

# TAKING A STAND

Spark Editor-in-Chief Shiloh Wolkfork connects her own experiences to the importance of Black Lives Matter and discusses how the movement has increased awareness of racial inequalities.

story and infographic **shiloh wolkfork** | photography **cassandra mueller**

At age 17, I finally got my driver's license. Although I was a year late, nothing could compare to the excitement I felt as I strutted out of the BMV. I was rewarded with a new sense of independence and maturity, and I was ready to take on anything that came my way. However, within the first week that I had my license, much of the initial giddiness faded away.

Movies, books, and talks with my parents suddenly began to chip away at my newfound freedom. They highlighted how dangerous and frightening it is to be a Black American behind the wheel. Something that should've been a long-awaited rite of passage quickly morphed into another way for society to remind me that I, as a black person, am not equal.

It's heartbreaking to know that one day, most black children will sit down with their parents for The Talk. "When the officer approaches you, put your hands on the dash. Don't make any sudden movements. When you reach for your ID, make it known to the officer. To them, being black is already a weapon so don't try to hide anything," says the parent. Gradually, anxiety replaces eagerness and light is clouded by hopelessness and despair. At first, the child won't know it, but knowing this information could be the difference between life and death.

For East senior Bri Harris, The Talk came soon after taking her Temps test.

"They [my parents] told me to always comply and do everything the cop says no matter what," Harris says. "They told me to always keep my hands visible so the cop doesn't have any reason to act in a way."

According to a 2020 Pew Research Center study, black adults are five times as likely as whites to claim that they've been unfairly stopped by the police on the basis of race or ethnicity. More specifically, 59% of black men say they've been unfairly stopped compared to 31% of black women.

According to Associate Professor of African American and African Studies at The Ohio State University  
Tiyi Morris

these discriminatory tendencies are the result of the systemic racism that has taken root in society. Systemic racism is a form of racism that is embedded as normal practice within a society or organization.

"Essentially everything in our society is structured to teach people to believe in white superiority and white normativity. It's all around us, it's like the air we breathe. It [racism] is taught from social media, the television shows that we watch, the magazines that we read, and the way that people occupy positions of power and authority in our society," Morris told Spark. "All of this sends messages consciously and subconsciously that black people and other people of color are inferior and that whites are legitimate with regard to authority and knowledge."

As a child, even though my parents went out of their way to ensure that I had dolls and toys that looked like me, I remember searching the Walmart toy aisles for a doll with my tight curls and brown skin. Among a sea of blond and blue, I craved representation on those shelves. Similarly, in the shows and movies that I watched, like the Disney movie The Cheetah Girls, almost every female African American character straightened her hair or had a relaxer. I yearned to see a black girl who wore her natural hair big and proud. I wished that seeing a main character who looked like me wasn't a special occurrence.

According to Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a leading anti-hate organization, women and people of color

made up only 32.9% and 19.8% among film leads in 2019. According to National Public Radio (NPR), a 2016 study from University of Southern California (USC) that sought to reveal the lack of diversity in Hollywood, only 28.3% of characters with dialogue were from non-white racial groups.

Even more so than in the media, I desired racial representation in school. In my entire school career, I've only ever had one teacher who was a person of color and she was a music teacher. I've never had that representation or feeling of understanding in any of my history classes. I've never had a teacher who went out of their way to do Black History justice. Having access to that representation matters. It is empowering.

According to a Center for American Progress study, teachers of color will typically have higher expectations of minority students, are more likely to provide students of color with culturally relevant teaching, develop meaningful relationships with students, and discuss and confront racism through their lessons.

According to UNCF (United Negro College Fund), an organization that strives to uplift under-represented students and aid in moving those students to and through college, in 2011-2012, only 10% of public school principals were black compared to 80% white. In relation, 82% of public school teachers were white, compared to 18% teachers of color.



# Modern Examples of Systemic Racism

Systemic or institutional racism is a set of institutional, historical, cultural, and interpersonal practices within a society that actively put one social or ethnic group in a better position to succeed, while disadvantaging other groups of people through disparities that develop over time. The systemic racism that faces African Americans can be seen in many different modern and historical aspects of society.

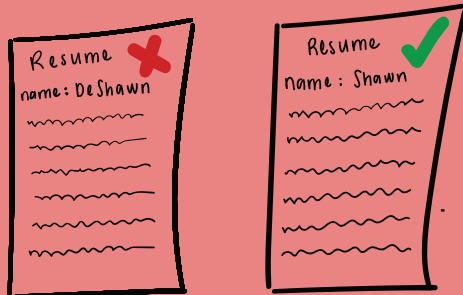
## WEALTH GAP:

Of the same job and qualifications, how much a black man earns for every dollar a white man makes as of 2020



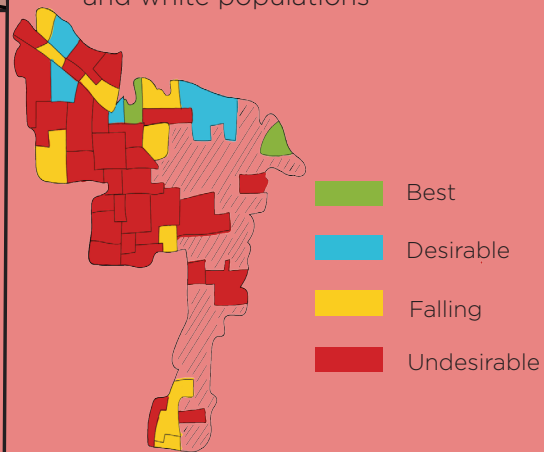
## HIRING PROCESS:

25% of black job candidates received callbacks when they used resumes with “whitened” names, while only 10% got callbacks when they applied with more “ethnic” sounding names



## REDLINING:

System that outlined areas with large black populations in red ink on maps to warn mortgage lenders. Meant to isolate black people in areas that suffered lower levels of investment than white neighborhoods; banned after the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and contributes to disparities in homeownership between black and white populations



source [americanprogress.org](http://americanprogress.org), [shrm.org](http://shrm.org)

According to the U.S. Department of Education 2016 Racial Diversity report, black teachers and other teachers of color are more likely to be employed at high-poverty elementary and secondary schools, and tend to have a lower retention rate than white teachers.

Whenever topics of slavery or the Civil Rights Movement arose, I was met with pitying stares from my classmates and teachers. The Black History unit was always brief and rushed. Endless videos and pointless readings unapologetically replaced my heritage and glossed over my ancestors’ struggles.

Morris says that the curriculum needs to be adjusted when it comes to Black History, and as a teacher, she tries to contribute to the change as much as possible.

“Our entire curriculum in the American school system is one that focuses solely on the contributions of white people, but in doing so, undermines the value of the contributions of people of color,” Morris says. “I’m trying to give them [my students] a new narrative of this country [and to allow them to] more fully understand the ways that black people have built and contributed to the development of this country. A narrative needs to be taught where everybody’s contributions are valued.”

East senior Michelle Antiri says that her experiences concerning Black History might have been more positive if all cultures were taught more completely, and the education continued outside of the classroom.

“I think it would be really beneficial if Black History Month wasn’t the only time that

history classes focused on Black History,” Antiri says. “A lot of Black History has been erased from schools’ curriculum and it’s important not to just isolate Black History for a month and never address it again. That also goes for other areas of American history like Asian-American history and Indigenous People’s history. It’s great to have the national months to celebrate these diverse areas of history, but it’d be beneficial if it was consistently discussed within school.”

According to Associate Psychology Professor at The Ohio State University and author of *The Psychology of Racial Colorblindness*, Phillip Mazzocco, introducing racially aware topics to young children could be beneficial in the fight against prejudice.

“There’s a lot of research in early childhood education that shows even at preschool age that

there are ways to introduce topics like diversity and inequality to children in ways that they will understand in order to build a base of healthy racial awareness,” Mazzocco told Spark. “Those topics can’t wait. It may seem as if racism is a big issue now because there’s more videos and social media but it’s always been an issue and each new generation needs to be made aware of this problem as early as possible so that they can start contributing to the solution in a positive way.”

Lately, I’ve noticed that the rise of Black Lives Matter (BLM) as a social media movement has made those around me more interested in improving their Black History education and learning about the experiences and conditions facing black people today. My friends and peers have made active efforts to reach out to me and ask questions about things they may not have considered important in the past.

The global reaction to the recent murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor have moved people to actively try to understand things that they didn’t in the past.

According to Assistant Director at the Kent State University Women’s Center Alicia Robinson, the attention that BLM has gained as a social media movement has revealed some misconceptions surrounding the goals of the movement, encouraging people to educate themselves. According to Pew Research Center, about a third of Americans familiar with BLM said they didn’t understand the goals of the movement.

“A lot of people who don’t identify as black feel that by saying ‘black lives matter’ it’s saying that other lives don’t matter,” Robinson says. “It’s super disheartening because [saying] one group matters doesn’t

minimize any other group. [People also] think that because we say ‘black lives matter’, we’re saying police don’t matter. It’s sad because it’s not [a matter] of either/or, it’s [a matter] of both.”

According to a 2018 Pew Research study, about 14% of Americans have changed their mind about an issue because of something they saw on social media. About 23% of adult social media users in the U.S. say social media led them to change their views on a particular issue. When asked to elaborate on the specific issues, many mentioned BLM and police brutality.

Robinson says that modern access to social media has also helped to promote the goals of Black Lives Matter as a human rights organization that advocates for protest against events of police brutality and racial violence against black people.

“Without social media, it [Black Lives Matter] wouldn’t have gained the traction that it gained. The fact that [the murder of George Floyd] was videotaped [allowed it to] reach millions of people instantly,” Robinson told Spark. “Social media is the reason why police brutality is heightened and visible now. We can arrest cops and we can demand police reform because we can see it.”

For East senior Anne Matthew, social media has been a crucial factor in her awareness and support for BLM.

“It is through social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram that I am made aware of things going on outside of my scope. Not everyone makes time to go read the news but everyone does make time for social media,” Matthew told Spark. “I would see links to petitions of cases that I had not heard

before, and I would post them on my social media platforms. My friends would sign the petitions and share them and it continues the cycle of bringing awareness to police brutality.”

