

# Burdens and Blessings:

Intersectional Statistics and Stories of Black Women and Energy Justice

DRAFT





***Burdens and Blessings: Intersectional Statistics and Stories of Black Women and Energy Justice***

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### **OVERVIEW**

#### **Summary**

We have a deeply entrenched system of environmental and energy injustice where intersecting identities, particularly for Black women, create compounded marginalization. Addressing these disparities requires a fundamental shift towards energy democratization and justice, which not only centers Black women's leadership and lived experiences in developing solutions but also dismantles the systemic barriers perpetuating these profound inequities.

#### **Introduction**

In the vein of those closest to the problem are best equipped to design the solution, a shift towards energy democratization and justice must center the leadership of Black women in forging a more equitable and sustainable future.

This report maps the disproportionate impacts of the fossil fuel economy on Black women in the United States. The intersectional nature of these injustices underscores the compounded marginalization faced by Black women due to the intertwined systems of racism, sexism, and economic oppression and inequality.

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Black women are not only on the frontlines – they’re essential to the fight for climate and energy justice. They are leading the way – as exemplified by the stories and actions of Black women leaders woven throughout each section of this report and recapped in the concluding Solutionaries section.

### **Layered Injustices and Impacts**

<b>Injustices / Extractive Practices → Current Outcomes (The realities of where we are)</b>					
1) Pre-Vulnerabilities	2) Fossil Fuel Economy Pollution	3) Energy Access and Affordability (Lack of)	4) Fossil Fuel-Driven Climate Change	5) Intersectional Identities	6) Exclusion
<b>Intersectional Challenges (But we try to solve piecemeal and in silos)</b>					
1. Racial Wealth Gap 2. Housing Insecurity 3. Lacking Access to Basic Resources (Health Care and Transport) 4. Political Under-representation	1. Air Pollution and Mortality 2. Respiratory Health Effects and Asthma 3. Proximity to Pollution 4. Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) 5. Infant Outcomes 6. Maternal Mortality 7. Violence Against Women	1. Higher Energy Burdens and Costs 2. Disproportionate Income Spent on Energy 3. Energy Inefficient Housing 4. Links Between Energy Insecurity and Adverse Outcomes 5. Higher Rates of Disconnections 6. Deadly Consequences of Shutoffs 7. Disproportionate Impact on Black Women	1. Climate-forced Migration 2. Disasters 3. Food Injustice 4. Sea Level Rise	1. Differently Abled Persons 2. LGBTQI+ Persons 3. Rural Communities	1. Under-representation in the Workforce 2. Fossil Fuel Influence 3. Under-representation in Zoning Boards 4. Under-representation in Public Utilities Commissions (PUCs)



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	8. False Solutions 9. Profits Over People				
<b>Adverse Outcomes → Scalable Models and Solutions → Liberation led by BIPOC Women Solutionaries:</b>					
Amy Mays	Roishetta Ozane	Shimekia Nichols	"Caroline"	Dara Baldwin	Dorceta Taylor
Monica Lewis-Patrick	Denise Abdul Rahman	Linda Daniels	Dara Cooper	Catherine Flowers	Chandra Farley
Cori Bush, Stacey Abrams, and Pamela Pugh	Sheila Holt Orsted  Esther Calhoun  Dorothy Felix		Shana Griffin  "Latrice"	The McKenzie Project	

## **CONNECTING STATISTICS AND STORIES**

### **Pre-Existing Vulnerabilities for Black Women**

**Overview:** Black Women in the U.S. face significant pre-existing vulnerabilities that exacerbate the impacts of the extractive nature of the fossil fuel industry.

#### **Key examples include:**

- Underrepresentation in governance roles: Black women are underrepresented in the elected offices that make key decisions about the energy system.

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- Wealth differentials/disparities (racial and gender wealth gaps): Underlying financial inequities give rise to increased vulnerability to energy burden. These economic disparities limit the ability to cope with energy burden, rising housing costs, and the financial fallout of climate-related disasters.
- Housing insecurity and high cost (and energy) burdens: When it comes to experiencing significant cost burdens related to housing, Black renters (nearly 60%) and Black homeowners (30%) have significantly higher rates than the national average. [\[v\]](#)
- Barriers to accessing quality healthcare: Black women face significantly reduced access to quality healthcare, with higher uninsured rates and a maternal mortality rate nearly 3x that of White women – much it due to preventable causes and systemic bias.
- Transit inequality: Limited access to reliable transportation disproportionately affects Black women, with nearly a quarter of Black households lacking a vehicle, leading to delays or missed medical appointments and reduced access to essential healthcare services.

#### DATA

- **Underrepresentation:** Despite comprising 7.8% of the US population, Black women hold less than 5% of the positions in statewide executive offices, Congress, and state legislatures. They have only 1.9% of statewide executive positions, and no Black woman has ever been elected governor. [\[i\]](#) While there are currently two Black women serving in the US Senate for the first time, [\[iii\]](#) their overall representation remains severely limited, hindering their ability to influence policies that address their specific vulnerabilities.

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- **Wealth differentials:** Black women earn 64 cents for every dollar earned by white men and possess approximately 90% less wealth than white men.<sup>[iii]</sup> Furthermore, 80% of single-parent households, which face the highest rates of poverty, are led by single mothers. <sup>[iv]</sup>
- **Housing insecurity:** Black women face eviction more than any other group in the U.S., <sup>[vi]</sup> with Black women renters with children comprising 28.3% of average annual eviction filings – the highest rate across all race and gender groups.<sup>[vii]</sup>
- **Barriers to healthcare access:** Black women are nearly 3x likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women (69.9 vs. 26.6 deaths per 100,000 births, 2021). Over 60% of these deaths are preventable, often due to delayed care, or racial bias. 22% of Black women are uninsured, compared to the 12.7% of White women, limiting timely and quality medical access.
- **Transit inequality:** 24% of Black households lack access to a private vehicle, compared to just 7% of White households. Only 12.4% of Black women using public transit in Atlanta can reach radiation centers within 30 minutes. Transportation delays often lead to missed or foregone medical appointments.

