



Black Women's Response to

THE WAR ON WOMEN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	I
THE WAR ON BLACK WOMEN	1
WOMEN'S HEALTHCARE, PARTICULARLY REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH	2
EMPLOYMENT FAIRNESS, PAYCHECK EQUITY, AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS	3
VOTING RIGHTS	5
SUMMARY	6
BLACK WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP	6
NOTES	8

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Commissioned by Higher Heights for America

ABSTRACT

In the sixteen months between the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the Supreme Court's decision to uphold these provisions, anti-choice legislators waged a war on women, seeking to roll back women's rights. This is especially important for Black women who are overwhelmingly impacted by the proposed policies and whose voices are routinely drowned out of the discussion. In this critical election cycle, Higher Heights for America seeks to insert Black women's perspective into the national narrative on the "War on Women". This report provides a snapshot of the country's nearly 22 million Black women, exploring their alarming health and socio-economic status as well as their growing political and economic influence, and offers suggestions on how to increase the involvement of these women in the policy debates that most impact their quality of life.

The War on Black Women

Since the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (better known as ObamaCare), conservative forces have launched an attack on women's rights the like of which has not been seen since the 1950s. In the last sixteen months, conservatives have tried to roll back women's healthcare rights, particularly on reproductive healthcare. They have also tried to reverse hard fought efforts to achieve paycheck fairness, collective bargaining rights, and voting rights. These debates assume a mid-20th century characteristic; one where men believed that

As it relates to Black women's impact on the economy, their spending power is estimated at over \$565 billion.¹ In 2009, Black women influenced how 85 cents on every dollar was spent by Blacks. By 2015, the buying power of Blacks is projected to grow to more than \$1.2 trillion, particularly due to an increase in education, household earnings, and spending.²

Black women also have a strong presence at the voting booth. According to the Pew Research Center, during the 2008 presidential election



85 ¢

“In 2009, Black women influenced how 85 cents on every dollar was spent by Blacks.”

speaking for women meant women's interests were adequately represented. Black women represent a major political constituency, consumer base, and volunteer base. Yet, these women have largely been left out of debates about health and equal access, relative to the role they play in American society. The result is that the impact of the “War on Women” is exponentially greater on Black women.

Black women had the highest voter turnout rate and represented approximately 69% of the Black electorate.³ Their increased political participation in 2008 is credited in part to electing President Obama.

This report examines the country's nearly 22 million Black women, exploring their alarming health and socio-economic status as well as their growing political and economic influence, and

offers suggestions on how to increase the involvement of these women in the policy debates that most impact their quality of life.

Rolling back women’s healthcare, particularly reproductive healthcare rights

Central to the “War on Women” is the debate over healthcare. Conservative forces criticize “ObamaCare” as an infringement on an individual’s right to choose their own health care, subsequently ignoring the broader benefits to society as a whole. Conservatives have erred in trying to portray the debate as one that limits federal funding to any organization that provides abortion services. Even if this assertion was accurate, such organizations continue to serve as a primary location for women’s health monitoring and prevention services such as contraceptives and annual preventative screenings (e.g., mammograms, PAP smears, STD testing).

Impact on Black Women’s Health

Data shows that Black women’s health care is influenced by a variety of factors including employment, health insurance, family responsibilities, education, transportation, cost, available support services, and inconsistent relationships with medical providers.⁴ Black women are more likely to seek services in clinics and hospital emergency rooms where preventive care is not the emphasis. Research indicates that the lack of health insurance is a primary barrier to Black women in receiving services.⁵



17%

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“Currently, 17% of Black women are uninsured, twice as many as White women.”

Currently, 17% of Black women are uninsured, twice as many as White women. The 2009-2013 National Institutes of Health Disparities report referred to the recently reorganized offices of minority health precisely to better emphasize and coordinate responses to the disparities that highlight the disproportionate prevalence of diabetes, breast cancer, and hypertension-related coronary heart disease in Black women.⁶ The lack of convenient services and under-insurance work to exacerbate the high incidence of these diseases among Black women.

Adequate access to health resources significantly impacts one’s quality of life. For example, a study released in the Journal of the National Medical Association revealed that Black women have a greater mortality rate from cardiovascular diseases than their White counterparts.⁷ Some startling statistics:

- Black women can expect to live to age 76; five years less than White women.⁸

- One in four Black women over 55 has diabetes, four times the rate for White women.⁹
- High blood pressure, lupus, and HIV/AIDS disproportionately affect Black women.¹⁰
- The mortality rate from coronary artery disease is 69% higher in Black women than in White women.¹¹
- Mortality for Black women from hypertension is 352% higher than for White women.¹²
- Age-adjusted stroke death rates are 54% higher in Black women than in White women.¹³
- Black women with cervical cancer are twice as likely to die from the disease as their White counterparts.¹⁵
- From 2003-2007, Black women had a 39% higher death rate than White women, despite a lower incidence rate.¹⁶
- Black women have fibroid tumors at a rate of three times that of White women. Fibroids are responsible for more than 60,000 hysterectomies a year.¹⁷
- Black women have over twice the unintended pregnancy rate of White women.¹⁸
- Black women are 21 times more likely to die from HIV/AIDS than White women.¹⁹
- The infant mortality rate for Black women is 13 per 1,000 births which is more than twice the rate for White women. Preterm births and related deaths account for the highest rates of infant mortality for Black women.²⁰