However, Sweeney says that the recent positive relationship between BLM and social media is a result of COVID-19, and explains how this connection between the movement and social media is not completely beneficial.

“One of my biggest fears is that I think that the George Floyd incident in particular sparked such a huge national outcry because of COVID-19,” Sweeney says. “People were bored and had nothing else to do. People were paying attention to social media; they weren’t distracted. My fear is that people are going to get bored with [the movement] and move onto something else as soon as they get distracted.”

As someone who has spent years under the foot of racism and prejudice, I can only hope that people don’t simply get bored. I can only pray that the most recent instances of police brutality, and the numerous ones before them are enough to instill senses of urgency and empathy within the people of America. I’m no longer okay with patiently waiting for the day that the way that I’m treated is no longer dependent on the color of my skin.

I will no longer sit politely in the face of ignorant microaggressions and derogatory comments. I am desperate for change, desperate for a day when my skin color is not a threat. Time is of the essence. With each murder of an innocent black person, I feel my breath slipping away. And now, I can’t breathe. •

“Our entire curriculum in the American school system is one that focuses solely on the contributions of white people, but in doing so, undermines the value of the contributions of people of color,” -Tiyi Morris



# STARTING IN THE CLASSROOM

As racism continues to grow in our nation, the impact of the lack of representation of people of color in schools is becoming more powerful.

story **rehab jarabah** | infographic **shiloh wolfork** | photography **cassandra mueller**

**A**t 12 years old, East junior Brenda Fofie moved across the country with her family from the Bronx, New York to Cincinnati, Ohio. Like any young child moving to a new home, Fofie was nervous to say the least. She was scared to start middle school without her childhood friends, and uncertain about the upcoming school year. However, Fofie also had a more intense worry; she was one of less than 10 black students at her middle school.

"I remember being so uncomfortable. Because I thought, 'What am I supposed to do or say?'" Fofie told Spark. "I knew, everybody in that school was going to [think], 'Oh, she's black, she's going to be ratchet and ghetto.' And I was like, I can't do it. I was put in this position where I can't do anything. So I just had to sit there and take it as if it didn't bother me. And that was the first time I was like, 'I hate it here.'"

According to Associate Professor of Psychology at University of Albany, Alex Pieterse, racial biases within the classroom are the first type of microaggression of racism

that students of color face in their lifetimes. Students can start to feel uncomfortable in their classrooms and the places that they are "meant to feel the most safe" when teachers display actions that are harmful for students of color, whether it's intentional or not.

According to a 2019 Princeton University report, data shows that compared to their white counterparts, students of color tend to be disciplined at higher rates. While white students made up only 4% of in school suspensions and 3.5 % of out of school suspensions, students of color accounted for 11% of in school suspensions and 13.5 percent of out of school suspensions.

"When we first tell teachers our findings, the most common reaction is 'That's surprising, in my classroom I treat everyone as equals,'" Pieterse told Spark. "But then we'll pull out all the data and they see the disparity between how many students of color there are and how they tend to be disciplined at a higher rate than their white counterparts."

One professional developmental organization,

Innocent Classroom, is working to eliminate racial biases within the school setting. According to founder Alexis Pate, Innocent Classroom was created in 2010 to help train teachers in noticing subtle racism in the classroom and eliminating it as a whole.

"Innocent Classroom is and was always more than a project. It started out as an idea. I had to help teachers become anti-racist and look for the good in their students," Pate says. "Children are innocent and good and when you believe in their good, [students] believe in their good."

According to the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Center, an anti-racist activist is a person who is in the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies, practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.

Pieterse says that many forms of racial bias can come from within and outside of the classroom doors. Pieterse maintains that these experiences can be traumatic for children of

color, who's first response is usually one of fear, anxiety or depression.

"Depending on how threatened someone feels, that will [relate to] how severe the [necessary] trauma response is. And [what] we do know about children is that for them, healthy development needs to have a sense of secure attachment," Pieterse says. "So they need to feel secure in their surroundings and they need to feel secure with the adults in their life. Childhood experiences of racism can really have quite an effect. It really impacts a feeling of security."

According to University of Connecticut Psychology Professor Frederick Gibbons, although the most major effects of racism on minority children are fear, anxiety and depression, there are other feelings that tend to accompany those. There is the initial sadness which for some, turns into anger.

Gibbons finds that children in a racial minority group will seek others who've faced similar events after encountering racially charged incidents themselves. After seeking out others who have had similar experiences and talking about their trauma, that oftentimes anger becomes more prominent.

"Anger tends to be the long-term emotion people have as they grow older," Gibbons told Spark. "It can also influence their behavior in a variety of ways. For example, engaging in delinquent behavior, especially after having a discriminatory experience like police brutality."

The rate of black children ages 5–11 who died by suicide nearly doubled from 2007 to 2017, according to a Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Pediatrics report. The study's researchers believe that one of the factors linked to this increase in suicide rates include experiences of disproportionate exposure to violence, traumatic stress and aggressive school discipline. More research is needed to determine why suicide rates began trending upward for black children in 2007 and decreasing for white children. According to a 2019 report by the Congressional Black Caucus, mental health studies and interventions for black children are notoriously underfunded.

**E**ast senior, Darek Sanabria, says that he has encountered his own experiences with microaggressions in the classroom, such as feeling ostracized for being a person of color when his teacher and peers ignorance to his racial identity, and has worked to surround himself with people who have experienced similar incidents.

"I consider myself lucky because I've only had one racist experience. It was in fourth grade. I was presenting my heritage project as an Afro-Latino from Puerto Rico and then my peers and teacher started questioning my status and my immigration journey. It was a little funny because Puerto Rico is an American

territory," Sanabria says. "I never really face things like that anymore though because I just surround myself with people who make me feel good about myself."

Sanabria says that he has encountered a different type of racism that is oftentimes overlooked, colorism. Colorism is discrimination against individuals with darker skin tones, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group. Growing up, Sanabria was told that his hair was "not presentable" because it was curly rather than straight, due to his Afro-Latino heritage.

Colorism is seen throughout our current society in many communities, whether they are a minority group or not. It affects job opportunities according to the 2006 University of Georgia study, *The Inclusion Solution*, which showed that employers prefer light skinned black men to dark skinned men, regardless of their qualifications. The black and hispanic communities are prominent examples of colorism within their communities; they are taught the notion that the lighter your skin is, the better and more attractive you are.

"It's hard growing up knowing that your natural features are seen as 'ugly,'" Sanabria says. "However, surrounding myself with people who make me confident has really helped."

University of Georgia researcher Man-Kit Lei says that children start realizing forms of discrimination as young as six or seven.

"Although racism can be learned and used from observing it, [racism is] usually learned from a social environment. Racism and discrimination are products of society," Lei told

## Educational Black Lives Matter Documentaries/Films

1. 13th: Documentary; explores the history of racial inequality in the United States and specifically discusses the disproportionate amount of imprisoned African Americans



2. The Central Park Five: Documentary; case of five African American teenagers who spent 6-13 years in prison after being wrongfully accused of raping a white woman



3. I Am Not Your Negro: Documentary, explores racism through the eyes of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr, and Medgar Evers, based on the unfinished book of James Baldwin



4. Teach Us All: Documentary, focuses on the existence of modern day segregation in schools and educational inequality



5. Just Mercy: Movie, based on a true story, focuses on the injustice facing African Americans in the criminal justice system, a young Harvard graduate seeks to fight for the accused in Alabama

source cbr.com and fair use

Spark. "During the elementary years, children learn patterns of behavior from family, peers, and school."

Pieterse says that students and teachers alike can work to become anti-racist activists by gaining better knowledge of racial intolerance and discrimination in our modern society.

"One of the really impactful mechanisms is the education courses," Pieterse says. "Having people really understand how racism has operated historically [can help reveal] how it's been developed and sustained in our society."

Throughout the last few months, many people have adopted the anti-racist activist label to show their allyship with the the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

But Pieterse says to become anti-racist is hard work. People can be discouraged and lose hope easily after learning the reality. However he believes that there is beginning to be a generational shift in perspective towards racism that will impact racial prejudice within and outside the classroom.

"My youngest son is 11. He was born into a world where the person in power was Barack Obama - a black man in charge" Pieterse says. "However, I'm from South Africa. I lived in times of apartheid, and it was normal for me to not be able to drink out of a certain water fountain. When I explained to [my son] what I went through, he was confused why it had happened to me. To me it was normal, to him he questioned it and fought against it. It was inconceivable to him. He gives me hope for the future; he gives me hope that this generation has the potential to change the world."•

# OUTCRY FOR CHANGE

Since its founding in 2013, the organization Black Lives Matter has gained recognition and support after the deaths of many Black American lives as a result of police brutality.

story **megan miranda** | infographic **cassandra mueller** | photography **ianni acapulco**



## HISTORICAL BLACK DEATHS

source BBC News

Trayvon Martin  
February 26

2012

Michael Brown  
August 9

2013

Black Lives Matter  
Founded  
July 13



2014

Eric Garner  
July 17

After a trip to a nearby convenience store around 6:24 p.m. on a Floridian winter evening, Trayvon Martin walks to his father's fiance's rented estate in the Retreat at Twin Lakes development. In the next hour what could have been a casual evening for the 17 year-old boy was completely altered by the gun shots fired at his unarmed self. After the shots became fatal, what remained was the trace of teenage innocence left in his pocket, the Skittles he had bought just an hour prior.

Professionals believe that Martin's killing on Feb. 26, 2012 sparked a movement for change. Protesters gathered in more than 100 US cities in response to Martin's shooting death by George Zimmerman, the neighborhood civilian patrol who chased and shot the 17-year-old after suspecting him of robbery in the neighborhood.

The response to Martin's killing launched the rallying-cry "Black Lives Matter." Other phrases like "don't shoot" and "I can't breathe" drew eyes in protests and posts regarding the killing of black men and women. Following Martin's murder in 2013 three black women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors founded the organization Black Lives Matter. Now as the organization continues in 2020, separately the Black Lives Matter (BLM) social movement is an activist movement that focuses on the specific ideals of black equality, independent of the organization.