#### ILLUSTRATIVE STORIES

***Amy Mays*** lives in Arizona and had her electricity repeatedly turned off for non-payment. Then came the imposition of deposits on top of reconnection fees, placing Amy and her family in a downward spiral that felt like quicksand, with no way out of the pit of debt. In a place that routinely



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*gets above 100 degrees, having no electricity to be able to even run a fan, can be a death sentence.*

***Monica Lewis-Patrick*** co-founded *We the People of Detroit* in response to several emergencies. In 2014, as one effect of Detroit's bankruptcy, the Detroit Water and Sewage Department (DWSD) initiated a massive water shutoff campaign against Detroit residents who had unpaid water bills. In a city where thousands of people live in poverty, many Detroiters choose between their water bill and other necessary payments.

***Cori Bush, Stacey Abrams, and Pamela Pugh*** are all examples of Black women who ran for office while exemplifying liberatory values and advancing intersectional policies including human rights, racial justice, gender justice, economic justice, education justice, environmental/climate justice, democracy, and beyond. Unfortunately, none of their campaigns were successful, leaving a void and resulting in the loss of the opportunity for truly representational leadership for many Black women whose interests continue to be suppressed by those who hold elected offices.

(Learn more about Amy Mays and Monica Lewis-Patrick, as well as Cori Bush, Stacey Abrams, and Pamela Pugh in the Solutionaries section)

**Why pre-existing vulnerabilities matter:** The data underscores the layered forms of oppression that increase vulnerability to environmental and energy injustices. These structural inequalities set the state for deeper harm. Wage and wealth gaps limit the ability to pay for utilities, recover from climate disasters or invest in safer housing. Housing instability increases vulnerability to environmental hazards and displacement due to disaster or toxic contamination. The lack of wealth,

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housing security, and political power translates into limited protection against the harmful effects of extractive industries. As a result, Black women and their communities face unchecked environmental and health risks.

## **Direct Impacts of Fossil Fuel Industry Pollution on Black Women**

**Overview:** A housing system shaped by slavery and Jim Crow-era laws has led to substandard housing near toxic sites in historically redlined Black communities. Emissions from power plants, factories, vehicles, and industrial agriculture release pollutants such as carbon dioxide, particulate matter, and ozone precursors, which damage respiratory, cardiopulmonary, reproductive, and maternal health. Biological and sociological factors result in gendered impacts that spell double jeopardy for Black Women as they are more likely to reside in highly polluted neighborhoods, consequently at higher risk of deteriorated health.

### **Details:**

- Fossil fuel production and combustion release endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) like phthalates, BPA, and PFAS. These substances interfere with hormonal systems and accumulate in fatty tissues, making Black women particularly vulnerable. EDCs, reproductive health and harm that spans generations: Black women face greater cumulative exposure to EDCs due to overlapping environmental and product-based risks including living in polluted areas and higher use of products containing these chemicals. This increases risk of fibroids. [\[xii\]](#) Women are particularly vulnerable to these substances due to their hormonal systems and differential hosting of fatty tissue. Exposure can lead to fertility disorders, reproductive system diseases, and other health problems with potential intergenerational impacts. [\[xiii\]](#)

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- Maternal mortality and pollution exposure are linked, with air pollution during pregnancy increasing the risk of adverse outcomes, including hypertension for the mother and low birthweight, preterm births, and other challenges for the child.[\[xiv\]](#)
- Studies reveal that individuals living in predominantly Black communities face a greater risk of premature death from particulate pollution compared to those in predominantly White communities, even when controlling for income.[\[xvii\]](#) This suggests that factors beyond income, including chronic stress resulting from discrimination, play a significant role in mortality rates.
- Female-headed families are overrepresented in neighborhoods with high toxic concentration values, as are single-father-headed families with young children.[\[xix\]](#) Single-parent families are thus disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards due to historical and ongoing patterns of segregation in low-income communities and communities of color.[\[xx\]](#)
- Burning fossil fuels contributes to the emission of particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide, which can cause or worsen asthma. Mothers caring for children with asthma often experience significant caregiver burden and stress, particularly Black mothers who frequently report financial instability, housing instability, and neighborhood disorder as daily stressors. [\[xxii\]](#)
- Historical trauma (due to colonization, systemic racism, and the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous peoples) contributes to the differential vulnerability of Indigenous women. The construction and operation of oil and gas pipelines, along with the temporary housing for workers known as "man camps," have been associated with a deeply concerning issue: the heightened risk of violence against and disappearance of Indigenous women. The influx of predominantly male, transient workers into often isolated areas near Indigenous communities has been linked to increased rates of sexual assault, harassment, sex trafficking, and overall violence. The transient nature of the workforce can lead to a lack of accountability and contribute to a climate where violence against Indigenous women is more likely, exacerbating



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the existing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Often, these crimes are committed by non-Indigenous individuals on or near Indigenous lands, creating complex jurisdictional challenges that can hinder investigation and prosecution, leading to impunity for perpetrators. [\[xxiii\]](#)

- The shift towards "false solutions" such as "natural gas," carbon capture and storage (CCS), and nuclear energy, perpetuates a system of profits over people. Natural gas, nuclear, and carbon capture are presented as "clean" – but they continue to harm communities. By touting a narrow definition of "clean" they shift focus away from people and justice. It fails to address the root causes of environmental injustice.
  - Examples such as uranium mining in Kayenta, Arizona (where health impacts were so significant that special health clinics were established for the primarily Indigenous workers), carbon capture and sequestration in Kemper County, Mississippi (where the CCS plant was sited in a predominantly Black, low-income community), a natural gas plant in Randolph, AZ (where a historically Black, low-income community has already suffered ill health effects and had to fight a recent permit request to expand operations significantly) and the Grand Gulf Nuclear Station in Port Gibson, Mississippi (a predominantly Black community where residents reported a spike in breast cancer in young women after the station went online) highlight the continued environmental burdens placed on marginalized communities.

DATA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Proximity to Pollution</b> (Female-Led Households): People who live closest to U.S. chemical facilities are 75% more likely to be African American. <a href="#">[ix]</a> A Yale University Study found that</li></ul>

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African Americans have higher exposure rates than White Americans for 13 out of 14 most common pollutants. Black Americans experience 56% more pollution than their consumption generates.<sup>[x]</sup> Nearly 4 in 10 Black children live in areas with poor environmental and health conditions compared to 1 in 10 white children.

