

BLACK BY GOD

THE WEST
VIRGINIAN

BlackByGod.org

PRINT EDITION #3

FEBRUARY 11, 2022

INSIDE: PULLOUT POSTER



History & Hope

SPECIAL BLACK HISTORY
AND LEGISLATIVE EDITION

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In the Senate and
in the House

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Indifference and Neglect

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to Learn about Cannabis



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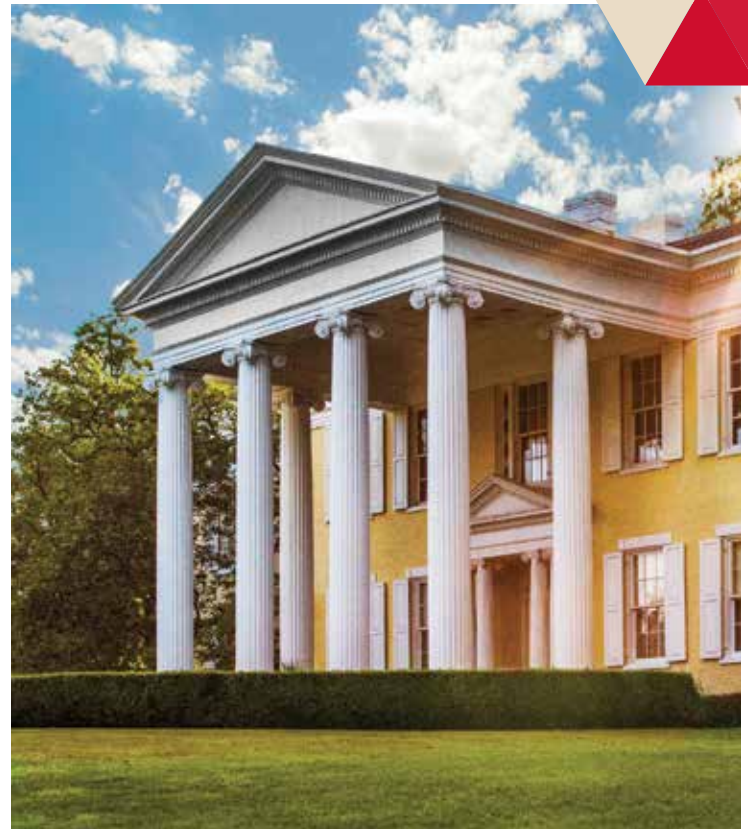
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BLACK BY THE WEST VIRGINIAN GOD

Special Black History and Legislative Edition

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COVER PHOTO:
Kiyia Brandon, 20, of Charleston, spoke Jan. 22 at an abortion rights rally on the steps of the West Virginia Capitol.
PHOTO BY ANN MICHELLE MECHAIL

FROM THE PUBLISHER:

Advocate for change

As the Founder of Black By God, I'm proud that this Legislation Issue is the first of its kind — BBG is Black History!

This Legislative/Black History edition was created with the hope of reaching West Virginians who are passionate about advocating for change and share an interest in public opinion and citizen-written stories that impact the Black community, and we know that these issues always intersect with vulnerable poor white communities.

In this issue we discuss pending legislation and lobbying efforts being made during this 2022 legislative session to highlight the issues that impact the livelihood, health, and well-being of one of the state's most marginalized and vulnerable populations.

This issue accomplishes these goals by introducing the Folk Reporters Program and so many policy makers, citizens and citizen journalists offering their commentary on the history of Black lawmakers in West Virginia, rallies and protests advocating for the passage of voting rights acts, the addition of critical race theory to the public school curriculum, the legislative agenda for Black farmers in West Virginia, Cannabis, anecdotes about Senator Owens Brown, critical race theory, our "Ghost of John Brown" for radical white voices!

In the words of Delegate Danielle Walker calling Mountaineers to take action to remind that Black Policy is NOT TABOO we appreciate your support and welcome your feedback.

Be sure to follow us on social media and stay updated through blackbygod.org.



Crystal
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BLACK STORYTELLING AND POLICYMAKING IN APPALACHIA

DECEMBER 2021

"...the one who holds the narrative holds the power."

—Zabriawn Smith, Pennsylvania



**BLACK
APPALACHIAN
COALITION**

blackappalachiancoalition.com

In the fall of 2021, the Black Appalachian Coalition (BLAC) and the Ohio River Valley Institute (ORVI) hosted five virtual listening sessions to hear from Black Appalachians. The sessions were part of the ongoing national conversation around infrastructure policy but weren't limited to infrastructure. Black Appalachians shared stories about their past and present and thoughts about how Appalachia should move forward.

This document highlights some common themes across the sessions related to policymaking in Appalachia.

Black Appalachians have played a critical role in Appalachian history, but Appalachian narratives have been whitewashed. Neither the contributions of Black people to Appalachian history nor the harms experienced by Black communities are popularly known or appreciated, especially in media and policymaking.

Speakers identified many policy needs for Black communities in Appalachia—including access to healthcare and healthy foods, child and elder care, public transportation, clean air and water, more and higher quality education opportunities, criminal justice reform, jobs, and equal and higher pay.

Across all of these policy issues there is a common need for Black storytelling and participation as a precondition for policymaking. Narratives shape how policymakers prioritize public problems. Narratives that leave out the Black parts of our region's history and present guarantee that problems experienced by Black people won't be prioritized. Policymakers should place more value on creating spaces for groups of Appalachians that have been historically oppressed or ignored to share their stories, and on helping shift narratives to accurately reflect the region's past and present.

In addition to policy implications, decolonizing Appalachian stories is key to helping many Black Appalachians see themselves in this place and to heal individually and collectively from past racist trauma. Without this healing, prosperity for many members of Appalachian communities remains beyond reach.

“

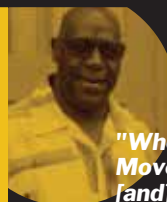


"Black people are missing from the policymaking table. Participatory policymaking does not include us."

—Bishop Marcia Dinkins, Ohio



Read the full "Black Paper" on the website <https://www.blackappalachiancoalition.com/>



"When the NAACP started, it was initiated by the Niagara Movement, which took place in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia... [and] when the garbage workers' strike took place in Charleston...I kind of got drawn into it, not by the NAACP, because they were not really active in that struggle, but by the union...and I just remember how much fun we had just participating in that movement that was intended to deal with equal wages, wages for those garbage workers..."

—Rev. Ronald English, West Virginia

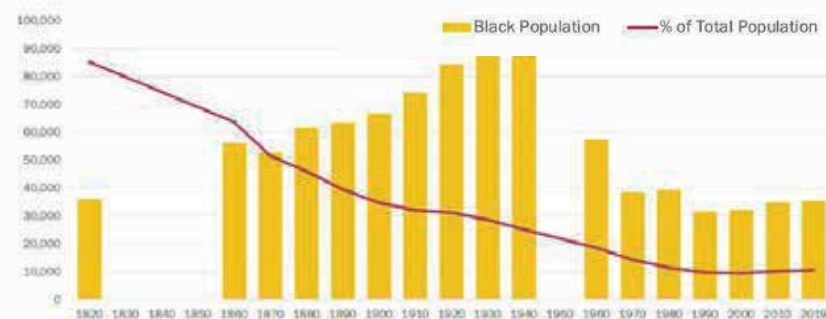


"...my great great grandmother, who went by the name of Mammy Callie...was a midwife who traveled by horseback...she was one of the most well-regarded midwives in the region, and white families needed her services out of necessity. But she was especially important to Black families, who could really only be able to have access to the services of a Black midwife. Yeah, if you were to do a Google search of midwives on horseback, you would not see one single image of a Black midwife during that time."

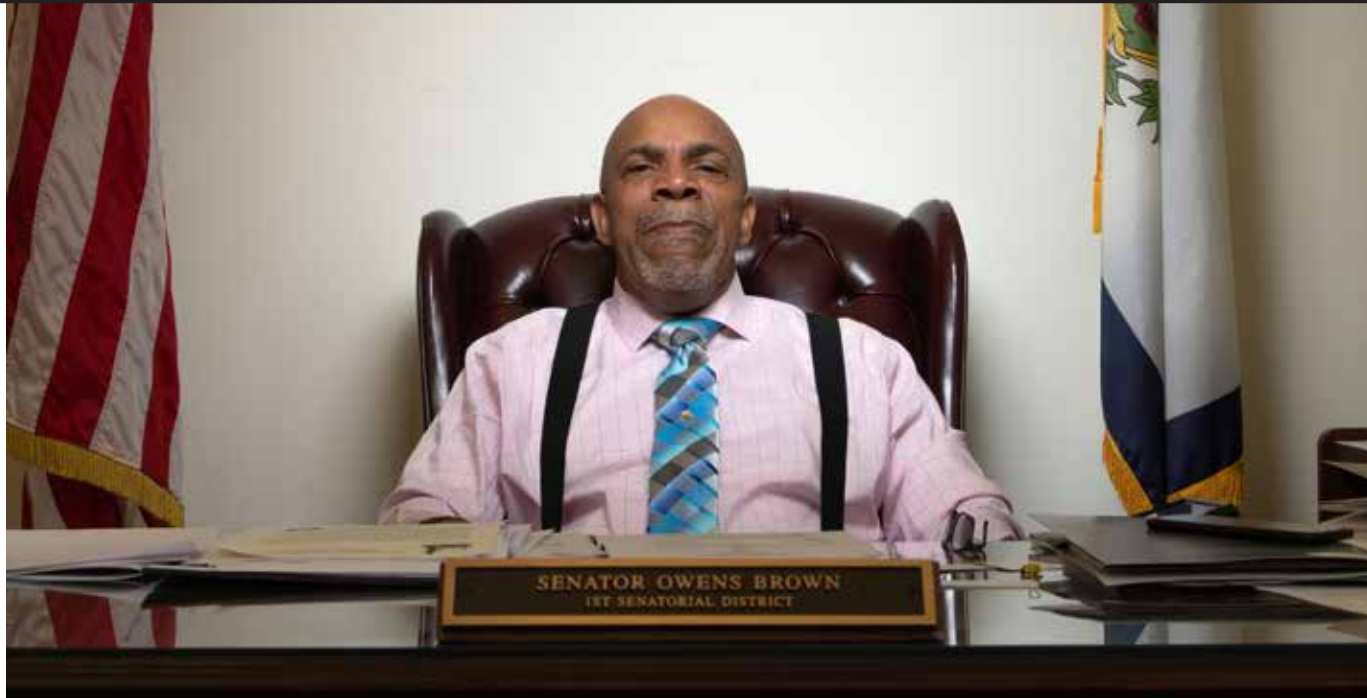
—Akisha Townsend Eaton, Kentucky

BLACK WORKERS HAVE COMPRISED A SIGNIFICANT—IF DECLINING—SHARE OF THE REGION'S POPULATION FOR CENTURIES

FIGURE 1: BLACK POPULATION, CENTRAL APPALACHIA²



Owens Brown is the first Black man and the second Black person in West Virginia to hold the title of Senator.



REPRESENTING WEST VIRGINIANS: In the Senate, Owens Brown

STORY AND PHOTO BY KYLE VASS

When Senator Owens Brown (D-Ohio) was appointed to the West Virginia Senate by Governor Jim Justice, he was as surprised as anyone else. His history with the Governor is one of public spats, dating back to 2018 when Sen. Brown, who was serving as the head of the W.Va. NAACP at the time, accused Justice of appointing a “political crony” to the Office of Minority Affairs.

“I pretty much called [Justice] stupid in the papers,” Sen. Brown said in an interview. “He’s not a bad person. He’s just ignorant of being in this cocoon where you have Black people in the state but you don’t have to see them.”

In his first vote as a public official, Sen. Brown made sure he was seen. Once again, he stood up to the state’s highest elected official. Gov. Justice had called a special session to rush through a deal giving a steel company hundreds of millions of dollars to open a plant in West Virginia. When Sen. Brown’s colleagues proposed suspending constitutional rules in order to get the bill through the senate in a single day, Brown was the only person to vote no.

“Why are we rushing this through? \$315 million. That’s a lot of money.” The answer? Brown explained. “[Justice] wanted to rush this through so he could announce it in his ‘State of the State’

address. It was so the Governor could have his photo-op with this new bill.”

When it came time to vote on the bill, Sen. Brown was, again, the only senator to vote no.

Sitting at his desk at the State Capitol, Brown traces a lifelong commitment to being the sole voice of reason back to his junior year at West Liberty University, where he played football.

“At the beginning of the year, they elect captains. The only four-year starter on the team was a Black player. And they didn’t vote for him; they voted for white player who was only a two-year starter. And I said, ‘only in America.’ I’m done.”

Sen. Brown quit the team on the spot in what he called his own “Antonio Brown moment.”

After graduating college, Sen. Brown joined his local NAACP branch and began organizing with a group called the “Unemployed Workers of the Upper Ohio Valley.” It was with these groups that he began organizing people to lobby against Ronald Reagan cutting unemployment benefits and fighting to help people avoid foreclosures on their homes. In 1984, he was invited to attend the United Nations as a special North American delegate on the UN plan to end apartheid.

But while Sen. Brown was making great strides in organizing on a national level, he faced a more granular challenge at home: finding and holding

down a job in West Virginia. Out of university, he began working at a smelting mill in Ohio but was laid off after a few years. He tried coal mining but was laid off again after only a year.

During one stretch of unemployment, Sen. Brown found himself doing door-to-door sales for House of Lloyd’s Gift, a company where his wife, a teacher by day, was working a second job.

“So, I would go out and give a demonstration to these young mothers, usually in trailer parks, who didn’t have much money. Spending all the time out there with these families that had so little, you begin to understand the gravity of the situation of how we all struggle out here together.”

For Sen. Brown, the perspective he brings to the West Virginia Senate as a working-class Appalachian who understands first-hand the effects of poverty is almost as nuanced as the perspective he brings as a Black man. The first Black man and the second Black person in the state to hold the title of Senator. Marie Redd was the first in 1998.

As for his penchant for standing up in what he believes is the right thing despite it not always being an unpopular opinion, Brown says, “I’m not just the only person in an all-white room to speak up, I’m often the only person in an all-Black room too.”

*Read more Kyle Vass on
dragline.org*

In the House of Delegates



Perry Bennett/West Virginia Legislative Photography

Black delegates in the House are (from left) Caleb Hanna, Danielle Walker and Sean Hornbuckle.



Perry Bennett/West Virginia Legislative Photography

West Virginia's only Black female lawmaker Danielle Walker (D-Monongalia) represents the 51st district, which covers Morgantown and the majority of Monongalia County. See Del. Walker's opinion piece on page 37.

Caleb Hanna (R-Nicholas) represents District 44, which serves Webster County and parts of Nicholas, Randolph and Upshur counties.



Perry Bennett/West Virginia Legislative Photography



Photo courtesy of Sean Hornbuckle

Sean Hornbuckle (D-Cabell) has served the 16th district since 2014. His district includes Huntington and Barboursville.

And Keeping it Under Control

The doorkeeper, a non-political position, announces special guests and messages, and with his team of assistants keep lobbyists and others without floor privileges out when in session.



Bishop Joe Thomas has served as Senate doorkeeper for 10 years.



Reverend Mahlon Dungey has served as Senate doorkeeper for 14 years.



CREATE A RESPECTFUL AND OPEN WORLD FOR NATURAL HAIR

How the CROWN Act is Becoming a Movement in West Virginia... Without Legislative Support

BY REBEKAH ARANDA
and CATHERINE GOODING

Time and again over the last several years, the West Virginia state legislature has been presented with opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to creating a more welcoming and equitable environment by passing the CROWN (Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) Act. Instead, state legislators have failed to act or in some cases intentionally derailed the momentum and the bill has never reached the governor's desk. Organizers are now looking to local governments to bring this important legislation to life.

The CROWN Act bill would make it illegal to discriminate against someone in a school, workplace or public environment based on their hair style or texture. At the state level, it was initially championed by Delegate Danielle Walker, the only Black woman currently serving in the WV legislature; Charkera Evans, a Bluefield native and organizer at Our Future West Virginia; and Tarsha Green, the mother of a Beckley student who was forced to cut his hair to play basketball. When CROWN legislation was rejected in the Capitol, Delegate Walker turned to the city of Morgantown to make change in her home district instead.

2021 saw a change in the narrative. Constituents are no longer willing to wait for meaningful policy changes to trickle down from unwilling state legislators; they are working within their local communities to create the change around them. To date, four West Virginia cities have passed the CROWN Act as a local ordinance. Momentum kicked off

If you are interested in championing the CROWN Act in your city, text INFO to (304) 896-9534.

If you're reading this on Feb. 11? Then go to the Support the Crown Act Rally Details on back cover



with the Morgantown adoption of the ordinance as put forth with cooperation from Delegate Walker and the local Human Rights Commission. Since then, Beckley, Charleston and Lewisburg have

followed suit. Charlestonian Katonya Hart in her role as WV National Organization for Women Vice President of Action is leading a committee of volunteers from all over the state to see that every West Virginia city has the opportunity to adopt this ordinance. She has been involved in empowering constituents, making connections with city councilors and Human Rights Commissions (HRCs) and helping provide sample language for cities to adapt.

Wheeling is working to become the next West Virginia city to pass the CROWN Act. City Councilwoman Rosemary Ketchum and leaders of the Wheeling Human Rights Commission have been eager to work with organizers to move the legislation forward. The HRC voted unanimously to support the CROWN Act and chair Rev. Ralph Duncan addressed the City Council at the end of October, urging them to pass the ordinance. Councilwoman Ketchum told WTRE, "it is really important that we are setting a tone in the city of Wheeling that says you are welcome here... and we want to make sure we are reflecting that in the way we behave, but also in the way we govern."

Clearly, local officials are hearing from their communities that there is a need for the CROWN Act. In December of 2021 the West Virginia Human Rights Commission weighed in and gave its support in the form of a resolution calling on the legislature to pass the CROWN act. It's time that the state legislature gets on board and provides this protection for all of the citizens of West Virginia. In the meantime, it has become even more evident that politics, organizing and elections at a local level play a vital role in achieving good policy.

WV HR Commission Model Resolution

It is common that the process to pass an enforceable policy under the WV Human Rights Commission begins with passage of a resolution which describes the desired outcome and intent. A resolution passed by the Human Rights Commission may be enforceable by the organization, unlike resolution passed by municipal Human Rights Commissions. Below is a resolution modeled on similar resolutions, which were passed by several local HR Commissions throughout WV.

Resolution in support of the "CROWN" Non-discrimination in the State of West Virginia

Whereas, the word "CROWN" is an acronym which stands for the words "Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair" and

Whereas, the State of West Virginia is working to establish a pattern of opposing discrimination in employment, housing, education and public accommodation in individual classes based on race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, blindness, disability, familial status, veteran status, and

Whereas, the State can legally protect persons of diverse protected classes from discrimination based on hair style of natural hair including use of textures and protective hairstyles, and

Whereas, hair does not define a person's character, morals or values nor does hair define a person's adherence or conformity to perceptions or stereotypes, and

Whereas, each student, employee or service recipient, regardless of diversity in individual classifications, should not be penalized for the manner in which they choose to wear their natural hair, and

Whereas, CROWN bills have been adopted in California, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Colorado, Washington, Maryland, Virginia, and Connecticut, while 25 other states including West Virginia, introduced legislation in the 2021 session and being considered:

Now therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that the Human Rights Commission of West Virginia:

(1) Adopts the definitions of CROWN act, specifically acknowledging that prohibited includes discrimination on hair textures and styles that are traditionally associated with protected classes and which include braids, locks, twists as well as dreadlocks and afros to non-discrimination provisions to our code

(2) Calls on our West Virginia state legislators to join other states in enacting legislation which codifies the elements of the CROWN ACT, and protects students, employees, and consumers from discrimination so that no person shall be penalized for the manner in which they choose to wear their own natural hair.

THE RESOLUTION

According to the WVHRC as of Feb. 1, 2022, the resolution has not been officially signed.

Advocates are waiting for the Commission to sign the resolution and send a letter of support to the Legislature.

The HRC passed the resolution on Dec. 16, 2022.

The official roll call for the commissioner's presence was:

Dr. Darrell W. Cummings, Chair (did not vote)

Democrat. Karl S. Gattlieb: Yes

Democrat, Timothy L. Hairston, Vice Chair: Yes

Democrat, John T. McFerrin: Yes

Republican, Lisa K. Younis: No



ON TWITTER



The Need For LGBT Nondiscrimination Protections

an infographic presented by
MAP
movement advancement project ▶

Why Do We Need Nondiscrimination Laws?

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people still experience discrimination when going about their daily life—whether eating at a restaurant, trying to obtain safe housing, or applying for a job or a loan.

- Nationwide, 72% of all Americans—including 64% of all West Virginians—support LGBT-inclusive discrimination laws to protect their friends, family members, and neighbors against this kind of discrimination.

- That's why most people are surprised to learn that federal laws don't explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and that only 21 states and the District of Columbia do offer such protections. This means that, in a majority of states, LGBT people can still be evicted, refused service at a public business, or even denied government services simply because of who they are.

- In June 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that federal employment law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, explicit federal, state, and local laws are still needed to ensure that LGBT people can not only go to work, but also find housing and go about daily life without fear of discrimination.

- Protecting people from discrimination, including LGBT people, is about treating others as we want to be treated. Even though we may have different beliefs, we also have much in common, including wanting to take pride in our work, make a safe home for our family, and being able to safely and freely participate in our local community.

What Can You Do to Protect Your Constituents?

Respect shouldn't depend on your zip code. Therefore, it's crucial that federal, state, and local nondiscrimination laws are updated to explicitly ensure that LGBT people can participate fully in society and provide for themselves and their families.

- Update federal, state, and local laws to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity in:

Private Employment	Health Care	Credit and Lending
Housing	Medicaid	Education
Public Accommodations	Public Employment	Adoption
		Foster Care

- Fight against legislation or efforts to create religious exemptions to nondiscrimination laws, as well as other efforts to harm LGBT people and roll back LGBT freedom.

- Repeal laws that allow individuals, businesses, and/or service providers (such as doctors, pharmacists, adoption or foster care agencies, and more) to discriminate against minority faiths, immigrants, people of color, LGBT people and their children, single parents, unmarried couples, women who are eligible for birth control under the Affordable Care Act, and unmarried and/or divorced pregnant women on the basis of religious beliefs.

Quick Facts About West Virginia



State LGBT Population
(Ages 13+):
68,000

State LGBT Workers
(Ages 16+):
40,000

% of State's LGBT Adults
Raising Children:
31%

According to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI):

But, only:

72%

of all Americans
support LGBT-inclusive
nondiscrimination laws

64%

of all West Virginians
support LGBT-inclusive non-
discrimination laws

11%

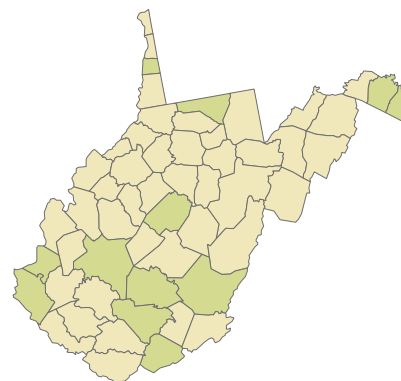
of LGBT West Virginians
are protected from
discrimination* by local law

0%

of LGBT West Virginians
are protected from
discrimination by state law

KEY	● LGB State law covers sexual orientation	✓ LGBT State law covers sexual orientation and gender identity/expression	✗ State law offers none of these protections
✗ Employment			✗ Foster Care
✗ Housing			✗ Credit
✗ Public Accommodations			✗ State Employees
		✗ Health Care	
		✗ Education	
		✗ Adoption	

At Least 13 West Virginia Municipalities Already Offer LGBT Protections



In West Virginia, more than a dozen cities across the state already prohibit discrimination against LGBT people in employment, housing, and public accommodations, showing the already widespread and growing constituent support for adding these protections at a state level. These communities, with populations ranging from 5 to nearly 50,000, include:

- Athens
- Beckley
- Charleston
- Harpers Ferry
- Morgantown
- Thurmond

State profile: <https://tinyurl.com/WestVirginiaLGBT>

Data on state LGBT population from The Williams Institute (2019). Data on public support for LGBT-inclusive nondiscrimination policies from PRRI's American Values Atlas (2019).