For many, BLM represents a fight against racism in the United States and communities, but to many the idea of racism is assumed to be solved. A 2018 National Broadcasting Company (NBC) survey revealed that 30% of Americans say racism exists today but is not a major problem. However according to Associate Professor of African American and African studies at Ohio State University Tiyi Morris, underlying racism in the US still exists to minorities even if it isn't as highlighted as it was in the past, and BLM acts as a trying solution.

"[BLM] is an effort to disrupt racist structures in society, and is a movement that everyone can participate in," Morris told Spark. "BLM is not an effort to undermine the fact that everybody's humanity matters. BLM is a specific articulation against the reality that, with regard to policies and procedures, access to opportunities and resources, black lives don't matter."

The BLM expression has gained popularity in recent years through widespread social

media use, hashtags, and protests around the world. Morris says that the Black Lives Matter organization is just one of many social justice groups calling for change across the country.

"Black Lives Matter is calling for abolition [of racism and racist structures] but there are individuals and organizations who have been advocating for abolition for years," Morris says. "Organizations organize critical resistance and insight [and] they have for years but it was the catalyst of the pandemic, the back to back murders that were happening at this time that just gave visibility and a greater urgency for black equality."

Chuck Mingo, pastor at Crossroads Oakley, located in Cincinnati, Ohio, is the leader of the Undivided movement. Founded by Mingo in 2015 amidst the racial tension in the US, its goal is to unite Americans through a curriculum intended to push for racial solidarity and promote justice through building relationships.

"[Crossroads] continues to want to invest in the work of racial healing and racial solidarity through things like Undivided," Mingo says. "I've got a lot of encouragement. I think about the bold leadership I see many of my friends taking to be present in uncomfortable places, and there is something rewarding about unity across differences."

The program started as a 6-week plan with multiracial small groups held to discuss the many layers of racial reconciliation, addressing in a racial sense ideas that previously were divisive, by first recognizing acts of discrimination and having open discussions with varying perspectives that relate in seeking empathy.

One aspect that Crossroads and other organizations like Black Lives Matter works to address is systematic racism. According to Professor of African American and African studies at University of Kentucky, Nikki Brown, systematic racism is the structures that have been placed by laws, methods, and policies and the ways personal behavior makes other groups subsidiary to others.

"For many groups who have experienced racism, it isn't always about individual acts or individual thoughts, it's about systems," Brown told Spark "It's about institutions that divide groups and say that this one is inferior to another group and that this one group may not have access to power in any way, shape, or form."

Brown says that there are parallels between

systematic racism commonly remembered by the 1960s Civil Rights movement and the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. While there are no longer segregated bathrooms and water fountains, Brown says discrimination between racial groups are still prominent today. An example being wage gaps, which according to a report by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics remain existent.

In 1979, black men earned about 80 percent of what white men earned, in 2016, it slipped to about 70 percent (\$18 per hour vs. \$25 per hour). Although wages for black males have increased, the gain still lagged significantly behind that of their white counterparts. The wage gap also widened for black women, though the disparities were smaller.

Mingo says that the main goal of movements like the BLM and Undivided is to eliminate systematic racism in modern society.

"[The 2020 BLM movement] is the modern day version of [the fight against] the devaluing of black lives," Mingo says. "BLM is calling and rallying people-in this case many young people-to a cause for equity and equality for black lives."




There are many community resources that give passionate Americans a way to easily get involved in the BLM movement. For young citizens and students like PhD candidate at Indiana University, Jelani Ince, the change orchestrated by BLM is only feasible by turning words to actions.

"Having hope is not enough because it relegates people to the role of the spectator, it makes you a passive recipient of something versus an active one," Ince told Spark. "A part of it is educating yourself by reading, and many outlets have organized [ways] for folks who are interested in anti-racism [to get involved]."

Morris agrees that young people have an influence in the BLM movement and they have access to educational resources and ways to show support. She has been encouraged by the support of young people getting involved and actively fighting for racial justice.

"Seeing [young people get involved] is very inspiring and seeing the potential that [young people] have," Morris says. "I simply love seeing the activists and the initiative that people are taking to think outside of the box and envision a new world."

Mingo believes one reason young people

<p>Walter Scott April 4</p>	<p>Philando Castile July 6</p>	<p>Breona Taylor March 13</p> 	<p>George Floyd May 25</p>
2015		2020	
<p>Tamir Rice November 22</p> 		<p>Stephon Clark March 18</p> 	

“[The 2020 BLM movement] is the modern day version of [the fight against] the devaluing of black lives. BLM is calling and rallying people—in this case many young people—to a cause for equity and equality for black lives.” -Chuck Mingo

have had increased involvement in this movement compared to those in the past is because of social media.

“There’s never been a tool like social media to galvanize people to a cause,” Mingo says. “It was the reason [that] when Martin Luther King was leading the civil rights movement, [the people] would go from city to city to galvanize that support. Can you imagine what he could have done with a platform like social media?”

Recently Yubo, a social networking app intended for ages 13-25, polled 38,919 U.S. young adults (aged 13-25) and saw that 88% of those respondents believe that Black Americans are treated differently than others. Furthermore 73% said they are using Facebook owned social media platform, Instagram, to demonstrate their support towards Black American equality.

Director of African American and African Diaspora Studies at American University Sybil Williams engages in her student’s discussions on BLM and listens to younger audiences ideas

“I have students engaged with their local chapters of BLM and I am privileged to hear about all of their success, but I also offer honest criticism,” Williams told Spark.

Ince’s initial connection to the BLM movement came in 2012 after Trayvon Martin’s death which pushed him to explore Black Lives Matter and its connection to him and his students.

“Similar to many other folks in the country, especially black folks, my initial sort of moment was in 2012 [when] Trayvon Martin was murdered back in the summer of my junior year of college,” Ince says. “I [began to] look inwards towards people who I trusted, especially my professors at the time who are passionate about things I was passionate about, and [then] a lot of the conversations are so localized, so obviously a lot of processing happens in community.”

Not only can people support movements through social media but information can spread quicker than ever. Videos, pictures, and dialogue are being recorded and used to help people recognize cases of injustices, specifically police brutality. This provides evidence that many people need to boost support in the BLM movement.

“Even after Trayvon Martin, even after the death of Tamir Rice, even after the death of Michael Brown, people didn’t take [racism] seriously,” Brown told Spark “It’s almost as if it

wasn’t until George Floyd was lynched in front of our eyes that people took it seriously.”

However Morris acknowledges that social media also has negative repercussions within social movements. She believes social media can oftentimes spread confusion and misinformation as different people understand different realities of the truth.

“One of the problems with social media is that it’s so easy to create biased news or simply false news,” Morris says. “If you have just a few sources controlling all of the media sources that exist then it’s very easy to make sure everyone gets the same story, and if people don’t know how to critique and analyze the media they are going to believe it.”

Williams finds that within the BLM movement there is a lot of momentum behind it but questions the desired outcome or feasible goals.

“In 2020 we are seeing large groups of BLM protesters act with clarity on expected outcomes on the movement, and I would like to see greater discussion on how to achieve their goals with a suggested timeline attached.”

Mingo also offers honest criticism of the Black Lives Matter organization. As many Americans struggle to differentiate between the movement and organization itself, Mingo says the organization’s foundations may go against personal beliefs and impact their view of the movement.

“Even though there are things about the organization that I don’t agree with [such as] stances that [Black Lives Matter] may take that disagree with my theological beliefs or other understandings that I have in Scripture and maybe even how I think this should be approached,” Mingo told Spark. “But I do want to recognize and honor the space that they’re occupying of being a frontline voice in a moment where someone does need to cry out injustice that is still visited upon far too many black or brown people in our country.”

In a June survey conducted by the Pew research center, the support towards the BLM movement has seemingly increased. The survey reported that 67% of all adults somewhat or strongly support Black Lives Matter which is about two thirds of Americans.

Despite receiving success and widespread support through social media, Black Lives Matter has also faced ridicule. Some of the backlash focuses on the political affiliations of the group, as they are left winged and two

founders have noted affiliation with marxism, the theory of socialism and communism, and the founders intent to “transform America”. In response Morris asks for skeptics to recognize the necessary change that will come from the movement.

“The movement is bigger than the founders, and that it is an old strategy used to undermine movements that have importance to history,” Morris says. “One of the ways that we attempt to discredit people is when we act as though people are static and their movements should be static, and they can’t be, because the movements that are going to be effective are going to evolve, respond to, and change with the changes that are happening in society.”

Mingo challenges the idea that if people are to be critical about the BLM movement then they should hold that same accountability to other aspects of their life.

“A lot of people say they can’t support anything that BLM represents because of this one thing they disagree with but they don’t apply that same standard to other things they support, and other people they support, and that’s hypocrisy,” Mingo says. “All of us have to own and recognize that [BLM] is complex, these organizations are complex, and people are complex. Moving forward, the minorities in the US continue to face discrimination. So the question BLM faces is what’s next? Will justice be served, and what does that look like?”

The desirable outcome of the Black Lives Matter movement is to seek justice as a collective change. This change is deemed necessary by many professionals analyzing the movement in relation to our current society. Ince wants to see visible change in America’s systems and structures but realizes that that will not be accomplished without putting in the work.

“In order for us to secure the future that we need, we need to fix in at a higher threshold, and get rid of these predatory practices,” Ince says. “It really is like Martin Luther King believes—it’s not a matter of capacities it’s always been a matter of will. Do we have a willingness to do the work necessary? [It’s] not a matter of resources [or] a matter of time, [or] a matter if people are available [or not]. Are you willing to listen to what so many people experience as an issue.”•



# KNOW BETTER, DO BETTER

More than 1.6 million public school students in the state of Ohio are required to take 12 social studies courses during their academic careers, but many believe that Black History is overlooked in this education.

story and infographic **mia hilkowitz** •  
photography **cassandra mueller**

**E**ast Junior Xaneia Williams is one of over 1.6 million K-12 public school students in the state of Ohio who began their social studies education at just five or six years old. Taking social studies classes in every grade level and recently completing United States (U.S.) History in sophomore year, Williams has experienced a form of education extensively detailed by the State of Ohio.

The Ohio Department of Education outlines the curriculum for every grade level in the “Ohio’s Learning Standards for Social Studies” handbook. But even with a thorough curriculum, Williams says that there is one important aspect of her history education that has been continuously overlooked and excessively simplified: Black History.