- **Air Pollution and Mortality:** According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 71% of African Americans live in counties in violation of federal air pollution standards compared to only 58% of non-Hispanic White Americans.<sup>[viii]</sup> Black Americans are exposed to 1.54 times more fine particulate matter than White Americans.<sup>[xi]</sup>
- **Respiratory Health Effects and Asthma:** Black people in the U.S. are 40% more likely to have asthma than white people. Black women are 84% more likely to have asthma than Black men. <sup>[xviii]</sup> Black children are 8 times more likely to die from asthma than white children. <sup>[xxi]</sup>
- **Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs):** Black women are 3x more likely to be diagnosed, preterm birth and pregnancy complications, and hormone-related cancers. These exposures may also have intergenerational health consequences.
- **Infant Outcomes and Maternal Mortality:** Black women are 2-3 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women. <sup>[xv]</sup> Environmental pollution significantly exacerbates this crisis, with Black mothers and infants disproportionately exposed to harmful pollutants. <sup>[xvi]</sup>

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- **Violence Against Women:** Beyond environmental harm, Black women living near fossil fuel extraction sites face increased vulnerabilities due to systemic neglect and the influx of transient workforces. This creates conditions that heighten the risk of violence and exploitation in their communities.

For example, A 2019 report by the National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCSX) found that various forms of violent crimes in the Bakken region consistently increased from 2006-2012, while crimes outside the region decreased. 1) Aggravated assault reported to police increased by 70%; 2) Reports of intimate partner violence against women increased by 33%; 3) Violent victimization of Native Americans in the Bakken region was approximately 2.5 times higher than for white individuals; 4) Specifically, sexual assaults on women on the Fort Berthold reservation increased by 75% after the oil boom.<sup>i</sup>

There were similar findings in the aftermath of the BP Oil Drilling Disaster as domestic violence increased significantly. For example, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana had 32 reported cases of domestic violence in the first quarter of 2010; in the second quarter of 2010, when the oil spill began, the number of reported cases more than doubled, to 68. In her article, Collateral Disaster: Domestic Violence Up After Oil Spill, Jenny Inglee reports that Mayor Stan Wright of Bayou La Batre, Alabama, said that domestic violence had risen by 320 percent since the Gulf oil spill began. “There has been a 110 percent increase in daily calls and complaints to the local police department,” Inglee wrote.<sup>ii</sup>

- **False Solutions:** These “solutions” are often built near marginalized communities. They profit corporations – while Black and Indigenous communities bear the environmental and health



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burdens. An example is Louisiana's Cancer Alley – a heavily polluted corridor where predominantly Black communities live – oil and gas companies are building carbon capture and storage (CCS) facilities, claiming to fight climate change by trapping emissions underground.

Studies show a direct correlation between reproductive and health issues in women and uranium radiation exposure. Women living near tailings ponds or using contaminated water sources have reported disruptions of menstrual cycles, inability to conceive, spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, and birth defects in children.<sup>iii</sup>

Higher Radiation Exposure: A study on the Savannah River Site (SRS) from 1951-1999, a federal nuclear facility, found that Black workers were more likely than non-Black workers to have a detectable radiation dose [Odds Ratio (OR) = 1.36 (95% CI: 1.28, 1.43)]. While the overall odds of female workers having a detectable dose were lower than males (possibly due to women being historically excluded from higher-exposure jobs), when stratified by race, the odds of Black female workers being in higher dose categories were comparable to non-Black males and higher than the odds for non-Black females. This suggests that despite overall lower exposure for women, racial disparities meant Black women in certain roles faced higher risks.<sup>iv</sup>

- **Profits Over People:** Utility companies shut off power for unpaid bills – while CEOs take home average salaries of \$9.8 million. These profits often fund lobbying efforts that undermine clean air and water protections and support voter suppression, school and prison privatization, and water privatization through groups like ALEC.

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### ILLUSTRATIVE STORIES

***Roishetta Ozane*** was born in Ruleville, Mississippi, a small town in the heart of the Delta.

*“I lived in rural, poor Mississippi, where people didn’t even have the basic necessities like clean water and food, and they were dying at rapid rates from alarming health conditions that our white counterparts were surviving,” she said. “So, I wasn’t really on the environmental justice scene the way that I am now, because I started my work in community organizing, community development.”*

*She eventually moved to Lake Charles, Louisiana, where she noticed the city’s numerous oil and gas refineries. She wondered, “Why are there so many? Why? Why is there always fire? Why is there always some type of smoke? What is this pollution?”*

*(See the Solutionaries section to learn what Roishetta did.)*

***Denise Abdul-Rahman*** is fighting against false solutions and for greater inclusion of women in the energy sector. In a March 2025 op-ed for the Indianapolis Recorder, Denise wrote: “...the Indiana Statehouse continues to catapult legislation detrimental to women and children — legislation that will prop up fossil fuels, nuclear, hydrogen and untested geotechnologies like carbon capture sequestration... Nuclear is a false solution for climate change because it will take decades to build, and the crisis is now. And if a nuclear reactor ever gets built, who is stuck holding the radioactive waste? Hoosiers can’t afford to pay our electric bills, especially single moms struggling to care for their families. Hoosiers can’t pay additional health costs, especially women living on the front lines

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*of pollution and who would incur yet another burden like radioactive waste directly impacting our health and our children's health."*

***Sheila Holt Orsted's*** family members became ill due to exposure to toxins from the nearby Dickson, Tennessee landfill that uses methane to generate energy. The landfill is located just 54 feet from the family's property – a farm her family has owned for over 150 years. Sheila herself battled breast cancer and her father died of cancer in 2007.

***Esther Calhoun*** is from Uniontown, Alabama and is the daughter and granddaughter of sharecroppers who grew cotton and vegetables and raised hogs, cows, chickens and horses. For eighteen months starting in July 2009, railcars rumbled into the nearby Arrowhead Landfill on a daily basis, carting more than 4 million tons of coal ash — a byproduct of coal burning that contains arsenic, lead, and other heavy metals — from eastern Tennessee, some 300 miles away. (A disaster at a power plant there had spilled the ash into a nearby watershed.) Although regulators and the landfill's owners assured them otherwise, Uniontown residents grew alarmed at the prospect of fugitive ash choking their air and chemicals leaching into their creeks. Some also detected a racial dynamic at play. The power plant was in Roane County, Tennessee, which is more than ninety percent white. The same percentage of Uniontown's 2,400 residents is black. And it didn't help that despite all the empty acreage available within the site, Arrowhead's operators chose to truck the coal ash two miles from the rail depot and deposit it on the southern edge of the landfill. Trailer homes line the two country roads that cradle the disposal site. Their occupants for the most part are black.