*Percent of state's population protected by local ordinances from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. See <http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/>.

MAP
movement advancement project ▶

www.lgbtmap.org

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FOR ALL AMERICANS

www.freedomforallamericans.org

EDITORIAL

These Bills Have the Power to Disrupt Your Life — and Your History

BY BBG & WV COALITION AND HISTORY

Divisive Issues bills are expected to be introduced in this year's WV Legislature as well as bills containing the phrase Critical Race Theory. Dismantling Racism Together, a Morgantown-based group, is educating state residents and encouraging them to be vocal in debunking the misleading language/concepts and the real intentions behind the bills which is to prevent the teaching of real history.

Three bills introduced last year (HB 2595; SB 558; SB 618) contained similar language proposed by the conservative group, The Heritage Foundation, which would ban “divisive” discussions about the history of racism, sexism, and diversity. According to the Brookings Institution, eight states have passed legislation banning the discussion of Critical Race Theory, and another 20 are planning to or already have introduced it.

The Heritage Foundation appears to have framed a real problem: the non-teaching of full societal history, by grabbing fear-inducing language—“critical,” “race,” and “theory;” by making untrue claims about CRT; and by proposing bills that would prevent teaching history. The three words, Critical Race Theory, existed together in law schools as a study tool, not as a curriculum, for decades to examine the history of race in the USA. What is untrue: CRT is being taught in elementary and high schools, a claim that has scholars puzzled. Yet misdirection from real issues gives extreme right supporters the platform they need to win elections and gain the power to cut or implement the programs they really want to control. Funding schools, for example, has never been among the programs they want. Making schools an issue to misdirect the public's focus and votes has been.

On the surface, these bills appear to be neutral toward racism and sexism in the classroom, but they propose to ban any discussions of “full history.” Under these potential bans, a teacher could lose their job if they truthfully discuss past activities and the consequences of laws, wars, and more. Fair treatment — in

BBG and Dismantling Racism Together asks that you:

- Tell your West Virginia delegates and senators to vote against these three bills — HB 2595, SB 558, SB 618 — and similar bills.
 - Tell your U.S. senators and representatives to vote against similar bills.
 - Ask your community's teachers how you can support them as they try to teach history and literature in your local schools.
 - Help local organizations that are working to support teachers who are trying to teach respect and truth in their classrooms.
 - Invite your friends and family to learn more about history and democracy at these helpful sites:
- Zinn Education Project** www.zinnedproject.org
Teaching for Change www.teachingforchange.org
Facing History and Ourselves www.facinghistory.org/about-us
Learning for Justice www.learningforjustice.org

schools, businesses, and healthcare — requires fair presentation of all facts and consequences. All citizens need to know what happened in this country, why it happened, who benefited, who was hurt, and what might be done differently in the future. Under these Divisive Issues bills, teachers and trainers would be forbidden to discuss societal problems — the basics of who, what, when, where, how, and (the very important) why of our collective history. That's not neutral. That's deception.

Readers of these pages don't need to be convinced that people of color have had a marginalized experience in the United States compared to those of the dominant, white population, nor do they doubt that much of U.S. state and federal policy has been shaped by attitudes about race. Today's teachers want to teach the truth. History and English teachers are trying to move away from half-truths that today's adults learned

in school when they were children. For example, most adults only know the blemished half-history that explains the large land expansion of the United States, which omitted the repeated forced removals of Native Americans to other territories. Additionally, also omitted were the generational consequences of those repeated and continuing losses. That is just one example of the half-truths most Americans have learned in our public schools. Under the proposed bills, such expanded discussions will be prohibited; therefore, the truth will be prohibited.

Proposed January 28, 2022, WV Senate Bill 498 states that “A school district, a public charter school, the West Virginia Board of Education, the West Virginia Department of Education, or any employee of the aforementioned entities may not provide instruction in, require instruction in, make part of a course, or require a statement or affirmation by any employee of the following concepts: . . . (6) An individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of the individual's race, ethnicity, or biological sex . . .” This is double speak at its finest. The aim is to shut down the truth and strip educators of their jobs if they speak it. Their aim is to whitewash the truth of our people. How can anyone guarantee someone will not feel distress? Why should people not feel distress upon learning the atrocities our country was built on? How can we heal the deep wounds of this country when we cannot even look at those wounds in their entirety? How can we understand the problems we face today, if we cannot understand the past? We cannot. This is not an anti-racist bill. It is racist to the core.

BBG and WV Coalition for Truth in History is a group of individuals and organizations from across the state who advocate for the protection of open discussion about our country's discriminatory history towards black, indigenous, women, and LGBTQIA persons. The group seeks to protect the right for our teachers, professionals and all citizens to speak freely without fear of repercussion.



TWO DECADES OF APATHETIC INDIFFERENCE & NEGLECT

West Virginia Legislative Bills Introduced from 2002 – 2022 to Address Challenges in Minority and Low Income Communities

*Compiled by Rev. Matthew J. Watts
with Hope CDC and The Tuesday Morning Group*

2004

SB 271 **SUNSET**

Racial Profiling Data Collection Bill
Passed, signed into law, implemented and executed at least one year.

HB 4669 **SUNSET**

Professional Development School Pilot Project
Passed, signed into law, implemented, and not executed according to law.
Over \$5 million dollars went to state school board, \$0 dollars to the community.

SB 573 **ACTIVE**

Minority Economic Development Bill
Passed, signed into law, never funded, never implemented and not executed according to law.

GOV. BOB WISE | 2001 - 2005 | DEMOCRATIC

GOV. JOE MANCHIN | 2005 - 2010 | DEMOCRATIC

HCR 76

House Concurrent Resolution
Passed to collect data on racial disparities in West Virginia.

2002

Select Committee on Minority Affairs Interim Committee
Established to convene hearings on racial matters and collect data and information of its findings.

Select Committee on Minority Affairs Interim Committee
Issued its report which contained 29 Finding of Facts regarding challenges confronting African Americans in the area of health, education, employment and economic development, criminal and juvenile justice etc. The report delineated 36 specific Recommendations of Action that the West Virginia Legislature, Governor's Office and WV National Congressional Delegation should consider.

2003

HB 2568 **NEVER FUNDED**

Analysis of Traffic Study Annual Report
Data collection of 301,479 traffic stops indicated that Black drivers are more likely to be stopped compared to white drivers. Hispanics were 1.48 times more likely to be stopped compared to white drivers. While the rate of searches was higher for Black and Hispanic drivers, the contraband hit rate was lower.



FULL REPORT

2007

AMERICAN
RESCUE PLAN

The American Rescue Plan funds provide the resources for a robust targeted response that could be placed-based and people-focused to address these issues.
Learn more at: whitehouse.gov/american-rescue-plan



TWO DECADES OF APATHETIC INDIFFERENCE & NEGLECT

CONTINUED

2016

HB 4598 **NOT ON AGENDA**

Minority Health Advisory Team Bill

Introduced each year from 2016-2021, but Republican committee chairs refused to place on agenda; even in the midst of a pandemic.

2016 - 2021

2018

SB 556 **SPEAKER REFUSED TO RUN BILL**

Creating a Small Business, Minority Populations Economic and Workforce Development Task Force

Passed senate, amended and passed out of house, title amended in senate, passed senate and sent back to house. Speaker Armstead refused to run bill.

GOV. EARL RAY TOMBLIN

GOV. JIM JUSTICE | 2017 - PRESENT | REPUBLICAN

HB 2188 **SUNSET, COULD BE RE-ACTIVATED**

Re-activation of Special Community-Based Pilot Project to Improve Outcomes for At-Risk Youth

Passed, signed into law, never funded, never implemented and not executed according to law.

HB 2724 **SUNSET, COULD BE RE-ACTIVATED**

Governor's Bill to Create a Pilot Project to Address Poverty to Improve Community and Population Health

Passed, signed into law, never funded, never implemented and not executed according to law.

2017

SPECIAL SESSION

HB 182, SB 1042 **NOT PLACED ON AGENDA**

Community Development School Pilot Program Alternative To Charter School

Not even discussed by Democrats who introduced the bills.

2019

AMERICAN
RESCUE PLAN

The American Rescue Plan funds provide the resources for a robust targeted response that could be placed-based and people-focused to address these issues. Learn more at: whitehouse.gov/american-rescue-plan



APATHETIC INSENSITIVE INDIFFERENCE

The bills and laws delineated here are a vivid and lucid depiction of the apathetic indifference of elected Democrat and Republican legislators and governors to the challenges and associated pain experienced by Black people in West Virginia over the past 20 plus years.

This apathetic insensitive indifference has been in the light of the 2003 Select Committee in Minority Affairs Report which delineated 29 Findings of Facts of challenges confronting Blacks and 36 the Specifics Recommendations outlined in the Report to address these Challenges.

Things have gotten much worst for Blacks in West Virginia since the 2003 Select Committee on Minority Affairs Report was issued. The COVID-19 Pandemic has further exacerbated these dire conditions for Blacks in West Virginia. The American Rescue Plan funds provide the resources for a robust targeted response that could be placed-based and people focused.

Americans around the state should organize and mobilized in their respective communities to develop and submit projects for funding to their respective county commissioners, county boards of education and local municipalities.

Nhat
Matt
Perry

February 1, 2022

Dear Governor Jim Justice, Senate President Craig Blair, House Speaker Roger Hanshaw, Senate Minority Leader Stephen Baldwin and House Minority Leader Doug Skaff:

On behalf of the Tuesday Morning Group (TMG) Collaborative, attached is a package of bills that were passed and signed into law in previous years' legislative sessions. We believe these laws can provide a legislative framework and serve as a legislative "Response to Mitigate the Negative Impact of COVID-19 in West Virginia." These bills could be used by state, county, and local government officials to guide their efforts to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 in the areas of health, housing, education, employment, and economics. Since these bills are already codified into law, and since the funding from the American Rescue Plan has already been allocated by the federal government to the state, county and local governments, it should be a non-controversial, bi-partisan light legislative lift for the Governor

along with the leadership of both parties in both legislative houses to agree to collaborate in this effort. The people of West Virginia desperately need the two major political parties to work collaboratively in a bi-partisan fashion to guide the state through this unpre-

cedented, epic, novel, Coronavirus pandemic.

These bills were developed based on the work of my organization, HOPE CDC, on the West Side of Charleston. They were compiled to create the West Side Revive Movement Model to serve as a model to improve community and populations' health that could be applied across the state. We believe the WSRMM could serve as a model for the whole state because the WSRMM's legislative framework is a place-based, people-focused approach.

Unprecedented challenges are normally accompanied by unprecedented opportunities that summon unprecedented leadership. An unprecedented once in-a-lifetime opportunity must be seized and capitalized upon in the lifetime of the opportunity. The epic novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has imposed unprecedented challenges on every institution in American society, particularly; in the areas of health, housing, education, employment, and economics. Every institution and system in American society has been stressed and stretched to its outer limits. The COVID-19 pandemic has also further exposed, magnified, and exacerbated the economic and racial disparities that have long existed across America including West Virginia. Unfortunately, little has been done to address these disparities over the years. These disparities are extreme in West Virginia and contribute to

the depletion of the state's workforce. It is my opinion that West Virginia's depleted workforce evidenced by its low labor participation rate, lowest nationally is the state's most pressing economic challenge. This is despite billion of dollars in expenditures over the years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in unprecedented opportunities in the forms of the federal government's allocation of resources to the state, county, and local governments across America in particular, in the forms of the federal CARES Act funds and the America Rescue Plan (ARP) funds. West Virginia has received over \$5 billion dollars from the U.S. government through the CARES Act and the ARP funding allocations. Much of the ARP funds have been allocated to the county and local levels. Therefore the county and local governments would benefit from a legislative framework provided by the state legislature. COVID-19 demands a bold robust response to mitigate its negative impact. A legislative package from the Governor and Legislature would provide such a response.

A legislative package would provide a framework that the state, county and local government officials could use to strategically align and link their ARP funds with other funding streams to make the most efficient and effective use of all funding streams and to avoid duplication of efforts. In addition to over \$4 billion dollars in the federal ARP funds, West Virginia has received its annual allocation of over \$4 billion dollars in other federal funds. Yet there is no legislative framework in West Virginia to strategically align and coordinate these federal funding streams or link them to local funds.

During their comments during the recent West Virginia Press Association press conference, both House Speaker Roger Hanshaw and House Minority Leader Doug Skaff expressed concerns as to whether local political subdivisions had the capacity to effectively and efficiently manage the additional federal funds they have received. They both agreed, and Senate President Craig Blair and Senate Minority leader Stephan Baldwin concurred, that the Democrats and Republicans should work together for the best interests of the people of West Virginia. President Blair also made the statement that, when bills have been introduced in the past in the Senate but not completed in the House, it should be easy to expedite their re-introduction and passage in the present. Senate President Blair also indicated a willingness to entertain ideas from the public. This proposed legislative package provides you gentlemen the opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to working together in a bipartisan manner to help West Virginians.

The unprecedented challenge, unprecedented opportunity, and the unprecedented resources provide the backdrop for you gentlemen to take the stage and provide the unprecedented leadership that is so desperately needed and that the fine people of West Virginia so desperately deserve at this time. I trust that you gentlemen will seize and capitalize on this once in-a-lifetime opportunity to provide local governments' guidance to move West Virginia forward.

Outlined below are the legislative laws that are already codified with the exception of Senate Bill 556 which should be passed. These bills/laws were never funded, implemented or executed. Each of these bills/

Continued on page 21

**A LETTER FROM
REVEREND MATTHEW J. WATTS
AND THE TUESDAY MORNING GROUP**

WEST VIRGINIA NOW

West Virginia NOW is the state chapter of the National Organization for Women– the largest grassroots feminist organization in the country. WVNOW takes a holistic approach to women's rights. Our priorities are winning economic equality and securing it with an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that will guarantee equal rights for women through the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA); championing abortion rights, reproductive freedom and other women's health issues; opposing racism; fighting bigotry against the LGBTQIA community; and ending violence against women.

As the state's leading feminist organization, WVNOW is committed to fighting for legislation that improves and addresses those issues that disproportionately impact women, children, and people of color. For the 2022 WV Legislative Session, WVNOW will be championing two main issues.

Eliminating Child Marriage

Eliminating child marriage by raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 without exception. West Virginia has the 9th highest per capita rate of child marriage in the nation and current state law allows any child (no minimum age) to enter into a marriage with permission from a parent and a judge. Child marriage is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, as statistically, 86% of child marriages will happen to girls.

- 3,532 children were married in West Virginia between 2000 and 2018
- Child marriage has many harmful consequences including:
 - Minors have limited legal options or rights to navigate a marriage contract and even fewer options when attempting to leave a forced marriage
 - Child marriage is a human rights abuse according to the U.S. State Department
 - Child marriage destroys educational, economic and health outcomes, while increasing the risk of domestic violence
 - Child marriage undermines statutory rape laws by creating loopholes in which child rape is legalized via a marriage contract

Fair Pay and Pay Transparency

According to the National Womens Law Center, in 2021 West Virginia was the 8th worst state in the nation for the gender pay gap. In WV, women on average make \$0.76 for every dollar paid to men; the gap for women of color is even worse. These lost earnings, on average, equate to women providing two years' worth of food on her family's table or paying the tuition for two years at a West Virginia community college for herself or one of her children.

This has a significant impact on West Virginia's economy. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, the poverty rate for women in WV would be reduced by 1/3 if they were paid the same as comparable men. A reduction of this magnitude in our poverty rate would have far reaching economic benefits for West Virginia. The economic impact of pay inequity has been made worse by the Coronavirus pandemic. Nationally, 3.5 million women have left the workforce since the start of the pandemic with women's participation in the workforce at its lowest level since 1988. It is estimated that this crisis will set women back a generation. Our state must address the wage gap for the sake of women, WV families, and our state's economy. The Katherine Johnson and Dorothy Vaughn Fair Pay Bill takes an important step in addressing fair pay. This bill, named after two West Virginia African American women who played a significant role in safely sending astronauts into space and were featured in Hidden Figures, will allow employees to discuss their wages with one another. Pay transparency is important to ensuring equity and eliminating wage discrimination.

To become a member of WVNOW or to learn more about our work, please visit www.wvnnow.org or email us at westvirginianow@gmail.com.

Social media

<https://www.facebook.com/WestVirginiaNOW/>
https://twitter.com/WV_NOW



WHAT CAN AN ORGANIZATION OF FEMINISTS DO?

- Work toward equitable policy solutions at federal, state and local level
- Educate and mobilize voters
- Recruit and train candidates that will represent us
- Support each other and fight back against oppression

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FEMINIST?

TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN ALL ITS FORMS

Priorities include: reproductive freedom; opposing racism; ending violence against women; ending bigotry; standing in solidarity with LGBTQIA, indigenous, immigrant and other impacted communities

WV Women are paid 76 cents for every dollar their male counterpart earns (statusofwomen.org)

WV Women make up 50 % of the population but hold only 12% of state legislature positions (wvlegislature.gov)

1 out of every 6 WV Women will be the victim of an attempted or completed forcible rape in their lifetimes (www.friss.org)



West Virginia has \$1.335 billion from American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to spend in the next four years

KANAWHA COUNTY: \$34,598,499 MONONGALIA COUNTY: \$20,513,893
MCDOWELL COUNTY: \$3,423,255 CHARLESTON: \$36,801,358 BECKLEY: \$7,698,933
JANE LEW: \$160,000 KERMIT: \$150,000 OCEANA: \$500,000

Black voices should help decide fate of ARPA funds

BY CRYSTAL GOOD

The 1985 remake of Brewster's Millions stars Richard Pryor as Montgomery Brewster, a man with an odd mission — in order to receive his full inheritance, he must spend \$30 million in 30 days. With bumbling sidekick John Candy by his side, hilarity ensues. (We also recommend Pryor's 1979 routine about killing cars, which sadly won't stop being relevant.)

Brewster's dilemma sounds like something only a Hollywood writer could conjure — millions of dollars just laying around waiting to be spent. Hey, West Virginia, want to hear a secret? We have millions of dollars laying around waiting to be spent! The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, signed into law by President Joe Biden on March 11, 2021, distributes COVID-19 relief funds directly to municipalities and counties across the country.

Every state. Every county. Every city. They have all received some form of ARPA money. The guidelines state the funding must be used for COVID-19 recovery efforts, including infrastructure projects related to water and sewer, as well as expanding broadband internet service.

The state of West Virginia will receive \$1.335 billion — yes, with a "B" — to be administered

by the governor and Legislature. The cities and all 55 counties will receive \$677 million, which will be spent by local governments. The funds are distributed in two payments, with everybody receiving roughly half last year, and the remainder at some point in 2022. The funding is allocated based on population, and smaller cities and towns (aka non-entitlement units of local government) are also subject to a cap of 75% of the most recent budget as of Jan. 27, 2020.

A few of the dollar amounts: Kanawha County will receive \$34,598,499. Monongalia County gets \$20,513,893. McDowell County will see \$3,423,255. Charleston itself gets \$36,801,358. There will be \$7,698,933 going to Beckley. Jane Lew gets \$160,000. Kermit receives \$150,000. Oceana sees \$500,000.

Here is the important part: There is a four-year window in which the money can be spent. We do not need to rush into this, and can figure out how to best help the state and its communities; especially its most vulnerable citizens.

Local leaders and community members have been encouraged to attend public meetings to discuss areas of need that could potentially be addressed through the allocations of ARPA



Graphic Journalist Nhatt Nichols explores how rural areas across the country are using funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).



Used with permission by The Daily Yonder

To help tell the story, she's using comics, not spreadsheets, as her format of choice.

funding in West Virginia.

Topics discussed in these meetings are:

- Pandemic-Related Challenges
- Targeting Greatest Needs
- Making an Impact
- Sustainability
- Pooling Resources

It is important that state and municipal leaders deliberately create the space for their constituents to share what they most need to move forward in a post-pandemic world. And, while electronic platforms are a good start, it is crucial to recognize that socially distanced in-person meetings are possible and necessary to ensure that low-income individuals, people without internet access, and Black and brown communities are heard clearly.

This must happen before any special session to appropriate ARPA funds is called.

We started BBG to help serve the underserved communities. We are just getting started, and hope BBG can serve as a resource for people. The more we do that, the more we will be fulfilling our mission.

As you read this issue, thanks to the Tuesday Morning Group and Pastor Watts there are numerous bills that have been passed and not funded. ????

We know that public input can be collected through many different mediums, including statewide surveys, listening forums, or an advisory commission with a broad membership of business owners, non-profit leaders, community members, and others would all serve as good places to start. There are so many other voices out there wanting to be heard as well. And, so often we hear that community leaders and influencers are invited to the table.

To help get those voices heard, the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs (HHOMA), in partnership with the Office of Governor Jim Justice, is traveling to all 55 counties for a listening tour focused on ARPA. Cities and the State BOE and County Board of Education are doing the same. Charleston should be commended its community engagement.

Outreach is happening, but we see an alarming trend that often this information is being exchanged absent of the very voices that the funding could help the most. We are talking

about the vulnerable communities of West Virginia — we know these voices are left out because BBG readers are saying they are unaware of what's happening, they do not understand it, and they are afraid to ask questions.

BBG hopes to help and is seeking your donations and seeking support to follow the ARPA process: From funding, disbursement, and the successes and failures that come as a result. We believe in our Folk-reporters program and know that this is the very type of issue that needs to be shared in the people's voice.

This issue includes ARPA facts that highlights the information disparity and how our oversaturated news cycle leads to a lot slipping through the cracks. People trust people — call or text us with questions, follow us on social media (@BlackByGodWV), and we will try to point you in the right direction.

The money is already there. Please, contact your county commissioner, your mayor, your city council representative, to get your voice heard. You can find out more information about ARPA on U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin's website — www.manchin.senate.gov/arp — in addition to your local city and county websites.

In a way, you could say that West Virginia has won the lottery. Let's hope the tale of the Mountain State suddenly coming into an otherworldly amount of money ends on a positive note, lest we forget the sad demise of Jack Whittaker.

Winning a \$314.9 million jackpot — then the largest in history — and taking \$113 million home after taxes sounds like a dream. It turned into a nightmare for Whittaker, whose life seemingly unraveled over the next two decades. He died in 2020, and reportedly said multiple times he wished he had torn up the winning ticket.

"I pretty much lost everything I held dear in my life," Whittaker said in an ABC News interview. "I don't like the hard heart I've got. I just don't like what I've become."

We are hoping to not see history repeat itself in that regard.

On a final note, not to spoil Brewster's Millions for y'all, but the Black hero succeeds. We at BBG want to see more Black heroes succeed, and we can't do that without the help of the governor and the West Virginia Legislature.

In the Legislature: Bills Related to the Criminal Legal System

Several bills related to the criminal legal system have been introduced and some have moved towards passage.

Impacted people and allies in the WV Criminal Law Reform Coalition are supporting the following bills:

SB 425: Providing for free menstrual products for incarcerated people. Sadly, this is an issue in prisons and regional jails.

HB 4354: "Ban the Box Act," which would remove the question about prior felony convictions on job applications for state jobs. This would not prohibit background checks but would eliminate a major barrier to employment for people with felony convictions.

SB 488: Restoring voting rights for people on probation and parole.

Unfortunately, several bills enhancing penalties, fines and sentencing have been introduced that coalition supporters are opposing, including:

HB 2184: Would add new penalties for exposure of governmental representatives to fentanyl, or to any other harmful drug or chemical agent," a policy that drug and health experts have said is based on misinformation.

HB 4006: A massive rewrite of the criminal code which could increase penalties and incarceration for many offenses. Narrowly defeated in 2021.

HB 2257: Extends the period of supervision for people with certain felony drug convictions for up to 10 years after they complete their sentences and parole, also a rerun from last year. This could result in incarceration for trivial technical violations such as missing a curfew or meeting or failing a drug test.

SB 29: Would expand fees paid by people who post bail or bond and disproportionately impact low income people.