“When learning Black History, there’s not enough detail so it doesn’t really create a good image for you to see what was [actually] happening,” Williams told Spark. “Overtime, I feel like [teachers] just go over it so fast that you don’t really get an impact from it.”

Williams, who is biracial, remembers these brief encounters with Black History education with a frustrating feeling.

“I remember this mostly from middle school where you would talk about [Black History] and you get that sense of ‘Oh here comes this part of history that’s super sad,’” Williams says. “People would look at you a different way if you are black.”

According to a 2015 study by the National Museum of African American History and Culture and Orberg Research reported that nationally only 8% of social studies class time is used to teach Black History.

Williams recalls that the Black History she has received left out how people felt and how African Americans were actually treated, which caused some students to form misconceptions

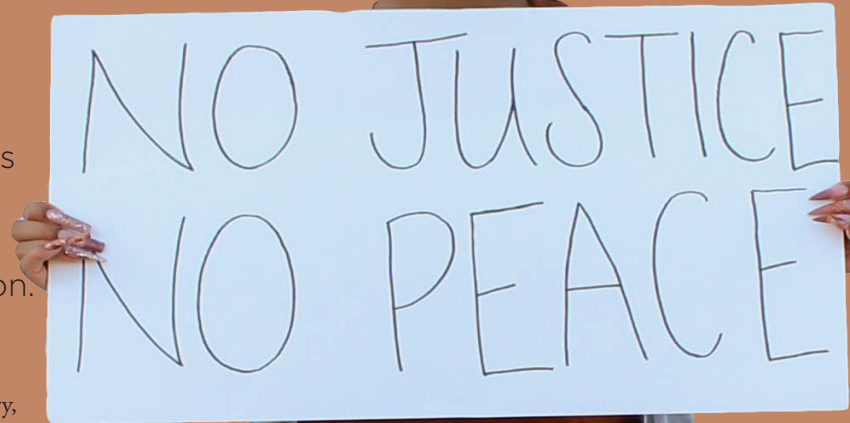
about slavery, the Civil War and segregation. Williams attributes some of these misconceptions to a fear among students to ask questions about history in the classroom.

“There’s a tension where [students] want to ask questions but they can’t because they feel like they’re going to get a certain attitude from someone who may not agree with how a movement happened,” Williams says. “They want to dive deeper but they’re too afraid because they feel like they’ve gotten enough from history class in general.”

The Southern Poverty Law Center reported in 2017 that only 8% of high school seniors could identify slavery as the central cause of the Civil War. Of those seniors, 68% did not know that the 13th Amendment officially abolished slavery in the United States and only 22% could identify how the Constitution gave advantages to slaveholders.

**A**ssociate History Professor at the University of Cincinnati Holly McGee says that these same misconceptions of African American history tend to be carried into the college setting. McGee describes her experience teaching about the Progressive Era, a time period from 1890 to 1920 commonly remembered for its social activism and mending of issues caused by widespread industrialization. But for African Americans, the Progressive Era has been considered one of the lowest points in race relations in the U.S. It was notorious for racial segregation hate groups such as the “Ku Klux Klan”, and lynchings of African Americans.

“Every semester I have at least one student



who is angry with me,” McGee told Spark. “Students would get angry with me [because they thought] that I was making [information] up and lying, only to find out later that this was just history that they had not been taught.”

According to McGee this gap in knowledge leaves students “experiencing a reality that makes no sense and has no context.” She says that without learning an accurate history of race and discrimination in the United States, many people will not be able to fully understand modern day social movements, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement. McGee believes that this is one of many reasons there needs to be major changes to Black History education in schools.

“A state or institution will make a designation about what [they think is] important and what is not important, and what is often important [to them] is a false narrative,” McGee says. “Not only does the curriculum need to change, the way that the people who are teaching the curriculum needs to change as well.”

Currently, there are no federal mandates requiring Black History to be taught

in public schools.

LaGarret King, Associate Professor of Social Studies Education at the University of Missouri, researches how Black History is interpreted and taught in schools across the nation. LaGarret believes that African American history is taught in an over simplified manner.

“There is rarely any context for notions of Black History,” King told Spark. “Black history is only focused on in three aspects: slavery, the Civil War and the 1960s Civil Rights movement. There are large gaps in the ways we approach black history.”

LaGarret says that there is a mainstream “narrative” of U.S. history that is taught in social studies classes across the country, which can in turn have a significant impact on the way the Black History is interpreted.

“There is a certain story that the U.S. is trying to tell us,” LaGarret says. “That story is a progressive lens of [U.S history]. That we’ve had some problems but because we have the moral aptitude to fix those problems and we’ve always believed in the pursuit of

happiness and liberty for all, that we solve these issues. If you [look at] it through a black historical lens you’ll see that these issues are rarely solved.”

LaGarret says that black history education is often taught with “historical uniformity.” According to LaGarret, historical uniformity is the idea that “white and black people have had the same approaches throughout history.”

“People are correct when they say that Black History is American history, but that’s a fallacy in the way that we understand and approach Black History,” LaGarret says. “I like to tell people that what is historically important to white people is not always historically important to black people. We shouldn’t be simply progressing into historical uniformity.”

LaGarret believes that even though the official, state-mandated guidelines may exclude this aspect, the required curriculum should not stop students from receiving a better Black History education. He thinks that one way to achieve this is for teachers to shift their own mindsets towards Black History.

“We need to stop hiding behind the curriculum,” LaGarret says. “Teachers need to understand that they are not just teaching a curriculum. Social studies teaches us about who we are and about others. but we can’t understand half the population because [Black History] is ignored, silenced or excluded.”

East Social Studies teacher Samantha Miller has been teaching U.S. History for five years. Miller says that teaching Black History can be a sensitive and difficult topic to approach.

“There is a delicate nature that you have to teach Black History with,” Miller told Spark. “Coming from me as a white person and having classes that are generally ethnically mixed, don’t want to insult anyone or their families.”

Miller says that when students first come into her classes, they often lack knowledge of certain parts of Black history, specifically about the Reconstruction era, the turbulent time period after the Civil War as Southern states reintegrated back into the Union and determined the legal status of African Americans. Even though slavery had been officially abolished in the United States following the Civil War, African Americans faced widespread discrimination and violence from those who disagreed with abolition.

“It’s really hard [to teach U.S. history] because we are such a proud country,” Miller says. “I say it all the time in class and I’m sure kids get sick of it but I’ll



“I hope that the [curriculum] will change. I hope that [officials] decide to add more about minorities in general and the way that minorities have been treated throughout history.” -East Social Studies Teacher Samantha Miller

tell you I'm not going to sugarcoat things and I have to be real about it.”

Miller teaches these historical eras from many different perspectives so her students can have a more holistic view of a period.

“If you go to a history textbook, it's [written] from that 'winner's' perspective,” Miller says. “If I really want to know the truth about an event, I need at least three different people's stories to figure out what actually happened.”

Miller shows these perspectives by having students read primary source documents and excerpts from black historical figures like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Miller searches for her own resources outside of the required curriculum to further expand on students' knowledge of not only black history, but other minority histories as well.

“I hope that the [curriculum] will change,” Miller says. “I hope that [officials] decide to add more about minorities in general and the way that minorities have been treated throughout history.”

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center report, 58% of U.S. teachers find their textbooks “inadequate” and 40% believe their state offers insufficient support for teaching about slavery.

According to Lakota Outreach, Diversity and Inclusion Director Elgin Card, the district is working to add courses and resources to Lakota curriculum that addresses different cultural histories.

“It's important to know all the great contributions that others have done, whether [they are] African American, Native American or [a part of] different groups that we don't get to learn about as much in school,” Card told Spark. “I want [students] to see people of color in a positive light in our curriculum.”

Lakota Director of Curriculum Keith Koehne says that the district has been working towards the goal.

“We've met a couple of times so far and continue to meet about [including more black history in the curriculum],” Koehne told Spark. “[Card] has plans for how to incorporate more courses and resources for the kids and their curriculum.”

Associate Professor of African American Studies at Ohio University Bayyinah Jeffries thinks that one way for teachers to encourage better Black History education is to take a Black History course themselves.

“No matter their field of study, I encourage

educators to take African American studies courses,” Jeffries says. “African American studies challenges one's preconceived notions and attitudes and provides opportunities to learn about oneself in relation to other people.”

Jeffries believes providing students with a valuable black history education is vital for society.

“Broadening one's education helps to bring out our best self. When someone witnesses an injustice, they may be inspired to act or work to abolish those injustices because of those educational experiences,” Jeffries says. “An education is supposed to prepare you to be a contributing member of society. Black History adds value to that mission.”

For East junior Olivia Lockett, a better Black History education is both important and personal to her. Lockett, who is black, says that in her experience with social studies education, Black History has been ignored.

“If [a historical event] happens Black History wise we will talk about it for a day and then it'll be completely out of the window,” Lockett

says. “We mainly talked about the Civil Rights movement. [The curriculum] doesn't really go outside of that or teach about the [black] people during that time. We don't learn about what's happening in different places during the Civil Rights movement or what caused it.”

Lockett believes that her peers do not have an adequate understanding and knowledge of black history.

“My peers will get on their phones or talk to someone around them or do homework from other classes,” Lockett says. “Instead of actually listening and learning.”

Lockett believes that in order to make a real difference, teachers and students alike need to put more effort into learning about Black History.

“I am African American so I have to deal with this on a daily basis, while they only have to pay attention for 45 minutes” Lockett says. “I think it's very important for [Black History] to be taught and it really hits home for me because this is something I have to live through for the rest of my life. I can't just put on face makeup and change it.” •

## AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

### Myth

### Fact

Slavery was only confined to the South.



Slavery existed in every colony by the end of the 17th Century.

The Civil Rights movement began in 1955.



Black Americans had been organizing efforts against racial oppression since before the Civil War.

Rosa Parks was the first African American to refuse to give up their seat on a bus.



15-year-old student Claudette Calvin refused to move to the back of the bus, 9 months before Parks.

Interracial marriages have been legalized for many decades.



Alabama was the last U.S. state to officially legalize interracial marriages in 2000.