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***Dorothy Felix*** is from Mossville, Alabama. Her community is one of the “sacrifice zones” where they keep building toxic facility after another resulting in the community being one big cancer cluster. Unusually high rates of cancer, lung and respiratory disease abound. Two federal surveys found that the average resident of Mossville carries three times the concentration of dioxins as a typical American. Dangerous levels of dioxins also have been found in fish. And separate studies found that dioxins are in indoor dust and yard soil where Mossville children play.

**Why the impact of the fossil fuel economy matters:** Fossil fuel pollution directly harms Black women and their communities. Toxic emissions are everywhere and living in areas burdened by industrial pollution means that Black communities are exposed to harmful chemicals that accumulate in the body, with serious implications for reproductive and overall health. This is a layered environmental, racial, and gendered injustice.

### **Energy Access and Affordability**

**Overview:** Black women bear the brunt of the negative impact of the fossil fuel economy while disproportionately lacking access to energy.

#### **For example:**

- Studies demonstrate that African Americans are more likely to reside in older, energy-inefficient homes with structural deficiencies and outdated systems, leading to a disproportionate burden of energy insecurity – the inability to adequately meet household energy needs. This results in

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increased costs, decreased comfort, and adverse physical and mental health outcomes, perpetuated by income inequality, wealth gaps, and racial residential segregation.[\[xxiv\]](#) [\[xxv\]](#)

- Children in energy-insecure households have higher odds of food insecurity and hospitalization, and their caregivers are more likely to report poorer health and developmental concerns.[\[xxvii\]](#)
- African American households are more likely to have their electricity/oil and gas shut off for non-payment, even in circumstances where they are in the same level of arrears as a white household. Energy shutoffs can be fatal, particularly during extreme weather conditions, and can lead to loss of access to essential services like phone, internet, medical equipment, and food storage.[\[xxix\]](#) The inability to provide safe living conditions can even jeopardize child custody.[\[xxx\]](#)
- The current system prioritizes corporate profits over community wellbeing. Besides enriching shareholders and executives, fossil fuel companies use profits to lobby against clean air and water regulations and to support voter suppression, school privatization, prison privatization, and water privatization through groups such as the American Legislative Exchange Council.[\[xxxiii\]](#)

DATA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• According to the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy (ACEEE), Black, Latino, and Indigenous/First Nations households spend a more significant portion of their income on energy bills than non-Hispanic white households (43 percent more, 20 percent more, and 45 percent more, respectively). Low-income families spend three times as much on energy costs as other households.<a href="#">[xxvi]</a></li></ul>

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- The population with low-income served by LIHEAP is 56 percent women. The high percentage of women-led households living in poverty (23 percent) is more than double the rate of men-led households, which highlights the gendered dimension of energy insecurity.[\[xxxi\]](#)
- Studies find that African Americans earning less than 150% of the poverty level were about twice as likely to have their electricity shut off as white households with similar incomes.[\[xxviii\]](#)
- Utility companies disconnect households for non-payment of small bills, while CEOs earn exorbitant salaries (averaging \$9.8 million annually).[\[xxxii\]](#)

#### ILLUSTRATIVE STORIES

***Shimekia Nichols*** was born and raised in Southwest Detroit zip code 48217, one of the country's most polluted urban areas. Her current community of residence – Highland Park, Michigan – went dark in 2011. DTE Energy, the utility serving the greater Detroit area, repossessed around 1,000 streetlights from the financially struggling city — because the city government had failed to pay the utility bill.

***“Linda Daniels*** was gasping for air, the Newark heat in the 90s, when she died of congestive heart failure on July 5, 2018, her family said. Hours earlier, a utility company had shut off her power and, with it, her air conditioner and an electrified oxygen tank she relied on to help breathe.”<sup>v</sup>

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**Why energy access and affordability matter:** Racial and economic discrimination has caused Black women to live in older, inefficient homes with high utility bills and unsafe conditions. African Americans experience higher frequencies of disconnections compared to White American households with comparable incomes. High rates of energy insecurity are linked to adverse mental health, respiratory health, thermal stress, sleep quality, and child health outcomes. People should not have to pay the price of energy poverty with their lives.

### **Impacts of Fossil Fuel-Driven Climate Change on Black Women**

**Overview:** Climate change, driven by emissions from the fossil fuel industry, has profound and disproportionate effects that fall along racial and gendered lines. Extreme weather, shifts in agricultural yields, and sea level rise all have a disparate impact on Black women across the globe -- from maternal and child health to forced migration from Afro Descendant nations.

#### **Details:**

- Climate change exacerbates infant and maternal mortality in Black families.[\[xxxiv\]](#) Furthermore, studies link exposure to high levels of ground-level ozone to preterm birth, with Black women experiencing the highest rates.[\[xxxvi\]](#) Black women in urban areas, often with high heat and ozone levels, face the greatest risk of adverse maternal and infant health outcomes. The allostatic load from intergenerational gendered racialized trauma already contributes to higher maternal mortality rates in the Black community, and climate change-induced preterm births could worsen this crisis.[\[xxxvii\]](#)
- Black communities in the U.S. are disproportionately affected by climate displacement due to historical redlining, environmental racism, and concentrated impacts of extreme weather

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events, leading to more significant risks of property damage, health issues, economic hardship, and more incredible difficulty in recovering and rebuilding. [\[xl\]](#)

- Globally, many of the top 15 countries with the highest levels of climate displacement (Nigeria, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, United States, Brazil, Ethiopia, and Somalia) have significant Black populations. [\[xxxix\]](#)
- Black Americans also experience disproportionate impacts from disasters due to socioeconomic vulnerabilities, historical injustices, and limited access to resources and support, resulting in increased exposure to hazards, slower recovery, and reduced access to relief. [\[xlii\]](#)
- Notably, Black Americans receive less Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) relief funding on average than their white counterparts, and their communities take longer to recover due to historical segregation, devaluation of Black property, and lack of development. FEMA's reliance on real estate market values and property appraisals, influenced by historical redlining practices by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), perpetuates these disparities, as Black communities were historically denied access to homeownership and wealth building through housing. [\[xliii\]](#)
- Women are more affected by food insecurity than men, with Black and Latinx women with children disproportionately impacted. [\[xliv\]](#) Pay disparities between men and women, and further between women of color and white women, coupled with systemic policies related to the racial wealth gap, make Black and Latinx families more vulnerable to economic stress and the difficult choice between paying for necessities like rent and affording food. [\[xlv\]](#)
- Sea level rise disproportionately affects women in coastal communities who often rely more on natural resources. Increased erosion, flooding, and saltwater intrusion can negatively impact