There's no doubt that many more bills will require attention, both pro and con. Follow BlackbyGod.org or wvlegislature.gov for the latest updates.

2022

Legislative Session

SMART JUSTICE POLICY PLATFORM

DIVERSION AND DECARCERATION

1 Reduce Pretrial Incarceration

2 Reduce Incarceration

Increase efficiencies in community corrections through presumptive probation; restricting use of incarceration for technical violations; and providing earned time credit for a person's successful time on supervision.

3 Reduce Application of "Three Strikes" Law

Support the "Levi Phillips amendment" to revise recidivist statute so that a person cannot be given a life sentence after three separate nonviolent felonies.

SAFE AND HUMANE CONDITIONS

4 Support Family Connections

Provide more affordable access to phone calls and communication for incarcerated people and their families.

5 Free Feminine Hygiene Products

6 End Solitary Confinement for Children Incarcerated

REDUCE BARRIERS TO REENTRY

7 Restore Voting Rights for People on Probation and Parole

8 Clean Slate Legislation

Provide for automatic expungement for non-convictions, as well as for qualifying misdemeanors and felonies.

9 Expand Access to Transitional Housing

10 Fairness in Employment

"Ban the box" on state job applications so that employers consider a candidate's qualifications first, and not their arrest or conviction record.

Vote YES on H.B. 4354 "Ban the Box Act"

ENHANCE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION | REDUCE RECIDIVISM

What's the deal with "the box"?



The box is a section on job applications which people must check if they have a conviction history. It creates unfair barriers to employment, harming BOTH job seekers AND employers:

- The presence of **the box on a job application often discourages individuals from applying.**
- Research finds that a **conviction record reduces the likelihood of a job callback or offer by nearly 50%.**
- When **employers toss out applications that have the box checked** without considering applicants' actual skills and qualifications, their pool of qualified candidates significantly narrows.

Why ban the box?



Banning the box enables employers to **judge applicants based on their qualifications first**, without the stigma of a record.

Removing job barriers helps the economy and is good for business because it increases tax contributions, boosts sales tax revenue, and saves tax dollars by keeping people out of the criminal justice system.

Increasing employment opportunities reduces recidivism and improves community stability. In the United States, 37 states have embraced some version of "ban the box."

What does "ban the box" NOT do?

An employer is not required to hire an individual under this policy, and it **does not prohibit an employer from conducting a background check** after an initial interview. Additionally, the policy would apply only to public employers that do NOT require, by state or federal law, a criminal history inquiry as a preliminary qualification to be considered for employment.

Lida Shepherd
Lshepherd@afsc.org



WATTS LETTER from page 16

laws was designed to create a pilot project to address disparities in the areas of health, housing, education, employment and economics.

Proposed Existing Laws that Could be Re-Introduced During the 2022 WV Legislative Session to Serve as the COVID-19 Mitigation Legislative Package for the State

- 1. Health : 2017; HB-2724**, Relating to Creating a Pilot Project to Improvement Public Health by Addressing Poverty Through Comprehensive Community Development; never funded, never implemented or executed; status: sunset, could be re-activated
- 2. Health : 2017, HB-2188**, Re-activation of Special Community-Based Pilot Project to Improve Outcomes for At-Risk Youth, passed, signed into law, never funded, never implemented or executed, status: sunset, could be re-activate
- 3. Health: 2012, Senate Bill-611**, Special Community-Based Pilot Demonstration Project to improve Outcomes for At-risk Youth; status sunset, could be re-activate
- 4. Housing: 2009, House 2950**, Neighborhood Housing and Economic Stabilization Bill, passed, signed law, implemented, execute, partially funded, template developed, status: still active
- 5. Education: 2013, SB-359-18-3-12**; Expansion of the Special Community Development School Pilot Program; passed, signed into law, never funded, implemented but not executed according the law, status: still active
- 6. Economics: 2004; SB-573**; Minority Economic Development Bill; passed, signed into law, never funded, never implemented or executed; status: still active
- 7. Economics: 2018; SB-556**: Creating a Small Business and Minority Populations Economic and Workforce Development Taskforce passed senate, minor amendment in house, title amended in senate, house speaker skipped on last day of 2018 Session. Re-introduced during 2022 Legislative session as: HB-2062, HB-3168, & SB-186

Please call me if you have questions or would like to discuss.

Reverend Matthew J. Watts, Chair
Ricardo Martin, Vice Chair
Tuesday Morning Group

AN OPEN LETTER TO SENATOR AZINGER AND DELEGATES KEATON, HOLSTEIN, BARNHART AND WAMSLEY

An Eighth Grade Civics Refresher

BY SHEILA COLEMAN-CASTELLS

Ah, Senator Azinger and Delegates Keaton, Holstein, Barnhart and Wamsley, I think you must have been absent from significant portions of Civics in the eighth grade. Before you seek to pass (the proposed) Senate Bill 618 and House Bill 2595, perhaps a refresher in this subject is in the offing? As I was a middle school teacher, and then a professor teaching teachers for 21 years, please all me to assist you in grasping some constructs that you have obviously failed to master. This won't hurt ... much.

So to review, delegates and senators, Thomas Jefferson tells us that we have the right to be free in most any proper way we justifiably see fit; we should not have to pay taxes for the right to have any government tell us what to say or believe, and that we are compelled to use logic, reason, and methods of rational inquiry to expand human understanding, refusing to sacrifice so-called ideals of "unity" for "liberty." You, however, wish as two legislative bodies to bind our mouths and our minds such that not only can we not speak of things some might call "divisive",

but we cannot even elucidate nor enunciate difficult truths that might cast dispersion on some groups of people, past or present, for their own actions?

I thought that you guys were the party of personal responsibility. No?

Now here I thought Thomas Jefferson was a GOP poster boy, a Federalist's heartthrob! However, these bills (aptly named "Divisive Acts") stand categorically against Jeffersonian principals and ethics. In fact, they stand against American principles and ethics, most of all, our Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Almost all of what our Founding Fathers wrote — every single note, treatise, and article, argued for our right to be a nation of free people, able to speak and act in ways that furthered the public discourse, convention and government proclamations be damned. Were you to have proposed such a Bill in Jefferson's time, he might have failed all of you at the University of Virginia (my alma mater).

We West Virginians have the right to speak and assemble freely, including in schools. Disagreement is how we BECAME a republic, Delegates and senator, if you will remember. Had we NOT disagreed, we would be preparing to celebrate Her Majesty's 70

years on the throne, and not our 246th birthday on July 4th. Many of our detractors felt we might buckle under the weight of our disagreements (as they do to the present day), but we didn't suppress dissent like the British, nor did we practice self-immolation like the French. We spoke, we dissented, we were divided but then we came back together, always seeking to find that which Jefferson (Va.), Gouverneur Morris (N.Y.) and James Madison (Va.) called in the Preamble of the Constitution a "... more perfect union ...". While we haven't found said perfection, you condemn the youth of our state to ignorance and lower-level thought when you propose that no teacher could call the Swastika and Nazism objectively wrong, or lynching of Blacks a heinous, illegal act of murder. We are not like former President Trump, equivocating between "good people on all sides". Some people and ideas aren't good. Some folks are indeed racists, sexist, homophobic, bigoted in every way. That First Amendment implores us, both teacher and student, to speak freely and expose our tainted and unworthy ideas in the pursuit of serious learning.

We WANT people in our state who critically think, can debate the issues, and ask profound questions.

**WE THINK OUR READERS ARE
"SOME KIND OF WONDERFUL"**

We want to celebrate the many creators that have paved the way for the song and story of Black West Virginians, like native West Virginian John Ellison, who wrote the famous song "Some Kind of Wonderful" and is the creator of this delicious seasoning.



Look for this seasoning at The Bigly Piggly Wiggly!



They can't do those things if educators are muzzled, and we fail to call out what is egregiously wrong and list its errors. Jefferson, Madison, Washington, Hamilton, and all the rest of our "Founding Fathers," Abraham Lincoln and Francis Marion Pierpont, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Martin Delaney knew it that enforced silence equals death where this is concerned. Mother Jones, Booker T. Washington, Coralee Franklin Cook (suffragist and great-granddaughter of Jefferson who taught at Storer College,) Walter Reuther, and of course, many a miner who died during the Mine Wars for simply trying to organize to earn a better living. Dissent and debate are the hallmarks not of insolence and ignorance, but of great depth in knowledge. Evaluation between two often opposite ideas is the highest order of thinking, something we should be wanting our young people to strive toward, not shun. In order to build our state's 21st-century economy, we don't need more "yes men;" we need those who can discern right from wrong, weakness from true strength, and ignorance from intelligence.

America is strong enough to endure not only the sins of the world, but its own sins, and still keep shining on. West Virginians know what is right and what is wrong. They are neither intellectually nor emotionally weak. We know that we can't always agree sometimes, but we need not be disagreeable, and we don't need everyone to think just like we do to get along.

We have REAL problems in our beautiful Mountain State that we send all of YOU down to Charleston to solve. Instead of launching un-American bills that won't stand up against the REAL U.S. Constitution, how about ensuring that every one of our teachers is teaching the U.S. Constitution in ways that our young people can understand, so that should they wish to debate its merits, they do so aptly and faithfully, making Jefferson, Madison and even the late Robert C. Byrd, the 20th century's greatest Constitutional champion (who loved it so much that he carried it in his breast pocket every single day of his 57 years in the US Senate) proud of who we are, and who we are becoming in these hills.

Let our teachers teach the truth, and let our students learn the truth.

Sheila Coleman-Castells is an educator and professor of Education with more than 30 years of experience and a Political Activist living in North Central West Virginia with her son and two 2016 flood rescue dogs from Nicholas County.

Speaking of Education...



Perry Bennett/West Virginia Legislative Photography photos

Del Danielle Walker voted against the bill.



Del Sean Hornbuckle voted against the bill.



Del Caleb Hanna voted for the bill.

House of Delegates Education Committee passes "Anti-Stereotyping Act" 18-5

At a West Virginia House of Delegates Education Committee meeting on Feb. 4, members discussed House Bill 4011, which proposes "curriculum transparency."

The bill requires West Virginia public schools to post curriculum and teacher training materials about race, sex and nondiscrimination was introduced Feb. 2.

Here's how West Virginia's black delegates voted:

NO

Del. Danielle Walker, (D-Monongalia)

NO

Del. Sean Hornbuckle (D-Cabell)

YES

Del. Caleb Hanna (R-Nicholas)



FROM THE STATEHOUSE

Lack of Legislative Diversity Not Likely to Change

BY PHIL KABLER

When I wrote the column announcing my retirement (or semi-retirement) from the Charleston Gazette-Mail, I recounted the many technological improvements that occurred over the course of my career in journalism.

What hasn't changed much over that time is the composition of the Legislature.

When I covered my first legislative session in 1990, white men occupied 108 of the 134 seats in the Senate and House of Delegates.

This session, as I enter into my new role as a part-time columnist, that number has grown to 113 – and that number would have been higher had Gov. Jim Justice not appointed two women and a Black man to seats vacated by white male legislators.

In 1990, the only African-American in the Legislature was Delegate Ernest Moore, D-McDowell. (His son, Cliff Moore, would later represent the district.)

Currently, that number is up to four, although Sen. Owens Brown, D-Ohio, was appointed by Justice when Sen. Bill Ihlenfeld, D-Ohio, resigned to become a U.S. Attorney. Brown is the lone Black member of the Senate, and becomes the first African-American in the Senate since Sen. Marie Redd, D-Cabell, who served one term beginning in 1999.

Astoundingly, Brown is the first Black man to serve in the state Senate in the state's 158 years.

If the Legislature accurately reflected state demographics, there should be five African-Americans serving in the House and Senate.

Also in 1990, there were 25 women in the Legislature, a number that has declined to 18 in 2022, and was as low as 16 last session before Justice appointed Sen. Hannah Geffert, D-Berkeley, and Delegate Kathie Hess Crouse, R-Putnam, to fill seats vacated by white men.

If representation in the Legislature corresponded precisely with state demographics, there should be 61 white male legislators.

So why do we have 113 white men serving in the Legislature? The reason, frankly, is because they want it that way. White men have controlled the Legislature

What that means is West Virginia will continue to have a Legislature that looks less and less like the demographics of the state as a whole, with women and people of color further under-represented in House and Senate chambers, and with white men over-represented by a factor of 185 percent.

long before I ever started covering the place, and have made policy decisions and enacted rules that favor themselves.

In 1991, a redistricting committee controlled by moderate-to-conservative white males decided to break up Kanawha County, which at the time was a 12-member multi-member House district.

They did so under the guise of turning Charleston's downtown, East End, and West Side into what they called a minority influence district. Actually, the new district had a 31 percent minority population, so only by West Virginia standards could it be argued that it met that definition.

However, what it did very effectively was to isolate a reliably progressive voting bloc within a single delegate district, assuring that those voters in Charleston could not influence the outcome of the other House

racers.

Over time, that helped flip the Kanawha County House delegation from predominately Democrat to predominately Republican.

In 2001, after Redd's historic win, redistricting expanded the portion of Redd's senatorial district in rural Wayne County, ostensibly to adjust for population losses in Huntington. Redd lost her 2002 reelection bid, as well as a 2006 Senate run.

Redistricting effectively drew Redd out of her district.

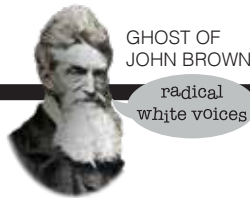
With redistricting in 2021, the numbers of white men serving in the Legislature is almost certain to increase after the 2022 elections, with the House of Delegates being broken up into 100 single-member districts (research shows that women and minority candidates tend to fare better in multi-member districts), and with gerrymandering that splits cities including Charleston, Huntington, Morgantown and Martinsburg among multiple House districts, and plucks Charleston out of Kanawha County, putting it in a Senate district with rural Clay and Roane counties, and parts of Putnam and Jackson counties, among other measures to dilute the influence of urban areas.

What that means is West Virginia will continue to have a Legislature that looks less and less like the demographics of the state as a whole, with women and people of color further underrepresented in House and Senate chambers, and with white men over-represented by a factor of 185 percent.

Arguably, the lack of diversity in the Legislature is a key reason why bills are advancing this session to ban abortion after 15 weeks, to permit recall elections for city and county ordinances, presumably to allow recall of LGBTQ Fairness Ordinances, and to permit individuals, businesses, and organizations to discriminate under the guise of religious freedom.

The likely outcome is that the state will become even less diverse and inclusive, and will continue to lose population. Personally, I don't know how West Virginia reverses that trend at this point.

Phil Kabler's Statehouse Beat column runs in the Charleston Gazette-Mail.



COMMENTARY

What We are Missing

BY BETTY RIVARD

I am going to do something really weird here and start off this commentary by quoting myself.

Many of my op eds have been appearing in the Charleston Gazette-Mail over the past several years. The latest one, on Jan. 23, included a chain of thought that I want to share here:

"During this second year of following our state legislature only remotely, what I miss the most are the moments of being in the room where I can see the best of the democratic process in action. ...

"I have my own definition of the best of the democratic process. I believe that it happens when there is an open exchange of views that leads to the resolution of an issue, all in real time.

"It is like I know it when I see it, at least from my point of view. There is a kind of energy in the room as people move past their own set views and alliances to engage in the search for the best path forward.

"I have always cherished these moments. I have also experienced a lifetime of meetings, going back to my Brownie troop when I was 7. I learned, sometimes the hard way, to work with others to find and achieve our common goals.

"This process is still ongoing through the wonders of Zoom."

Until recently, over the course of 70 some years of being in rooms and sitting at tables, I can probably count on both hands the times that very many Black voices were included as full partners in the process.

I was a veteran of the civil rights movement and affirmative action. Yet until I saw the video, "Cracking the Code," and took some workshops that followed, I did not fully understand the concept of white privilege.

I have felt very responsible for compensating for my ignorance since I found out what I did not know that I did not know. I benefited greatly by joining a historically Black church, which I attended faithfully until COVID.

Not being there has left one of the biggest holes in my life. I look forward to going back when I can again feel OK about being with numbers of people inside places.

My biggest takeaway from rethinking my experiences in all of the rooms and tables over the years is that I did not know what we were missing. I suspect this is also true for other white people who filled up these rooms.

I am convinced that both the conversations and the validity of the results are much deeper and richer when diverse voices are involved. This principle applies across all kinds of identities and differences. I am focusing on Black voices here in the context of this newspaper.

I am like anyone may be who has seen the light and now wants others to see it also. I am a zealot.

In every room I am in I ask, where are the Black people? If there is only one Black person, I ask why there are not more so that the one person is not so alone.

If I sense either overt or micro aggressions I get upset and call them out. Even if the Black people in the room seem not to notice or decide to let them go by.

I am not saying this to bring attention to myself. I am saying it because I want every white person to bring this same kind of awareness and to ask these questions also wherever they go.

Going beyond this awareness to the outcomes themselves, I want to know that all views are considered to arrive at the best possible results. How can I possibly understand what it is like to walk in your shoes? I need to hear this from you, from your wisdom, your experience, and your heart, which may be very different from mine, at least in some ways.

Any policies or laws that we come up with are incomplete and thus weaker without this full understanding. This must be a collective and collaborative process, not from me speaking for anyone else or dictating the answers for them.

I am finding that it can be shockingly difficult to get to this place. I understand that it is a matter of sharing power that people may want to keep to themselves.

At the same time, it is so obvious to me that we need all hands on deck right now.

We all share the most daunting challenges of income inequalities, threats to our democracy, and global warming. What one person or group can possibly have all of the answers to these incredibly complicated issues?

The only way humanity can prevail is to have a level playing field with all of us in the rooms and at the tables. This core reality applies to every level of decision-making, from the most local to the global.

Each of us has a unique voice to contribute to the whole.

The democratic process is a matter of us all coming together to find the best possible path.

Betty Rivard is an activist and frequent contributor to the Charleston Gazette-Mail.

COMMENTARY

Witnessing the Resurgence of Jim Crow

BY ERIC ENGLE

"With no sacredness of the ballot there can be no sacredness of human life itself. For if the strong can take the weak man's ballot, when it suits his purpose to do so, he will take his life also." — Ida B. Wells

With the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, I began working from home almost two years ago. I decided to spend as much of my isolation time as I could spare, between my family, my job, and my activism, learning as much as I could about a subject or subjects that I felt would benefit my growth as a person. For a while, I couldn't decide what I should spend most of my reading time on — then came May of 2020 and the murder of George Floyd.

I knew that George Floyd's murder was not atypical in a society where the policing of Black lives has never been about "serve and protect" so much as ostracize, contain, and eliminate. But witnessing the recorded suffering of a man begging for, and being denied, breath by an arresting white officer in front of a dozen or more onlookers was such a shock that I could not allow myself to look away from the suffering of the Black community any longer, shielded by my white privilege. I had to know. I had to try to understand by uncensored examination the history of the horrors preceding George's brutal death.

Of the numerous books I've read in

Continued on page 21

radical
white voices

ENGLE from page 25

the ensuing years, five have changed my life: “A Black Women’s History of the United States” by Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, “Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619-2019” edited by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain, “Between the World and Me” by Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together” by Heather McGhee, and “The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story” by Nikole Hannah-Jones and The New York Times Magazine.

To say that these texts were eye-opening is an understatement. I spent months with them to try to appreciate every entry, every chapter, every essay, poem, short story, and blurb. While most came from the library, I’ve also begun purchasing them because I want them in my private collection for my children and future generations of my family to read, and to loan out to other family, friends, and acquaintances as often as possible. I can’t begin to convey, in 600 words or less, what I learned, how I felt, or how much these texts forever changed me.

I now realize that I had (and have) a responsibility to know and understand all that these readings brought to me. As a white, cis/het, male person of at least lower middle-class means (for where I live), I have always had the privilege to just ignore what these books provided, but I wasn’t as human until I discovered them. The conscious awareness I now have is part of my own path to self-actualization; a path that, truth be told, never ends for as long as we live.

I offered the Ida B. Wells quote to begin this piece because I’ve just witnessed the resurgence of Jim Crow. I’ve watched all Senate Republicans and two Democrats (one being Sen. Joe Manchin III from our state) undermine the democracy that I now know Black Americans championed and stewarded for all of us after our birth as a slaver’s republic. But I have hope. I have hope that stems from learning how much the Black community has persevered and, in so doing, has delivered for us all.

*Eric Engle is Chairman of
Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action*

COMMENTARY

Manchin’s Behavior is a Betrayal of Democracy

BY JOHN W. DOYLE

Senator Manchin has spurned all the arguments made in support of our failing democracy and has once again failed to stop suppression of voting rights. By my count, that is five times in this session. A serious moral argument must be made about what legacy he will leave. It is clear that Manchin’s strategy goes far beyond the abandonment of the current bills we have encouraged him to champion.

The backdrop of Manchin’s position includes some ominous and critical elements:

Throughout the Trump years, we saw him (Trump) bent on dictatorship and we saw vast numbers of people supporting it. It is all he has ever thought or practiced in his known business and personal relationships.

After four years of this, the Republican Party abandoned all appearances of a philosophy and refused during Trump’s re-election campaign to even formulate a party platform. Trump was the only priority.

When the campaign failed, revolution became the strategy to preserve power. Radical right wing propaganda and preparation for armed revolt reached a level not seen since the Civil War. As ludicrous as the 6th of January was, it has supported the continued worshipful support for Trump and inspired further growth of right wing radicalism in the public, Congress, and the Courts. Consider the reactions of police and government “troops” to the Black Lives Matter movement as compared to the attack on the U.S. Capitol.

The Republican Party in the Senate (and less successfully in the House) is boycotting everything that could work to rebuild a fair structure of governance. Joe Manchin has been their perfect partner in delaying any progress while the clock runs out on this session of Congress. The process continues to increase public frustration, decrease support for the Administration, and ensure a midterm election

disaster.

The nation stands very close to the threshold for a new constitution. A few more state legislatures voting for it will put the entire constitution up for grabs.

Certainly, I agree that Manchin should be called out for his moral betrayal of the majority who support the current legislation, but I think our understanding of his “legacy” is incomplete.

Manchin is building his legacy on the expected triumph of Trumpism, and the voter suppression measures are essential to the effort. He is smart to retain his Democratic Party membership because it keeps him center stage in the spotlight and assures him the power to paralyze anything the Democrats want. Of course, it allows him to pass those initiatives that he wants.

The voting rights gained since the Civil War are being stripped away with the blessing of the Supreme Court. They say the anti Jim Crow laws are obsolete; with 30 new voter suppression measures just passed in the states, how will democracy survive?

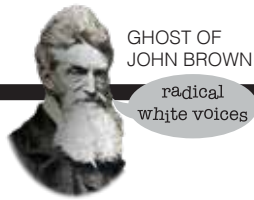
Support for dictatorship, particularly in the person of Trump, is gigantic; behind the scenes, the next coup attempt is being planned with much greater care than the last one. “Dictatorship” is a drastic buzz word that nobody claims, but that is the reality of it.

Joe Manchin knows all of this. He continues to shepherd the process along. He rises and prospers by it while playing a masterful charade on us.

Judging by his actions, I say Manchin is at the forefront of this new American revolution and he is smart enough to keep us all playing along until the balance tips beyond any hope of a correction.

It is hard to face this and act on this emergency for what it truly is. Making the moral case to the man is always necessary, but the crisis is here and now. He is demonstrating that he does not care what is right. He is destroying the power of citizenship — our resistance must intensify.

John W. Doyle lives in Charleston



COMMENTARY

Bill is a Backdoor Attempt to Block Teaching

SB498 language seems benign but the problem is in the application

BY JOHN BOLT

On Jan. 27 a bill introduced in the West Virginia Legislature by Senate Education Committee Chair Patricia Rucker (R-Jefferson) carries the lofty name of the “Anti-Racism Act of 2022” (SB498) and purports to “prohibit a school district, a public charter school, the West Virginia Board of Education, the West Virginia Department of Education, a state institution of higher education or any employee of the aforementioned entities from providing instruction in, requiring instruction in, making part of a course, or requiring a statement or affirmation by an employee of certain specified concepts.”

