brains (Dweck, 2006).

In essence, a growth mind says effort counts. We must train our brains to do much more than we think we can achieve. How we show up, amplify our voices, and pay attention to the experiences of our Black youth will determine how the next generation participates, leads, and functions in a post-pandemic world. Concerned citizens, policymakers, and the community at-large must remain hopeful in our collective ability to improve and make permanent changes which will maximize the potential of Black scholars.

“Look closely at the present you are constructing. It should look like the future you are dreaming.” -Alice Walker



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S T A T E O F B L A C K M I N N E S O T A

BLACK BUSINESS



Business in Black Minnesota

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One thing is clear, there is very strong entrepreneurial energy and resilience among African American businesses in Minnesota. Visiting an African American business pop-up market such as Blackout, or the many cultural malls around the Twin Cities metro area, one is quickly struck at the high entrepreneurial energy in the African American community. Ordinary people are trying out various business ideas, soul food with a twist, wellness products, clothing, small gifts, imported African products, beauty products, art, entertainment, and body-art like Henna painting. This is the valuable talent that can be effectively tapped with the right business ecosystem and

support. During the period 2007-12 the latest period where comparable data is available, the growth in the number of African American businesses, sales, jobs, and payroll were all higher than nonminority firms in Minnesota.⁴

Some core characteristics emerge from the data (2012 Survey of Business Owners, 2014 Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs):

- Data on African American businesses merge two unique market segments—African Americans who lived in this country prior to 1965 and African Americans who are new immigrants post 1965. Unfortunately, comparative data is not available on both market segments. They differ by business sector, customer base and products and services offered.
- The 2012 Survey of Business owners reported around 20,000 African American businesses with or without employees with \$1.7 billion in annual sales, employing over 20,000 with an annual payroll of over \$500 million.⁵ Today it is likely that the number of businesses is around 40,000 given past growth trends.
- 1155 businesses, or 6 percent of all African American businesses had employees⁶ with most of them having sales less than \$1 million (see table below).
- The more than 18,000 African American businesses without paid employees had \$404 million in sales or on average \$21,000 in annual sales.
- 42 percent of ALANA (African, Latino, Asian, and Native American) businesses are African American
- 44 percent of African American businesses are female owned. There were close to 9000 female owned African American firms in 2012 with \$222 million in annual sales.
- 3 percent of African American female owned businesses had employees with \$110 million in sales employing close to 3000 people with an annual payroll of \$57 million.



Entrepreneurs gather at a small business incubator in the Grain Exchange Building, Minneapolis for the launch of a black-owned tech venture in the Twin Cities.

Photo courtesy of: James Wade, 2110 Design Group

The data below provides a perspective of African American businesses relative to other businesses in Minnesota.

- The average sales of African American business were only around \$80,000 compared to over \$500,000 for nonminority businesses in Minnesota.
- 6 percent of African American businesses had employees compared to 22 percent of nonminority businesses.
- Only around a quarter of African American businesses have been in existence for over 10 years compared to over half of white businesses.⁷
- Most African American businesses with employees are small with revenue less than \$1 million.
- While African American businesses made up 42 percent of ALANA businesses, they made up only 20 percent of the sales of ALANA businesses and 20 percent of ALANA businesses with paid employees.
- Female owned African American businesses made up 44 percent of African American businesses but only 13 percent of the sales of African American businesses.
- 3 percent of African American female firms had employees compared to 6 percent of all African American firms.
- A national report and analysis by the McKinsey and Company, documents various structural forces that put African American businesses in a vulnerable place: operating in sectors with low growth potential, location in lower income neighborhoods, barriers to access to capital, lucrative networks, markets, and resources. These factors are linked to a history of racial discrimination and barriers to wealth building.⁸ These trends can be found locally in the experience of Black owned businesses in Minnesota.
- The pandemic had a devastating impact on Black owned businesses nationally, with over half of them in a precarious position before the pandemic and over 40 percent being pushed into closure in 2020.⁹ The Black Business Support Collective in Minnesota did a survey of 85 Black owned small businesses in 2020 to assess the impact of Covid 19 on these businesses and concluded: “Sixty-two percent of the businesses surveyed have experienced reductions in their revenue, 40% of Black business owners are struggling to pay their bills, 35% of Black-owned businesses have closed temporarily due to social distancing mandates and closures, and 21% are at risk of closing permanently. In addition, 14% of Black-owned businesses have seen a reduction in staff and 13% are at risk for eviction.¹⁰”
- Post pandemic, the Federal Reserve Bank Beige Book reports moderate growth of ALANA owned businesses with no data specific to Black owned businesses.¹¹ Anecdotal evidence as reflected in a recent informal survey in September 2021 revealed these Black owned businesses across the nation were resilient and determined to succeed despite setbacks.¹²
- Federal aid in the form of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) did not reach Black owned businesses effectively. Analysis of Minnesota data for the first round of PPP funding showed very little benefit to African American businesses and a greater reliance on nonprofit lenders to access this resource.¹³ Very few Black female entrepreneurs received PPP loans in Minnesota.¹⁴

