

STATE OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE U.S. & KEY STATES, 2018:
TIME FOR A *POWER SHIFT*
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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5TH ANNUAL REPORT



Released March 28, 2018



A signature program of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Moriah Fund, Ford Foundation and AARP for their generous support of this work. We also thank the contributors to this volume for your willingness to share your expertise and wisdom on behalf of the needs of Black women and girls.

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Executive Summary

Black Women in the United States & Key States, 2018: Time for a Power Shift



Avis A. Jones-DeWeever, Ph.D.
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Black Women in the United States & Key States, 2018

Black Women in the United States & Key States, 2018, is the 5th in the series of annual reports produced by the Black Women’s Roundtable meant to assess the challenges, triumphs, and overall contemporary condition of Black women in the nation. This year’s report, entitled, “*Time for a Power Shift*,” takes an in-depth look at the issue of power and where Black women fall within the overarching power-dynamic. In some spaces, such as in the political sphere, Black women’s leadership and power is truly rising. Through both voter participation and by waging successful electoral campaigns as candidates themselves, Black women are, at this moment, exemplifying historic political strength, a trend that seems destined to continue through the 2018 Mid-Term Election Cycle and beyond.

However, in other areas, such as economic power, power of their own health and even their own bodies, Black women, it seems, remain as vulnerable as ever. Yet, this report shows that Black women continue the fight to push through challenges where they exist, while also building on strengths in the political and economic arenas and beyond.

The following are some key findings from this year’s report:

Black Women Shifting Their Power

- Black women’s leadership has had a significant, positive impact across issues and communities. Black women have played a critical role in leading social movements in the US and globally – as organizers, thought leaders, innovators, architects of policy, authoring groundbreaking research and more. Black women provide leadership for progressive *movements across the spectrum* including racial justice, gender justice, environmental justice, and labor.

- Unlike previous generations of women, particularly the baby boomers, Millennials who make up the largest generation in our history, are not chasing the glass ceiling. Millennials have made it very clear that they are unwilling to trade their racial and cultural identity for the unlikely possibility of being granted a seat at the obscure power table. They are much more comfortable and determined to pull up their own chairs at tables designed by them and for them.
- Since stepping foot on these shores, whether in bondage or free, Black women have found power and unity in their labor. In our darkest days, our intelligence, physical strength and sheer grit were tools for survival. Within a few years post slavery, Black women laundresses in Atlanta were organizing strikes and demanding higher wages and better working conditions. Today labor union women stand on the shoulders Black women labor leaders who came before them as the fight for social and economic justice continues now and into the future.

When It Comes to Politics, the Power of Black Women is on the Rise

- Whenever Black women organize and engage around issues of justice and inclusion a power shift occurs. There is room for Black women to lead power shifts and change conditions they are willing to no longer accept. From local school boards, city clerks, council members, mayors, county executives, and state representatives, all the way to Congress and the White House, there is opportunity.
- African American women in the United States play a critical role in both the civic life and the electoral process. Whether it be through efforts to mobilize communities or through leadership in advocacy organizations that are working to expand access to the ballot box, the voices and experiences of Black women continue to shape democracy today.
- In the November 2017 Elections, Black women candidates were exceedingly successful in their bids for office. Fourteen Black women were elected or reelected mayor in cities with a population of 35,000 or more, with seventy percent of the 20 women who ran for mayor in these cities winning their elections. On the other hand, only five Black men were elected mayor in cities of the same size and less than half of the Black male candidates won.
- In certain key states, Black women were exceedingly successful at the ballot. New Jersey elected its first Black woman Lieutenant Governor. Further, in Virginia, Black women were elected District Attorney, two were elected sheriff and two were elected treasurer of their cities, and in Minnesota, the first Black transgender woman was elected to the Minneapolis City Council with 70% of the vote.
- At the Congressional level, there is only one Black woman in the U. S. Senate; conversely, in the House of Representatives, Black women make up a larger percentage of House members than they do citizens in the general population. Black women are currently 12.7 percent of the population in the US, but make up 18.9% of all women serving in the 115th Session of the House of Representatives. Yet, overall women remain underrepresented in Congress as they make up just over half (50.8%) of the population, but less than a fifth (19.8%) of those in Congress.

- Black women voters were the key constituency responsible for flipping the once solidly red state of Alabama blue in its 2017 Special U. S. Senate Election. Further, Black women-led organizing was key to Senator Doug Jones' historic electoral victory.