Instead, it is a back door attempt to block teaching or discussion of the United States’ problematic past treatment of indigenous, LGBTQ and non-white peoples.

Don’t be fooled by such benign-sounding language that says no educational institution may “provide instruction in, require instruction in, make part of a course, or require a statement or affirmation by any employee” of a laundry list of topics that are on the surface may appear to be non-controversial.

No one would really suggest that we should teach that:

“Any race, ethnic group, or biological sex is inherently, morally, or intellectually superior to another race, ethnic group, or biological sex;”

That any of those groups are “inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;”

“An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of the individual’s race, ethnicity, or biological sex;”

“An individual’s moral character is determined by the individual’s race, ethnicity, or biological sex;”

An individual, by virtue of the individual’s race, ethnicity, or biological sex, bears responsibility for actions committed by other members of the same race, ethnic group, or biological sex;”

An individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of the individual’s race, ethnicity, or biological sex;”

“Academic achievement, meritocracy, or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race, ethnic group, or biological sex to oppress members of another race, ethnic group, or biological sex.”

The problem, as is often the case, comes in the application.

How, for example, does one teach about times in this nation’s history when people of different color, or ethnicity, or sexual orientation than the dominant population have been discriminated against or disadvantaged by governmental policy?

How, indeed, when the law allows any student or employee who objects to sue the individual and the agency — a classic chilling effect?

Not all of our history is roses; there are weeds as well. But we can’t ignore the weeds or they will choke out the roses.

This proposed legislation is nothing but a rephrasing of efforts here and elsewhere to ban discussion of so-called “divisive concepts” or teaching of Critical Race Theory.

Those West Virginians who want the state to draw new people and new business — both of which are crucial to its future — must join to oppose this effort.

Accordingly, a variety of more than 200 organizations and individuals from across the state have come together as the West Virginia Coalition for Truth in History.

As West Virginians and Americans who respect the insight of the writers of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence’s promise of equality and liberty to all, we must ensure that we keep aiming to do our best to form a more perfect union. This requires open airing and courage to see where we have fallen short and can do better.

This legislation:

- Is antithetical to the concept of academic freedom and intellectual inquiry.

- Leads to a repeat of the sins of our past and legitimizes them.

- Is an attempt to hide racist events such as the Tulsa or Wilmington massacres, Jim Crow laws, chattel slavery and more.

- Leads to suppression of any sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

- Prohibits discussion of the history of gender inequality and women’s rights.

Instead, teachers and other governmental employees and agencies should:

- Be free of fear of reprisal for open discussion.

- Be free to discuss our history and the equality for all people.

- Be able to address gender and sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace.

It is crucial that this bill be rejected or our state will suffer both social and economic consequences for years to come and our population will continue to evaporate and our state be shunned by the very entrepreneurs it hopes to entice.

We would be wise to listen to the many people throughout history who have cautioned against ignoring the past, including Sir Winston Churchill, who said, “Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

Bolt is a founding member, along with many others, of the WV Coalition for Truth in History.

WEST VIRGINIA'S RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Fund struggles to pay renters and landlords

BY EMILY ALLEN

Mountain State Spotlight

This story was originally published by Mountain State Spotlight. Get stories like this delivered to your email inbox once a week; sign up for the free newsletter at mountainstatespotlight.org/newsletter

West Virginia officials have struggled to spend the hundreds of millions of dollars allocated to the state to help struggling renters and landlords through the pandemic. Now, they have less money to work with after having to send more than \$3 million back to the U.S. Treasury Department in December.

"I can't emphasize enough, we never want to give money back," said West Virginia Housing and Development Fund Director Erica Boggess. "We want to help the citizens of West Virginia."

West Virginia launched its rental assistance program through the West Virginia Housing and Development Fund in late March. The program, funded with federal money, is meant to help West Virginians who are facing eviction or utility shutoffs. The WVHDF normally works with homeowners, and this is the agency's first time overseeing a program for renters.

But since the program began nearly 10 months ago, officials have disbursed \$45 million of the \$350 million the state received. This slow pace is what prompted the federal government to ask for more than \$3 million back, to redistribute to other states that were spending their money faster.

"There are lots of people that need 18 months worth of rental and utility assistance," said Mountaineer Rental Assistance Program Manager Jessica Greathouse. "And we're paying that out. And we also know that there's a huge, probably untapped market out there."

'2021 definitely had an uptick' in renters' needs

Even though money has been slow to flow from the rental assistance program, some West Virginians are still at risk of losing their housing. Around the same time the state had to send the money back, the

Federal government took back some funding due to slow pace of fund distribution

U.S. Census Bureau estimated in early December that roughly 37% of West Virginia renters, who were behind on rent, were "very likely" to face eviction within the next two months.

"I will say that 2021 definitely had an uptick," said Shannon Cunningham-Snead, the executive director for the Central West Virginia Community Action Association, which serves the Clarksburg area.

Last year, her agency helped about 370 West Virginia households in its five-county service area with services, including utility and rental assistance for Lewis and Harrison counties.

Cunningham-Snead says she's noticed requests for help ebb and flow with the availability of federal, direct assistance like stimulus checks, unemployment benefits and child tax credits.

"The calls really have fluctuated tremendously as other benefits have come to households, and we see ourselves catching a lot of customers who have fallen through the gaps of much of that assistance," she said.

While many unemployment benefits and direct payments to families have received widespread attention and coverage, some people worry that there has been little marketing or communications around the \$350 million West Virginia received to provide rental and utility assistance to households affected by the pandemic.

Cunningham-Snead said that as we enter year three of the coronavirus pandemic, the state needs to do a better job making sure the word gets out to everyone who's eligible.

"I think that there are a number of families who have been financially self-sufficient for quite a while, who have come upon hiccups such as loss of income because of quarantine, or a child's school being closed," Cunningham-Snead said. "Those are the people we worry about. Those are the people who

have used their savings at this time, those are the people that have dipped into their retirement funds. As the emergencies hit, they've already exhausted their personal resources."

Program improvements

West Virginia and a handful of other "small states" were first given \$200 million for rental assistance in January 2021 through the CARES Act that was passed in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This funding has to be spent by September 2022, and there are a series of spending benchmarks that states must hit every month.

The state received an additional \$150 million through another later coronavirus-related pot of money, the American Rescue Plan Act, that was also for rental and utility assistance later. This funding comes with fewer spending requirements and has a September 2025 deadline. WVHDF has spent some of this so far on renters, but also people living in recovery homes and sober living facilities, according to Greathouse.

Despite varying state sizes and needs, the monthly spending requirements imposed by the U.S. Treasury are the same for every state.

"There has been a lot of criticism across the country about slow spending on these things," said Boggess. "But here's the deal. They passed these laws very quickly, trying to get assistance out to people who needed it. Some states got more than they're going to need, and others didn't get what they needed, comparatively. ... So even if we have expended every single thing in our pipeline, we're still not hitting those funding ratios. We're just not that big of a state."

Now, WVHDF leaders say they're working to pick up the pace, in case the federal government asks for more money back.

"I think we're working quickly toward hitting our stride, in terms of getting applications out the door," Greathouse said. "Eventually, we're going to get to the point where we're getting an application and turning it out again in days, instead of weeks."

It wasn't until months into the program that they

hired more people to process applications through an outside contract. Before that, WVHDF was relying on its staff and community action agencies throughout the state to help process applications.

Right now, Greathouse says, it takes a normal application about four to six weeks to process, and processors throughout the state can get more than 100 new applications a day.

The process has also been complicated by new software. When WVHDF leaders submitted a program improvement plan to the U.S. Treasury last fall, they reported receiving more than 6,000 online applications during the software transition period — in an interview on Jan. 13, Greathouse said application processors are still working through much of that backlog today.

“As a rural state, there is a significant portion of the state that is unable to access our application software system due to technology constraints,” WVHDF wrote in the plan. “While we are committed to serving this population through application assistance and paper applications, it is a very labor-intensive process that is an obstacle to providing timely assistance.”

The program improvement plan further detailed what WVHDF said is causing West Virginia to spend so slowly, and how the state plans to fix that. Some promises include plans to partner with Legal Aid of West Virginia and target smaller-scale landlords with less than 10 rental units to increase the amount of money they give out.

If West Virginia’s improvement plan doesn’t work and the state doesn’t spend the money faster, it could risk losing more. Though WVHDF officials have increased the pace at which they’re approving applications, the federal government has other benchmarks that will need to be met this year for the agency to keep the rest of the money.

Reach reporter Emily Allen at emilyallen@mountainstatespotlight.org



Mountaineer RENTAL Assistance Program

wvrentalassistance.com



**Real Help for
West Virginia
Renters is
Here!**

The Mountaineer Rental Assistance Program

is now open and accepting applications.

If you are a renter who is struggling to pay rent or utilities because of financial hardship during or due to the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be eligible for assistance.

Eligibility:

To be eligible for assistance through the Mountaineer Rental Assistance Program, a renter household must meet all 3 of the following:

1. Have a household income no greater than 80% of area median income (AMI)*
2. One or more member of the household must:
 - a. have qualified for unemployment

OR

- b. experienced a financial hardship during or due to the COVID-19 pandemic
3. One or more members of the household must be at risk for homelessness or housing instability such as having a past due utility or rent notice or an eviction notice.

* To find the AMI for the West Virginia County you live in visit: wvrentalassistance.com

Eligible Expenses may include:

- Past due and current rent beginning April 1, 2020 and up to three months forward rent for a maximum of 18 months.
- Past due and current water, sewer, gas, electric, trash, and home energy costs such as propane.
- A one-time \$300 stipend for internet expenses so you can use the internet for distance learning, telework, telemedicine and/or to obtain government services.

Please go to the website for more information:

wvrentalassistance.com



ABOVE, from left, Pastors Marlin Collins and Matthew Watts walk with Alex Gallo on Martin Luther King Jr. Day protest. LEFT: Kai Newkirk with other protesters in downtown Charleston.



Photos by Joe Soloman

Katonya Hart was arrested along with eight other protesters at a protest calling on Sen. Joe Manchin to pass voting rights legislation in Congress. Hart was the only Black woman arrested and was separated and held in a “cage.”

NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE IN CHARLESTON

Nine Arrested in MLK Day Protest

BY HAADIZA OGWUDE

Nine people were arrested on Jan. 17 during a protest in downtown Charleston. The protest was organized by concerned citizens calling on Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., to pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act and the Freedom to Vote Act, which is currently being held for a vote by Congress. Both acts require 60 votes to avoid a Republican filibuster.

According to the Charleston Gazette-Mail, two dozen people gathered on the morning of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, at the corner of Kanawha Boulevard and Court Street. Court Street was honorarily named after Martin Luther King Jr. in 2020. Rev. Matthew Watts of Grace Bible Church and Rev. Marlon Collins of Shiloh Baptist Church gave opening remarks on the impor-

tance of preserving Martin Luther King Jr.’s legacy through the passage of federal voting rights legislation. Watts said there is no MLK celebration without voting rights legislation that gives a voice to all citizens.

When discussing the MLK Day protest and the importance of nonviolent resistance, Watts stated, “I think it’s the most potent weapon that law-abiding nonviolent people have at their disposal.”

Kai Newkirk, a West Virginia native who currently resides in Arizona, was one of the nine protesters arrested during the MLK Day protest. Newkirk discussed the role of nonviolent resistance in the fight for voting rights legislation.

“...that’s how we won the Voting Rights Act in the first place, and that’s how we have to fight to restore it and continue to expand and build in that legacy

of, you know, creating a truly inclusive multiracial democracy,” Newkirk said.

The protest included blocking all four lanes of traffic on Kanawha Boulevard, which led to a response from the Charleston Police Department. After several orders from the police to leave the street, the protesters and Charleston Police Lt. Dave Payne eventually agreed that those refusing to go would be handcuffed, detained, and cited. When inside the station, however, officers began booking protesters for arrest under the charges of unlawful protesting without incident. The protesters have a hearing scheduled for March 2.

Katonya Hart, of Charleston, was the only Black protester arrested. Hart was kept, in what she referred to as, a “cage” and was separated from the other eight protesters who were arrested. According to Hart, the

WV NAACP FAILS TO CONVINCE SEN. MANCHIN TO CHANGE HIS MIND ON VOTING LEGISLATION

From an NAACP Press Release

Wheeling, W.Va. — On Jan. 17, 2022, the day on which the nation honored civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, a delegation of four West Virginia NAACP presidents met with Senator Joe Manchin to discuss voting rights legislation and changes to the filibuster. They gathered. They prayed. They commemorated. But, they did not celebrate.

“Sen. Manchin remained opposed to supporting the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and remained opposed to changing the filibuster rules,” said West Virginia’s NAACP State Conference acting president, Darryl Clausell. “Both of these issues are of vital importance to America, and Sen. Manchin has shown his disregard to not only West Virginians but to every American in voting against them.”

“Voting is the bedrock of freedom, and every eligible American should have unrestricted access to vote,” said Clausell. But, according to Clausell, when he asked Sen. Manchin if the legislation failed, would he take further action or let it die, the senator sidestepped the question and was more focused on disclaiming himself as an author of the legislation, even though he is listed as such.

Clausell said the senator was even more uncompro-

mis in supporting any procedural rule changes to the filibuster. “Manchin said he is saving democracy by voting against filibuster rule changes, when the opposite is true,” said Clausell. “The senator is on the wrong side of justice, in this particular regard, and mistakenly believes that devoting more strides to ‘order’ is more important than shoring up ‘justice’ and the value of democracy. Procedural rule changes to the filibuster are necessary to prevent the country from heading toward an authoritarian, dictatorship governance.”

Clausell said it is important to turn to Dr. King, who expressed it best while in solitary confinement on April 16, 1963, in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”: “... I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action’; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives

by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a ‘more convenient season.’ Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.”

“As the nation now knows, Sen. Manchin voted against the Freedom to Vote Act and any procedural changes to the filibuster, and West Virginians are left in the dark about any future alternative proposals from the senator,” said Clausell. “Sen. Manchin has called himself a ‘centrist, moderate conservative Democrat’ who is ‘fiscally responsible and socially compassionate.’ Trust comes with integrity and accountability to the people who elected him,” Clausell added.

“It is time for Sen. Manchin to do what is right and take a responsible, soul-searching approach ‘for the people’ instead of for private interests or self-enrichment,” said Clausell.

Connect with the West Virginia NAACP on its Facebook page at www.facebook.com/NAACPWW.

ABOUT THE NAACP

Founded in 1909 in response to the ongoing violence against Black people, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the largest and most pre-eminent civil rights organization in the nation and is a 501(c)(4) organization.

cage is a small room surrounded by metal bars similar to a holding cell. Hart explained that she could not understand why she was separated from her fellow protesters, as they were all arrested for the same violations.

“I saw myself as a freedom fighter ... I was the only Black person, let alone Black woman in the group. It went from ‘we’ to ‘I,’ and I started to notice that I was actually being treated different,” Hart said.

Hart explained that she was apprehensive about speaking out about her treatment due to potential retaliation from the police. Despite her reservations, she questioned an officer about why she was the only one locked in a cage. In response to Hart’s concerns, the officer put Selena Vickers, Vice-Chair of the Women’s Caucus for the Democratic Party and fellow protester, in the cage with her. Hart believes that if she did not

speak up, she would have remained in the cage alone.

“I don’t think he thought about it, you know? It’s like an implicit bias,” Hart stated.

Several other protesters expressed thoughts on the arrest and the perceived racial bias that might have played a part in Hart’s treatment. Newkirk said he was inspired by Hart’s courage and commitment given the history of unjust treatment and discrimination by law enforcement toward Black people in the United States.

“I think we all shared the concern about her being discriminated against, and it being racially motivated and racist,” Kai stated.

Emma Marshall, a student at Marshall University studying ceramics, also expressed concern about the treatment of Katonya Hart.

“... It was just very ironic. Because we’re fighting

for our voices to be heard, and when the only African American person in the room is the only one in a cage. It’s just very ironic to be experiencing it firsthand,” Marshall said.

Watts stated that he was not surprised that Hart was treated differently than the other protesters. He said that Hart’s treatment resembles the racial disparities in school-based disciplinary actions. According to a 2019 study, researchers Travis Riddle and Stacey Sinclair found that Black students in the United States are subject to disciplinary action at higher rates than their white counterparts. Watts said that he believes this implicit bias is built into every system in the U.S., whether it be the school system, the prison system, or law enforcement.

“... Black people are gonna be treated differently and more harshly regardless of their agenda,” Watts said.

Timeline of a whole US history

Let's raise the right questions about why we are afraid of history told fully.

To admit that we now recognize and know more than we were taught before is not about shame; it is about courage to do better.

Without our whole history told, we continue to propagate an inaccurate story that uses stereotypes to mask reasons for the very large gap in family generational wealth.

We will continue to punish Black families and mislead our children and ourselves without an understanding that comes from truthful history of race and gender.

We can solve no problems with half the information and half of the compassion required.

We CAN handle the truth.

key A timeline infographic of things that have lifted us up or burdened us economically, contributing to division and misunderstandings about one another. The hope is to inspire curiosity for you to explore the linked, fact-based resources and learn more.

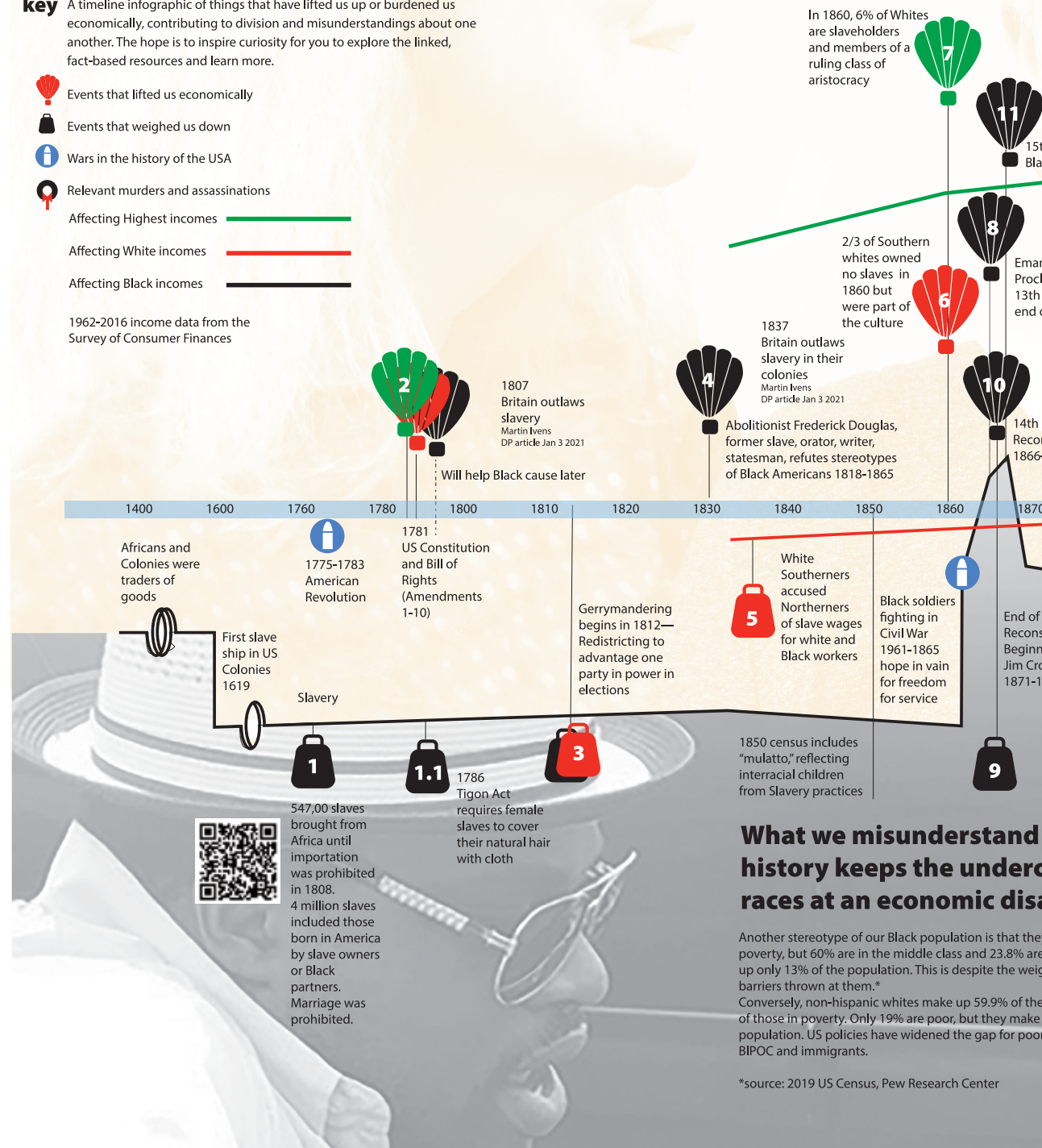
-  Events that lifted us economically
-  Events that weighed us down
-  Wars in the history of the USA
-  Relevant murders and assassinations

Affecting Highest incomes

Affecting White incomes

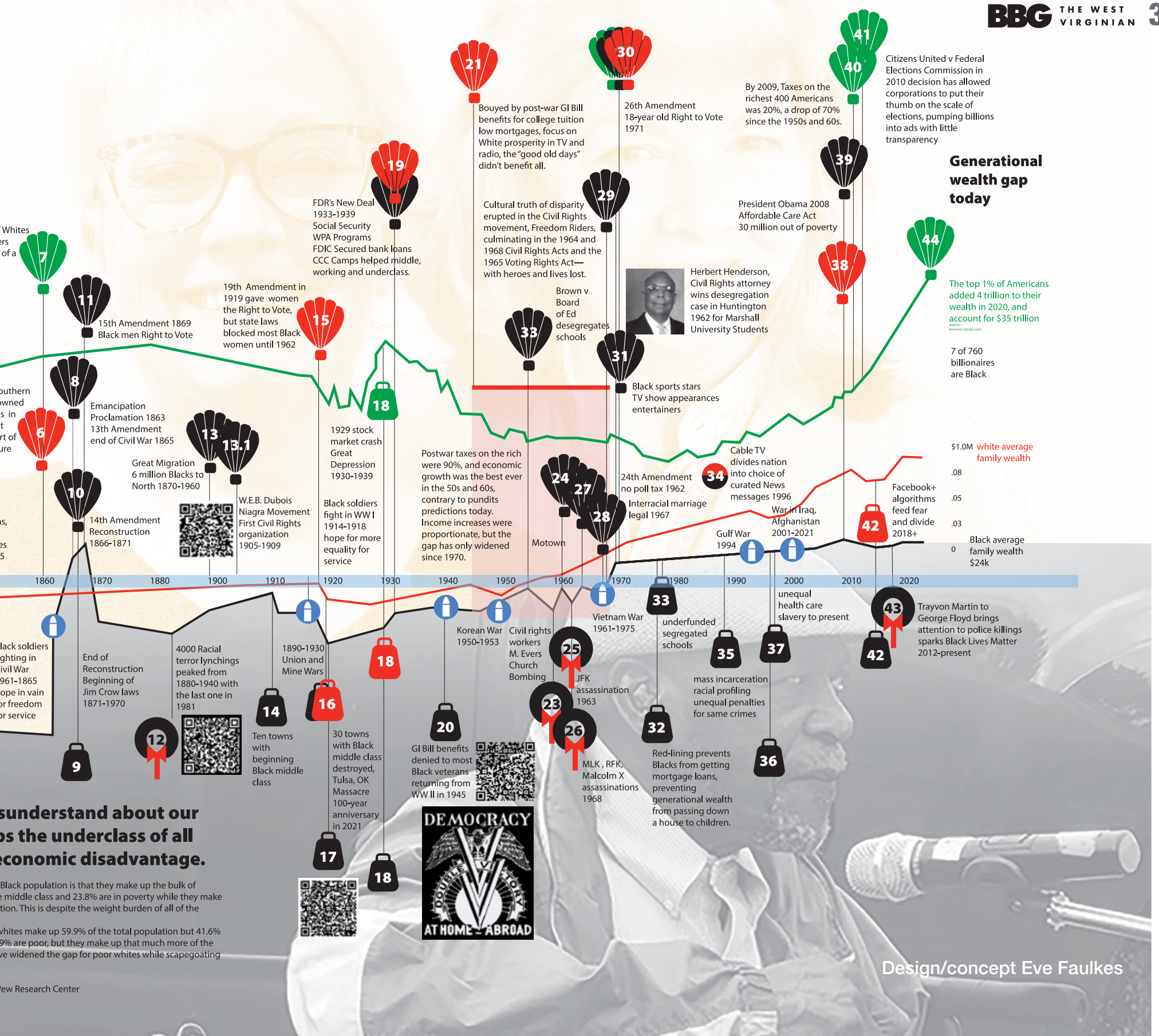
Affecting Black incomes

1962-2016 income data from the Survey of Consumer Finances



What we misunderstand history keeps the underclasses at an economic disadvantage

Another stereotype of our Black population is that they are poor, but 60% are in the middle class and 23.8% are up only 13% of the population. This is despite the weight of barriers thrown at them.* Conversely, non-hispanic whites make up 59.9% of the population. US policies have widened the gap for poor BIPOC and immigrants.