Business in Black Minnesota

Table 1

Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs, 2014

Firms	Greater than 10 years in Business	3-10 years in Business	Less Than 3 years in Business	Total Number of Employer Firms	Receipts <100k	Receipts> 100k<1 million	Receipts >1 million
White	53.50%	28.70%	17.70%	97,690	21.00%	53.50%	25.40%
Black	24.70%	40.50%	34.70%	1,303	15.27%	58.10%	26.40%
Non-minority	53.70%	28.60%	17.60%	96,438	21.00%	53.40%	25.50%

Source: Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs, 2014. Nonminority refers to business not African Latino Asian or Native American.

Solutions

Most African American businesses are small in terms of both revenue as well as employees and many are in the critical startup phase of business development. Below are some strategies to tap into and grow African American entrepreneurship.

Cultural Intelligence

The business ecosystem in Minnesota needs to relate to African American entrepreneurs with cultural intelligence and provide appropriate resources for the various market segments: African Americans who lived in the US prior to 1965, African Americans who came into the country post 1965, women versus men entrepreneurs, those with employees and without employees, small versus larger businesses, differences by language or country of origin, and those needing non-interest or fee-based loans. The existing business ecosystem is not serving these market segments effectively.

Boots on the Ground for Economic Inclusion

Because of historical experiences with institutional racism and language and other barriers, African American businesses are not effectively being served by mainstream institutions like banks. This was evident in the analysis of PPP program participation experience by ALANA (African, Latino, Asian, and Native American) groups. African American businesses relied very strongly on nonprofit lenders compared to other ALANA groups. In the second round of PPP, The ALANA Brain Trust developed an alliance of lenders who were ready to lend to the ALANA communities and observed one major reason why African American and other ALANA businesses are not accessing mainstream financial institutions—they need a human connection to help them navigate the bureaucratic maze. Nonprofit lenders take the time to walk businesses through requirements, help them get their paperwork together, and effectively close the loop.

Product Innovation

The business ecosystem is not serving the creative talent and energy of African American entrepreneurs. As such, they are moving into areas of low hanging fruit—access to a resource or idea within their reach. Centers of product innovation should be available in every community tied to market research to help entrepreneurs access high growth industries. For example, there is a lot of potential in the emerging Green and Digital sectors.

Size Based Interventions

Businesses need different types of resources as they move from startup to scale-up. What a startup needs are very different from a \$1 million or a \$10 million-dollar company. The data show a large number of African American businesses in the startup phase where critical business support services and access to markets will help them grow.

Gender Focused Resources

Women entrepreneurs make up 44 percent of African American businesses. However, the current business ecosystem is not set up to serve them effectively. Women entrepreneurs need different kinds of resources than men entrepreneurs as they face unique barriers such as a greater difficulty in funding their ideas due the lack of cultural intelligence in lenders and others.

Business Operations and Processes

There are not enough resources dedicated to assist a business to establish and maintain effective and efficient business operations and accounting system. Every African American business should have efficient business systems in place to help them reach the next level faster.

Networks

Business and other networks work for people in relationship to their level of power. Those connected get benefits proportionate to their power. Those outside the networks do not benefit. Here also a “boots on the ground” strategy can be effective connecting an entrepreneur to an opportunity or resource. Just having a program within a chamber of commerce for example is of limited use unless a structured business to business relationship is established.

Public Contracts

The abysmal failure of public contracting to be a tool for African American business development has been well documented. Further, most public contracting focuses on meeting goals of a particular project and there is lack of infrastructure to monitor how the contracts have helped the businesses grow over time. Often, the departments set to monitor or enforce public contracting goals lack capacity, power, and are set up to fail. Given the size of African American businesses, public contracting needs to be structured in a different way, possibly as a joint venture with a more established business with strong capacity development elements connected to the program so that business growth can be catalyzed and monitored over time.