Electoral Successes Prove Black Women Can Win Anywhere

- Unlike their male counterparts, most Black women elected to Congress represent districts that are not majority Black. The average Black population percentage for Black women is 38.4%, compared to 55.6% for Black men. This suggests that Black women can be competitive and win *anywhere*.
- Of the eight largest cities where Black women have been elected mayor in the last two years, only half have a majority Black population.

In 2018, Black Women Can Make Political History

- In 2018, more women are expected to run for office than ever before and Black women make up a key part of this potential electoral landslide. In addition to the House of Representatives, 36 gubernatorial seats, 30 lieutenant gubernatorial seats, 132 other state executives, 87 state legislative chambers and countless municipal and other local positions are up for grabs.
- Once again, Georgia is positioned to potentially make history for Black women as four are running for state-wide offices including Secretary of State, Insurance Commissioner, Lt. Governor, and with Stacey Abrams' run, 2018 may be the year in which the nation receives its first Black woman Governor.

Despite Gains, Black Women Are Not Without Political Challenges

- The 2018 election cycle will occur under the shadow of the 5th Anniversary of the Shelby v. Holder Supreme Court decision, a ruling that is widely perceived to have gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act. This leaves the Black vote vulnerable to a wide range of voter suppression tactics such as precinct consolidation and closures, reductions in early voting, purging of the voter rolls, and even misinformation distributed on voter registration forms.
- Georgia's Secretary of State was forced to change the language on voter registration forms which had incorrectly indicated that first time registrants were required to produce a Photo ID at the time they register. No such requirement exists. As Black political power increases, it is all but certain that voter suppression targeting Blacks will increase as well.

Power of Black Women's Leadership Significantly Curtailed at Work

- Of the record 32 women who now hold the position of CEO of a Fortune 500 company, none of them are Black. In fact, Ursula Burns, who ended her run as CEO of Xerox in 2016 remains the only Black women to have achieved this feat in the entire 60-year history of the Fortune 500 list.
- The dearth of Black women in leadership is not limited to the C-Suite. Black women's representation in executive leadership pales in comparison with their white counterparts, even though Black women are much more likely to aspire to lead. Black women are nearly three times more likely (22% vs. 8%) than White women to indicate that they'd like to ultimately acquire a position of executive leadership. Yet, when it comes to who actually receives those positions, white women make up almost a quarter (24%) of all executive leaders, even though only 8% say they aspire to such. Conversely, Black women make up just 1.5% of those who hold positions of executive leadership, while 22% indicate that's exactly where they'd like to be.
- Part of the problem appears to be that companies have made the clear decision to preference gender diversity (78%) as their main diversity priority over racial diversity (55%). And as has always been the cultural tradition in America, the term "woman" is reflexively viewed as "White woman" while "Black" is viewed as "Black male." Due to these narrow conceptions of race and gender, Black women are especially likely to be left behind.
- The double-pane glass ceiling faced by Black women, ultimately limits not only their professional potential, but also their earning potential, which has a cascading effect on their ability to maximize economic security for their families today and for their own retirement tomorrow.

Black Women Especially Vulnerable Within the Criminal Justice System

- Though the incarceration rates of Black women have gone down in recent years, Black women are still twice as likely to be incarcerated as White women for the very same offense.
- Eight out of ten women behind bars are mothers, leading to intergenerational effects of criminal justice policy. It's estimated that in the last 20 years, 250,000 children have been placed in foster care specifically because their mothers went to prison. Other research has shown that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, have problems with anger management, and are more likely to develop a learning disability and experience disciplinary problems in school, leaving Black children especially vulnerable to these challenges.

Black Women Immigrants and Their Families Uniquely Targeted in Trump Era

- The current Administration has consistently targeted immigration programs that benefit Black immigrants for reduction or cessation. For example, 2018 saw the end of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitian and Honduran immigrants, putting tens of thousands of people in peril for deportation.
- While most Black immigrants arrive in this country via the Diversity Visas, the process for selection is far from the perceived "lottery" designation by which it is widely known. Qualification for a Diversity Visas require a significant financial investment and the successful completion of multiple interviews and background checks. In addition, African applicants are especially likely to

have received college or graduate degrees at a rate that exceeds the level of education of most Americans before gaining entry to the country. And so, Diversity Visas are already very much merit-based system for gaining entry into the country. Yet, this year a Congressional compromise put the Diversity Visa program in jeopardy by offering to largely end it in exchange for a pathway to permanence for Deferred Access for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, only a small percentage of which are African or Afro-descendant. In essence, this move has unnecessarily put Diversity Visas and the DACA program at odds with one another, which could result in a major blow to Black immigrants and immigration moving forward.