Design/concept Eve Faulkes

THE FATHER OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Carter G. Woodson's West Virginia Wasn't 'Trump Country,' It Was a Land of Opportunity

BY CYNTHIA R. GREENLEE

For young Carter G. Woodson, West Virginia shimmered in the distance, a not-so-far-off land of opportunity.

Of his decision to set off for this frontier as a teenager in the 1890s, the future “father of Black History Month” wrote that his home state of Virginia, “like most of the worn-out South, was passing through an age of poverty and to escape the hardships that endured in that state, younger Negroes went as workers to build railroads and open the coal mines of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio.” Neither did it help that, due to his father’s meager earnings as a carpenter, Woodson could only attend school when it snowed or when agricultural production was slow.

Part of a precursor wave to the Great Migration that propelled Southern Black people across the nation, Woodson (1875-1950) listened to his brother, Robert, who had relocated and glowingly reported the prospects in West Virginia. Woodson saw manna in the mines and followed his sibling to the southern part of the state.

In predominantly white Appalachia, Woodson continued his education and sharpened his interest in history. He wrote a few pieces that were remarkable in their early focus on Black people in a region that was, then and now, more diverse than contemporary stories of its white poverty and Trumpian politics imagine. Though his memories of West Virginia and research on the region make up a tiny share of his voluminous writings (which include the classic text “The Mis-Education of the Negro”), they are important contributions and correctives to versions of Appalachian history that define Appalachia by whiteness alone. Woodson may arguably be considered an intellectual pioneer in Appalachia studies, a field that became an academic discipline so late that, in 1966, West Virginia University librarian

Woodson’s first stop in West Virginia: Nuttallburg, a boomtown that was later a pet project and fuel source for car magnate Henry Ford. As Woodson

remembered in a 1944 recollection in his Negro History Bulletin, it was during his time in Fayette County that “my interest in penetrating the past of my people was deepened and intensified.”

The National Parks Service (which maintains historic Nuttallburg, which was abandoned in the 1950s) estimates that Black laborers made up almost 25 percent of West Virginia coal workers by 1909. Many served as coal loaders who filled the trucks. The work was dirty and dangerous: Early 20th-century reports of mine deaths document the violent deaths of Black Americans, Italians, Poles, when giant wedges of earth crushed them or when coal powder combusted and started fatal fires. But the wages were better than sharecropping or farm work, workers could leave early if they met their day’s packing targets, and though towns such as Nuttallburg separated black and white workers (in this case, with their residences on a separate side of a creek), they came with lodging.

African-Americans — some of them “leased” out while serving jail sentences — did the backbreaking and sometimes fatal work of laying railroad tracks that would shuttle the coal from the mountains to hearths nationwide. Woodson was among them, manning the line that traveled from Thurmond to Loup Creek until he found “more desirable work” in Nuttallburg’s coal mines and a part-time teaching gig.

In Nuttallburg, Woodson found a kindred spirit in Oliver Jones, who ran a tearoom for black workers. In Jones, he found a subject of a 1944 personal recollection, where he recalled this modest shop that was the nerve center for Nuttallburg’s black working class. The cozy setting was an alternative to the price-gouging company store, which “sold the essentials of life at prices from 60 to 100 per cent [sic] more than they were offered elsewhere. There was no objection, however, to Oliver Jones’ selling ice cream, fruits and especially watermelons, which he bought by the carload.” The autodidact Jones became a friend who was just as eager for conversation as Woodson.

Jones’ tearoom was both a sweet shop and a layman’s library. A former cook who had been injured in a mine accident, Jones could not read. But he impressed Woodson with his curiosity and broad intellectual interests. The two struck a deal: Woodson could eat to his heart’s content — for free — if he read newspapers to Jones and the Black men, many of them also illiterate, who frequented the shop for provisions and camaraderie. Woodson understood that Black people barely a generation removed from slavery, coal miners and laborers of all sorts, and mountain people had minds and interests that went beyond their often back-breaking work.

Jones and Woodson’s relationship was an intellectual bonanza for Woodson. He had read newspapers to his father, but had few publications to savor back in Virginia because “Negroes and poor whites could not spare funds for such a purpose, and we had to



Carter G.
Woodson

depend on stale news.” West Virginia miners had more disposable income, and while some spent it on gambling and alcohol, Jones spent his money on books and magazines.

Woodson wrote that Jones “bought interesting books on the Negro — J.T. Wilson’s ‘The Black Phalanx,’ W.J. Simmons’ ‘Men of Mark,’ G.W. Williams’ ‘Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion,’ and others giving the important contributions of the Negro.” Jones also subscribed to newspapers for Black West Virginians, including Christopher Payne’s “The Pioneer,” and periodicals from Cincinnati, Toledo, and Pennsylvania. And his salon entertained Black visitors, who debated topics as varied as the role of blacks in the Civil War, whether the dollar’s value should be tied to gold or silver, and the white populist politicians who organized for workers rights.

Woodson would go on to Kentucky’s Berea College; the University of Chicago; and Harvard, where he earned the second doctorate in history awarded to a Black student (the first went to another scholarly polymath, W.E.B. DuBois). But much of his formative learning — inside and outside classrooms — happened in Nuttallburg and in Huntington, W.Va. where he moved to attend high school as a young adult and then accepted a principal post at Douglass High School.

Since education was of the push-and-pull factors that propelled Woodson to West Virginia, it’s not a surprise that he trained his eyes on chronicling Black education in the state. In a 1921 paper titled “Early Negro Education in West Virginia,” Woodson noted both the small numbers of Black people in the state — some 13,000 had been enslaved in the mountainous counties — and the varied efforts to establish schools for this population.

Woodson, often known for his acerbic wit and vocal denunciations of anything that assumed black inferiority, had remarkably little to say about white resistance to black education. Writing about Storer College, a school established in Harper’s Ferry, Woodson only wrote, “This institution, of course, had its opposition. But wherever there was a helpful attitude toward the Negro, the work which it was doing in spite of its difficulties stood out as a shining light.”

However, snippets from Woodson’s writings reveal a less sanguine view of white attitudes toward Black Americans who lived in Appalachia. In “The Mis-Education of the Negro,” he remembered meeting a “very faithful vestryman of the white Episcopal Church” who boasted of participating in an 1891

“In Appalachian America the races still maintain a sort of social contact. White and black men work side by side, visit each other in their homes, and often attend the same church to listen with delight to the Word spoken by either a colored or white preacher.”

lynching of four Black coal miners in Clifton Forge, Va. And making a living may have been particularly difficult for smaller groups of Black professionals in West Virginia; as Woodson relayed, a simple land purchase he made from a white lawyer was delayed by six months because he had hired a Black attorney to see the process through. When Woodson inquired about why the transaction was taking so long, the “white attorney frankly declared that he had not taken up the matter because he did not care to treat with a Negro attorney; but he would deal with the author, who happened to be at that time the teacher of a Negro school, and was, therefore, in his place.”

That conversation probably lingered in Woodson’s mind. In 1916, Woodson published an article titled Freedom and Slavery in Appalachian America, one of the few pieces to tackle this topic at the time, in the Journal of Negro History he had founded just three years earlier. He compared the German and Scotch-Irish settlers of the “West” to the planters of the coastal regions. Woodson rhapsodized over what he argued was a love of democracy among the

hard-scrabble settlers of the mountains, citing abolitionist movements in Kentucky and West Virginia as well as well-documented resistance to state and elite control:

“In the mountainous region the public mind has been largely that of people who have developed on free soil. They have always differed from the dwellers in the district near the sea not only in their attitude toward slavery but in the policy they have followed in dealing with the blacks since the Civil War. One can observe even to-day such a difference in the atmosphere of the two sections, that in passing from the tidewater to the mountains it seems like going from one country into another. There is still in the back country, of course, much of that lawlessness which shames the South, but crime in that section is not peculiarly the persecution of the Negro. Almost any one considered undesirable is dealt with unceremoniously. In Appalachian America the races still maintain a sort of social contact. White and black men work side by side, visit each other in their homes, and often attend the same church to listen with delight to the Word spoken by either a colored or white preacher.”

Woodson’s view was part reality and part romance: Swaths of whites in Appalachia resisted the Confederacy’s call to arms, but were also not as dependent on remote state governments or on slavery for economic survival. Typically small numbers of Black residents and few community buildings did sometimes make for shared spaces — including schoolhouses — that were not segregated or policed in the same way or with the same rigor as they were in the South.

That’s one of the lesser told stories of Appalachia, stories that include Black migrants who mined coal and dreams on the frontier; former slaves who called the region home and became today’s “Afrilachians”; and small, intimate communities that simultaneously upheld and sometimes undermined Jim Crow. That was Woodson’s world. And as Huntington’s current mayor Steve Williams said during a recent Black History Month commemoration that featured Carla Hayden, the first Black head of the Library of Congress, “Woodson changed the world from Appalachia, he changed the world from Huntington, West Virginia, and his roots run deep here.”

*Dr. Greenlee is a historian and journalist.
Follow her on Twitter @CynthiaGreenlee.
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100 Days of Appalachia*

THE FATHER OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The Hidden History of West Virginia's Black Lawmakers

BY MYYA HELM

Originally published on WV Black Heritage Festival

Too often, lessons of our politics include only the stories of white West Virginians. The whitewashed history of Appalachia has primarily become its legacy, silencing the Black lawmakers that have worked to create a place where Mountaineers are always free. More than two and a half centuries after statehood, Black political power is still subject to the oppressive, white-supremacist structure that serves to erase it. Being Black in Appalachia has been overshadowed by white political narratives and documentaries to which we have all unknowingly accepted. Postbellum Appalachia is more than just what we have perceived through a white lens, and it's everyone's responsibility to recognize and explore the substantial Black influence on West Virginian legislation and policy.



Christopher Payne

As southern West Virginia's Black population grew in the late 1800s, Black individuals began to carry more weight in an overwhelmingly white political system. It wasn't until 1896 that Christopher Payne, the first Black person to serve in the West Virginia legislature, was elected. From Payne onward, Black lawmakers in West Virginia have advocated for social and racial justice. Payne began West Virginia's legacy of Black newspapers by establishing three of his own, bringing accessible information to marginalized Black communities. James Ellis, the second Black person elected to the legislature, played a vital role in revising West Virginia's educational system to increase student success to this day.

Unsurprisingly, many of West Virginia's Black women were political trailblazers as well. In 1928, Minnie Buckingham Harper was appointed to the House, shattering the glass ceiling as the first Black

woman to become a member of any legislative body in the United States. Harper's appointment reflected the growing importance of southern West Virginia's Black political coalition at the time and surely inspired women to pursue legislative careers nationwide. This included Elizabeth Simpson Dreyer, the legislature's second female Black delegate who introduced several major bills from providing compensation for victims of black lung to amending the state constitution so that women could serve as jurors. The first Black person elected to the Senate was also a woman, Marie Redd, who began to serve only about two decades ago in 1998.



Marie Redd

Black history and hidden history should not be synonymous; Black history is West Virginia history. The progress made by our Black lawmakers is a groundbreaking element of what the Mountain State is today. Their fight to build a more just society and their spirit of public service alongside racial struggle depicts their true dedication to West Virginia, and their innumerable contributions deserve to be recognized. From Christopher Payne and Minnie Buckingham Harper to Sean Hornbuckle and Danielle Walker, Black Appalachian history continues to be made in front of our very eyes, and it is our job to break down the constructs used to erase Black power as well as to learn and teach about the presence and significance of West Virginia's Black lawmakers.



Myya Helm is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Political Science and International Studies at West Virginia University. Her academic interests lie in racial and multicultural affairs, ranging from Black American politics to Middle Eastern refugee policy. She's featured in Young, Black and Gifted on page 56-58

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Virtual Remembrance Celebration



NOW IS THE TIME FOR
HOPE AND HEALING

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Black History Month Virtual Celebration

**Saturday,
Feb. 12, 2022
1:00 p.m.**



Zoom ID: 3352279190

Passcode: 112560

Keynote Speaker

Rev. Ron English

Interim minister in Charleston and consultant in healing and restorative justice.



**WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU ONLINE!
Sponsor Monroe County NAACP**



DEL. DANIELLE WALKER

‘Black Policy Is Not Taboo’

Dear Mountaineers,

I am Delegate Danielle Walker, the only Black woman serving in both West Virginia state houses. I am a House of Delegate member currently representing District 51, Monongalia County. Being the only Black woman currently allows me to stand on many shoulders of the giants who served before me, such as former Delegate and Mayor of Morgantown, Charlene Marshall, former Delegate Meesha Poore, and many others. It is a dire need and reflection that the policies I introduce, vet, and vote for are inclusive to communities of color and minorities.

The process starts with an idea from a constituent or a group seeing a need or obstacle in our state. The idea is sent to the bill, drafting to craft the legislation. The bill's sponsor may lean on fellow colleagues to sign on to the bill. After all signatures are gathered, the legislation is given a bill number and sent to a committee. This is the time for lobbying of the bill in order to have it placed on the committee's agenda. It takes calls, emails, opinion editorials, and physically coming to the Capitol to speak to your representatives to support the legislation. At times, the same efforts are needed to oppose potentially hurtful legislation.

I have attempted to educate my constituents about what I can and can't do throughout the years. Many issues are federal or local issues; it's a task to attempt to keep up with all the legislation that will impact the Black communities, rural communities, and/or minority communities. Black policy is not taboo: we know what we need to be able to thrive in our communities and what affects each of us. The time is now to be educated, be vocal, and be present.

Please follow the following:

You can search for these bills and more information at www.wvlegislature.gov

- **HB2061:** Katherine Johnson College Award Program
- **HB2062:** Creating Small Business and Minority Population Economic and Workforce; Development TaskForce
- **HB2066:** Providing School Days for Registering Eligible Students to Vote and Transportation of Registered Students to Appropriate Voting Places
- **HB2194:** Establishing the Minority Health Advisory Team
- **HB2208:** Exempting Social Security Benefits from Personal Income Tax
- **HB3141:** Designating February 3rd as Freedom Day
- **HB 2698:** C.R.O.W.N Act
- **HB3123:** Family Leave Program
- **HB 3176:** Requiring Sharp Containers in State Buildings
- **HB 4015:** Establishing West Virginia Religious Freedom Restoration Act
- **HB 2022:** Establishing West Virginia Intrastate Commerce Improvement Act
- **HB 4382:** Preserving a Patient's Right to Abortion
- **HB 4004:** Limiting abortion to 15 weeks

Look up these bills on www.wvlegislature.gov

FROM



How Black communities become ‘sacrifice zones’ for industrial air pollution

One of the most dangerous chemical plants in America sits in one of West Virginia's only majority-Black communities. For decades, residents of Institute have raised alarms about air pollution. They say concerns have “fallen on deaf ears.”

This is an excerpt from the story.

Read more at mountainstatespotlight.org

BY KEN WARD JR.

Mountain State Spotlight

Every time Pam Nixon drives along Interstate 64, she sees the Union Carbide plant. Wedged between a green hillside and the Kanawha River, the sprawling facility has helped define West Virginia's “Chemical Valley” for the better part of a century, its smokestacks belching gray plumes and fishy odors into the town of Institute, population 1,400. To many West Virginians, the plant is a source of pride — it was a key maker of synthetic rubber in World War II — and a source of hundreds of jobs. But to Nixon and others in Institute's largely Black community, it has meant something else: pollution. The plant reminds Nixon of leaks, fires, explosions — dangers she's dedicated most of her adult life to trying to stop.

This article was produced by Mountain State Spotlight and ProPublica as part of ProPublica's Local Reporting Network initiative.



Redesigning the state flag with diversity in mind

BY CRYSTAL GOOD and LEESHIA LEE

“I don’t see why there aren’t three, five, or ten of these flags that manage to look like our actual population,” said Aaron Hess, creator of the Black version of the West Virginia flag. While Hess had considered drafting a more diverse flag design for some time, his urge to jumpstart his creative pursuits intensified during the start of the George Floyd, and Black Lives Matter protests.

“I, like many folks, developed a strong urge to do something, and making a flag that depicted Black mountaineers was something I could do right then and there, without asking permission from anyone...for context, I am white,” Hess stated.

There isn’t just one standard version of the West Virginia state flag in use. The current standard flag, which includes an illustration of two characters, is not the original state flag. Hess reiterates that his opposition to the commonly used flag is due to its inherently white supremacist origin. West Virginia’s flag seal was designed by Joseph H. Diss Debar, of Doddridge County, in 1863 at the request of the Legislature.

West Virginia’s state flag has been used for approximately 150 years and features two white men. It is not uncommon for state flags, or flags in general, to evolve in order to better reflect the values of a group or community. An example of this practice can be

seen in how the U.S. national flag has historically added stars to represent new states. Hess views the lack of transformation with the standard West Virginia state flag to be the definition of exclusion.

Hess discussed the traditional 1800s flag, explaining that there is not one official clean, codified version. Those who study the flag often refer to the design as “a logo on a banner.” Hess’ adaptation of the flag is derived from the commonly used graphic design; however, he adds different physical flags, logos, emblems, and seals, choosing from a handful of versions with marginally different graphical quality depending on the need.

Elements featured on the commonly used state flag include a rifle, mining tools, foliage, and crops, alluding to the rich history of coal mining and agriculture within the state. Although these elements are foundational, Hess’ modernized version contains a doctor and engineer.

“The state still is very committed to an identity revolving around work, and medicine and development of new technologies are directions the working people of the state are heading toward in the future,” Hess said.

One prominent feature of Hess’s adaptation is the inclusion of a female doctor. However, the scarce space for definitive details allows these hyper-simplified figures to compare to the folksiness appear-

ance of other flags.

“... symbols matter, depictions matter, and only having white men on the state symbol matters. We have learned over recent decades that imagery depicting heroes and role models in media and elsewhere that allows children to see people that look like themselves in positions of respect contributes to mental well-being and a well-developed self-image,” Hess explained.

Hess concluded that West Virginia was founded on the idea that the state is a place for freedom and justice for all. Therefore, this adapted version of the state flag serves as a beginning rather than an end, joining the lineage of past flags - not discontinuing it.

“I wanted to crack open a window that had been nailed and painted shut and shout out to those on the other side.”

Hess is not the only one adding his vision to the virtual linen. West Virginian music group Duck City created not just one but two flags to represent their version of life in Appalachia.

INTERESTED IN ALTERNATE FLAGS?

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Flag_publicdelivery.org/david-hammons-african-america-flag/
www.gettysburgflag.com/flags-banners/afro-american-flag



The “License to Discriminate” Bill

Multiple versions of this bill have been introduced, including HB 4015, HB 2545, SB 24, and SB 416. All of these bills would give anyone in West Virginia a license to discriminate against LGBTQ people, people of minority faiths, and many more groups.

1. West Virginia has lost more population than any other state in the last decade. This “License to Discriminate” bill will put West Virginia at a **competitive disadvantage** and will make it harder for our business to recruit new talent. Surveys of **young workers consistently show they strongly oppose laws like this**, and these workers won’t want to relocate to our state if we adopt this law.
2. Discrimination is bad for business. The vast majority of **Fortune 500 companies (94 percent)** have **anti-discrimination policies** that protect their LGBTQ employees. Businesses are looking to invest and grow in states where their employees won’t be harassed because of who they are or who they love.
3. Our freedom of religion is one of our country’s most fundamental rights, and that’s why we already have protected this right with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Article III of West Virginia’s constitution. **This bill is unnecessary.** RFRA would go far beyond protecting religious freedom and would allow discrimination against a West Virginia — whether for their sexual orientation, gender or even the color of their skin — without consequence. **Our freedom of religion does not give us the right to discriminate.**
4. Freedom of religion and LGBTQ equality are not mutually exclusive. **More than 150 faith leaders across West Virginia have endorsed laws like the Fairness Act**, laws that would protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in employment, housing, and public spaces.

RFRA IS ANTI-BUSINESS

When Indiana passed a similar RFRA bill in 2015, major corporations and conventions pulled out of the state or reduced their investments there. In the year after Indiana lawmakers passed their version of RFRA, **the city of Indianapolis lost out on \$60 million** in tourism dollars because so many conventions pulled out of the city.

WV’s Tourism is At Stake

In 2020, tourists spent \$4.6 billion in our state, which supported more than 45,000 tourism jobs. This generated \$534.5 million in state & local tax revenue.

What do WV business leaders think?

“The [WV] Chamber **will not support** legislation which promotes or allows discrimination, nor which sends the wrong message regarding economic development and job growth in West Virginia. **The Chamber will oppose legislation (including RFRA)** that authorizes a form of discrimination or that creates new causes of action against employers. Such legal actions would place our state’s employers at a competitive disadvantage with other states.”

— WV Chamber of Commerce’s Position Paper on Diversity

Leaders of the **Charleston Regional Chamber of Commerce** announced at this year’s annual Issues & Eggs legislative breakfast that passing the Fairness Act and opposing RFRA are two of their top priorities.

What do voters think?

- New data out this month from a Republican pollster shows that 81 percent of West Virginians support protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination.
- 67 percent of Mountaineers are worried about jobs leaving their communities and our state falling further behind our neighbors because of it. That’s exactly what will happen if our state adopts a “License to Discriminate” bill.
- 64 percent of Mountaineers say business owners should not be able to deny service to a customer because they are LGBTQ.

RFRA Has Far Reaching Affects

Child Welfare – A pastor who helped kidnap a child in Virginia from her legal guardian cited religious freedom as his legal defense. In New Mexico, a local religious leader cited the state RFRA when he appealed a conviction for sexually abusing two teenagers. A federal judge just held that the federal RFRA prevented a full investigation of possible child labor law violations because the individual under investigation said that his religious beliefs forbade him from discussing those matters with the government.

Domestic Violence – Domestic violence and women’s rights organizations across the country have opposed such measures, because, as one advocate wrote, “Too often in our history, religion has been used as a justification for the abuse of women and children, often by family members.”

Public Safety – In addition to issues relating to child welfare and domestic violence, a religious exemption law could allow a police officer to refuse to even interact with certain members of the community, even while on duty. There has already been an example of this in Oklahoma, where an officer cited a RFRA law in defense of his refusal to even attend a community event hosted by a local Islamic Society. Other police officers have claimed “religious liberty” in their refusal to police an LGBTQ pride parade.

LGBTQ People – LGBTQ Americans work hard to earn a decent living and provide for their families – just like everyone else. When a gay or transgender person walks into a business or government office, they shouldn’t have to worry if they will be turned away simply because of who they are or who they love. No matter how you feel about marriage for gay and lesbian couples, treating all people with respect is something we can all agree on.

State & Local Government – Religious exemption laws muddy the legal landscape and have already led to many costly lawsuits across the country, as local municipalities have been embroiled in lengthy litigation. In Arizona, it took one small town four years to settle a dispute where the plaintiff used a similar law as a basis for refusing to comply with an ordinance regulating sign postings. The National League of Cities and the National Associations of Counties have both cautioned against such laws.

Public Health – Pharmacies could turn away women seeking to fill birth control prescriptions, people seeking to fill prescriptions for HIV prevention treatment, or transgender people seeking gender affirming hormones.