**sources:** TIME and PBS

# BENEATH THE SURFACE

In the midst of a pandemic, while the entire world is struggling, there is one demographic that seems to be struggling more than others: the Black community.

story and graphic **ava huelskamp** | photography **ianni acapulco**

**A**s Teresa Bradley was wheeled through the emergency room at her local hospital after contracting COVID-19, something was different about this hospital experience. Aside from the squeak of New Balances on the tile and the heavy cleaning solution smell, Bradley noticed that like herself, most of the occupants of the COVID-19 ward were African American.

Bradley and her husband, both in their early 60s, made a trip to the hospital in their home town of Grand Rapids, Michigan after experiencing fevers and trouble breathing. According to the New York Times, 63% of infections in Grand Rapids are within the Black and Latino community.

Many things about the novel disease, COVID-19, remain unknown. However there is one thing professionals have been able to agree upon: COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting people of color in a negative way significantly more than their white counterparts. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Black Americans are 2.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to White Americans.

Associate Research Professor at Yale University Jorge Alfaro-Murillo accredits access to health insurance as a contributor to who gets hit hardest by the virus. Alfaro-Murillo says that about 7.5% of caucasian people are uninsured compared

to 11.5% of black people.

“This causes a problem because once you get the disease, if you don’t have insurance, you’re less likely to go to the doctor,” Alfaro-Murillo says. “[By the time] you go to the doctor, you’re probably very sick and those cases are more difficult to treat and are going to have worse outcomes.”

Professor of Medicine at Yale University Cary Gross has been tending to patients in the COVID-19 ward at New Haven Hospital, Connecticut for the past few months. Gross believes the healthcare system is stacked in favor of white people, causing disparities when it comes to health insurance.

“Our healthcare system is really built on a foundation of structural racism. In order to get access to healthcare, there are barriers such as health insurance,

or where you live,” Gross says. “Some communities have fewer doctors and [there is also] the risk of job exposure for essential workers.”

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), a non-profit organization that focuses on reporting news about national health issues, 2.9% of white people between the ages of 19-64 are uninsured, compared to 14% of black people between the ages of 19-64. Assistant Professor in the Department of Population Health Sciences at the University of Wisconsin Madison Tiffany Green has noticed that the lack of health insurance coverage in the black community directly correlated to the types of jobs they hold.

“Many of the jobs that are essential for [running] our economy—the jobs that will allow us to stay home—don’t have benefits like health insurance, and that means when you get sick you either go to work or you don’t get paid,” Green told Spark. “Because [essential workers often times] don’t have benefits like insurance, people who are in these essential jobs are still likely to go to work, even if they’re sick. They can’t stay home, and that’s a huge problem.”

**T**he type of job a person holds during a pandemic directly affects your exposure and risk category. A person who holds an essential job like a grocery store worker, bus driver or taxi driver is at a much higher risk of contracting the disease than a person who can perform their job remotely.

According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, 41.2% of all front line workers fall in the non-white category.

“We’ve really latched on to this term called essential workers, and those are the people that have to go to work when the rest of us stay at home. In fact, they’re the people that allow us to stay at home. They are the grocery store workers, the frontline workers in nursing,” Green says. “All of these occupations are disproportionately inhabited by people of color, and more specifically, by Black Americans. What it means is that [people in] these occupations are more likely to be exposed because they can’t work at home.”

Green believes there is a domino effect when it comes to who is holding



essential jobs and the position these people are in to take care of themselves during the trying time of a pandemic.

“It’s harder for you to get tested if you don’t have a job with flexible hours and benefits,” Green told Spark. “What we know is that Black Americans in particular are less likely to have jobs with benefits like flexible hours, which is an important barrier to testing.”

Along with the issue of getting tested, Green believes there is a systemic issue in America concerning how black people are treated in medical situations. These situations keep them from trusting doctors. According to National Public Radio (NPR), 1/3 of Black Americans say they’ve personally faced discrimination at hospitals, and 22% say they’ve avoided seeking medical care for fear of being discriminated against.

“Black people tend to be mistreated in public healthcare settings. For example doctors are less likely to be able to correctly assess [a black patient’s] pain,” Green says. “We see all this evidence that doctors tend to treat black patients differently, and this historical and contemporary evidence means that there is a lack of trust [between black patients and doctors].”

The Washington Post says that in Puerto Rico, women were sterilized for the purpose of controlling the population. From the 1930s to the 1970s, 1/3 of Puerto Rican mothers of childbearing age were sterilized.

**R**esearchers debate about the impact of pre-existing conditions on COVID-19 infection demographics.. While some scientists believe pre-existing conditions are a catalyst for infection in the black community, there are a good number that disagree.

Maryland School of Medicine Clinical Researcher Karen Kotloff told Spark that black people are more susceptible to severe diseases in general due to underlying conditions, but she has not yet done enough research about how those conditions contribute to COVID-19 infection rates.

“[Black people] have an increased risk for more severe disease, and that may be due to the fact that there are disparities in the occurrence of underlying conditions like diabetes and heart disease, obesity and other factors that we don’t completely understand yet,” Kotloff says.

Gross opposes this claim, saying that the notion that COVID-19 cases are higher in black populations due to underlying genetic conditions “drives him nuts.”

“COVID-19 is a virus that doesn’t pay attention to the color of your skin,” Gross says. “[It is] highly unlikely that because someone’s skin is darker the virus is going to be more or less [present]. The reason why it drives me crazy is that it is an easy way out for society.”

The CDC has neither confirmed nor

denied that pre-existing conditions definitely contribute to severe infection, but the organization has ranked conditions in order of the most to least evidence of the contribution towards COVID-19 on their website. Conditions at the top of the list include cancer, chronic kidney disease, and heart disease. Green disagrees with this narrative, saying that the real issue lies within the United States class system.

“I’d like to dispel one of the reasons why people think that there are racial disparities, and that is the existence of pre-existing conditions. Things like asthma and being classified as obese are thought to be pre-existing conditions that can make COVID-19 worse or lead to mortality,” Green told Spark. “I would push back against that narrative because it’s an oversimplified one. A lot of the reason that we’re seeing racial disparities in COVID-19 is because of the way that our occupational systems and classes are organized in the US.”

**G**reen goes beyond this to say that black people are also more likely to know someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or died from it. According to the Pew Research Center, 17% of Black Americans know someone who has been hospitalized or died from COVID-19 as opposed to 13% of white Americans.

“Not only do we have the overall mental health impacts of dealing with a pandemic, but Black Americans are more likely to know someone they’re close to who’s died from COVID-19,” Green says. “That’s going to have an enormous mental health impact above and

beyond what all of us are experiencing with this pandemic.”

Experts have developed several ideas of how systemic racism can be addressed, but it requires Americans to be proactive and take the first step.

Gross finds that the first step to end systemic racism might be simpler than expected. When he attended a panel about racial disparities in cancer treatment a few years ago, a senior doctor made a comment about what he would do to end systemic racism, and his answer was astonishing to Gross.

“[The doctor said that] by the time kids get to the end of third grade, there are profound racial differences in reading level because black kids are more likely to be in schools with a higher student teacher ratio, and a lower amount of resources,” Gross says. “The problem is once you make it to third grade, you’re already starting to see the disparity, and that plays out to the rest of your education.”

Gross himself believes that a more widespread distribution of healthcare is something that should be in place already, but it can now be a goal to work towards.

“[We need] to think of health as a natural human right, as something that’s interwoven into all types of policies. In addition to health insurance, it also comes down to a multi-generational wealth gap in our country,” Gross told Spark. “Unfortunately, there is a strong correlation between wealth and health. A rich neighborhood has a life expectancy of 10-15 years longer than a poor neighborhood. It’s pretty striking.” •

## 4 LOCAL BLACK OWNED BUSINESSES

**1** Barcode Glam Studio  
10002 Montgomery Rd, Suite #16, Cincinnati OH 45242



**2** Black Career Women’s Network  
114 Pike St, HQ - Cincinnati, Covington KY 41011



**3** BlaCk Coffee Lounge  
824 Elm Street, Cincinnati OH 45202



**4** Blush the Event Lounge  
345 W. 4th Street, Cincinnati OH 45202



**source** The Voice of Black Cincinnati

# A SPLIT IDENTITY

Black members of the LGBTQ+ community face additional discrimination within their own communities as a result of the intersectionality creates overlapping layers of discrimination.

story **marleigh winterbottom** | photography **cassandra muller**

*\*Note: This story uses a false name to represent a student who wishes to remain anonymous.*

**B**rian “Egypt” Joseph Powers, a 43-year-old African-American transgender man adored wearing his signature “unicorn braids,” a mixture of pink, green, blue, and yellow braids. However, this particular day, he wore his hair in its natural state of brown curls.

With dreams of becoming a backup dancer and starting his own t-shirt company, Powers was a man of many aspirations. He had put substance abuse and housing insecurity behind him and pursued a journey of sobriety for seven months, ready for a fresh start.

June 13th, 2020, Powers was found motionless on the sidewalk near downtown Akron, Ohio. Investigators determined that Powers had walked about 100-yards before collapsing outside of a church after a single bullet pierced both of his thighs causing his death.

Power’s family fears he may have been the victim of a hate crime due to his transgender identity.

Three and a half hours southwest of Akron and merely four days earlier, on June 9th, Riah Milton, a 25-year-old black transgender woman was killed in Liberty Township, 1.5 miles from Lakota East. That same day, Dominique “Rem’mie” Fells, a 27-year-old black transgender woman, was found dead in a river in Philadelphia.

As part of the black LGBTQ+ community, East junior Sarah\* found the proximity of the death of Milton very upsetting, especially after seeing the media coverage.

“I’m in a group called Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) at East and the club President at the

time sent out a message saying what happened,” Sarah told Spark. “When the first articles came out, it made me upset because she didn’t deserve what happened to her. On top of that, the media was deadnaming her and using the wrong pronouns.”

Deadnaming is using the birth or other former name of a transgender or non-binary person without their consent.

East junior Natalie Dace, who is biracial, says she felt unsettled knowing there was an act of violence and discrimination so close to home.

“I think it’s scary because we read and see all these things on the news [but] it’s not normally around here, so when it is, it’s definitely scary,” Dace told Spark.