Expand Capacity of Nonprofits Serving Black Businesses

For various reasons, Black business owners rely more on the nonprofit sector as their entry point into business, especially organizations such as NEON, ASANDC, NDC, MEDA, AEDS, ADC, and the Black Women’s Wealth Alliance. All these organizations were stretched beyond capacity during the pandemic and worked very hard to serve businesses needing assistance. NEON, for instance, reported through the pandemic almost all of their clients are still in business; which is testament to their important role in the community. Increasing and deepening their capacity to serve African American owned businesses is important.

Business in Black Minnesota

Wealth Building—The Minnesota Solution²⁰

The ALANA Brain Trust proposed the Minnesota Solution to address the deep racial economic disparities in Minnesota. The Minnesota Solution recommends that we change our strategy from the old economic playbook of single scattered investments into a comprehensive and sustained strategy of wealth building.

The ALANA Brain Trust IMPLAN Economic Model estimates that if African Americans in the workforce moved up one level in their educational credentials, say completing high school or college, then African American income would increase by \$2 billion dollars. This new income will, in turn, support 19,000 jobs, an estimated \$3 billion in output in various industries and an estimated \$425 million in federal, state, and local taxes.

The ALANA Brain Trust IMPLAN Economic Model estimates that a \$50 million investment in African American businesses would support an estimated \$68 million increase in output in the Minnesota economy, supporting almost 500 jobs and \$24 million in wages and \$9.7 million in federal, state, and local taxes. In every neighborhood, African American entrepreneurs should have access to these wealth building tools below.

- Capital (loan, grant, equity, and alternative finance).
- Land banks/land trusts, business incubators/makerspaces.
- Cultural Destination tools that leverage cultural assets to support wealth building.
- Loan guarantee funds to leverage private investments.
- Public finance tools such as TIF and tax abatements.
- Public contracting goals that will grow ALANA business and workforce.
- Loan guarantee funds to leverage private investments.
- Public finance tools such as TIF and tax abatements.
- Public contracting goals that will grow ALANA business and workforce.
- Community development organizations and lenders—both CDFIs as well as community organizations.
- Workforce skill development pathways and job exchanges.
- Business protections against predatory lenders.
- Affordable business support services (legal, finance, insurance).
- A “boots on the ground” strategy providing access to available resources.



Our economic development toolbox should also include tools for Black entrepreneurs venturing into large commercial real estate development, as that is a very important avenue for wealth building. Very often, they have the talent and vision to execute on commercial real estate development projects but lack the capital, especially pre-development dollars. Minnesota will gain tremendously as African American business grow. For example, if African American businesses had the same level of revenue as white owned businesses, this would amount to over \$9 billion, with corresponding growth in jobs and annual payroll, benefiting all Minnesotans.

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S T A T E O F B L A C K M I N N E S O T A

ARTS & CULTURE



Penumbra Theatre, St. Paul, Minnesota
Auditorium motif
Photo credit: James L. Stroud, Jr.



Grammy Award Winners, Sounds of Blackness
Photo courtesy of Sounds of Blackness

Arts & Culture in Black Minnesota

**LIKE A LIFE PRESERVER IN A STORM:
THE STATE OF THE ARTS IN BLACK MINNESOTA, 2021**
DAVID GRANT

Some of us probably remember the jokes that bounced around on late 70s radio and tv when the world first discovered Prince. “He’s from where? I didn’t think there were more than but two of us up IN Minnesota!” Even if most of the rest of the country did not know it, in the Twin Cities, we have a considerable presence. But we do represent only about seven percent of the population of a small state (21st in population; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021)—a place geographically far away from the centers of African American culture that have historically molded and defined us as a people.

Yet, somehow, the Black community in this small corner of the world has produced—and continues to produce—an outsized influence on American and world culture, especially in the arts. Without having to think hard at all, it is easy to reel off names like Gordon Parks, August Wilson, and Prince... Gary Hines and The Sounds of Blackness, Jimmy Jam, and Terry Lewis... and the Steeles. But why? What is it about this place that has made it such an incubator for powerful Black artistic expression? “Maybe there’s just something in the water,” jokes actress, filmmaker, and community arts activist Sha Cage.