LET YOUR WV FLAG FLY

Why the BBQ Should Be Canceled

BY HOLLIS LEWIS

With the start of 2022, many states, including West Virginia, are resuming legislative sessions, state elections are upon us, and national elections will occur in 2024. Black folks will once again find ourselves on the hamster wheel of political pandering if we don't pivot. Now is the time that we become laser-focused on issues that concern us and cancel the BBQ indefinitely.

Black folks use the colloquialism "(insert name) is invited to the BBQ" when a non-black person or organization does something for Black people. While the phrase is used in jest, this creates a bad mentality amongst us. In many ways, Black folks have become the social justice doormats in which others acknowledge and use, but we are left in the cold when it comes to others advocating meaningful policies for us. I conjecture that now is the time to reevaluate what it means to have effective allies.

With the unjust killing of many Black people over the past several years, Black folks have become acutely aware of the damage of unchecked policies, which has caused us to address this through policy evaluation. We must use this focus on political issues to educate and properly organize to ensure that our progress isn't perpetually regressed. These include voting rights, economics, education, discrimination, criminal justice, and more. In West Virginia, we are still seeking a favorable resolution on the Crown Act



and the removal of Confederate statues from our state capitol grounds. Too often, we find ourselves pleading with "allies" to prioritize our issues and not hijack our narratives for their benefit, while contending with our elected officials to observe our fundamental human rights. It is exhausting, and Black people must quell distractions to resolve issues that loom over our communities.

I would never advocate Black Americans seclude ourselves and not work with others. That would not be wise; we should work with those willing to work with us. However, people will inevitably become preoccupied with their issues and be limited in their willingness to advocate for others. At this time, Black people can ill afford to constantly be a Trojan horse. Even some of our biggest allies have shown a dismissive attitude toward issues important to Black people. Jane Elliot, a well know white woman who teaches anti-racism, diverted a question about reparations for descendants of American slavery into advocating reparations for Native Americans instead. Locally,

at the height of the social justice protests, several white allies in Charleston, West Virginia, attempted to stage a rally in the name of Black Lives Matter without permission from that organization. SOAR, an addiction response organization in West Virginia, set up a needle exchange program in a predominantly Black neighborhood without consulting residents or community leaders. Even many national programs intended on addressing historical disparities amongst Black Americans have become co-opted.

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris recently went to Atlanta, Georgia to address voting rights, the filibuster, and several matters concerning to Black Americans. Several Black grassroots organizations chose not to be present during the speech. The message was clear; we need your action, not your talk if you want our support. In that same vein, Black West Virginians must reconsider our support of Senator Joe Manchin who blocked several pieces of legislation that could have benefited black people.

Ultimately, the equitable results we seek cannot be accomplished through emotional connections or tradition, but rather strategic associations based on an expected outcome. Therefore, instead of inviting those who wish to partner with us to the BBQ, let's schedule a meeting and talk numbers, business, intent, and strategy.

Hollis Lewis is a legal professional, adjunct criminal justice professor, and co-chairman of the West Virginia Democratic Party Black Caucus.

Auditions

FAIRVIEW

Alban Arts Center
April 2, 2 p.m.
&
April 3, 2 p.m.

Roles available for
Men 20 - 50+
Women 18 - 50+



TAX DECISIONS HAVE REAL IMPACT ON REAL PEOPLE

Don't Doze Off When Budgets Come Up

BY RICK MARTIN

When you start talking about West Virginia's state budget and tax system, eyes glaze over. I get it. Budgets and taxes are boring—but breathing can be boring until someone starts choking you. Then it's fascinating.

In reality, state budget decisions impact the lives of every West Virginian in terms of K-12 education; higher and vocational education; services for children, public health and health care; families, veterans, people with disabilities and seniors; public safety; libraries; parks; outdoor recreation and more.

Budgets are also moral documents in the sense that they reveal the state's true priorities. Anyone can wax poetic about supporting kids or the elderly, but budgets show the real deal. In the Bible, Jesus said "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Or, if you prefer, money talks and...something else walks.

Fortunately, you don't need to go down the wormhole to learn what you need to know to be an advocate for fair priorities. The basics are pretty simple.

The main pot of state money to watch is the General Revenue Fund, which is over \$4 billion dollars. West Virginia has some decent priorities in terms of where the money goes, although it could do better in terms of fully funding basic needs. Over 40 percent goes to K-12 education. Health and human resources get around 25 percent. Higher education gets around 10 percent and everything else (seniors, public safety, commerce and the costs of administration, the judicial system, the legislature and more).

Taxes and tax revolts

This money comes from various taxes as well as lottery revenue. The personal income tax accounts to around 40 percent of the state budget, by far the largest contributor. Next comes sales taxes, which in 2019 accounted for almost 30 percent of the general revenue fund. The corporate net income tax only contributed around 4 percent to the budget the same year. Special taxes are also levied on things like tobacco, alcohol, soda, automobile sales, motor fuel, etc.

There's also a severance tax for the extraction of

You don't need to go down the wormhole to learn what you need to know to be an advocate for fair priorities. The basics are pretty simple.

minerals such as coal, oil, and gas, which is mostly paid by the out of state corporations that own so much of West Virginia's natural resources.

One way to look at the different kinds of taxes is to see how they impact people with different levels of income. Regressive taxes, such as those on sales, hit low income people hardest because they spend more of their money on basic needs. Taxes on incomes are progressive in that people with higher incomes pay a somewhat higher rate. In general, our tax system leans to the regressive side: and this could get worse.

Sometimes, people portray progressive taxation as radical idea. Actually, it carries the Adam Smith seal of approval. In his 1776 study of *The Wealth of Nations*, widely seen as the classic celebration of capitalism, Smith said, "The subjects of every state ought to contribute towards the support of the government, as nearly as possible, in proportion to their respective abilities; that is, in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy under the protection of the state."

Ever since the Reagan era, business groups and their allies in politics have pushed an anti-tax narrative and even claimed that lower taxes on corporations and the wealthy will resort in more economic growth, more prosperity for all, and increased revenue—something that hasn't happened. Instead, the results tend to be budget cuts and growing inequality.

West Virginia is a case in point of that failed strategy. Beginning in 2007, the state began cutting corporate income taxes and eliminating the business

franchise tax. The idea was that this would create more jobs. The jobs never came, but there were years of budget cuts. In fact, the WV Center on Budget and Policy has calculated that the revenue lost due to these tax cuts would have been enough to cover in-state tuition at all our colleges and universities, which really would have been a game changer.

What to watch

Unfortunately, fans of cutting taxes are not deterred by the shaky record. If anything, they double down on it. For the last several years, there have been sporadic efforts to eliminate or phase out the income tax, the biggest source of general revenue and the most progressive tax.

That would necessarily involve either massive cuts to state programs (think closing universities and skyrocketing tuition for those that remain, for example) or else shifting taxes to people with lower incomes. Or both, with low income and working people paying more and getting less. So far, that hasn't happened, but we can expect more efforts to push it through in the future.

In this session, we're likely to see more efforts to reduce various taxes in the interests of corporations and the wealthy. One to watch is an effort to reduce severance taxes, which in 2021 brought in over \$331 million. Of that, nearly \$300 million went to the state and the remainder to local governments.

We can also expect to see a constitutional amendment on the ballot this November to phase out property taxes on business equipment and machinery, which brings in around \$400 million, mostly to county governments and public schools, which have already taken a major hit in the last session. If approved by voters, it could even impact the ability of local governments to levy taxes for things like ambulance services, public libraries, and such. Let's hope voters care more about kids than cuts.

Bottom line: tax and budget decisions have huge impacts on real people. If you care about the needs of ordinary West Virginians, it might be good to resist the temptation doze off when you hear about taxes and budgets.

Read Rick Martin on goatrobe.blogspot.com



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Call your State Delegates and Senators to let them know how important it is to support Worker-Owned Cooperatives this legislative session.

Get contact information for State Delegates here:
<https://www.wvlegislature.gov/house/roster.cfm>

Get contact information for State Senators here:
<https://www.wvlegislature.gov/senate1/roster.cfm>



2019
Worker-Owned Coop
Economic Report



During my years in college as a business student and well after I left to pursue a career as an accountant, three questions have remained imprinted in my mind.

WHO SHOULD OWN?

WHO SHOULD PROFIT?

WHO SHOULD DECIDE?

After stumbling across the cooperative business model that was never taught or mentioned in college or graduate school, the answer to these three questions started to become more clear. In fact, there is only one answer to all three questions. It's YOU! The WORKER should own the business, should share its profits, and should decide how and where profits are invested over time.

Searching for this answer landed me in my role as the Director of Lending at New Economy Works WV.

As a representative and local ambassador of Seed Commons and Southern Reparations Loan fund networks, we work according to five guiding principles. (1) Building cooperative, democratic ownership within communities, (2) productive sustainability, (3) maximizing community benefit, (4) radical inclusion and (5) Non Extraction.

This legislative session, we have an opportunity to convince West Virginia lawmakers that we need a Worker-Cooperative Statute in West Virginia. It is our job to remain engaged. We need this law because laws provide security and protection. How do we protect our businesses? How can we ensure that we are accounted for? Right now for our community, this is a critical time to action for us, by us! Worker-owned cooperatives are business enterprises that are owned and governed by their employees. Cooperative laws would provide more options

to attract resources including human and financial capital to black and minority owned businesses.

Demographics of worker owners show a majority of black and brown people, with the largest concentration being Latinx workers (37.9%), followed by Black workers (12.7%) and Other (6.2%). Together, people of color make up the majority of Worker-Owned businesses. Females make up the majority of the workforce at worker cooperatives as well (62.5%).

In this business model, compensation is measured in terms of both wages and profit sharing, providing a significant difference in annual compensation.

The average wage paid at all reporting worker cooperatives is \$19.67 per hour, more than \$7.00 higher than the minimum wage in the 13 states with the most businesses taking this form.

Based on this report, Worker-Owned Cooperatives on average, distributed profit shares of \$8,241 to each worker-owner across the membership.

Today, our people need all of the alternatives we can get to the side job (gig) economy, low wages and exploitation. What would it look like if the workers owned the businesses, made key strategic decisions, and shared in the profits?

Worker-Owned Cooperatives, unlock an additional option for us to own our business and communities, collectively.

The narrative is often; creating better jobs, building economic wealth and strengthening our communities. Worker Co-ops are a vehicle to community wealth building. Cooperatives are a bipartisan solution to growing West Virginia. Let's get ahead of the curve. It is essential that we adopt worker cooperative statutes into legislation to protect all West Virginian rights to have equity and ownership of their work.

Co-op Invitation for BBG

BY CRYSTAL GOOD

Here's something we'll bet you never imagined anybody ever asking you:

How would you like to be an owner, not a big one, but really and truly an owner, of the only publication in West Virginia that aims to serve the state's 65,000 Black people?

That would be this publication, the one you're reading right now, Black by God | The West Virginian. We are an emerging news and storytelling organization centering Black voices from the Mountain State, already publishing a weekly digital newsletter and a quarterly print newspaper. You'd be an owner of BBG with a stock certificate and a vote in the annual meeting.

By now you should be wondering if we're putting you on.

We're not. We're dead serious. And we hope you'll keep reading and join us in seriousness. Knowing what's going on and what it means to the Black people of our state really matters.

BBG's vision is that it will be a cooperative, owned by hundreds and eventually thousands of our readers, not unlike the way depositors own credit unions. We deliver trustworthy news and authentic storytelling — of, by and for the Black people of our state.

This is true grassroots ownership, from the bottom up. There would be no owning family, no distant corporation that looks to BBG as a source of profits that would get sucked out of our state to line pockets on Wall Street. The owners would be the co-op members — lots of us. And, by law, every member, including you, would have only one vote and thus an equal say in how the co-op is run.

A cooperative BBG would develop into the voice of the Black people of West Virginia. A significant voice. A powerful voice.

Have you ever heard a voice even remotely like this? No?



That's because no one has ever created a mechanism for blending enough individual voices to form this combined voice and make it heard. Until now. This is exactly BBG's design.

Let your imagination run. How might West Virginia change if it had a grassroots institution with vocal cords on this scale? How might your life change if you lent your voice to this mighty Black civic choir?

So, you're wondering, what would be in it for me if I became a member/owner of the BBG co-op?

First, the bad news: There's no way you'd get rich. Co-ops like this, and like credit unions, are designed to meet members' needs, not for profit-making.

The good news? You'd get an ownership stake and a vote in selecting the co-op's board, which would hire and oversee the editor and general manager. Do you know anyone, anywhere, who owns any kind of piece of a crucial community institution like this one? No? You could.

More good news: As an owner/member you'd be invited every week to offer ideas to BBG's editors. You'd be welcomed at the annual meeting and other events that are just for owners. If you wanted a bigger role, you could enroll in one of our citizen journalism classes. Perhaps you could become a community correspondent — or even a full-fledged Folk Reporter.

And more: Being a member costs no more than a digital subscription to a daily newspaper.

If this interests you, we'd love to hear from you — right now. BBG is not yet set up as a co-op. First, we need to know how many people like this idea enough to express interest. So send us an email: crystal@blackbygod.org. Be sure to tell us your name, email address, and where you live. Please include questions you might have — and ideas you'd like to offer. After all, the idea is that we'll make BBG great, and our lives better, by combining our voices. Please join in.

THEY'RE TRYING NOT TO HEAR IT

WV Lawmakers Have a Lot to Learn about Cannabis

BY RUSTY WILLIAMS

There's not a single problem that can't be solved with a proper education. When it comes to cannabis, West Virginia lawmakers have got a lot to learn.

For nearly a decade, my life has been dedicated to ending the prohibition of the flower that got me through chemotherapy. I've spent countless hours pounding the marble halls of the capitol complex, talking about the immediate need to end prohibition to anyone willing to listen, and though I get a lot of credit for my work on medical cannabis, my focus has always been on decriminalization. Before we allow industry to come in here and use the cannabis plant to build their empires, it is imperative that we take every possible step to right the societal wrongs created and maintained by prohibition.

Unfortunately, unless it's an association or a representative from some big-money lobby firm doing the talking, our lawmakers don't seem to be very interested in listening.

When I talk about the fact that over the last decade, nationally, we saw a downward trend in the number of non-violent cannabis arrests while in that same time frame, West Virginia saw a 49 percent increase, they're not trying to hear it.

When I bring up the fact that Black West Virginians make up less than 4 percent of the state's population but 19 percent of the non-violent cannabis

arrests, they're not trying to hear it.

When I mention the fact that nationally, Black folks are four times more likely to be arrested for non-violent cannabis offenses but here in these hills, the risk of arrest is 7.3 times the rate of whites, they're not trying to hear it.

In the years I've spent engaging lawmakers on behalf of cannabis reform, I've been told multiple times that I need to "leave the racial stuff out of it and focus on the economics" by elected officials on both sides of the aisle. It doesn't matter how much information is presented to back up every single claim; they just don't seem at all interested in talking about race.

In the age of information, ignorance is a choice, and when you boil it all down, willful ignorance is drowning out reason and stomping out and all attempts at cannabis reform.

This is where you come in.

The WV Medical Cannabis Act didn't get passed because elected officials felt like it was the right thing to do. We became the 29th state to legalize medical cannabis because the people stood up and demanded it. We figured out how to use social media and the tools we had at our disposal to organize and establish a network of like-minded West Virginians, and as a result, we were able to successfully push a piece of game-changing legislation through one of the most anti-weed legislatures in the country.

We figured out what they're terrified of us knowing; when we stand up together, we can move moun-

tain with little to no money or resources.

If we stand together, we can create a cannabis industry that works to heal a century of state-sanctioned trauma. We can ensure that every non-violent cannabis offense on the books is immediately expunged. Through the implementation of micro-permits and language supporting the equitable distribution of industry licenses, we can give WV small businesses and small farmers the tools they need to lift entire communities out of poverty.

If we work together, we can put West Virginia on the path to equitable, sustainable prosperity.

There's just no simpler way to say it; as each day of the legislative session passes, every single one of our elected officials not actively working to end the draconian prohibition of cannabis grows more and more complicit in the perpetuation of institutional racism. Maya Angelou said to "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." When it comes to the racist prohibition of cannabis, it's time to demand that the folks we elect to represent us in Charleston and on every level of government, do better.

Please take a few minutes to call your representatives and urge them to support ending the prohibition of cannabis and get five of your friends to do the same.

Rusty Williams is a patient advocate on the West Virginia Medical Cannabis Advisory Board as well as an artist and activist.

Meet Jason Tart, one of the country's rare Black farmers

BY TAUHID CHAPPELL

Black-run farms make up less than 2 percent of all the U.S. farms. One of those rare farmers lives right here in West Virginia, and he's incorporating a myriad of crops, including hemp, on his farm to help heal the community.

When I first heard about West Virginia's cannabis market, all I could think of when it came to the Mountain State was a former coal powerhouse with a

lot of trees – and no, not cannabis but the actual land that was blanketed by the Appalachia region.

Four years after it legalized medical marijuana, the state has finally seen its first dispensary open, with Trulieve Cannabis Corp. being the first mover to open in Morgantown. While medical marijuana and the ongoing legalities around cannabis legalization at both the state and federal level drag on, the plant's "cousin," industrial hemp — the type of cannabis that has less than 0.3 percent THC expressed in its

flower — has been a popular industrial crop that's seen expansion and growing interest in West Virginia farming.

Among the West Virginian farmers discussing hemp is a rarity: Jason Tart, one of the country's few Black farmers who's not only hoping to increase the makeup of Black-run farms in the country, but also reversing the stigma and negative narrative surrounding hemp based on his personal experiences

Continued on page 46



Text Us



Website

**#YOUOWNTHEJOINT**

Element Federal Credit Union is known for going places and doing things others won't. Our creativity and innovative spirit have helped us serve a wide variety of groups and industries. The cannabis industry, and those who support it, is no different. Our passion for serving you is what separates us from all others.

If you're looking for transparent, safe, and secure banking, Element is
#ThePlaceYouBelong.

Because we're a cooperative, it also means **#YouOwnTheJoint.**

ElementFCU.org

Your savings insured by NCUA.

TART from page 44

and first-person account of how the plant helped his family and network. In a recent interview with YES! Solutions Journalism Magazine in January, Jason expressed his desire in building an everlasting and enduring farming economy that would be made for people like us, by people like us.

Q *Let's first start with some basic background: Can you describe how community agriculture influenced your upbringing? Did it influence you directly to become a farmer as a profession?*

In West Virginia, growing food just came with the territory for most people in the area when I was growing up. Gardens were a very common thing and many raised small numbers of livestock for personal and community use also. It really gave me a great appreciation for family and community and showed me to never take any blessing for granted. Hard work and discipline were a part of normal life for us and it helped shape my work ethic and commitment to getting the job done, whatever the task. Furthermore, being able to see what folks in this region were doing to sustain themselves years ago played a vital role in helping me to shape my approach to agriculture and in understanding what agriculture in Appalachia truly is.

Q *Describe your life navigation as an early adult (in your 20s) — did you maintain your relationship with agriculture while you were away from your community? How, and why, did you return to agriculture after your military and contractor work?*

Upon graduation, I joined the military, serving as a Military Policeman. I had a family most of my 20s so my focus was primarily on caring and providing for my wife and three children. Upon leaving the military, I got into DoD contracting work. This became my career path, once I left West Virginia after high school, my connection to nature and agriculture was none. I spent about 15 years in the DoD contracting world and then ended up moving back to West Virginia to care for my mom. She was diagnosed with Sarcoidosis. Once we returned, my mom and I started a small garden, which is where my engagement with agriculture as a profession started.

Q *In the beginning of starting McDowell County Farms (MCF), what barriers and hurdles did you have to face in regards to resources, financial support*



“Food is our medicine
and medicine is our
food.”
— Jason Tart

and technical support? Were these barriers typical in what you saw and heard from other farmers?

Once we started MCF, we started to really engage with the industry and all the agencies around the state who we thought could assist us. We realized right away West Virginia did not have a plan for economic development if it didn't involve energy. Most of the state agencies had no real plan for agriculture. When I joined the Vets to Ag program (a WV Department of Ag initiative) we also realized that the idea of agriculture by those in leadership was based on a traditional ag model. Most of Appalachia is mountainous so there is very little access to flat land. We also live in a very poor area with some of the worst health statistics in the country. The culture here is one that does not promote a healthy lifestyle. The typical food desert community and very few people here have any interest in changing this situation. We did try working with the WVDA but realized we were of no significance to the leadership there, they blew us off. Being a black farmer in West Virginia has had its own set of challenges, so we have worked mainly independent of any West

Virginia-run organizations, as they demonstrated no desire to support us.

Q *West Virginia has beautiful land, and rich agriculture but it's not known for that. What would you like people to know about your home state as it pertains to the richness it offers to prospective farmers, young and old?*

Mountain farming is a mode of farming that is unique and presents a wide range of opportunities. Things that most folks wouldn't consider when thinking of agriculture. And most of the things unique to this region can be very lucrative if done correctly. Honey, maple syrup, fruit, livestock, medicinal herbs and several other products are here. The education and awareness around what agriculture is in Appalachia is very limited in the area so we are working diligently to create training and development around these opportunities. We have the capacity to produce lots of food and be major contributors to the food supply chain in the US and definitely the east coast. There are jobs and small business opportunities in Appalachia; it's just not coal anymore and the state of West Virginia at least is really behind in identifying economic development opportunities for the state. Agribusiness can certainly be a big one.

Q *There are not many Black farmers who exist in the country, how are you working to build the next generation to increase representation?*

We are currently doing some workforce development and entrepreneur training with Economic Development Greater East (EDGE) and Coalfield Development, two nonprofits to train people in areas we've identified as economic drivers in the region. We are on our second training class now and 90 percent of the trainees over the last two years have been African American. The current group of five is made up of all African Americans. We've also started a youth organization (American Youth Agripreneur Association). A nonprofit that focuses on training young people in agribusiness. We want to ensure we reach folks at the right age and also ensure we focus on getting the information on these opportunities to the African American communities throughout the region. We work with West Virginia State University, one of two HBCU's in the state and also the National Resource Conservation Service with the USDA on the 1890 land grant scholarship program. A lot has changed since we started.

Q Can you describe why it's important that more Black community members embrace agriculture and returning to stewarding the land to improve a community's health and wellbeing?

The majority of African Americans in the US live in poverty, live in the inner cities and live in food desert communities. African Americans in rural communities face these same conditions and in most cases, have access to even less opportunities than those in the inner cities. West Virginia has no black agenda, agriculture or otherwise. Agribusiness is in a growing need, as the country is experiencing shortages and big ag has created real problems with the environment and doing business sustainably. Small farms once ruled agriculture in the country and it's obvious that method is the future. Black farmers made up about 20 percent of the farmers in the country at one time and big ag had a lot to do with their demise. With us living in mostly food deserts, poor and drug-infested communities, agriculture just makes sense. Black people in the U.S. are statistically the sickest group of people. We have no choice, getting engaged with food production and policing what our communities are being fed is critically important if we are going to change the situation for future generations of black people. Food is our medicine and medicine is our food, we have to stop letting Big Agriculture and Big Pharma continue feeding us lies.

Q How did hemp/cannabis make its way into your life and what drew you to the crop?

My father, brother and I are all disabled veterans. Seeing the suffering veterans face and living in McDowell County with this opioid situation, it's obvious hemp/cannabis could do some major good here. I know many veterans and people in the community that would prefer a more natural form of treatment and not deal with the addictive effects of pharmaceutical drugs.

Q Dream a little: Where do you see your farms in 5 years? Where do you see your community in 5 years? What steps are you taking to ensure your dream and concepts are turning into reality?

In 5 years I see my farm producing honey, maple syrup and poultry. Having some value added products in place is also a part of my 5 year plan. My farm will also be a place that people (young and old) can come to get training on food production in Appalachia and a support system for others who are looking to engage the food business.

Tauhid Chappell is an Executive Board Member and a credentialed Parliamentarian of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists. He is an 8-year veteran of the media industry.