Impact on Black Women's Reproductive Health

The focal point of the “War on Women” is the debate regarding reproductive health, especially highlighted as one of Black women’s priority concerns by the Women’s Legislative Priorities group.¹⁴ The primary attack has been centered on Planned Parenthood – one of the nation’s leading sexual and reproductive health care providers – as the major institution that provides abortion services to low-income, women of color. In 2010, Planned Parenthood affiliates provided family planning counseling and contraception to 280,000 Black women. Threatening to eliminate funding by preying on legitimate faith-based concerns and creating inaccurate, divisive arguments leaves the lives of Black women and their children at risk. With Black women having disproportionately higher incidences of reproductive health issues, their silence in related policy debates only serve to exacerbate the following statistics:

What appears to be a coordinated effort to roll back the rights of women does not start and stop with the attack on healthcare and reproductive rights. Simultaneous attacks were also launched against women’s voting rights and their right to equity in the workplace.

Rolling back employment fairness, paycheck equity, and collective bargaining rights

As the nation works to rebuild and strengthen the economy, women continue to fight for paycheck equity. On average, women in the United States earn \$0.77 of every dollar a man earns. The disparity among Black women is

62¢

“Black women take home \$0.62 of every full dollar that a White man earns.”

even bleaker with these women taking home only \$0.62 of every full dollar that a White man earns.²¹ Due to the current polarized political environment, Congress failed to advance “The Paycheck Fairness Act”, which would update the Equal Pay Act of 1963 providing critical changes to the law and providing enforcement tools, including:

- Requiring employers to demonstrate that wage differentials are based on factors other than sex;
- Prohibiting retaliation against workers who inquire about their employers’ wage practices or disclose their own wages; and
- Strengthening penalties for equal pay violations.

There have also been recent attempts to sharply limit the collective bargaining rights of public employees. Collective bargaining helps ensure decent wages, benefits, and working conditions for these employees who provide important community services, such as teachers, nurses, social workers, child care workers, police officers, firefighters, and janitors.

Women who are members of unions or covered by union contracts earn more than their non-unionized peers and experience a smaller gender wage gap. In addition, collective bargaining helps women achieve economic security for themselves and their families. In January 2011, women made up approximately 57% of all government workers.²²

Impact on Black Women

Black women are a vital part of the nation’s economy. In 2006, Black women constituted 7% of the working-age population, 14% of female workers, and 53% of the Black workforce.²³ Yet, the disparities in the economic opportunity for Black women are shocking. Black women are twice as likely as White women to work in the service industry, characterized by low wages, no benefits, and limited opportunity for advancement. Furthermore, Black women are underrepresented in managerial positions and face barriers in transitioning from low-wage to professional positions.²⁴

Black women in unions or covered by a union contract earned 25% more than non-union Black women, or \$146 more per week.²⁵ Unions traditionally improve the economic quality of the country and have a direct impact on the stability

of the middle class. With threats to roll back the rights of union workers, this could subsequently have an enormous impact on the socioeconomic status of Black women.

In addition, the failure to pass the second part of the Paycheck Fairness Act has a direct impact on women's economic equity. In 2005, Black women earned 85 cents for every dollar earned by a White woman for the same hours worked, 87 cents for every dollar earned by a Black man, and \$0.62 for every full dollar that a White man earns.²⁶ In 2006, over 13% of Black women workers lived in poverty, compared with 5% of White women, 8% of Black men, and 4% of White men.²⁷ One of the most shocking findings in a recent study by the Insight Center for Community Economic Development is that while single White women in the prime of their working years (ages 36 to 49) have a median wealth of \$42,600, the median wealth for single Black women is only \$5.²⁸

With a rapidly aging workforce and growing debate on the future of Social Security benefits, there are some concerns about Black women's ability to make ends meet when they retire. The safety net provided by the Social Security Administration is less effective in reducing the poverty of Black women. Social Security benefits are based on one's own earnings or the earnings of one's spouse and, historically, Black women earn less and are less likely to marry than their White counterparts.²⁹ Social Security is the only source of retirement income for more than 25% of Black women.³⁰

Black women have continued to find work and support their families, despite inequities and because of their connection to community and family, they continue to play a large role in the economic recovery of the nation.

Some disparities Black women face present as institutional barriers, which make them even more daunting and destructive.