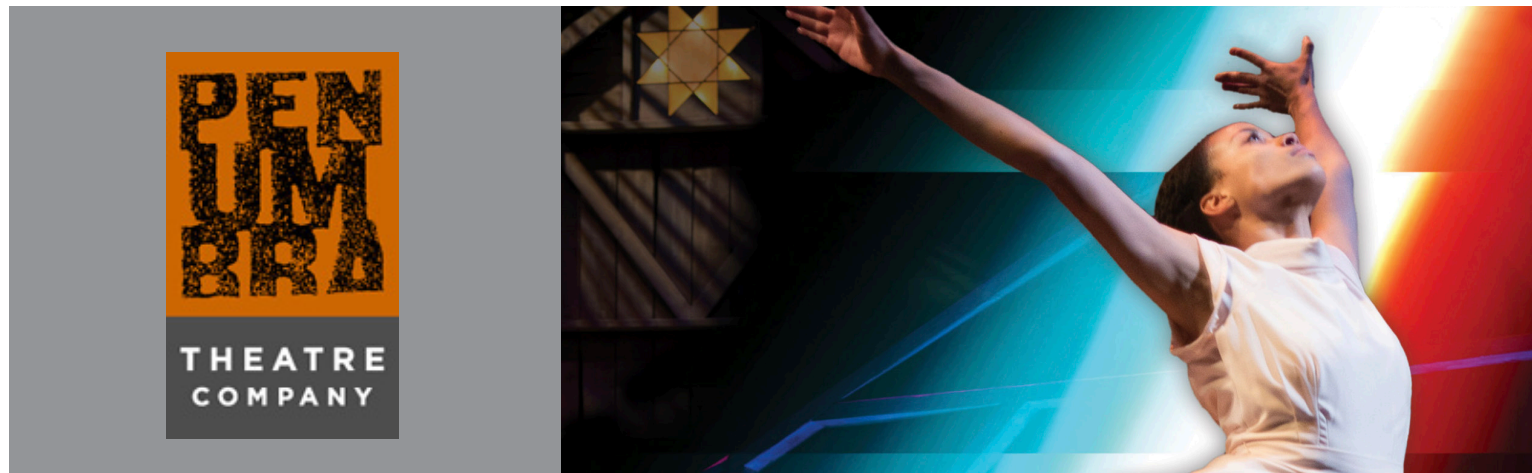
“Seriously though, maybe it’s that sense our arts community has of being isolated up here that’s pushed us into a heightened level of engagement with each other and with the wider Black community. It’s created this sense of urgency about what we do in community. If every public space connected to art seems like a white space where we may not feel fully at ease or welcome, it’s a natural response to come together to create and hold space for each other in ways that feel both safe and nurturing.”¹

Part of that sense of urgency springs from Black Minnesotans’ need to respond to the constant emotional and spiritual dissonance that comes from living in a place renowned for being one of America’s most socially progressive and livable cities—but which is also home to some of the nation’s worst racial disparities. The gaps between Black and white citizens in income, family wealth, housing, education, equal treatment before the law, and others are documented elsewhere in this report. In response, socially-engaged artists have been doing exactly what artists have always done: striving to hold a mirror up to society; challenging cherished myths and basic assumptions; challenging people to recognize trauma and begin to heal from it; to recognize beauty and embrace it; to imagine something better than the world we know, and to fight for it.

¹ Interview with Sha Cage by David Grant, Oct. 7, 2021

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That sense of urgency became acute in the aftermath of the very public murder of George Floyd. As communal rage spilled out into the streets, Black Twin Cities artists scrambled to find ways to foster art and community building. Marginalized communities have always used art as a refuge—to meaningfully channel as much of that raw emotion and energy as possible into creative, public ways to “plant the flag” for their cultural identity and hold space for it. And in times of crisis, making art—being nourished by art—can become a matter of survival, the way people cling to a life preserver in a storm.



Penumbra Theatre is one of the largest African American theaters in the nation.

As head of Minnesota Artists Coalition, Cage feels a keen sense of mission about helping people understand that art changes everything. “We’re all about elevating a paradigm shift that will change the perception that making and enjoying art are elite activities only for a privileged few. We’re about getting every-day people to engage in art-making... art-making in community.”