Black Farmer Agenda WV

WV/Federal guidelines

Training and Support to Black Community/Black Farmers/Black Businesses to be State/Federal Vendors

- Money for the Black community to be trained to be State/Federal vendors
- Public campaign to state and cities to understand rules for hiring Black vendors
- Hiring of independent data company to track hiring of Black Federal vendors in WV
- Audit of cities/state/counties not hiring any Black vendors

Land Access

- Land speculators come in and "rob" opportunities for locals to buy land, especially in counties with high levels of properties seized through nonpayment of taxes. These companies should be given last choice, AFTER private West Virginians, to purchase land. This disproportionately affects residents in the coalfields to expand into agriculture and other enterprises.

Training and Support to Create Black Farmers

- Attracting in population to be agriculturalists — helping interested individuals understand the potential for an agricultural sector throughout Appalachia and how these efforts can connect to other Black communities throughout the east coast to build viable, necessary food and business networks
- Great opportunity for Black population — maybe EDGE and other groups partner to run a marketing campaign
- Create working group comprised of nonprofits and other organizations to research, discuss and implement solutions to propel Black West Virginians forward in agribusiness and other enterprises
- Work with WV historic HBCUs—more money for them to support and attract Black farmers
- Land review of unused federal, state, county parcels land to be put into a trust for Black and beginning farmers
- Build education and awareness around opportunities in Agribusiness industry

EDGE's Resource and Resilience Center in Kimball, W.Va.

- EDGE and other nonprofits as organizing vehicles for implementation as State actors have few connections and inroads into West Virginia Black community
- EDGE as a research center on Black farming expansion in West Virginia in the 21st Century

Precedents in Virginia: www.nationalblackfarmersassociation.org and Florida: floridablackfarmers.com

Current target populations:

McDowell	Raleigh	Wayne	Ohio
Mercer	Kanawha	Wood	Marshall
Fayette	Cabell	Monongalia	

Additional: Reserve funds for Black Marijuana production

WITNESS

Black By God

Folk Reporter Program

SEEKING VOLUNTEER TO WITNESS 1 WV LEGISLATURE COMMITTEE MEETING IN PERSON OR VIRTUAL.

BBG's Folk Reporters Program seeks citizens, civic actors, creators, and collaborators representing a broad base of intergenerational, diverse communities to explore the 2022 West Virginia Legislative agenda that impacts Black citizens.

Black By God is centered on developing and distributing content that monitors the West Virginia Legislature, contributes to a communal pool of knowledge, and speaks to Black citizens.

We plan on bringing the community together by democratizing news and information at the local level, focusing on Black issues and voices, and holding local government accountable to the people; all the people benefit us all.

What's the Purpose of this Program?

Folk Reporters are able to provide something uniquely valuable - they don't tread on grounds that have already been covered at the local level, but are able to explore the grounds where value and impact can be more apparent, especially for Black citizens in West Virginia.

WITNESS

How Our Program Works

We are launching our 2022 program as a pilot in partnership with Los Angeles-based journalist Alicia Ramirez, who will also be launching a nonprofit newsroom later this year in Riverside County, California. This partnership is grounded in a shared commitment to serve rural communities by empowering everyday residents to bear witness and inform.

Together, BBG and Ramirez will be implementing a pilot program during the 2022 West Virginia legislative session to serve as a template for her forthcoming newsroom and hopefully for communities across the nation. But...we can't do this without you. We are seeking volunteers to virtually attend one or more committee meetings during the legislative sessions. We call this WITNESS. The 2022 program will provide one (1) training along with a general guide of how the meetings tend to work and what type(s) of information to be on the lookout for. Folk Reporters can follow the template and guide, but those comfortable doing so can also branch out and record their initial impressions via social media in a Twitter thread or a Facebook or Instagram post. At the end of the committee meeting, Folk Reporters will be expected to email their reports and/or a link to the social media posts to BBG.

Folk Reporters will also receive creative and editing support from the BBG team and Ramirez.

We hope this will be the start of putting the power of the pen back into the hands of local community members to support and empower homegrown news coverage.

Folk Reporters are the foundation for Black By God's editorial mission; they can help to fill the current void of media and reporting in West Virginia.

Folk Reporting 101:

Point of View: This type of journalism is typically done in third person perspective - the same details you, as the reporter, would include in a testimony can be shared from the third person perspective, as what is taking place cannot be denied by other attendees.

Different Sides: As asked in the template, there may be conflicting opinions or lack thereof. In meetings, silence sometimes does not translate into agreement. Ideally, reports include viewpoints from the conflicting sides to ensure all voices are represented.

Ethical Considerations: Advocates of certain stances write for opinion columns - Folk Reporters are meant to give voices to the voiceless and hold those in power within the West Virginia legislature accountable.

And remember: You're doing something that would not otherwise get done.



FOR THE FIRST PART OF THIS TEMPLATE, WE'RE GOING TO FOCUS ON YOU, THE OBSERVER.

1. How do you feel in this space? Do you feel like you're welcome in the space or do you feel out of space? If you feel out of place, what do you think could be done better to create a more inclusive space?

2. How did you prepare for this meeting? Did you eat something today? Are you hydrated and well-rested? How do you feel going into this space?

How did you feel before the meeting? Did that change during the meeting? How did you feel after the conclusion of the meeting? Was there anything in particular that made you feel a certain kind of way?

(FOR THE SECOND PART OF THIS TEMPLATE, WE'RE GOING TO FOCUS ON SETTING THE SCENE OF A MEETING.)

4. Take a look around. Who's in the room? What's the demographic make-up of the room? Are they dressed formally or informally?

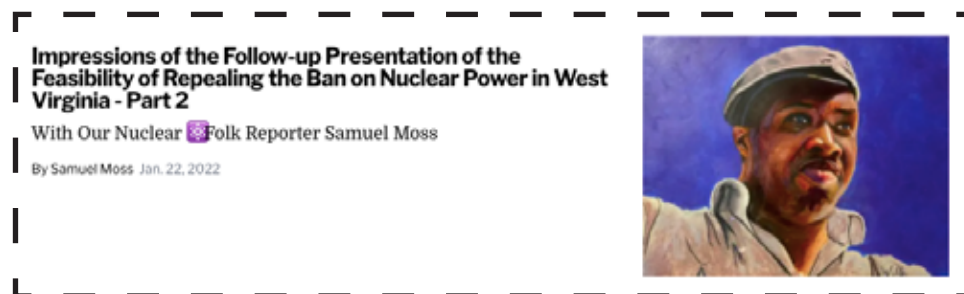
5. Now, we're going to focus on what you hear. Who is speaking and how much time do they take to express their views? Does it seem like those in positions of power are actively listening to the speaker?

6. Finally, what is the vibe of the room? Are people calm and orderly? Does there seem to be some sort of conflict?

(FOR THE FINAL PART OF THIS TEMPLATE, WE'RE GOING TO FOCUS ON THE CONTENTS OF THE MEETING.)

7. What was on the agenda? (copy and paste or send a link to a digital copy of the agenda). Were there any items that took a really long time to get through? Was anything tabled (not discussed) or pushed to a later meeting? Did any individual item on the agenda cause a heated debate? Were there any items that you felt should have gotten more (or less) discussion?

8. What kinds of metaphors and references are being made? Who is the audience for these references? Do you relate to the references being made?



Check out an example

**HE'S A DAD, A HUSBAND AND
LIKES PHYSICS! READ IT HERE:**



**Volunteer and
become a citizen
journalist here**

304-207-0352
Folk Reporters tip line

**DONATE TO
BBG's FOLK
REPORTER
PROGRAM**





Photos by Kyle Vass

W.Va. Del. Danielle Walker, center, speaks at the abortion rights rally.

“This is our time to fight and
take our voices back”

— Kiyia Brandon, 20

On Jan. 22 women and allies came together on the Capitol steps in Charleston, West Virginia to tell their stories and advocate for abortion rights. Featured at the rally were Kiyia Brandon and Ann Michelle Mechail, previously covered in Black By God for their fearless activism against anti-abortion protesters known for harassing those trying to visit the local Women’s Health Center for services.



Photo by Candice Maxwell

Speakers Ann Michelle Mechail, left, and Kiyia Brandon, right, meet beloved activist Rita Ray.

TWO TAKES ON

Construction of Nuclear Power Plants in West Virginia Presentation

BY SAMUEL MOSS

Folk Reporter

The commercial utilization of nuclear energy has been around since the mid-1950s, and contrary to the beliefs of some, this green zero carbon emission source of energy is the most efficient and reliable method in providing energy to the masses. Despite this fact, West Virginia is one of thirteen states that currently has a ban against nuclear power plants. As the effects of climate change are becoming more prevalent, West Virginia legislation is now considering lifting this ban. In March of 2021, a House Bill was introduced to repeal this ban; and today various representatives from the Nuclear Energy Institute, Terra Power, Nuscale, American Electric Power, Appalachian Power, Curio, and the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources exhibited a presentation on the possible benefits of allowing nuclear power plants to operate in West Virginia.

Some of the highlights from the presentation were following: How the construction of a nuclear power plant would temporarily generate more than 1,200 jobs; and upon the completion of construction, a

force of 270 personnel would be utilized to run each plant for the next 60 years. How some of the latest nuclear plants use advanced techniques in heat mediums and energy conversion to reduce nuclear



Moss

waste in comparison to conventional methods. How West Virginia's coal-fired plants can be converted into nuclear plants. How nuclear plants produce almost two times more energy than natural gas-fired and almost 3 times more energy than coal-fired plants while mitigating and protecting against possible black and brownouts. Besides obtaining energy from a zero-carbon emission plant facility, probably the best possible benefit covered was how operating nuclear power plants in West Virginia would increase the salaries of those operating these plants in comparison to coal-fired power plants.

As a Navy Veteran who has served and deployed on both nuclear-powered and fossil fuel-powered ships,

I have been able to experience first-hand how nuclear power plants are more efficient, convenient, and reliable than those reliant on fossil fuels. In comparison, Navy ships that are not nuclear powered must conduct continuous dangerous and complicated underway replenishments with fueling ships, resulting in warships being left repeatedly vulnerable to enemy attack if not protected by an accompanying guided missile ship. Nuclear-powered ships do not require fueling replenishments, which greatly reduces the amount of time a ship is left vulnerable from replenishments.

If West Virginia allows nuclear power plants to operate within the state lines, any issues that may arise from disrupted supply lines is no longer a major mitigating factor. America's current issues with interrupted supply lines would alone be a solid reason why West Virginia needs to diversify its sources of energy by incorporating nuclear power plants as an energy option to supply the state's growing energy needs with advancing technologies. To simply put it, nuclear energy allows West Virginia the capability to operate more independently with greater efficiency.

Read more about Samuel Moss on FusionandGravity.com

NAACP Opposed to Repealing Ban on Nuclear Power Plants

The West Virginia NAACP is opposed to HB 2882 and SB 4: Relating to repealing a ban on construction of nuclear power plants.

The WV Code, §16 - 27 A- 1 and §16 - 27 A- 2 were written into law to protect the residents of West Virginia from "undue hazard to the health, safety and welfare" until permanent disposal of radioactive waste can be safely and successfully developed. Nothing has changed since the Code was written. There is no need for urgency to repeal the ban. The technology for small modular nuclear reactors is not marketable yet, and there is no historical reference to base a conclusion on.

During a January 18th bipartisan town hall discussion on the pros and cons for 'advanced' nuclear power in West Virginia, it was stated the repeal of the ban is needed to allow discussion. I respectful

disagree. A special legislative committee can be convened to research information and have discussions over several months before making a decision, without repealing the ban.

Depending upon your final decision, this would allow you time to draft legislation for construction and operation of nuclear energy facilities, and for safe permanent disposal of radioactive waste. Repealing the ban will remove the safety valve protecting West Virginia, and leave a void.

Our State is called 'Wild and Wonderful' and 'Almost Heaven' for a reason — its beauty. It is one thing to attract businesses and population, and another to retain them. Don't make it more difficult by inviting another industry with the potential to cause further degradation of our land, air and water that can last for hundreds of years.

In planning for the future, we have the opportunity to advance greener energy: wind, solar, hydroelectric, and geothermal power. On the West Virginia Geological & Economical Survey home page is a map that shows we are "a relative hot spot in Eastern U.S. with subsurface temperatures high enough for geothermal energy generation on a commercial scale."

The West Virginia Office of Energy page states, "Mile-or-more-deep wells can be drilled into underground reservoirs to tap steam and very hot water ... for use in ... electricity generation, direct use, and heating and cooling." This is what we should develop. Again, WV NAACP is in opposition to HB 2882 and SB 4.

*Pamela Nixon, Chair
WV NAACP Environmental & Climate Justice
Committee. pamnixon@aol.com*

Tips for Writing an Op-ED

The term op-ed originally meant an opinion piece that appeared in the New York Times opposite the editorial page. Now it means a fairly short and clear opinion piece about an issue people care — or should care — about.

Like letters to the editor, op-eds are aimed at influencing public attitudes. While they're not silver bullets, they are an efficient way to reach a wider audience than we could by conversations, meetings and/or just posting on social media. And they can be an effective part of any campaign to move a public policy agenda.

In terms of preferred length, this varies by media outlet. Most letters to the editor should be under 250 words. For op-eds, the range might be 400-800, although you might get away with more sometimes.

It's also good to think about one's ideal audience. Typically, they won't convert hard core opponents, but they can move people who haven't made up their minds in your direction—or at least away from what you're opposing.

Win or lose, there's something powerful about speaking your mind

What does it take to write an op-ed?

While there is no formula for success, here are some basic elements:

■ **A news hook.** It is often easier to get an opinion piece placed in a media outlet if there is some connection to something people are already aware of. This could be a major event, anniversary, trend or any issue that people may be interested in.

■ **A good lede.** "Lede" is journalism-speak for what most people call a lead, that is an interesting first sentence or paragraph that gets the readers' attention and makes them want to keep going.

■ **A clear point to make—and make it soon.** Ideally, a reader should have no doubt about what you are trying to say.

■ **Arguments to back up your case.** These can be from your own experience; facts, research and data; and/or stories that the reader may connect with emotionally. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle taught there were three main forms of persuasion: ethos, which gives the reader or listener a sense of who you are and why your opinion matters; logos or reasoned arguments; and pathos or appeals to emotion. Yours may rely on one or more of these. Some will appeal to all three.

■ Be aware of opposing viewpoints and respectfully try to counter them.

■ Have a strong conclusion that leaves no doubt about what you were trying to say.

Other basic tips:

■ If you can talk and read, you can write.

■ Find your voice. Some of the best op-eds give readers a sense of who the writer is.

■ Get some extra eyes on it before you submit your piece. Friends can catch typos, raise questions and make suggestions.

■ For ease of reading, keep paragraphs short.

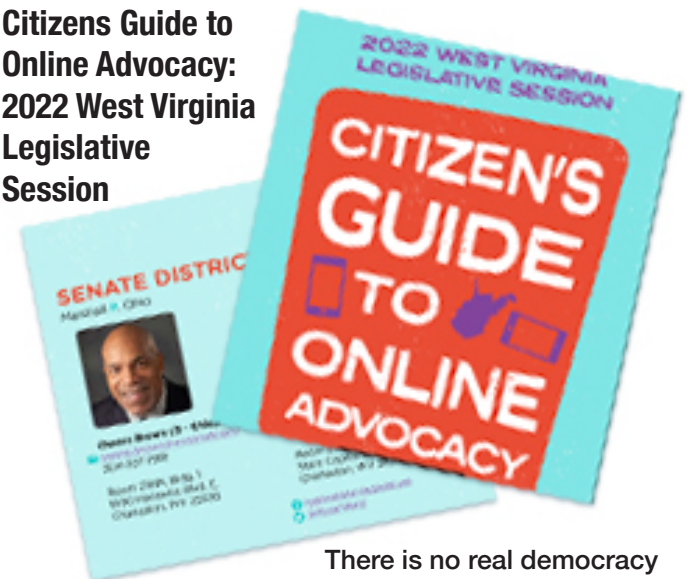
■ Usually, it's best to submit your op-ed to one media outlet—and let the editor know this. Editors often don't like multiple submissions. If you plan on sending your piece to multiple outlets or if it has appeared elsewhere, say so upfront.

■ Think about what media outlet would be the most strategic for your goals. For example, if you are trying to influence a legislator or politician, consider what outlets or newspapers would be most likely to get their attention.

■ Think defensively: ask yourself what an intelligent opponent could say to dismiss or discredit your viewpoint—then try to present as small a "target" as possible.

■ Once you're published in a media outlet, kick it out on as many social media platforms as possible and send to people you hope to influence.

Citizens Guide to Online Advocacy: 2022 West Virginia Legislative Session



There is no real democracy when the public is not actively participating in the legislative process. That's why we're calling upon BBG readers to speak loudly through your online platforms to ensure your representatives still hear how their policy decisions will impact your life.

Today's Paw Paw Joke



REPORTING ON THE LEGISLATURE

A shrinking press corps can still shape a session

BY JOE SEVERINIO

One of the most notable features of the 2022 West Virginia Legislative session has been its historically slow start.

Republicans are testing out a turtle-paced strategy this session. This is opposite the case of 2021, where a public-free Capitol complex had both chambers flying through red-meat issues. But bills like a 15-week abortion ban, a haphazard attempt at combating “Critical Race Theory,” water quality regulation trimming and a criminal fentanyl exposure bill are being championed by Republicans in the supermajority.

Meanwhile, working-class West Virginians continue to wait for substantive change in their daily lives. Food, utility and education costs continue to rise, but Gov. Jim Justice’s administration continues to paint rosy pictures of the state’s economic standing. Not all lawmakers under the dome are comfortable with the budget the governor is pushing.

Sen. Owens Brown, D-Ohio, said there is such a thing as being too conservative with a budget. He credits a good chunk of Justice’s recent financial highs to federal coronavirus relief money — not as much to his economic policy. Brown said the biggest issue lawmakers and the administration haven’t addressed this session is decades of stagnant wages for workers — even more so the case in state agencies.

“In almost every area of employment across the state, there’s numerous unfilled positions,” Brown said. “The issue is low wages. They cannot find people to take these jobs.”

Brown, West Virginia’s first Black male senator, said if the state is doing so well, why haven’t those good fortunes yet trickled down to working families? This session, Brown has floated the idea of using surpluses to create more tax breaks for people and families, not corporations, as a way to spur economic growth. Those comments have fallen on mostly deaf ears.

“The wages are not competitive here,” he said. “Until you get competitive wages here, you’re going to continue to lose people.” What has happened over the years — they’ve kept wages so low — it’s sort of

Good journalism
does not develop
on its own

hard to dig out of this hole.”

Inflation, which has become a problem globally, “is that boogeyman they always use” to keep progressive policy out of the mainstream, Brown said. It’s a right-wing buzzword that can be used to bury almost any tax break for low-and-middle-income earners.

“The more money you put into people’s pockets, the more they will spend outwardly,” he said.

West Virginia’s deteriorating press corps is also apparent this legislative session. So how can reporters and editors — how many are left of them — work to shift the public narrative from GOP supermajority talking points to what’s really happening out there?

Phil Kabler, the Charleston Gazette’s long-time statehouse reporter and columnist, said as the faces in the Capitol basement press room get younger, the harder it is for media outlets to keep lawmakers honest on these important issues. Some of it is due to the confusing nature of parliamentary procedure, he said.

“It takes a few years to get where all the rules and procedures and protocols kind of become second nature,” said Kabler.

A media outlet’s overall attitude toward its coverage is more impactful than a lone reporter can be, Kabler said. While reporters are busy tracking the politics and gossip of a session day-in and day-out, if media outlets continually center the important issues, even when they’re not being discussed, it helps get things going in the right direction.

“A lot of covering a session is reactive,” Kabler said, “but you could probably have more influence back then — as a paper — not necessarily as a reporter.”

Tim Irr, a WSAZ-TV anchor who has spent nearly 30 years reporting in West Virginia, said the Moun-

tain State is lucky to have as strong a press corps as it did during his early years here. A lot of local reporting in Irr’s home state didn’t include coverage of the statehouse, he said, which leaves out critical information for viewers.

“I noticed that when I first moved here to West Virginia years ago, the news was different than it was in Pittsburgh,” Irr said. “There was more legislative coverage.”

Irr’s news station is responsible for covering counties across Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia. With that size of coverage, “to try to do justice is sometimes very, very difficult” when reporting on these issues. But in recent years, Irr has hosted a no-time-limit, deep-dive interview program that allows him to center the issues that a 20-second cut just can’t do.

“I don’t have to worry about advertising. I don’t have to worry about producers in my ear telling me to wrap. I don’t have to worry about time constraints,” Irr said.

Brown said he wants to see the press come to meetings with the facts already in hand. To be able to swat down a bad-faith argument before it begins can go a long way in centering the most important topics, he said.

Irr said his advice to young reporters is to never stop working sources. You must find the people under the dome who fill in the blanks, he said, because good journalism does not develop on its own.

Kabler, who said heightened polarization was one of the main reasons he wanted to leave news reporting, said he could use his column to center important issues — a luxury most reporters in the new age don’t enjoy. But regardless of his work over the years, he has a bleak outlook for the future role of the press if the extremist end of the GOP continues to push moderate Republicans out of office. “Legislatures of the ’90s or 2000s, might be more receptive to what the media was saying, and saying ‘yeah, you’re right, we need to look at this. The current leadership doesn’t really care what the media thinks,’ he said. “I’m afraid the media could be almost irrelevant [after the next election] if certain people get into control.”

Joe Severino covers the statehouse for the Charleston Gazette-Mail



Lady D photo

Lady D began singing in church as a young girl.

Lady D Is West Virginia Thriving

BY MAKEDA EASTER

For my first art rebellion interview, I caught up with Doris A. Fields, aka Lady D, a singer, songwriter, actor, and writer, based in Beckley, W.Va. I met Lady D in early March 2020, when the pandemic was something of a looming question mark for many people. I was in West Virginia reporting an L.A. Times story about the connection between the state's history of slavery on its salt mines and a collection of documents at Huntington Library in the L.A. area. I reached out to Lady D because I wanted to learn more about her artistic journey as a Black woman in Appalachia.

At Tamarack Marketplace in Beckley, she told me

a snippet of her story. Lady D grew up an only child in Charleston, W.Va. Her father, who was heavily involved in union organizing, worked in the coal mines for 50 years, beginning at just 11 years old. "He was the kid they would send in with the lantern and the canary in the cage to check for methane," she said.

Lady D began singing in church as a young girl and over the years, the 62-year-old has lived in Biloxi, Japan, Ohio and Atlanta — but she always returned to West Virginia. It's in her home state where she carved out her own lane, making a name for herself by performing for Theatre West Virginia, forming an R&B, soul, and blues band called Mi\$\$ION, creating a one-woman stage play based on the life

and music of blues legend Bessie Smith, and organizing events like the Simply Jazz and Blues Festival.

Late last year, I reached out again. I wanted to know how she was navigating the pandemic as an artist. As it turns out, she's thriving. The past two years have been the most lucrative of her artistic career. Like most artists she knew, Lady D turned to Facebook Live to continue performing when the pandemic hit. She also started painting, and was surprised when friends and acquaintances began reaching out to buy her work.

She had been working on a new blues album when the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd forced her to change course and rearrange songs. The album became "Disturbing My



**Read Makeda Easter's
LA Times story
Slavery Documents From
Southern Saltmakers Bring
Light to Dark History**



Peace,” an expression of her inner turmoil and outrage during that moment of time.

In “Karma Is a Bitch,” she sings: It don’t pay to be a Black or a brown man, cause your life means nothing at all/ Who does it benefit to live in fear and hate or hide behind a wall/ Oh but you know the system is a fraud, but karma is a bitch and she works for God

Her social media became another outlet to voice her rage and frustrations with injustices she saw in her community and across the country. “I don’t feel like a celebrity, even a local celebrity. But people seem to put me on a pedestal in a way. People were waiting to see what I would say about certain things. People were messaging me to talk more about what I had posted,” she said. “Everybody has something that they were placed here to do. Mine was not to march in the street — somebody’s got to do that. And I want to be a supporter of those people who do that. But mine is to write about that and vocalize what they’re doing.”