According to The Human Rights Campaign, an organization that strives to end discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community of the 25 known transgender people killed in America during 2019, 91% were black transgender women. However, experts say that there are many cases of African American transgender killings that remain unreported.

“Many more transgender women died, in my belief, than are recorded,” Chief Operating Officer (CEO) and President of The Center for Black Equity, a global organization dedicated to achieving equality and social justice for black LGBTQ+ communities, Earl D. Fowlkes Jr. told Spark. “If they’re not connected to their family or they have a very marginal relationship with associates, who’s going to report them missing? And who’s gonna follow through on them?”

Transgender individuals face high rates of

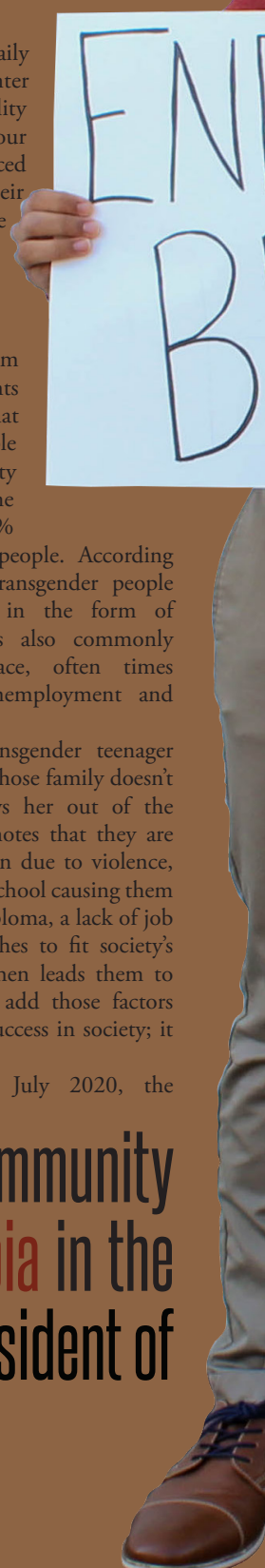
hate violence in their daily lives. The National Center for Transgender Equality states that over one in four transgender people have faced a bias-driven assault. Their research also shows that these rates are even higher for transgender women and transgender people of color.

**A** 2012 report from the Human Rights Campaign shows that black transgender people face severe rates of poverty with 34% living in extreme poverty, compared to the 9% of non-transgender black people. According to Fowlkes, while some transgender people experience discrimination in the form of violence, discrimination is also commonly found in the work place, often times causing struggles with unemployment and homelessness.

“You have a black transgender teenager who is 13 or 14 years old, whose family doesn’t understand her and throws her out of the house,” Fowlkes says. He notes that they are not finishing their education due to violence, discrimination, and bias in school causing them not to have a highschool diploma, a lack of job skills, and little to no clothes to fit society’s image of a woman. This then leads them to become homeless. “If you add those factors up, it doesn’t equal up to success in society; it equals up to poverty.”

At the beginning of July 2020, the

**“As an activist while I have to fight racism in the broader community I really have to fight, homophobia, transphobia, and phobia in the community. And that’s a tough nut to crack.” -CEO and President of The Center for Black Equity Earl D. Fowlkes Jr.**



# Cincinnati Black Pride

story **marleigh winterbottom**

**T**he month of June marks an important period for the LGBTQ+ community as they gather to celebrate Pride Month nationwide. Founded in 2018 and gaining non-profit status in 2019, Cincinnati Black Pride offers resources and events for the LGBTQ+ community and allies to learn more and celebrate Pride Month every year.

Cincinnati Black Pride begins its events in the week before the Cincinnati Pride Parade, an annual LGBTQ+ celebration that dates back to 1973. The 2020 Black Pride events were held Jun. 25-28 virtually. Cincinnati Black Pride aims to promote health, education and awareness, and social and cultural wellness of the black LGBTQ+ community of Greater Cincinnati.

Each year, Cincinnati Black Pride holds events each night leading up to the Cincinnati Pride Parade. One of the events in 2020 included the 3rd annual Black Alphabet Film Festival, whose name alludes to the acronym “LGBTQ+” and the inclusion of different gender and sexuality identities. The festival highlights films by or about black LGBTQ+ individuals. Although the film festival is focused on black pride, people of all sexualities and backgrounds are welcome.

“We invite others to be a part of our experience and to learn,” Cincinnati Black Pride Co-Founder Tim’M T. West told Spark. “That’s something I’m really proud of.”

Although the 2020 Census shows that Cincinnati’s population is 44.8% black, according to West, before Cincinnati Black Pride, there was no Black Pride organization in the Greater Cincinnati area. The only celebration was the Cincinnati Pride Parade, which celebrated LGBTQ+ pride, but West says that black community members were asked to “leave their race at the door.”

“Black Pride creates a space where people can be both [black and LGBTQ+],” West told Spark. “It’s not contradictory or in conflict, it’s a space where both identities can exist.” •

Trump Administration announced a plan to rollback the Obama era “Equal Access Rule” that had previously barred federally funded homeless shelters from discriminating against transgender people, in turn endangering the community of black and brown transgender woman who already face extraordinarily high rates of unemployment and homelessness. President and CEO of “SELF” (Strengthening and Empowering Lives and Futures), the largest provider of emergency housing services in the city of Philadelphia, Micheal Hinson, believes that this roll back is unjustifiable.

“There’s no way to justify stopping anyone from receiving life saving services like housing or shelter or emergency housing,” Hinson told Spark. “There’s just no reason other than a political reason to activate your political base.”

While they continue to face discrimination from mainstream society, black LGBTQ+ individuals also face discrimination within their own communities.

According to a report provided by Stonewall and YouGov in Britain, 51% of all black, Asian, and minority ethnic LGBTQ+ people report experiencing discrimination or poor treatment within their local LGBTQ+ community due to their ethnicity. This number rises to 61% when focusing solely on black LGBTQ+ individuals, 3 in 5 people.

“Even though there have been strides made and a growing awareness of racism in the LGBTQ+ community, being queer and trans doesn’t exempt people from having racial bias and implicit bias,” Cincinnati Black Pride Co-Founder and Teach for America’s Director of the LGBTQ+ Initiative Tim’M T. West told Spark.

**I**n addition to racism in the LGBTQ+ community, many including Hinson have reported instances of homophobia in the black community. While working as an LGBTQ+ liaison to Philadelphia Mayor John Street, Hinson talked with a school district about recognizing “National Coming Out Day” in their calendar.

“I felt my life being threatened by [other] black leaders,” Hinson says. “My life was threatened in that public discourse, in that public meeting and as a public official, as a black man, and as a gay man, that was a very low point for me.”

With the Democratic Party receiving nearly 90% of the black vote for the past six decades, many conclude that the black community is predominantly liberal. However, according to the Pew Research Center, only 28% of black Democrats consider themselves liberal, while 70% identify as moderate or conservative. Fowlkes credits some of this to many black individuals being grounded in



church philosophy, often creating a discomfort surrounding the LGBTQ+ community.

“The fact of the matter is, as an activist while I have to fight racism in the broader community I really have to fight, homophobia, transphobia, and phobia in the black community,” Fowlkes says. “And that’s a tough nut to crack.”

Sarah, with her own family being involved in the church, agrees that the belief system plays a part in LGBTQ+ acceptance.

“I feel like with older generations, a lot of families being in the churches when they’re younger are preached on “don’t do this”, [being LGBTQ+] is considered a sin and it’s wrong,” Sarah says. “When in reality you might not feel like something’s wrong but if you’re brought up to think something’s wrong you’re gonna automatically feel like it’s wrong.”

**F**owlkes believes that the constant battle from both sides of a black LGBTQ+ individual’s identity often leads to issues regarding mental health.

“We [black people] believe that we have to be a certain way

around certain groups of people,” Fowlkes says. “And it’s a lot of emotional and psychological pressure on many of us who are walking that tightrope because we receive distrust from both sides of the coin.”

While the black community is fighting for racial justice, Sarah finds that they continue to make hurtful comments to people in the LGBTQ+ community.

“It feels that like some black people, will [preach] racial justice, but then would be mean to LGBTQ+ people calling

them names. But they don’t like it when they face discrimination against themselves, for their face discrimination against themselves, for their skin color,” Sarah says.

East sophomore Kiera Leonard, who identifies as Lesbian, feels that minorities need to make an effort to support each other.

“All minorities really need to stand up for each other,” Leonard told Spark. “It’s hard to stand up, so we might as well just stand up for each other.”

Among black LGBTQ+ youth, a 2020 sample conducted by the Trevor Project shows that 66% of people aged 13 through 24 reported being in a depressed mood in the past 12 months, 35% reported seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months, and 19% reported a suicide attempt in the past year.

“When a black child comes out, not only do they not get support from their peers in their community, their parents are also coming out as well,” Fowlkes says. “We haven’t figured out a way of supporting black parents to the extent that they need to be supported, so that they can understand what the child is going through and be better parents, and be more supportive. That’s why these figures are so high because they’re not supported in the community, not supported in their church, not supported by their parents, and not supported by their relatives”.

**A** 2017 American Psychiatric Association (APA) report states that transgender individuals who identify as African American/black, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Multiracial/Mixed Race are at increased risk of suicide attempts than white transgender individuals.

West expresses having his own battles with mental health when he did not receive support from his father for being queer.

“I happen to have a dad who is a pastor who said lots of horrible homophobic things growing up, and I survived a suicide attempt as a high school student so it’s not uncommon to hear that,”

West says. “I think those numbers will change when we have a society that’s a little more accepting.”

Within the previous 2020 sample collected by the Trevor Project, only half of the black LGBTQ+ youth who had seriously considered suicide received psychological or emotional counseling, compared to three out of five LGBTQ+ youth overall.





Additionally, a 2017 report by APA shows that only 1 in 3 African Americans who need mental health care receives it.

The Center for Black Equity has recognized this issue and is working on identifying several virtual mental health service providers in Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, Georgia, and Alabama. Their goal is to reach out to organizations and people in need of mental health services who don't have the funds and provide them with three free therapy sessions.

"There are many black people who don't have access to mental health services," Fowlkes says. "Maybe that's a band aid on a gaping wound but it's a start for people getting used to and getting comfortable with mental health services, because it's one of the major needs in communities of color of all sexualities."