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their livelihoods, health (including reproductive health, malnutrition, and mental health), and overall well-being, exacerbating existing gender inequalities. [\[xlvi\]](#)

DATA

- A California study found that for every 10 degrees Fahrenheit of warming, there is an average 8.6% increase in preterm birth, but for Black women, this increase is significantly higher at 14.9%. [\[xxxv\]](#)
- An estimated 80% of people displaced by climate change are women, who face increased risks of violence, including sexual violence, human trafficking, forced marriage, and displacement. [\[xxxviii\]](#)
- Rising sea levels are predicted to push storm surges and high tides further inland. As such, over the next 30 years, the flood risk burden “falls disproportionately on communities with large African American populations on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts,” the scientists warn. Black communities in the United States will see the flood risk in their neighborhoods climb at least 20% over this timeframe.<sup>vi</sup>
- The risk of wildfires is 50% higher for Black, Hispanic and Native American communities in the US.<sup>vii</sup>

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- Even post-pandemic, women are 35% more likely to experience poverty than men, exacerbating food insecurity, particularly in under-resourced neighborhoods with limited access to fresh produce.[\[xlv\]](#)

#### ILLUSTRATIVE STORIES

***“Caroline” (an alias)*** is a native of Cameroon. She shared the story of her sister, who like so many in various nations, left home seeking refuge because her agricultural livelihood dried up because of climate change. Tragically, like so many others, she was sexually assaulted in the border crossing. As a result, her sister became HIV positive.

***Dara Cooper*** co-founded the National Black Food & Justice Alliance in response to Black land loss, reduction of Black farming, excessive junk food marketing in Black communities coupled with reduced access to healthy food infrastructure in urban and rural Black communities that paradoxically exist with hunger and high rates of food related illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease. This trend is increasingly exacerbated by a growing distancing from land-based culture in Black communities that is perpetrated by racist policies within the USDA and related financial systems who have historically made access to land out of reach for many communities of color, and specifically black farmers as recently revealed through the Pigford findings.

***Shana Griffin***, formerly of the New Orleans Women’s Health Clinic, shared, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, “I’m crying as I write....I found out two days ago that “Jane Smith” (alias) like hundreds of other women, was raped during the storm.”

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**“Latrice”** (a patron of a disaster recovery center post Katrina) *I had to flee my home with only the clothes on my back after Hurricane Ike. Now I had to do it again after Hurricane Katrina. When will it end??”*

**Why impacts of climate change matter:** African American women face double jeopardy in disasters. Extreme weather in the U.S. disproportionately impacts women's physical and mental health, as well as their social and economic well-being, increasing their risk of psychological trauma and physical violence. [\[xli\]](#)

### **Intersectional Identities—Compounded Marginalization and Impact**

**Overview:** Energy burden has a disproportionate impact across various marginalized communities.

#### **Details:**

- Energy insecurity disproportionately affects households with people with disabilities, who rely on electricity for medical devices and thermoregulation. During the pandemic, a significant percentage of people with disabilities had to forgo necessities, live in unsafe temperatures, or were unable to pay energy bills. They were significantly more likely to be energy insecure than people without disabilities, even when controlling for income. [\[lii\]](#) Furthermore, Black women with disabilities are even less likely to be in positions of leadership and influence in the energy sector.
- LGBTQ+ individuals face disproportionate environmental health burdens due to social, institutional, and structural discrimination affecting housing, employment, and healthcare access. Individual factors like proximity to secondhand smoke and underlying health conditions

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can also increase vulnerability to environmental exposures and impact their health response.

[\[lii\]](#)

- Rural households have a median energy burden one-third higher than the national average, with low-income rural households facing burdens almost three times higher. Elderly, nonwhite, and renting households in rural areas and those in multifamily and manufactured homes are particularly affected. [\[liv\]](#)

DATA

- Rural households carry a median energy burden one-third higher than the U.S. average. For low-income rural households, the burden is nearly 3x higher. Elderly residents, renters, non-white families, and those in manufactured homes are most at risk.
- A study published in the American Journal of Public Health examined air pollution impacts in the LGBTQIA+ community by looking at neighborhoods with high concentrations of same-sex couples. The study found that these neighborhoods had greater exposure to hazardous air pollutants and a 9.8-13.3% higher risk of respiratory illness.<sup>viii</sup>
- People with disabilities, people of color, and older adults face a higher average energy burden (19%) compared to the national average (4%).<sup>ix</sup> Individuals with low-income with disabilities are at an even greater risk, with those earning less than \$25,000 being 244% more likely to keep their homes at unsafe temperatures. Many people with disabilities reduce or forgo basic household necessities to afford energy bills, with 50.8% reducing necessities,

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36.1% keeping their homes at unsafe temperatures, and 37.5% unable to pay their energy bills during the pandemic.<sup>x</sup>

ILLUSTRATIVE STORIES

***Dara Baldwin***, former Director of National Policy for the Center for Disability Rights, was quick to realize and point out how the first CARES Act provided \$350 billion in bailout funds for payroll protection, but the support was gobbled up by big businesses. Businesses owned by people with disabilities, women, people of color and immigrants were particularly hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, but many did not get a response to their application for aid. Those with the biggest advantages got the most aid, while those who were disadvantaged became disadvantaged even further.

***Catherine Flowers*** is from Lowndes County, Alabama, where the poverty rate in this majority-Black rural county is double the national average. Cell phone service and sewage treatment are luxuries. By some estimates, more than half the impoverished rural residents have raw sewage running into their yards and even their houses.

***The McKenzie Project*** serves Black TGNCNB+ people in Florida who experience extreme threats to our survival: economic violence, and mistreatment from law enforcement and healthcare...<sup>xi</sup>

**Why addressing double jeopardy for persons with intersectional identities matters:** Existing vulnerabilities, often stemming from systemic inequalities and intersecting identities, exacerbate the challenges of accessing affordable and reliable energy and hamper the likelihood of having a role in systems design and governance. Intersecting identities further compound the marginalization and



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impacts experienced by Black women who are individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and residents of rural communities, revealing a complex web of disparities that demand targeted and equitable solutions.