The art-making that bubbled up in Black communities all over the state in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder expressed itself in myriad ways: wall murals or paintings created right on the street; elaborate altars or rows of faux grave markers erected to the memory of those killed by police violence; an outpouring of poetry, topical essays, and short fiction read and discussed aloud in crowded community venues; theater in parks and on street corners; sculpture; film; music; podcasts; and more. “Especially these days,” says Cage, “That sense of urgency in the work we do creates little pockets of momentum everywhere.”

Those little pockets of momentum are easily found. Several years ago, Cage and filmmaker/activist husband, E.G. Bailey founded Tru Ruts, an arts collective with many faces: an independent record label; the sponsorship of workshops and residencies; the coordination and production of both live theater and hip-hop and spoken word shows.

A couple of years ago, they founded Freestyle Films, through which they produced and directed the short, “New Neighbors,” in which Cage also played a role as an actor. Like everything they do, the film was an exercise in community-building, offering opportunities for established local actors and crew to work, but also creating opportunities for community members with no prior experience to begin learning all of the various skill-sets required to make a film from start to finish. The film did very well on the international film festival circuit. Their most recent film, “Keon,” premiered locally at the Center in September and appears poised to follow much the same trajectory.

Tru Ruts and Minnesota Artists Coalition are just two segments of a whole grassroots ecosystem of arts organizations in the Black community. It is an already diverse ecosystem that, nevertheless, continues to grow and evolve.

The relatively sudden appearance of Black Table Arts Cooperative on Minnehaha Avenue is an example. The principal organizers had been coordinating events that bring artists together in community for years. What they did not have was a building—a space to call their own. But after putting out an urgent call on social media for support during the turmoil that swept the Twin Cities last May, \$400,000 in donations poured in—literally, from all over the world—enough to buy and renovate a commercial building with sufficient space to accommodate their vision: space for writers to write; a reading room, space for classes and workshops; both indoors and out, for readings and community meetings; a reading room, and office space for volunteers and their staff of six.

“We feel like we’re fulfilling a promise we made to our community,” states Director Keno Evol, a poet.² “Manolo Callahan once said, ‘We must renew our habits of assembly.’ Well, here we have a physical space that facilitates the nurturing of that habit.”

“We put out the word that there’s going to be a reading of new work, or even just a bonfire where people know they can socialize and network with one another, and people just really show up, in numbers.” In a land where the farmer or worker/consumer-owned coop has deep roots, Black Table Arts Cooperative is in synch with a proud, old regional tradition.

“We’re a cooperative because, in order to keep that promise we made to our community, we have to make participation affordable ... so if you need space to create here, the rule is always, ‘pay what you can.’ A big part of an artist’s job is to help imagine different worlds – different possibilities... different futures.”

Evol says this is the other primary reason for coop membership; to actualize the power of collective action toward large, shared visions. When artists create work in community, those shared visions are not, “pie in the sky,” to be enjoyed in some idyllic future. The work helps create the conditions through which elements of that future begin to manifest, here and now.

²Interview with Keno Evol by David Grant, Oct. 1, 2021

Arts & Culture in Minnesota

The thought of becoming a working artist—someone who makes a significant portion of their living from the art they make—remains a dream for many unless they are lucky enough to receive some dedicated, long-term mentorship. That is another specific benefit to emerging artists of being involved with an organization like Tru Ruts or Black Table Arts. For many, these organizations serve as the conduits through which authentic mentorship becomes available. “To be recognized—to be mentored—can set your whole life as an artist on its course,” comments Evol.

“I got one kind of education at Minneapolis College of Art and Design,” says painter Ta-Coumba Aiken, “And another from working artists in the community who were mentors to me, like Alvin Carter and Kush Bey.”³ The early 70s were an intense time, he adds—a time that has a lot of resonance with our own current social and political moment. The war in Vietnam was raging, and a white supremacist backlash against Black gains made during the civil rights movement was in full effect. “Artists like me and Seitu Jones, were also blessed to be mentored by community people who gave us a powerful context for the work we were doing back then at Wallace Kennedy Arts on the Southside. I’m talking about cultural warriors like Vusi and Nothando Zulu, Mahmoud el-Kati, Dr. Lansine Kaba, Musa Moore Foster... so many others. We did a little bit of everything at Wallace Kennedy: art; music; dance; photography; workshops; exhibitions. We put together a

powerful show about African retentions in African American culture that captured a lot of national attention because nobody else—even then, at the height of the Black Arts Movement—had done anything quite like it.”