- In 2017 the Trump Administration indicated it was considering using family separation as a deterrent for future immigration. According to the ACLU, this traumatizing practice appears to currently be in place and even wielded against those seeking asylum. For example, a woman who fled the Congo with her seven-year old daughter was separated from her child only four days after arriving in the country. This despite the fact she passed the initial screening for asylum. The two remain separated.

The Power of Black Women's Push for Social Justice Remains

- Black women are key leaders in progressive movements across the spectrum. In the fight for racial justice, gender justice, environmental justice, labor, and more, Black women remain critical conduits of change.
- Despite their valuable contributions to social justice advocacy efforts, Black women led organizations remain woefully underfunded. In 1998, only 3.8% of foundation grant-making went to African-Americans, by 2006, this percentage had decreased by more than half, to only 1.5%. Though investments increased slightly in 2015, the change wasn't enough to address this sizeable gap.
- Yet, there are some organizations that stand in the gap for Black women. The Groundswell Fund, for example, is the largest funder of the U.S. reproductive justice movement. In 2017, Groundswell awarded \$8 million in grants and capacity building support to 103 organizations in 47 states and territories (including Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico). Of this total, \$2.7 million (30%) went to organizations led by Black women (up from \$1.7 million the prior year).
- Black women are leading efforts to increase diversity, inclusion and equity in mainstream environmental organizations and elevating environmental issues.

Black Women are Still the Foundation of Black Family Financial Power

- For most Black women, work is not an option, it's a necessary precondition for survival for themselves and their families. As a result, some 70% of Black women are primary breadwinners for their family unit. This compares to only 24% of White women who are the critical lynchpin in their family's economic well-being.
- Even beyond primary breadwinning status, fully three-quarters (75%) of Black women who are breadwinners, are themselves the *sole* source of income for their families.

- Over half (55%) of all Black families with children are headed by a single mother. And among single mother-headed families, fully 46% live in poverty.
- In the face of over-representation in lo-wage work, labor unions continue to be a key conduit to living wages and crucial benefits for Black women.

Entrepreneurship Seen as a Conduit to Greater Economic Power for Black Women

- Black women are continuing to turn to entrepreneurship, perhaps to escape structural discrimination across race and gender in the labor market. From 1997 to 2016, the number of businesses owned by Black women increased by more than 600%. As such, Black women remain the fastest growing demographic to embrace entrepreneurship in the nation.
- In 2017, Black women owned more than 2.2 million businesses, yet most remain sole proprietorships. As such, Black women-owned businesses employ fewer than 400,000 people nationwide.

Black Women Venture Capitalists Flex Their Economic Power to Help Close the Venture Capital Funding Gap

- A growing number of Black women are entering the venture capital space and making notable investments in startups largely ignored by White male venture capitalists, namely tech companies started by women and people of color.
- In 2015, a mere .2% of Venture Capital funding went to businesses founded by women of color, while more than 90% of funding went to white-male led companies.
- To combat this startling gap in access to capital, key Black women Venture Capitalists have emerged and invested into women-owned and people of color owned businesses within the tech industry.
- Top Black women venture capitalists, like Lisa Coca and Karen Kerr have each raised over \$1 billion to invest in promising firms.

Black Women Still Lack the Power to Live Free from Violence, Health Challenges, and in Full Autonomy of Their Own Bodies

- Founded by Black women, the reproductive justice movement continues to be one of the most prominent women of color–led movements in the U.S. today
- Black women are especially likely to experience negative health outcomes and are the most impacted by policies that restrict access to abortion, contraception, and paid family leave.