## **Exclusion from the Energy Industry/Sector Employment Ranks, Leadership, and Governance**

**Overview:** Black women are significantly underrepresented in the energy sector and its governance. The fossil fuel industry exerts extensive influence over policies and policymakers, while Black women are grossly underrepresented in key decision-making bodies.

### **Details:**

- Women, renters, and Black residents are "systematically underrepresented" on local land-use decision-making boards across the US. Property ownership requirements can function as "inexplicit racial filters," excluding certain groups from the local democratic process. These boards, predominantly composed of white men who own homes and work in "white-collar" jobs, have significant influence over housing construction, affordability, and segregation.[\[xlix\]](#)
- During the last election cycle, the fossil fuel industry spent a staggering \$445 million on political donations, lobbying, and advertising to influence elected office positions. This figure underestimates the full amount of the revenue received to sway the legislature due to undisclosed "dark money" contributions.[\[li\]](#) Due to the lack of positions of levels of authority within the fossil fuel industry, this is yet another avenue of suppressed influence by Black women in the energy sector and beyond.

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### DATA

- Women hold only 27% of jobs in the energy sector, compared to nearly half of the jobs in the overall economy. They also have a small percentage of industry senior management positions and board seats. [\[xlviii\]](#)
- Regarding underrepresentation in Public Utilities Commissions (PUCs), according to the 2023 report, *Who Holds the Power*, men constitute 65% of the 197 PUC commissioners, while women make up only 35%. Six states (Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, New Hampshire, and Utah) have all-male PUCs. There is also significant racial underrepresentation: 82% of commissioners are White, while only 11% are Black, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian, and 1% Native American/American Indian. This starkly contrasts with the US population demographics (14% Black, 19% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Asian).
- Nearly half of the states (24) have PUCs with no commissioners of color. In 30 states, white male commissioners hold the majority vote. Four states (Idaho, Maine, Mississippi, and Utah) have 100% white male PUCs. Despite having the highest proportions of Black populations in the country, Mississippi has never elected a Black commissioner, and Georgia has only had two in its 80+ year history. Among the PUC commissioners in Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama, 88% are white, and 88% are men, with only two Black commissioners and no Black female commissioners currently or historically (except for one in Louisiana's 80-year history).

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### ILLUSTRATIVE STORIES

***Dr. Dorceta Taylor*** studied 191 conservation and preservation organizations, 74 government environmental agencies, 28 environmental grant-making foundations, and 21 environmental professionals. Her report, “Green 2.0, The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations,” concludes there is a significant gender and ethnic gap in the ranks of environmental organizations — a gap that needs to be addressed if the movement is to remain relevant in a nation with rapidly shifting demographics.

***Chandra Farley***, currently Sustainability Director with the City of Atlanta, ran for Public Utility Commissioner in Georgia, a state that has never had a Black female public utility commissioner and has only had two Black commissioners in its 80+ year history. Chandra came into the race with over a decade of experience as a champion for equity and justice and a history of leading progress in her role leading Just Energy efforts with Partnership for Southern Equity and beyond. Yet, she was unsuccessful. A loss for frontline communities throughout Georgia and a loss for planetary health.

**Why exclusion matters:** This lack of representation in bodies that regulate energy directly impacts the ability to address the energy injustices faced by Black communities generally and Black women specifically as well as society writ large and the earth. [\[1\]](#)

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### **Summing up the intersectional challenges...**

The evidence presented unequivocally demonstrates the multifaceted and disproportionate impacts of the fossil fuel economy on Black women in the United States.

Pre-existing vulnerabilities rooted in systemic racism, sexism, and economic inequality, such as underrepresentation in governance and significant wealth disparities, create a precarious foundation. Environmental burdens, with most African Americans living in counties violating federal air pollution standards, flourish in the context of extreme vulnerability.

Furthermore, Black women experience higher rates of energy insecurity, with Black households spending significantly more on energy bills compared to non-Hispanic white families, and face disproportionately high rates of utility disconnections.

The climate crisis, driven by the fossil fuel industry, further exacerbates these injustices, contributing to higher rates of preterm birth for Black women, increased vulnerability to climate displacement, and more significant challenges in disaster recovery, evidenced by receiving less FEMA relief funding than their white counterparts.

The stark underrepresentation of women, particularly Black women, in the energy sector workforce and crucial decision-making bodies, like Public Utilities Commissions and zoning boards, perpetuates these inequities by limiting their ability to influence policy and advocate for their communities. The fossil fuel industry's spending on political influence further underscores the systemic barriers to equitable energy governance.

## SOLUTIONS AND SOLUTIONARIES

### Research

Many public policies have failed to effectively address problems because the design, enactment, and/or implementation employed limited research. Missing data or failing to disaggregate data have compounded – and will continue to compound – intersectional problems.<sup>xii</sup> To address these issues, we must:

- Restore respect and resources for equity-based research and ensure that we have race and gender disaggregated data that makes it possible to demonstrate differential impact and paves the way for targeted solutions.
- Fully resource community-based participatory research in accordance with the adage that those who are closest to the problem are best equipped to design solutions.

Increasing the respectful collection and use of intersectional data from diverse sources is essential for policy solutions that communities may fully embrace.

### Policy Solutions: Intersectional problems require systemic, transformational remedies

**Overview:** Recognizing that complex societal challenges require multifaceted solutions, this section outlines a sample range of policy recommendations that create the conditions necessary to support the energy transition in the context of a broader Just Transition framework that shifts from an extractive economy to a solidarity economy. These policies foster inclusive governance, advance public health, promote economic equity, and address intersecting social justice issues, particularly impacting Black communities and Black women, as critical elements towards transitioning to an equitably sustainable energy future. Combining short-term mitigation tactics and long-term transformation, these proposed measures are just a taste of the required comprehensive set of intersectional policies. The breadth and depth of the policy framework underscore the necessity of



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systemic change to dismantle myriad existing inequalities and create a more just and equitable society for all.

#### **A sampling of recommended policies:**

##### **Inclusive, Representational Governance**

To foster a more inclusive and representative government, the following recommendations aim to center frontline community leadership, mitigate corporate influence in politics, and specifically increase the representation of Black women in leadership and decision-making roles.