When Ta-Coumba was a precocious five-year-old who lived to draw and paint, his mother caught his father throwing away some of Ta-Coumba’s huge hoard of art. His father was a hard-working, no-nonsense garbage man with a scrap business on the side, who saw Ta-Coumba’s unruly pile of older paintings and drawings in the basement as trash that ought to be thrown out. But Ta-Coumba pleaded that he had held onto it all for a reason—and that his heart’s desire was to be a professional artist someday. His father felt it was his duty to forcefully turn his son away from such a foolish and impractical goal. There was no money to be made as

an artist. But Ta-Coumba’s mother intervened on his behalf and told her husband that at one of the wealthy white homes where she labored as a maid, there were paintings on the wall, each of which was worth more than a house. So, when Ta-Coumba screwed up the courage to add that he had been planning to hold a sale of his work soon, his father challenged him to prove he could actually pull it off. He did. And by the end of a very long weekend, he had earned \$657.36, of which his father kept \$657. But beyond the 36 cents that Ta-Coumba spent on penny candy, he felt like a winner, because even though his father still wanted to see him go to law school, he had won his father’s respect for the idea that his talented son actually could, perhaps, make a real living as an artist.

³Interview with Ta-Coumba Aiken by David Grant, Oct. 6, 2021



Production still from “Keon” by Uche Iroegbu

Young artists at Juxtaposition Arts on Minneapolis’ Northside have a whole community program and a hard-working staff dedicated to providing them a pathway to a livable wage should they decide to choose making art for a living. “Yes,” says Director Gabrielle Grier, “We’re here to give them ‘exposure’ to the arts, and to the possibility of a career in the arts. But we’re also determined to create real opportunities for them in the here and now. A significant portion of our budget is spent on youth wages. We pay them \$12 to \$17 an hour for the work they do. Fifty percent of them are Northsiders, and in many cases, the money they earn represents a major contribution to their family’s economy.”⁴ She stresses that across the country, a strong creative sector is a huge draw when businesses and individuals think about where they want to locate. “Minnesota’s creative sector has been one of the nation’s best for a long time.”

The **Creative Minnesota 2019 Report** shows Minnesota has double the arts economy of neighboring Wisconsin, even though both are about the same size in terms of population (Creative Minnesota, 2019, p. 2).

“The Legacy Amendment approved by Minnesota voters in 2008 helped affirm this state’s commitment to the arts in a profound way. We prove every day that even the youth who come through our programs and don’t choose an arts-based career, learn valuable skills that will enhance their lives and careers no matter what they do in the future. They get exposure to the tech and digital world, which is both our present and future. They learn time management and organizational management. They learn how to use creative practices to solve problems. They learn to create and preserve good mental wellness.”



Gabrielle Grier
Photo Credit: David Sherman



The Minnesota youth who are finding mentorship and guidance in programs like these will provide the leadership, energy, and focus that will help keep Minnesota’s Black creative community front and center for generations to come.

⁴Interview with Gabrielle Grier by David Grant, Oct. 7, 2021

David Grant is a writer, and screenwriting instructor at Film North and Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop

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S T A T E O F B L A C K M I N N E S O T A

BLACK FAITH

Faith in Black Minnesota

TRUE TO OUR GOD, TRUE TO OUR NATIVE LAND

REV. DR. JON ROBINSON

The story of Black faith in Minnesota is a story of resilience and determination; a narrative of unquenchable, unstoppable, undeniable power, and perseverance in the face of odds and obstacles that always seem to be higher for Black folk (Brown and Native too) than others. Any article that seeks to capture the essence of such faith is certainly ambitious and perhaps impossible. There are literally thousands of churches (and mosques, temples, and synagogues) across the state of Minnesota engaged in vital, life-giving ministry.

The number of people being served by Black faith institutions and ministries cannot be accurately measured and every one of these institutions and ministries deserve to have their stories told. Sadly, that work is beyond the breadth and depth of this article but fortunately, organizations like the Minnesota Council of Churches, the University of Minnesota, and others, are currently engaged in projects designed to tell these stories.



Black Faith Leaders join with protestors in Minneapolis to conduct a prayer vigil after the murder of George Floyd. Photo credit: Alyssa Schukar, New York Times

This article, on the other hand, is an examination of the spirit of Black faith and how it has manifested in the Black community since Minnesota's inception. Throughout the storied, and often checkered, history of America's 32nd state, faith, and faith communities have played a vital role in ensuring Black people and Black communities were able to thrive, even in the face of conditions designed to prevent our flourishing.