In 2020, Lady D also began receiving some unexpected opportunities, including a performance at an online Kennedy Center concert and a teaching gig with a university. She was booked and busy.

“A lot of white guilt has gotten me a little further along,” she said, laughing. “You get a lot of people looking for things, maybe they weren’t even thinking about booking you, but figured they better try to be a little more diverse in

their events.”

“There’s only been one gig I actually had to turn down [in 2021] because they didn’t want to pay my price,” she said. “That’s a whole new thing, and it’s late in life but it’s here so I’m just gonna run with it.”

She was conditioned to working for scraps. It’s hard being an R&B and blues singer in a state obsessed with country and rock music. She recalled some degrading experiences in the early years after returning to West Virginia — being asked to sing on the spot for a gig at a bar, driving hours to a gig only to receive \$50, singing at events where the audience was racist or where she felt like “the help.”

“Living here in West Virginia, I’ve had to perform for people — private parties and things that I would never normally have been invited to that party. And sometimes, you’re performing and you overhear people talking around you who are clearly racist and you still have to smile and do your job there and act like that doesn’t bother you. [2020] just really broke the straw for me as far as being quiet about these things.”

“I don’t want to go back to that at all,” she said. “This past year, I’ve been able to say, ‘well I need \$2,000 for this,’ and people say, ‘fine.’ I’m not used to this so I don’t know, I guess there’s been a change in me that maybe other people can see.”

She’s felt a shift in her spirit and attitude during this turbulent time, and has found the type of confidence to live in her truth and reject work that doesn’t serve her. And after a period of growth, Lady D is ready to level up even further.

She wants to be in a Broadway show, she wants to tour her music. She’s currently writing a book about Black musicians in West Virginia. “The whole country thinks West Virginia is those people they see on the news. And I just want there to be an acknowledgment of Black people, who we are, who we were, what we did, especially in the context of music.”

Visit Lady D: musicbyladyd.com

This story was originally published in the art rebellion. Sign up for their free newsletter at theartrebellion.net.

DOWN TO EARTH:

Duck City Music



Duck City Music: Ndakut, left, and DiagNosis, right. Cookie Head Jenkins is not pictured.

Rap group Duck City Music started out as a large collective of rappers from Rand and Charleston. The group moniker pays homage to both West Virginia locations, Dodge City and Chuck City. The remaining three members, NdaKut, CHJ, and DiagNosis have no plans of slowing down any time soon. They have managed to rock a crowd of 3,000 while opening up at Charleston’s Municipal Auditorium for Ja Rule and Ashanti. The goal of an artist is to have consistent airplay. Duck City has two songs on 98.7 The Beat in heavy rotation. With merch selling out and a recognizable brand that has garnered attention internationally the group continues to prove that they are worthy of a spot in West Virginia’s Hip Hop Hall of Fame. They have been on the music scene since the late ’90s under the name Appalachian Assassins. The down to earth group deserves their flyers. NdaKut says “DCM personally means to me, sticking to your guns. Being proud of being yourself and not being a follower. Creating for your own needs. Working hard and being humble.”



**Check out the
latest on
www.duckcitymusic.com**

Young Gifted and Black WEST VIRGINIA POLICYMAKERS

One of Appalachia's finest musicians, Nina Simone, is responsible for an anthem "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black" that since 1969 has made Black people all over the world feel good about themselves.

On Feb. 10 BBG co-hosted an event featuring some of the state's most gifted and youthful Black policymakers.

We encourage you to watch the event and follow BBG on YouTube here:



Listen to the song here:



*"To be young, gifted and black Oh, what a lovely precious dream
To be young, gifted and black
Open your heart to what I mean
In the whole world you know
There are a million boys and girls
Who are young, gifted and black
And that's a fact!"*

"Yes, we only make up about 4% of the population in West Virginia, however, the Black community along with the issues that impact us can sort of be a weather vane, in regards to fighting for other people and what the law really should be, as well as ensuring that; everyone is protected, everyone is covered".



"Just because we only make up 4% of West Virginia's population, doesn't mean our voices and rights should be denied"



"When you have news flashes and reports, some making national headlines, I believe it goes a long way by showing that as West Virginians, we aren't just accepting the status quo. There are Black people in West Virginia, that care and working towards change."



"Black Appalachians mined, loaded, and hauled the same coal that presently defines the cultural identity of West Virginia. Black West Virginians have always been here and we have a long, ancestral history with the region. Today, we serve as an example of the Black radical tradition, wherein we lead the fight in pushing for racial justice in areas where people of color are few and far between."

**Read the
YGBinWVP
stories on
BlackByGod.org.**

Behind Black By God's "Young, Gifted, & Black in West Virginia Policy"

By Malik Smith



Over the past month, I, Malik Q. Smith, along with the support of Crystal Good, Dr. Shanequa Smith, Leeisha Lee, India Frith, Katonya Hart, Johnna Bailey and Kyle Bailey (our BBG team), had the honor of meeting ten of West Virginia's young policy leaders. With help from the BBG team, we were able to come up with two ways of telling the stories of WV's young policy leaders. One of the ways was through an actual Q & A style interview via Zoom, where I asked the young policy leaders

questions like: "Tell me a little about yourself?," "What prompted you take action?," "What are some policies or things you would like WV to adopt?," and my favorite question, "Why is it important for us (Black Appalachians/Affrilachians) to have a voice in this state?"

One of the other ways we were able to share the stories of WV's young policy leaders was through written Q & A style interview(s) which I truly loved doing since it posed the question "How can we captivate the reader(s) while highlighting each young policy leader?" My background is in civil engineering and sociology (and have the desire to be of service to underserved Black and brown communities) so when I was first tasked with this opportunity, I saw it as a chance to be of service to the young Black policy leaders in WV and to fully immerse myself within this 2022 Legislative Session. I am extremely happy to share with everyone the stories and perspectives of our young Black policy leaders and hope that you will take time to visit BlackBYGod.org to read them and watch the Feb. 10 "Young, Gifted & Black West Virginia Policymakers" webinar.



Rhonda Rogombé
WV Center for Budget & Policy

"When we improve the conditions for the most vulnerable folks, (Black & brown folx, people living with disabilities, LGBTQIA+, and other marginalized groups) we also improve the outcomes for the overall population. By making Medicaid easier to access, based on the experiences from Black & brown folx, we are able to streamline the program and make it easier for all West Virginians".



India Frith

Black Voters
Impact Initiative

"Our youth is the future so, if you aren't helping to build them up then there won't be a future. Let's encourage the youth by allowing them to feel involved and comfortable enough to ask questions about our legislation. Inviting them to city council meetings could be a amazing start"



Rayana Momen

Scholar



Jihad Dixon

Education Policy
Advocate

"This movement, being a Black Appalachian...being someone Black from West Virginia... being BLACK BY GOD, it's so much bigger than us. We know where we come from, we know what the people are wanting and needing, even if we are remote or somewhere else; because we see it everytime we come home. This is why it's so important for our communities to recognize that we all have power".

"Black Appalachians, Affrilachians, we may be few in number, but it is no secret that we do so much of the heavy lifting. When we are cut off from accessing resources or when such access is inequitable, when we see each other struggling to meet basic needs, we close the gaps, we gather and distribute the resources, we find a way, we show up where it counts".



Reverend James Patterson is the CEO of The Partnership of African American Churches.

PAAC Helps Struggling West Virginians

BY LEESHIA LEE

Reverend James Patterson, CEO of The Partnership of African American Churches says that, “Health equity is applying the largest amount of resources to the largest amount of need. When it comes to people of color, Covid 19 is just the latest pandemic. So we have engaged the state of West Virginia to facilitate the Partnership of African American Churches being able to do vaccinations, as well as testing, food distribution and anything that we view as help to people who are struggling trying to endure the pandemic.”



For more information on PAAC and their initiatives visit www.paac2.org

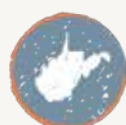
Pushing kids back into poverty is **unbearable.**



The expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) helped families afford groceries, utility bills, school supplies—even things like tutoring, dance classes, visits to grandparents—and everything that makes childhood special.

Stand with WV Mama Bears.

Share your CTC story on social media with the hashtag **#Unbearable**.



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unbearablecampaign.org

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Silhouette Boutique She vs Her 98.7 BEAT Charleston Town Center

JANUARY 6

Is This What Democracy Looks Like?

BY LAKIESHA LLOYD

On Jan. 6, 2021 I was sitting in my office at work. It was a quiet day, no different than any other. Suddenly, my boss, who was in a separate building, burst through the door yelling, "Hurry turn on the TV! My husband just called and said someone was attacking the Capitol." My colleague and I ran from our offices and stood in horror as we watched our own countrymen and women storming the Capitol.

I remember thinking to myself, "Wait, is this real?" I was in disbelief. My mind couldn't process what my eyes were seeing. I was horrified watching the Capitol Police being beaten, fighting for their lives by the very people who claimed that police lives mattered. The same feeling that came over me many years ago on September 11, 2001, when I watched the second plane crash into the World Trade Towers.

As a veteran, I couldn't believe that this is what I served to protect and fight for. How can Americans attack and attempt to destroy the very idea of what separates us from what we see in other corrupt and despondent countries? I finally realized that I was watching an attempted coup on our democracy. Because the election didn't go the way some Americans wanted, they were willing to overthrow the very basis of how our government functions, to achieve the results they wanted. This way they could replace the president-elect with the president they wanted..

I removed myself from my colleagues as tears of anger fell down my face. Work and time stopped that day. We never moved from our seats after that. No one spoke. We just watched, in silence, as the symbol of our democracy was being torn apart.

In the aftermath of Jan. 6, we began to learn the identities of these insurrectionists. Finding out that there were men and women involved in the insurrection who were actively serving in the U.S. military or were veterans, shook me to my very core. Didn't we all take the same oath to protect the United States from enemies both foreign and domestic? When we serve, we are not to be affiliated with any political party, due to the belief that regardless of who is president, we must respect the office of commander in



chief. However, there are men and women who are actively serving in our military using their training to overthrow the government. To overthrow the very values and principles we swore to protect.

It made me wonder, who allowed these people to serve in the first place? What vetting process allowed these people to protect what is most sacred to the United States, just to have them try to overthrow it using the skills, knowledge, and training they gained through their service? I sit here now with a sense of fear towards what may be festering in the minds of those who took an oath to protect this country. The trust I had for my brothers and sisters in arms, both active duty and veteran, has been ruined.

The most surprising thing to me about the aftermath of Jan. 6, were the lack of penalties, that the insurrectionists had received. Many were only given probation, while very few faced actual jail time. When an individual did receive jail time, it was so minimal that it made me wonder, what is the point? Active duty members were permitted to keep their jobs, after having only received a slap on the wrist. It is my belief that those who participated in the insurrection should have been charged with treason

and punished to the fullest extent of the law. In addition, service members should have been prosecuted and removed from duty. They broke the law, both civilian and military, they broke their oath, and they betrayed their fellow service members, and country.

As a veteran, I ask myself, is this the country that I gave my blood, sweat, tears, mind, and body for? If so, I don't recognize it anymore. If this could happen by our own military and veterans, then what makes the U.S. any different from other countries who do not believe in the democratic process?

Yet, it is because of these feelings, that I feel even more compelled to stand up against this cult mentality. We cannot stand idle and allow this type of violent politics to become the norm. We must all stand united and fight back against the death of our republic. The memory of Jan. 6, as horrible as it was, must be our battle cry to stand against the demagogic, destructive force that seeks to end what it truly means to be American.

Lakiesha Lloyd is a United States Army Veteran, who served from 2001-2010 as a Combat Military Police Officer. She currently resides in Charleston, W.Va.

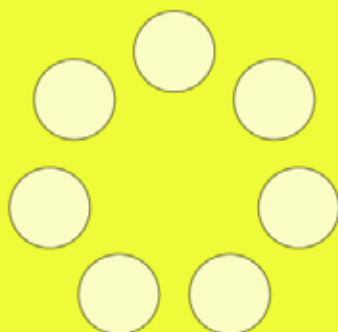
RADICALXCHANGE

Appalachian Chapter

This spring, come play with us !

We are developing ways to share, promote, and profit from coordinated community data.

Technology companies wield highly concentrated power over the way peoples' data is used, and make enormous profits from it. They can do this because we "bargain" for Big



Data Dignity

We are building better ways to make decisions.

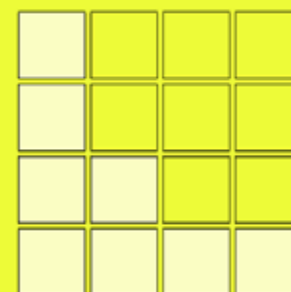
Quadratic Voting (QV) is a redesigned voting method reflecting the intensity of people's preferences in collective decisions. It greatly mitigates tyranny-of-the-majority and factional control problems.



Quadratic Voting

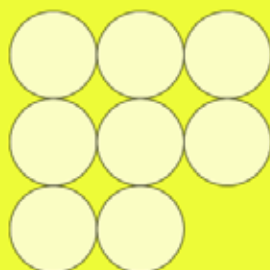
We are making tools for funding community initiatives reflecting their unique interests.

Quadratic Funding (QF) is a more democratic and scalable form of matching funding for public goods, i.e. any projects valuable to large groups of people and accessible to the general public.



Quadratic Funding

Partial Common Ownership



We are rebuilding the physical landscape in communities with new ownership tools.

Partial common ownership is a new way of managing assets that is fairer and more efficient than those under capitalism or communism.

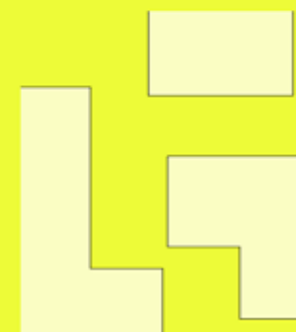
Radical Antitrust



We are working on strategies to reduce the gap between rich and poor in the digital realm.

Radical Antitrust is about looking for cartels in unexpected places, and recognizing that consumers and workers can be harmed through more than simply price.

Intersectional Social Identity



We're securing access to fair social venues.

Whereas most existing identity concepts are either centralized or individualistic, Intersectional Social Identity (XID) solutions embody human identities' social, and multi-dimensional characteristics. XID makes use of three central primitives: personal journal, shared identities, and transactional credit/collateral.

RadicalxChange.org

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HAPPEN
—Eve
**Design Can
Change Culture**
—Roman King

*I don't think Black students
in high school know what
graphic design is. I didn't.*

—Moniesha Wright



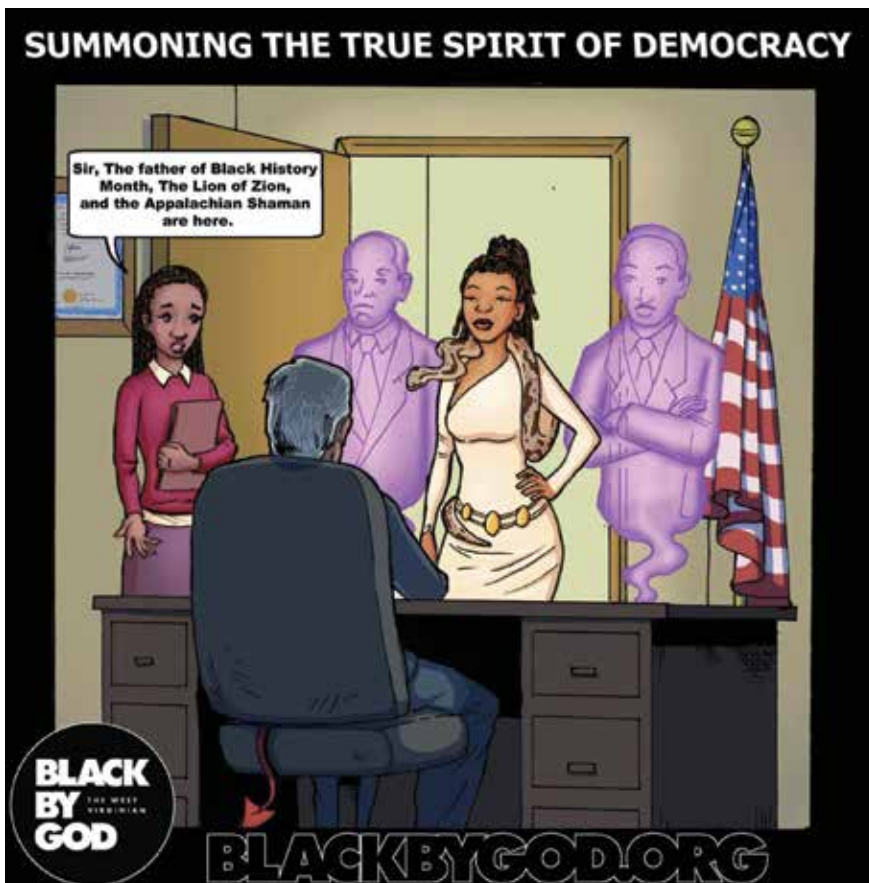
The design profession is aware of the dearth of African American and BIPOC seats at the table. This scholarship is a down payment on a future leader who might use their education in design to change culture by adding their voice to the conversation we need to have, and the innovations we need to make, as a society.

Preference is for underrepresented students as allowed by law and institutional policy. Recipients shall be determined by the WVU Office of Financial Aid and the WVU College of Creative Arts.

The WVU graphic design program was founded in 1973 and kept the name while embracing new technologies and expansions in the design field including UX, AR, and humancentered design. It is housed within the School of Art and Design in the College of Creative Arts.

Join us.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

We welcome your professional announcements. Send them to info@blackbygod.org



Covenant House names Interim Executive Director

Veteran Covenant House Program Director, Briana Martin, has been named Interim Executive Director. Martin will serve in this role during their search for an Executive Director. Current CEO, Ellen Allen, will be leaving after 10 years at Covenant House to join Mountain State Spotlight, a nonprofit newsroom, as Executive Director. "The Board voted unanimously to tap Ms. Martin as the Interim Director. She not only has 20 years' experience in the social service sector, but has worked in practically every program at Covenant House during her 15 years at the agency. We believe she is the right person to lead the organization through such a significant period of transition." "It is an extreme honor and pleasure to serve at the helm of an organization where I began 15 years ago, and I could not be more humbled by those who preceded me. I stand on the shoulders of great visionaries and my hope is that I too will be remembered as such one day," said Ms. Martin in reference to her interim appointment.



Covenant House has served the greater Charleston community for more than 40 years by championing the rights of all West Virginians for food, housing and healthcare.

Washington announces Charleston mayoral candidacy



On Jan. 27, 2022, Martec D. Washington announced his candidacy for Mayor of Charleston, West Virginia. Washington will challenge incumbent Mayor Amy Goodwin in the upcoming 2022 primary election cycle. Charleston's primary is May 10, and election day is November 8, 2022. Martec has been politically active for many years bringing attention to the disparities in the community, offering solutions, and putting in the work to make Charleston better.

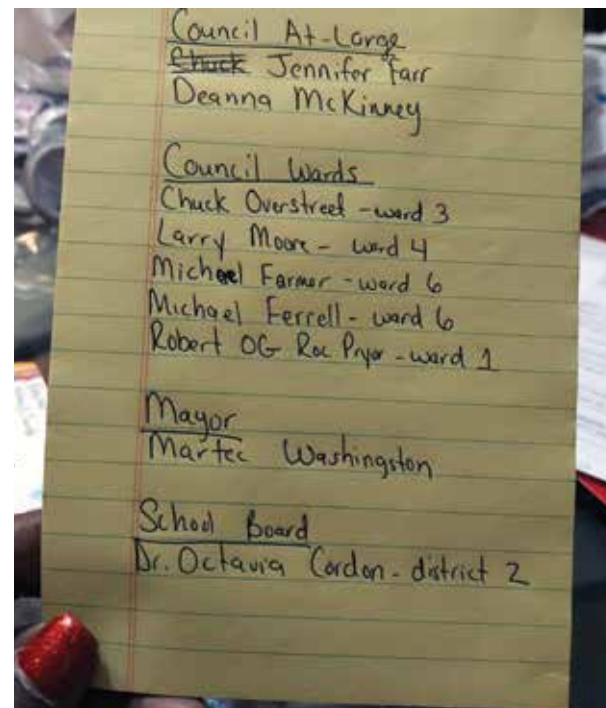
Mr. Washington's goal is to launch Charleston into the 21st century focusing on Charleston as a whole and not individual communities. His plans include building back better in public safety reform and crime reduction, youth programs, and addressing food insecurity. As for the city's revenue, Martec believes changes to the city's infrastructure plan, providing

avenues for cannabis legalization, and putting an end to Charleston's homeless and opioid epidemic are the driving force.

Martec (pronounced Mar-teece), is from the "West Side," is a constant presence at city council meetings and community events and enjoys walking the streets of Charleston in hopes of encouraging community togetherness and helping to find solutions for residents' issues. "A change is coming!" Mr. Washington said as he walked up the steps to file his paperwork. "Together, Everyone Counts, TEC... that's what it stands for."

To learn more, donate, or sign up to volunteer for TEC for mayor campaign, visit www.tecformayor.com. Campaign Headquarters: 304-685-2446, info@tecformayor.com, 'TecForMayor' on (YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook)

Nine Black candidates running for offices in Charleston, W.Va.



Barnes-Russell running for Circuit Clerk in Berkley County



Michelle Barnes-Russell, a leader in the African American community in West Virginia, is running for Circuit Clerk in Berkley County. She is a WV Women's Commission Commissioner and a proud sister of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Michelle has dedicated her life to community and serving others.

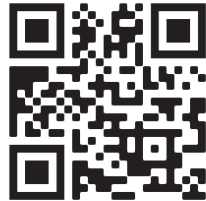
She works to strengthen and build community, and to focus the strength of that community on improving lives through education, health, and wealth.

In education, she shines the light on the lack of support for our Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Over the years we have abandoned the excellence of these organizations of higher learning. Her advocacy for them is focused not just on academia but also heritage and history. A people without a past are doomed to repeat it. These institutions create a vision of success so that the people don't perish.

We must rub the sleep from our eyes. We must be intentional and seek legislation, collaboration, and cooperation. An individual's win is celebrated by all. The same, needs should be shared by all. When we win, West Virginia wins.

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CHARLIE K EVENTS & DECOR

CHARLOTTE KWOFIE

RESIN ARTIST - EVENT PLANNER - DECORATOR

I'm Charlotte Kwofie the owner of Charlie K Events and Decor. This is a very special business venture inspired by and in honor of my late grandfather and uncle.

Charlie K Events and Decor is here to create timeless and memorable experiences that are unique to you. Helping others explore their imagination and bring their vision to life is my goal. Whether it's creating a 30x40 canvas or your elegant intimate wedding, it will be a reflection of you in every way.

Being born and raised in a big city like Toronto, Canada I was exposed to so much diversity. A city girl that moved to a small college town in West Virginia was a culture shock. Of course, I grew to love Morgantown and it has become my home. Both surroundings have cultivated my interests. I want to bring city life to the country and vice versa.

I offer a wide range of custom pieces, such as coasters, geodes, coffee mugs, keychains, trays, purses, furniture and much more.

@CHARLIEKEVENTS



YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS ACT

YEA!

Did you know the Young Entrepreneurs Act provides that any incorporator of an incorporation, member of a limited liability company, or partner of a partnership who is a West Virginia resident and is under 30 years of age to have their initial filing fee waived by the WV Office of Secretary of State, if formed on or after July 1, 2016?

To take advantage of the fee waiver visit the **WAIVER REQUEST** form and attach with your Secretary of State business registration.



CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA

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FRAZIER**

Charleston
City Council At-Large

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Charleston
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WEAR YOUR CROWN TO THE RALLY!

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 11TH
2:00PM
WV STATE CAPITOL COMPLEX
(INDOORS LOWER ROTUNDA)

PLEASE WEAR A MASK | CALL 304 - 896 - 9534

**FRIDAY
FEB. 11
2 PM**

**SUPPORT THE CROWN ACT
IN WEST VIRGINIA**

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CROWN!**

Rally located indoors in the
lower rotunda of the Capitol