- § Eliminate state pre-emption laws to grant local municipalities autonomy to enact policies tailored to their specific needs and circumstances.
- § Enact policies to reverse the Citizens United Supreme Court decision and reduce corporate money's influence in political campaigns.
- § Implement comprehensive campaign finance reform to limit contributions, increase transparency, and promote a more equitable and democratic election process.
- § Implement policies and initiatives to increase the representation of women in elected offices and leadership positions at all levels of government.
- § States should enact zoning board standards that require compensation, transit access, and flexible meeting times, and eliminate property ownership requirements to promote more equitable representation in land-use decision-making roles.

##### **Public Health**

To specifically address the health disparities faced by Black communities, these recommendations advocate for a national universal healthcare system, improved maternal and child health outcomes with culturally competent services for Black women and families, and the restoration of reproductive rights.

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- § Establish a national, universal healthcare system to provide comprehensive coverage to all residents and ensure access to affordable medical care.
- § Improve maternal and child health outcomes by expanding access to prenatal care, postnatal support, and pediatric services, and provide specialized, culturally competent, and situationally resonant services for Black women and families.
- § Restore reproductive rights.

**Economic Inclusion**

These recommendations propose implementing affirmative action, establishing a universal basic income, investing in job training, supporting disadvantaged businesses, reforming trade policies, promoting workplace diversity and inclusion, and ensuring fair and affordable housing to advance economic fairness and inclusivity.

- § Implement affirmative action policies to address historical and ongoing discrimination in employment and education, promoting equal opportunity.
- § Institute a universal basic income program to provide a regular, unconditional cash payment to all citizens, reducing poverty and income inequality.
- § Invest in job training and education programs to equip workers with the skills needed for current and future employment opportunities.
- § Allocate funding and support services to assist disadvantaged business enterprises in accessing capital and competing in the marketplace.
- § Reform trade policies to promote fair trade practices, protect domestic industries, and ensure equitable distribution of economic benefits.
- § Enact policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, fostering a culture of respect and belonging for all employees.
- § Implement policies to ensure fair and affordable housing, addressing matters such as discriminatory practices and housing shortages.

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### **Intersecting Social Justice Initiatives**

To address intersecting social justice issues with a differential impact on Black communities, these recommendations call for comprehensive immigration reform and investments in rehabilitation and re-entry programs within the criminal justice system.

- § Enact comprehensive immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, strengthens border security, and addresses the root causes of migration.
- § Invest in rehabilitation programs, reduce mandatory minimum sentences, and support re-entry initiatives, including employment and entrepreneurship assistance, to decrease the rate of reoffending.

### **Equitable and Just Energy Principles and Policies**

Policy solutions must center frontline leadership and people-led governance, promote public health and wellbeing, ensure access and affordability, advance economic inclusion, and lean into biomimicry and regeneration in energy infrastructure. Assistive policies to these ends include stringent environmental regulations, energy efficiency promotion, a rapid transition to clean energy with community solar expansion, utility shut-off moratoriums, expanded net metering, offshore wind investment, targeted clean energy funding for disadvantaged areas, and restored (and increased) LIHEAP support.

- § Enforce stringent energy production and consumption regulations to minimize environmental impact and promote sustainability.
- § Promote energy efficiency through building codes, appliance standards, and incentives for energy-saving technologies.
- § Accelerate the transition to clean energy sources by investing in renewable infrastructure and phasing out fossil fuels.
- § Support the development of community solar programs to expand households 'and businesses ' access to solar energy.

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- § Implement a moratorium on utility shut-offs for low-income residents to ensure access to essential services like electricity and heating.
- § Expand net metering policies to incentivize distributed solar generation and allow homeowners to receive fair compensation for excess energy.
- § Invest in offshore wind energy projects to harness a clean and abundant renewable resource.
- § Direct significant clean energy investments to disadvantaged communities.
- § Re-establish and increase funding for the Low-Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to help low-income households afford energy costs.
- § Ensure that building codes are anchored in passive design, locally sourced materials, electrification, and disaster resilience.
- § Significantly build out mass transit and increase investments in vehicle electrification for trucks, buses, and cars.

### **Policies and Practices in Action – Leadership of Black Femme Solutionaries on the Frontlines**

There are scores of BIPOC women whose leadership is driving us forward and whose work serves as models in a New Energy Economy. Swimming upstream amidst particularly treacherous forces, they persist as exemplars in leading the way toward an energy landscape and economy that is accessible, affordable, and sustainable.

### **34 Black women on the frontlines of energy justice and its intersecting matters and movements:**

*Stacey Abrams* witnessed firsthand how petrochemical pollution affects low-income and predominantly Black communities as she was growing up on the Gulf Coast near Louisiana's "Cancer Alley". When she was in high school, her family moved to Georgia. Stacey was elected to the Georgia House of

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Representatives in 2011 and served as Minority Leader until 2017. Stacey ran for governor of Georgia in 2018 and again in 2022. Though she lost both races, she drew national attention to issues of voter suppression in the state. As a Georgia legislator, Stacey fought for more resilient infrastructure. Her environmental justice work continues to be inseparable from her mission to build power, uplift underserved communities, and deliver economic and public health benefits through clean energy.

[Shalanda Baker](#) is the inaugural Vice Provost for Sustainability and Climate Action at the University of Michigan and previously served as the Director of the Office of Energy Justice and Equity at the U.S. Department of Energy.

[Dara Baldwin](#) is the former Director of National Policy for the Center for Disability Rights. Dara is the author of *To Be a Problem: A Black Woman's Survival in the Racist Disability Rights Movement*. For over 20 years, Dara has often been the only person of color in the room when significant disability policy decisions are made. *In To Be a Problem*, Baldwin candidly shares her journey to becoming a disability activist and policymaker in DC while critiquing the disability rights community. Disability rights groups have been centering white, straight, cisgender people while racial justice groups often fail to center disabled people, leading many Black and Brown disabled people to start their own Disability Justice organizations. Drawing from her unique vantage point, Baldwin calls readers to understand the shortcomings of the disability rights movement while inspiring us to push all movements towards a more inclusive and authentic liberation.