OUT FROM OUR GLOOMY PAST: A HISTORICAL GROUNDING

On New Year's Day 1863, when Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, The United States was nearly three years into its bloodiest, most divisive war. The enemy seeking to tear this relatively new republic asunder was neither a foreign government, nor an international crisis, but an internal reckoning over race, slavery, and Southern states presumed right to choose their own destiny. Those Southern states not only wanted to preserve the brutal system of chattel slavery and free labor that, along with the land stolen from First Nations people, was the driver of America's 17th, 18th, and 19th century economic growth and prosperity, but they were also willing to secede from the Union to do so. The Northern states fought against their Southern kin, not out of any spirit of benevolence toward the enslaved or any desire to see people of African descent flourish but, rather, motivated by the understanding that slavery was the fulcrum upon which the Civil War, and the future of the nation hinged, they fought to preserve the sanctity of the Union.

However, even if 19th century Northerners' motives were not as pure as revisionist historians would have us believe, life above the Mason-Dixon Line was at least marginally better for Black folk, both enslaved and free, than in the South. This reality led millions of our ancestors, through multiple 19th and 20th century migratory waves, to seek a new and better life in the North, which some were able to achieve to varying degrees of success.

Minnesota was among the northern territories/states to which Black people sojourned on their quest for relief from oppressive down-river realities. But escaping southern inhospitality did not usher those pilgrims into the utopia for which they longed. Rather, when they stepped onto the northern shores of the Mississippi River in Minnesota, they soon discovered that though the geography was different, they were dealing with the same old white supremacy. This was particularly true in religious spaces where, until Mother St. James AME Church was established in 1863, mixed-race congregations were the only religious option for Black worshippers.

In many cases, those mixed-race congregations reflected the same racial tensions and animus that characterized the spirit of the nation. Instead of their dignity and humanity being recognized and affirmed, Black churchgoers often faced just as much hatred and hostility in the sanctuary as they did in secular spaces. As Walter R. Scott wrote: "Strangely it would seem in a study of Minnesota history the first real lines of segregation, Black from White, occurred of all places in the church. The white community, particularly the building trade unions and politicians seemed to feel the need to draw a line between themselves and the Negroes arriving monthly by way of the Mississippi River" (Scott, 1968). These realities eventually led to the establishment of Black churches across the state beginning in 1863.

Although Pilgrim Baptist Church and St. James AME Church have both claimed to be "the oldest Black church in Minnesota" according to Pilgrim Baptist Church's own archives, it is recognized as the oldest Black church in St. Paul, and the second oldest Black Church in the State. In chronicling its history on their website (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/93202680>) Pilgrim lists the United States Department of the Interior National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Registration Form it filed in 1991 which states in part: "It is the second oldest Black congregation established in the state of Minnesota and the oldest in St. Paul. The church officially organized in 1866 by a group of ex-slaves and their leader Robert Hickman, who arrived in St. Paul in 1863 via the Mississippi River from Boone County, Missouri, a Compromise State..." As interesting and lively as this debate can be, of even greater import is the role these two, and other congregations, have played in the faith formation and public Christian witness of Black people in Minnesota since 1863.



Founding members of Mother St. James AME Church.

Other Black churches established throughout the Twin Cities and St. Cloud, and from Hastings to Duluth, became the center of their respective communities because, in addition to worship on Sunday mornings, they provided ministries that directly addressed the community's needs. They fought against ever-flowing tides of racism and white supremacy and advocated for legislative and policy change. They put hands and feet to the Gospel, particularly Jesus' mandate in Matthew 25 to meet the needs of "the least of these" (Matt.25:31-46) through daycare operations, food shelves, mutual aid societies, voter registration and mobilization, economic development, entrepreneurship, tutoring, health and wellness, and community building. Through every major human and civil rights movement of the 19th and 20th century, the Black faith community in Minnesota, and across the nation, consisting of churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues, was advocating and fighting for the advancement and expansion of human rights, worth, and dignity.