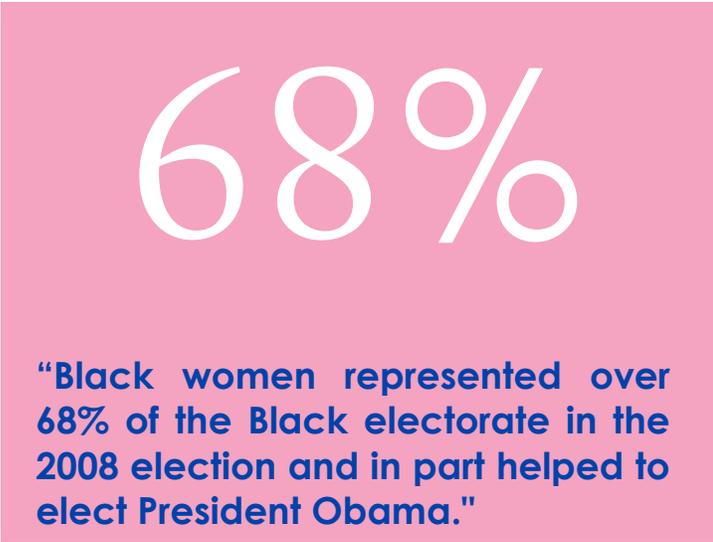
Rolling Back Voting Rights

In 2011 and 2012, state governments across the country passed new laws that could make it significantly harder for as many as 5 million eligible Americans to vote. Some states require voters to show government-issued photo identification, which almost 1 in 10 voters do not have. Others made it much more difficult for citizens to register to vote. Some states have cut back on early voting, an option used by millions of people. These new restrictions disproportionately impact young, minority, elderly, and low-income voters, as well as those with disabilities.

Impact on Black Women

The 2008 presidential election marked a significant change in American society. Not only was the first Black man elected to the highest office in the land, but the citizens who came out to cast their vote were the most diverse electorate in the history of this country. According to the Pew Research Center, the nation's three biggest minority groups (Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians) each accounted for

unprecedented shares of the vote in 2008.³¹ A closer look at the data revealed that Black women in particular had the highest voter turnout rate in that election.



68%

“Black women represented over 68% of the Black electorate in the 2008 election and in part helped to elect President Obama.”

Black women represented over 68% of the electorate in the 2008 election and in part helped to elect President Obama. Conservatives have successfully enacted restrictive voting laws in key battleground states designed to suppress voters of color. These laws create barriers for Black women’s political participation in the 2012 election. This wave of change may effectively silence the voices of even more Black women.³²

Eleven million U.S. born adults do not have available passports and drivers’ licenses; 3 million are low-income, 2 million are Black, and 4.5 million live in rural areas. Both the South and Midwest have large Black and elderly populations.³³ Data shows that registered voters without photo identification overwhelmingly tend to be women and Blacks. Therefore, the new voter ID laws will disproportionately affect Black women and successfully suppress a significant voting bloc.

Summary

The “War on Women” is particularly harmful to Black women. In addition to attacks on Black women’s health care, economic, and voting rights, there are also considerable attacks that were not referenced in this paper but include fundamental protections in the Violence Against Women Act, access to affordable higher education, Social Security and Medicare – all of which have a disproportionate effect on Black women. Legislators consistently add Black women only as an afterthought in policy discussions. They help ensure then, that Black women are located at the bottom of the hierarchy, discouraging any level of civic engagement, eliminating their role in determining factors impacting their own lives, and endangering an entire portion of the electorate by drowning their right to be heard.

Including Black women in the public debate and inspiring them to be change-agents will be a big step towards eliminating the inequities in health care, voting, and economic opportunities for Black women, their families and communities across the United States. Their exclusion by the generals of the “War on Women” is not accidental. Therefore, Black women’s counter attack must include a well-coordinated effort to harness their collective political power and influence through increased civic participation.

Enhancing Black Women’s Political Leadership

The 2012 election cycle has highlighted stark contrasts in American society, particularly as it relates to values. These contrasts emphasize

“You don’t make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering, and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas.”

Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm

the need for Black women to increase their power and participation in politics. Building political power is the key to having the influence necessary to protect their rights from access to economic parity to voting.

The late Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm once said, “You don’t make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering, and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas.” This statement rings true today and women (particularly Black women) have a pivotal role to play.

Imagine an America in which Black women fully participate in the decision-making process that ultimately affects their lives, families, and communities. Better public policies, improved judgments about the allocation of public money, and a more comprehensive strategy for building sustainable communities immediately come to mind.

Higher Heights for America is dedicated to organizing and mobilizing Black women; effectively moving them off the sidelines towards real political empowerment by arming them with the tools they need to engage, advocate, and lead their communities towards sustainable change. Higher Heights for America is working to:

- Reconfigure the makeup of decision-making tables to include Black women from across the socio-economic spectrum;
- Elevate Black women’s voices to shape and advance progressive policies and politics; and
- Foster creative collaboration across constituencies and issues ensuring that race/gender equity and inclusion are incorporated in progressive base building efforts, issue-based advocacy campaigns, and in voter engagement campaigns and electoral strategies.

About Higher Heights for America

The mission of Higher Heights for America is to elevate Black women’s voices to shape and advance progressive policies and politics. By harnessing the power of Black women to have our voices heard and to be sure that our interests are represented, these disparities will be erased. Higher Heights for America is strengthening Black women’s civic participation in grassroots advocacy campaigns and the electoral process. Through our programs, we are galvanizing and mobilizing the political power of Black women; giving them the tools to effectively engage, advocate, run for public office, and lead.

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