A 2017 GLSEN School Climate Survey showed there are beneficial effects from teaching a curriculum that represents the LGBTQ+ community in a positive light. 19.8% of LGBTQ+ students report being taught positive representations about LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in their schools and 18.4% reporting being taught negative content about LGBTQ topics.

"We want to talk about Ben Franklin, and we want to talk about MLK, and now we want to add John Lewis, who we should add to that education," Hinson says. "But, when it comes to talking about Bayard Rustin, who was an important leader in the civil rights era, particularly for organizing the March on Washington, you hardly ever hear about that. You hear about MLK in the March on Washington, but you don't hear about the person who actually organized it who was an openly gay black person."

Hinson finds an open dialogue to be an important aspect inside and outside of the school system.

"The biggest challenge has always been just figuring out a way to get more voices in the conversation," Hinson says. "Change isn't made with the Micheal Hinson show. It happens because there are brave voices outside, who no matter what, are saying no to the system."

Dace agrees, she would like more opportunities for open conversations with her peers.

"The only way that I think things are gonna get solved is if we talk about it and have conversations, even if you're uncomfortable" Dace told Spark.

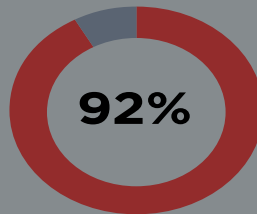
The most important thing Hinson wants to emphasize to black LGBTQ+ individuals struggling is that "you matter."

"You matter, your voice matters, your place in the world matters," Hinson says. "When our voices are in the room, it is felt. And when we are not there, that too is felt."•

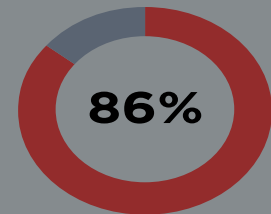
# POLICE PERSPECTIVE

graphic mia hilkowitz

**68%** of police officers said that demonstrations over the deaths of black people during encounters with law enforcement were motivated to a great extent by anti-police bias.



Percent of officers who say the country has made the changes needed to give black American equal rights to White Americans.



Percent of officers who say that high profile encounters between black people and police had made their jobs harder.



**6 in 10** black officers say protests were motivated to some extent by a genuine desire to hold police accountable.



**86%** of police say the public does not fully comprehend the risks and challenges that officers face.

source Pew Research Center

## SPARK SPECIAL REPORT

### LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT 2020-2021

PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES WILL BE EXPLORED IN AN IN-DEPTH IN ISSUE 3

# FIGHTING THE SYSTEM

As the Black Lives Matter movement brings light to issues that have previously gone unnoticed, African Americans who have faced racial injustice within the criminal justice system rise to share their stories.

story and graphic **natalie mazey** | photography **ianni acapulco**

**A**t 19, she was sentenced to 43 years to life for a crime she did not commit.

Tyra Patterson, an African American woman from Dayton, Ohio, did not plead guilty to the murder of 15-year-old Michelle Lai in 1994. Evidence was excluded from the trial that would have led to a different outcome, and Patterson was not allowed to testify on her own behalf.

Tyra was with her best friend that night, who happened to be white. Her best friend was never a suspect, and Patterson believes that the color of her skin played a role in that.

“[My best friend] told the police that night, Tyra Patterson was with me the whole night. If she’s in trouble, how come I’m not,” Patterson told Spark. “Now she understands that it was her privilege.”

After being booked on a murder charge, Patterson spent 23 years in prison. On Christmas day of 2017, she was released, getting to spend the holiday with her family for the first time in two decades.

“It felt like somebody was taking your life from you while you were still breathing,” Patterson says. “When I was released, it was like I got all of that air back. It motivated me to fight.”

According to the Sentencing Project, a research center working to promote criminal justice reforms, Black Americans comprised 27% of all individuals arrested in the United States in 2016, equating to double their share of the total population.

“The punishment should affect everyone equally,” East American Law teacher and Junior State of America (JSA) Advisor Matt Newell says. “The law should be designed to affect everyone equally. When you create walls that create separate systems of justice, based on who you are, then, by nature those people are going to feel disenfranchised.”

Beginning in the early 1970s, the War on Drugs began to perpetuate the idea that mass incarceration equated to mass safety. According to Danielle McDonald, Professor of Criminal Justice at Northern Kentucky University, incarceration became the solution rather than rehabilitation.

“Jail and prison were for people who were violent, who we didn’t think should be in the

community because they were a danger to themselves or other people,” McDonald told Spark. “Low level offenders like drug offenders weren’t incarcerated [before the 1970s], but today we incarcerate everybody.”

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the federal prison population has increased by almost 790% since 1980. Ohio courts are overflowing, and prisons designed to house 38,000 people hold almost 51,000. The ACLU believes law enforcement’s combative focus on urban areas, lower income communities and communities of color contributes to the racial disparity still seen today.

“Broken windows policing is the idea that if you pay really close attention to the small things, you won’t have to worry about the big stuff,” Marais Jacon-Duffy, Communications Manager at the Ohio Justice and Policy Center (OPJC) says. “They would aggressively pursue crimes literally like broken windows, crimes of poverty and desperation, which creates generations of mistrust.”

**M**cDonald says that policies like this allow for black communities to continue to be overpoliced. In the 80s, the disparity between crack and powder cocaine sentences left African Americans, who made up the majority of people arrested for crack cocaine offenses, facing longer sentences for comparable offenses.

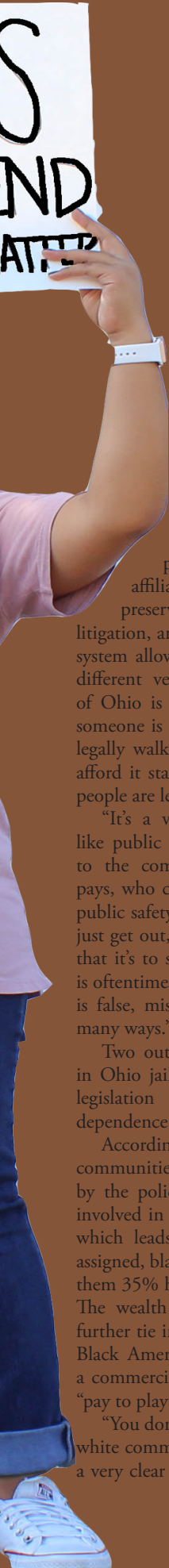
“In the 80s, [the United States] put policies in place specifically for crack cocaine,” McDonald says. “For instance, the 100 to one ratio, which means that if you have 100 grams of powder cocaine you get the same sentence as one gram of crack cocaine.”

Policies like this directly targeted urban, lower income communities and communities of color because these areas tended to use the cheaper alternative to powder cocaine, crack cocaine. People believed that crack cocaine was more addictive and made people violent, further justifying these policies. According to McDonald, powder cocaine tended to be used by wealthier people, allowing them to use without the chance of arrest.

THIS IS  
NOT A TREE  
#BLACK LIVES MATTER



# “You don’t see payday loans or bail bonds in white communities. So you see a very clear extraction of resources and wealth from black communities with the criminal legal system.” -Melekte Melaku



Although Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act (FSA) in 2010, reducing the ratio for crack and powder cocaine from 100:1 to 18:1, Melekte Melaku, organizing Strategist for the ACLU of Ohio, believes, that a ratio of 1:1 is the only fair ratio because they are essentially the same drug.

The cash bail system further plays a role in criminalizing poverty. The ACLU of Ohio, an affiliate of the national ACLU, works to preserve civil liberties through education, litigation, and lobbying. The current cash bail system allows for the wealthy to experience a different version of justice, and the ACLU of Ohio is advocating for that to change. If someone is able to pay the cash bail, they can legally walk free, while someone who cannot afford it stays behind bars, even though both people are legally innocent.

“It’s a very poor way to manage things like public safety risks and danger or threats to the community because somebody who pays, who could actually be a major threat to public safety, if they have the money, they can just get out,” Melaku told Spark. “This notion that it’s to safeguard our communities, which is oftentimes the resistance around bail reform, is false, misleading, and dehumanizing in so many ways.”

Two out of three people are held pretrial in Ohio jails, and the ACLU of Ohio wants legislation to pass that will cease Ohio’s dependence on cash bail.

According to Melaku, black and brown communities are over surveilled and targeted by the police, so they are more likely to be involved in an encounter with a police officer, which leads to arrest. When the bail gets assigned, black people get bail notes assigned to them 35% higher than the white counterparts. The wealth disparities black Americans face further tie in to the inability to make the bail. Black Americans are more likely to seek out a commercial bail bondsman, which acts as a “pay to play system.”

“You don’t see payday loans or bail bonds in white communities,” Melaku says. “So you see a very clear extraction of resources and wealth

from black communities with the criminal legal system.”

Other factors like poverty can intersect with race to bolster the ongoing racial disparity within the system, according to Christina Campbell, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati.