Faith in Black Minnesota

TILL NOW WE STAND AT LAST: THE 21ST CENTURY CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

The challenges confronting the Black community in the current climate call for the same spirit of resilience, love, determination, and collaboration that our forebears embodied in ages past. As we enter the 19th month of the COVID-19 pandemic, it appears the worst days are behind us. Yet, as we attempt to discern, or in some cases create the paradigms for a “new normal,” we are beset on all sides by multiple converging crises. Prior to the pandemic, in almost every measurable area of life, disparities between Black and White Minnesotans were among the worst in the nation.

Proportion of Students Proficient at Grade Level on MCA III Tests in 2018

	4 th Grade Reading	8 th Grade Math
White Students	65%	65%
American Indian/Alaska Native Students	31%	25%
Asian Students	48%	63%
Black Students	31%	29%
Hispanic Students	32%	35%
Students eligible for free/reduced-price meals	36%	36%
All Students	56%	57%

Multiple studies have analyzed disparities in Minnesota in education, wealth, healthcare, homeownership, and other areas. In almost every category, Minnesota’s disparities, particularly along racial and socio-economic lines, are among the worst in the nation. One such study which analyzes the educational achievement gap in 2018 revealed that Black students’ 4th grade reading, and 8th grade math proficiency were respectively 34% and 36% lower than white students. More details from this study can be found at <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/-/media/assets/pages/education-achievement-gaps/achievement-gaps-mn-report.pdf>.

COVID-19 has exacerbated those disparities and created deficits that could take years, if not decades, to erase. What happens, for example, to students who were already being left behind educationally (as the chart above suggests) amid a global pandemic that disrupted the entire academic system? What happens to communities who were experiencing underlying health conditions and limited access to quality healthcare pre-COVID, when an indiscriminate virus has stretched an already inequitable healthcare system beyond its limits?

In Minnesota, organizations like Isaiah, and His Works United, along with local churches, mosques, and temples have not only grappled with these kinds of questions, but they have also played a pivotal role in providing innovative, substantive solutions to these problems. In doing so, they have embodied the spirit of what Womanist scholar Delores Williams (1993) called the “Invisible Black Church” which according to Williams, embodies the spirit of liberation and justice that has historically empowered Black peoples’ fight for emancipation, liberation, and full inclusion. She contrasted this spirit with what she called, “the African-American denominational churches” (Williams, 1993) as an institution that at times, has not only failed to be an agent of liberation, but has actively worked against liberation aims in its treatment of marginalized people, particularly women and members of the LGBTQ community.

In my interview with Rev. Alfred Babington-Johnson, founder of the Stairstep Foundation and His Works United (HWU), he framed the issue in a similar fashion when talking about the difference between “the church as an organization and the church as an organism” (Babington-Johnson, 2021). Similar to Williams’ “Invisible Black Church,” the “Church as Organism” represents the peoples’ spiritual striving to make scripture come alive in tangible, life-giving, liberating ways. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul wrote: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

In the 21st century, amid a raging viral pandemic, and at ground-zero of America’s racial reckoning over George Floyd’s public lynching, good works in Minnesota refers to the innovative efforts of the Black faith community at the intersection of these multiple pandemics. Good works looks like Black churches serving as COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Health. Good works looks like voter registration and mobilization drives in church parking lots. Good works looks like learning pods set up in church fellowship halls that offered a safe, in-person option for students who were struggling with a 100% virtual academic model. Good works looks like ministries engaged in advocating for the unhoused. Good works looks like Black churchgoers standing on street corners offering the ministry of presence during the “21 Days of Peace” initiative during the summer of 2021. Good works looks like protesting police brutality while simultaneously challenging the economic and other social conditions that create high crime areas in cities across the state.

For over 150 years, this is the spirit and ethos that has characterized Black faith in Minnesota; a faith that has endured because it has been connected to the lived experience(s) of Black people, and has sought, at the most fundamental level, to ensure the flourishing of Black people and Black communities. We are heirs of this legacy of faith-in-action. Our ability to carry the baton and run

the next leg of this generational marathon with integrity and continuity will depend upon the degree to which we can preserve and honor the best of their wisdom and experience while simultaneously evolving our ministries to meet the ever-shifting needs of this present age. This is the 21st century call to Discipleship, and it is the work we have been anointed and empowered to accomplish.



Rev. Dr. Jon Robinson, DMin is the former Pastor of St. Peter’s A.M.E. Church in south Minneapolis and the founder and President of BUOY Foundation (www.buoyfoundation.org). He also serves as a Chaplain for the Minnesota chapter of the National Black Police Association.

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