- Black women are 22% more likely to die from heart disease than white women, 71% more likely to perish from cervical cancer, and 243% more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes.
- In a national study of five medical complications that are common causes of maternal death and injury, Black women were two to three times more likely to die than white women who had the same condition.
- Over the last two decades, more than 900 measures have passed to constrain a woman's right to choose. Many of these measures are concentrated in states with disproportionately large Black populations. In Georgia, for example, 58% of women live in counties without one abortion clinic. While in Virginia, where 34% of children live in poverty, abortion is covered in insurance policies for public employees only in cases of life endangerment, rape, incest or fetal impairment. So while legal abortion remains the law of the land, states are increasingly making it difficult for Black women to have full access to healthcare and economic resources they need.
- Black women remain particularly vulnerable to violence. They are three times more likely than White women to be killed as a result of domestic violence, yet Black women are also 80% more likely to be convicted in the criminal justice system for killing their abusers.
- Black women face unique challenges in abusive relationships, and as a result, they tend to remain in violent relationships longer. Many don't feel safe engaging systems meant to help. For example, some Black women hesitate to seek help from shelters because they believe they are "for white women." A lack of community outreach by shelters in Black neighborhoods contribute to the problem.
- Black women are also more likely to feel unsafe reaching out to the police for help, as it is widely known that police involvement in Black communities, can itself, have lethal consequences.

Black Women Lean on Spiritual Power to Make Magic Happen

- While Black women remain more religious than any other group in America, today many, especially younger Black women, seek self-expression, self-love, self-care, emotional and physical well-being that inspires their search for spirituality outside of organized religion.
- Still, facing escalating racism, sexism, misogyny and civil rights reversals, many Black women continue to rely on religious values and heightened spirituality to survive and thrive, particularly through challenging circumstances.

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BLACK WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE
**BLACK WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE 2018 ORGANIZING, POWER BUILDING
& GIRLS EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES**
NOW is the Time for a Power Shift!!!



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The Black Women's Roundtable (BWR) is the women and girls empowerment arm of The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (The National Coalition/NCBCP). The BWR operates from a holistic, comprehensive model that combines narrative and policy change, capacity building, leadership and life skills development for a transformative approach to civic engagement and network development. BWR organizes in culturally and community competent ways that center racial and gender justice to promote health and wellness, economic security and sustainability, education and global empowerment for its constituents.

We are beginning year two of the Trump Administration and although our communities faced unprecedented reversals in civil rights, human rights, social justice and environmental protection, there were also incredible, hard-fought wins—including protecting Affordable Health Care. Black women leaders, many of whom lead National Coalition state-based affiliates and BWR networks, played a critical role in these victories. *The Power of the Sister Vote* is now a center of national attention as sophisticated, Black women-led and powered civic engagement initiatives are garnering big wins for progressive movements nationwide.

More Black women are running for and winning seats to public office, especially in the Southern states like Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and North Carolina. Black women voters are showing up at the polls in bigger numbers and using their vote and their voice in savvy ways; and Black women are leading Black organizing, political and voter empowerment campaigns across the country. (See 2017 BWR Preliminary Report: <https://goo.gl/KWJMwL>)

Not enough has been written about the unique and powerful ways that Black women organize and make change, as too often this work is appropriated without credit or simply neglected. Yet, this work is on the cutting edge of movement innovation as Black women are bringing fresh, intersectional perspectives in a myriad of ways including as organizers, thought leaders, strategic communicators, architects of policy, and groundbreaking researchers.

Some of the nation's most impactful political strategists and organizers are members of the BWR, which is why BWR embarked upon a planning project to conduct a series of interviews with Black women organizers to explore the unique ways in which Black women build power, build community, make change and develop leadership pipelines to sustain the work over time. The project is interviewing a diverse cross section of Black women leaders across issues, gender expression, and geography. The project is also exploring how philanthropy can better support these leaders and their organizations.

The BWR also believes it is vitally important for Black women's perspectives, methods and leadership be supported in these critical times to achieve genuine equity in America. Black women are overrepresented in the public employee sector, among those who are disabled, in poverty and in the criminal justice system. As immigrants, Black people from the Diaspora are disproportionately targeted for deportation and have more difficulty entering the country in search of sanctuary. (currently unionized public sector jobs are under unprecedented attack in the courts, most especially the Janus vs. AFSCME Supreme Court case: <https://goo.gl/yr6vjF>). This is most disturbing as Black women achieve much higher wages through jobs protected by the Labor Movement.

Despite many economic and social justice barriers, Black women are resilient and thriving! The National Center for Educational Equity reported in 2017 that **black women are the most educated group in the nation.** The BWR 2017 Report revealed **Black women are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs.** As of 2016, “there were an estimated 1.9 million Black women-owned firms, employing 376,500 workers and generating \$51.4 billion in revenues.” **Black women are also leading the way to not only ensuring the Black vote is maximized in all elections, they are leading the way to hold elected officials and political parties accountable to Black and marginalized people.**

The time is now for the NCBCP and its Black Women's Roundtable to leverage its unique role as a diverse, intergenerational leadership and engagement table to raise the visibility of and support for this important intersectional work in our communities.