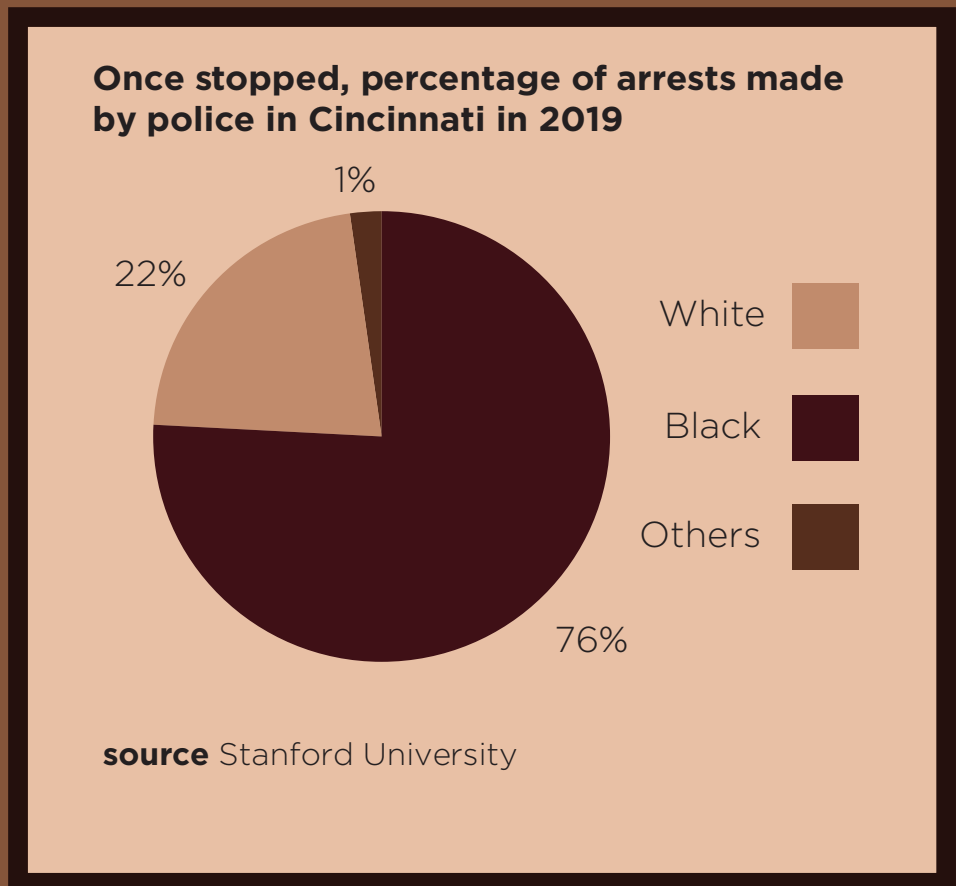
“It’s never just race. It’s race and family income, it’s race and school experiences, it’s race and lots of different things,” Campbell told Spark. “Because in black communities people who are at risk are exposed to a host of risk factors like school resources, family resources, and so on.”

Campbell referred to a case involving a 15 year old black high school student named Grace who was incarcerated during the pandemic as an example of this issue. Judge Mary Ellen Brennan ruled that Grace’s failure to complete her school work when her school

moved to remote learning was a violation of her probation, and she was incarcerated for almost 80 days before the Michigan Court of Appeals ordered her release. On August 11 she was returned home to her mother.

“I think a question the judge should have asked was, what were the barriers to completing homework? Were you motivated, did you need assistance, did you need a tutor, did you need wireless access? Were there other responsibilities within your family you had to take care of that interfere with your ability to complete them?” Campbell says. “We need to think about being proactive and thinking about how to reduce barriers that get in the way for kids doing well.”

A 2019 study of police stops in Cincinnati conducted by the nonprofit newsroom Eye on Ohio, The Cincinnati Enquirer and researchers from Stanford University’s Big Local News program, confirmed that police stops are impacted by racial bias. Blacks were stopped at





NO MORE  
SILENCE

a 30% higher rate than whites.

Blacks made up 52% of all vehicle and pedestrian stops between 2012 and 2017, despite being 43% of the city's population. And once stopped, police in Cincinnati arrested more than three times the number of blacks pulled over as whites, 15,127 compared to 4,315. Blacks made up 76% of all arrests, compared to 22% for whites.

The Ohio Justice and Policy Center (OJPC) located in Cincinnati is a nonprofit, public-interest law firm, that is working to reduce this racial disparity seen in Ohio's prisons. According to OJPC's mission statement, through legal services, education, and reform, the organization spreads a "fair, intelligent, redemptive criminal justice through Ohio." Part of their comprehensive policy reform includes bail reform and reducing the impact of collateral consequences, the "second sentences" a person faces after their criminal sentence, including restrictions that impact employment.

"We're missing out on workers that could fill a need for workers in hourly jobs and trades," Marais Jacon-Duffy, Communications Manager at the OJPC told Spark. "We're completely barring an entire group of people from aiding the economy essentially."

**W**hile the OJPC supports bills in the Ohio Legislature to assuage the impact of collateral consequences, they also help clients see if expunging or sealing their record is an option, which would allow the client access to adequate housing, job opportunities, and more.

"[Sealing or expunging records] is not a long term solution because something needs to systematically change, but it's a good way to mitigate the harm of a record for a person in the short term so they can literally survive and make a living," Jacon-Duffy says. "But we can find out what their options are for getting their records sealed. Not everyone's eligible, but a lot more people are eligible than not."

If sealing or expungement isn't an option, the OJPC can also help people to obtain a Certification of Qualification for Employment (CQE), which can break down barriers to employment.

"A person with a criminal record would go to a judge and tell the judge what the issue is with their criminal record," Jacon-Duffy says. "If they can get the judge to sign off, an employer will be able to hire them without the

possibility of being sued for negligent hiring."

Jason Williams, Assistant Professor of Justice Studies at Montclair State University, says that there needs to be a "wholesale education process" within our society as a whole. With another facet of the criminal justice system, juries, people can come in with preconceived notions that are inherently anti-black or anti-white that lead to the sentence.

"[Prejudice in juries] is representative of already existing racial issues in our broader society," Williams says. "It goes back to how we as a collective need to really sit down and have a conversation."

According to Williams, rehabilitation and alternatives to incarceration could be better utilized to create a safer community and a fairer criminal justice system.

"Community based rehabilitation is the number one thing," Williams says. "What it really is, is people coming together and basically making arguments for us diverting money from these traditional institutions, such as prisons, and giving to community based organizations, that have been proven to work."

**T**he United States has the highest prison population in the world, approximately 2.02 million at end of 2016 according to the World Prison Brief; incarceration reform like what Williams suggests could bring those numbers down.

"Part of that reform would mean trusting people who've been through the process," Williams says. "For instance, you do have a lot of organizations within the community that have come about from people who have been through the process, and now they've committed their life to helping other people who have been in that predicament."

Patterson's innocence didn't protect her from a sentence. But the years she spent in prison did not go to waste. At the time that she entered the system, she was illiterate after dropping out of school at the age of 11. Using her artwork to pay for her schooling, she was able to work her way through years of school, and receive her GED, along with becoming a certified tutor, obtaining a steam engineer's license, and completing over 200 educational programs.

Now, Patterson works as the Community Outreach Strategy Specialist at the OJPC where she advocates for the organization. Through outreach, she encourages kids to stay in school and stay away from drugs, and she wants to support those returning to the community after experiencing incarceration.

"I think it's important that [those who have been impacted by incarceration] remain hopeful," Patterson says. "Because it takes a team, it takes a village to fight this system that we're in."•



MY BLACK  
IS  
BEAUTIFUL

# EVERY LETTER TELLS A STORY

A team of artists and activists painted a Black Lives Matter mural outside of City Hall in downtown Cincinnati to call for police reform.

story **frankie stull** | photography **ianni acapulco**

Art is a vehicle for their voices to be heard. Dozens of artists gathered in front of City Hall this summer to call for police reform and racial justice. One artist, 36-year-old Latausha Cox, who calls herself a quiet individual, finds her art to be therapeutic.

“When I was 12, my sister and I would go to the neighborhood pool and everybody would leave because we were black,” Cox says. “They would also yell racial slurs at us.”

Years later, Cox studied Illustration at Columbus College of Art & Design.

“[By using art] I can demonstrate what is going on in my head,” Cox says. “It’s a little intimidating for me to be out protesting, but I can express my views through my art.”

For these artists, each letter in the large mural tells a story. Cox was assigned the “E” in “LIVES.” For her, the E represents education and the untold story of a child who does not have access to resources and community support, resulting in the child’s downfall. Every brushstroke and minor detail that Cox put into this project was done so with heart and with acute precision. This was not like any other piece of art she had done before. “Having equal education and funding for schools is extremely important in order for us to all have the same opportunities,” Cox says.

Cox is not the only qualified artist that assisted in creating the BLM street mural. In addition to Cox, there are 16 other African American project managers that organized the entire project. The mural, located on Plum Street in Downtown Cincinnati, was unveiled on Juneteenth, the annual celebration of the end of slavery. Each letter is loosely based on a poem written by mural project organizer Alandes Powell.

To form a team of black artists for the mural, Powell sent each project manager a group message via Facebook in early June. The following day, a Zoom meeting was held in preparation for the work. Fifth Third Bank

employee Vinay Duncan was one of the many workers involved with this initiative.

“At first, I wasn’t going to accept [the offer] because I was so nervous,” Duncan says. “However, I knew this was a big opportunity and we only had two days [to plan and design], so I continued through the process.”

Duncan, who is a self-taught artist, painted the “V” in “Lives” on the mural. She says that she joined the project in order to spread awareness about racial injustices. Her painting was inspired by the story of Sandra Bland, a twenty-eight year old black woman who was pulled over by a Texas state trooper for a minor traffic violation. Bland recorded all altercations with the state trooper, who eventually pulled out a stun gun against Bland. She was then arrested and charged for assault of a police officer. Three days after arriving at jail Bland was found hanging in her cell.

“[The story] made the hair on the back of my neck stand up because I was so angry,” Duncan says. “I’ve been in similar situations, and I know how she feels. In the [black] community, we have to deal with mental health issues including suicidal thoughts.”

On July 12th, weeks after it’s completion, the BLM mural was vandalized. According to the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD), surveillance video footage shows that the suspect damaged the mural around 2:20 a.m. No further evidence has been found in regards to the identity of the vandalizer.

Adoria Maxberry, a 33 year old entrepreneur and artist that aided in the illustration of the “M” in “MATTERS,” did not feel defeated after surveying the aftermath of the vandalism. Instead, she felt even more empowered than before.

“It was not negative. [The vandalism] just solidifies the fact that the mural does have a place here, and hopefully will one day not need to be stated,” Maxberry says. “People did not understand. Our art was an act of love to our city to express our concerns in a powerful way that was done so with care and kindness.”

A crowd of people bustle about downtown Cincinnati. Some are on their way to work, whereas others are stopping to stare at the spectacle below their polished shoes. The presentation that they continue to marvel at sparks mixed emotions throughout the street. While one man rolls his eyes at the sight and quickly passes by, the little girl behind him smiles, knowing that her life and rights as a human being are valued within her community. While the mural may be irrelevant to a considerable number of people in the Cincinnati area, its purpose will continue to make a big difference to the targeted audience in the long-run.

Though all of the various artists contributing to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) mural in downtown Cincinnati differ in career choices, family status and interests, there is one common theme among them all: art is each of their preferred form of expression. Using