The National Coalition and BWR are on the verge of an exciting transition that roots our work firmly on the frontlines of change in this country. By prioritizing Black women-led organizing and focusing more intensively on the South and other key states (AL, FL, GA, MI, MS, NC, OH, PA, DC/MD/VA areas), **we are headed in a vital new direction that will help amplify the voices and power of Black women and girls' leadership and communities deeply affected by this new policy context.**

Further, the BWR will organize its 2018 Empowerment Project (BWR Project '18) in 2018, which is designed to provide Black women and girls with strategies, tools and resources to invest in their goals to achieve sustainable economic security & prosperity, retirement security, health & wellness, life-long learning and other means of empowerment for themselves, their families and communities.

The BWR Project '18 will utilize interactive organizing and training models, civic engagement, coalition building, and leadership development strategies to achieve its project goals. Further, **due to the current movement to address historic and systemic sexual harassment and sexual assault; and most recently gun safety/gun control across the country, the NCBCP and its BWR is committed to ensuring Black women and girls' voices and stories are elevated in the public sphere on these critical issues and others through our 2018 *Power of the Sister Vote* Campaigns and BWR Project '18.**

Over the next 12 months and beyond, The Black Women's Roundtable's primary goals are to ensure 1) Black women-led organizing is elevated and supported by investing in BWR national and state-based leadership; 2) Black women are actively engaged in the policy decisions that will impact their employment and/or business ownership opportunities, health and wellness, educational opportunity and more; 3) Black women's voices and issues are front and center in the 2018 Mid-Term Election Cycle on local, state and national level; and 4) Black girls are empowered with leadership development, mentoring and empowerment tools to address the issues they are concerned about in their communities.

Building On Our Strength Across the Generations

In January 2018, BWR hosted a high-level two-day Planning, Leadership and Wellness Retreat in Atlanta, GA, bringing together its NCBCFP state-based affiliates, BWR networks and state partners. The convening provided structured opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, time in supportive community to reflect on the current context and develop coordinated strategies moving into the mid-term election season. Fresh from pivotal elections impacting Black communities in AL, GA, FL, MS, MI, PA, VA and other states, it was important to share the lessons learned and have them inform the work going forward.

In March 2018, the BWR hosted its 7th Annual BWR Women of Power National Summit that had a record number of over 400 attendees from over 20 states that was laser focused on developing innovative organizing strategies to elevate Black women's leadership and leverage the power of the Black women's vote in the 2018 Election, Census 2020 Decennial Census/Redistricting and other key power building issues that are included in the 2018 BWR Report.

The BWR announced its new Southern Black Women's Civic Engagement Alliance at the Summit, in partnership with the Southern Black Women's Rural Initiative and Black Voters Matter, to expand the power and impact of Black women's civic, voting and political power in the South, where over 55 percent of the Black population lives.

Girl Power!

The BWR hosted a special organizing session during the summit with over 60 Black girls that focused on developing a new *BWR Girl Power National Initiative* that is designed to empower girls to be leaders and change agents in their local communities. Key components the girls shared they would like to see in a BWR Girl Power initiative includes: 1) creating a safe space where young Black girls and women can feel empowered and have their voices heard; 2) making sure that when young Black girls and women are voicing their issues, they are seen as more than just angry and loud; 3) opportunity to speak in forums more openly about issues that affect us deeply and respecting the views we all express; 4) to have our voices heard through forums, protests and meetings; build on an organization that focuses on our issues; 5) uplift young Black women and girls to see and know their full potential; 6) time and space to plan and organize to build our organization to tackle sex trafficking, gun violence, unfair sentences, racism, gentrification, mental health, trauma, hate crimes against LGBTQ community.

BWR Girl Power Motto

"We are young, we are black, we are powerful, "We Are the Hope of Our Ancestors"

Now more than ever, it is of vital importance to lift up Black women and girls' perspectives, methods, leadership and build on this track record of success. Some are hailing 2018 as the Year of the Black Woman but this work and all of its impact have been decades in the making. It cannot be reduced to a trend or a fad. BWR has committed 35 years (established in 1983) to supporting and sustaining this work and we will continue to build on this legacy of holistic, intergenerational Black women-led change work in 2018 and beyond. *Now is the Time for a Power Shift!!!!*