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[Cori Bush](#) was fighting to clean up and test schools impacted by toxic radioactive waste from the government's Manhattan Project in St. Louis long before she was elected to Congress. A registered nurse, pastor, and former organizer in Ferguson, Missouri, Cori was elected to represent Missouri's 1st congressional district from 2021 to 2025. In Congress, Bush prioritized legislation that centers frontline communities, co-sponsoring the Environmental Justice Mapping and Data Collection Act of 2021, to collect critical data on whom environmental harms impact most. She also led the Energy Security and Independence Act of 2022, directing federal investment toward renewable energy and efficiency projects, particularly in underserved areas.

[Esther Calhoun](#) is from Uniontown, Alabama where she led the efforts to advance justice around harmful landfills in their backyards.

[Dara Cooper](#) is Co-founder and Senior Advisor at the National Black Food & Justice Alliance. Because of the urgency of our conditions, disenfranchisement, continued exploitation and exclusion from our food system, it is critical to reclaim, lift up and strengthen the abundance of Black food and justice work nationwide.

[Linda Daniels](#) (In Memoriam) On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019 a year to the day since her death due to having her electricity shut off for non-payment, Gov. [Phil Murphy](#) signed a package of legislation dubbed "Linda's Law" requiring utilities in New Jersey to check with all of their residential customers whether they rely on "life-sustaining equipment" that uses electricity. Through her unwitting sacrifice, Linda's story is saving others who may have ended up in similar circumstances.<sup>xiii</sup>



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[Gladys Brown Dutrieuille](#) is a former Commissioner and Chairman of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission with over thirty years of experience shaping the public utility landscape.

[Karen Earl](#) is the Executive Director of the Genesee Center for Domestic Violence Prevention and Intervention. The installation of a solar energy system in 2018 has saved nearly \$50,000 in energy bills, which are precious resources that could be redeployed for other critical programming. The project — in partnership with United Methodist Women, Grid Alternatives, Sunrun, and the NAACP, also provided hands-on job training to Jenesse Center clients. This provided a pathway to independence for 7 residents — in line with the organization's mission of fostering financial independence among domestic violence survivors.

[Denise Fairchild](#) of Emerald Cities Collaborative is working to heal the climate and build sustainable, equitable local economies through community-owned, renewable power systems.

[Chandra Farley](#) is originally from Gallatin, Tennessee. Growing up, she experienced firsthand how racial and economic discrimination, lack of resources, and inequity prevented Black communities and communities of color from fully participating in political processes. In 2022, Chandra completed a historic run for the Georgia Public Service Commission. Since its foundation in 1879, the Georgia Public Service Commission has largely been white, male, and Republican-run. Today, Chandra serves as Chief Sustainability Officer for the City of Atlanta and leads the Mayor's Office of Sustainability and Resilience.

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*Dorothy Felix's* community of Mossville, Alabama is one of the “sacrifice zones” where they keep building toxic facility after another resulting in the community being one big cancer cluster. Dorothy founded Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN). For years, MEAN advocated for relocation for residents -- knowing that the only way the plan can work is to meet the needs of Mossville residents, who suffer from industrial pollution that makes them sick and ruins the value of their homes.” In 2013, a Sasol representative announced plans to introduce the Voluntary Property Purchase Program in Mossville.

*Catherine Flowers* is an environmental and climate justice activist bringing attention to the largely invisible problem of inadequate waste and water sanitation infrastructure in rural communities.

*Shana Griffin's* work centers the particular experiences of Black women most vulnerable to the violence of poverty, incarceration, polluted environments, reproductive legislation, economic exploitation, housing discrimination, and climate change. Shana is the creator of DISPLACED, which chronicles the institutionalization of racial violence in spatial segregation, discriminatory housing policies, confinement, development schemes, and environmental degradation that reproduce systemic practices of racial and gender inequality, social exclusion, economic marginalization, and policing in New Orleans.

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[Krystal Hansley](#) is the founder and CEO of WeSolar, the nation's first African American woman CEO in the community solar industry.

[JoAnn Hardesty](#) is a long-time advocate for social justice. While serving as the President of the Portland Oregon Branch of the NAACP, JoAnn was a principal architect and champion of the Portland Clean Energy Fund and she went on to become the first African American woman to serve on Portland's City Council.

[Shamayim “Shu” Harris](#) (also known as Mama Shu) had the vision to build a sustainable eco-village on one of worst blocks in Highland Park, Michigan. Her vision became Avalon Village, which installed the first residential solar light in Highland Park after DTE Energy, the utility serving the greater Detroit area, repossessed more than 1,000 streetlights because the city government had failed to pay the utility bill.

[Savi Horne](#) of the Land Loss Prevention Project is fighting for land stolen from Black families.

[Marnese Jackson](#) is an environmental and climate justice activist and the Executive Director of the Midwest Building Decarbonization Coalition.

[Monica Lewis-Patrick](#) of We the People Detroit is fighting against water shut offs in her city; ensuring that all people have the power to claim the human right to water during the pandemic—and beyond.

[Amy Mays](#) is an Energy Equity Strategist. A formerly low-income Arizonian, Amy turned to solar when utilities shut off her power – going off-grid to power her home and business. She now represents

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lived expertise in energy equity, working with groups like Just Solutions Collective, Local Clean Energy Alliance, and Native Renewables to champion clean energy access. Amy's story underscores her mission: energy is a human right!

[Meishka Mitchell](#) is the President and CEO of Emerald Cities Collaborative, which tackles energy injustice in frontline communities through high-road energy infrastructure projects.

[Shimekia Nichols](#), born and raised in Southwest Detroit zip code 48217, one of the country's most polluted urban areas, serves as the Executive Director of Soulardarity, which is working to install solar-powered streetlights and save money on energy bills for the Highland Park community.

[Sheila Holt Orsted](#) leads efforts to advance justice around harmful landfills in backyards and communities. Her journey began with her family farm due to a landfill in Dickson, Tennessee, which contaminated the family's well for almost 40 years.

[Leah Penniman](#) of the Soulfire Farm in Upstate New York, who is growing a Black local food movement centered on care and cooperation.

[Pamela Pugh, DrPH, MS](#), has been at the forefront of the fight to reduce childhood lead poisoning in Michigan. Dr. Pugh was elected to the State Board of Education in 2014, and currently serves as its president. She has worked on numerous projects aimed at fostering the wellness of young children by addressing systems and programs that involve the physical, social, and emotional aspects of their

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development. Pamela's research entails the development of an instrument to assess and identify households and neighborhoods that pose the greatest environmental health risk to children.

[Denise Abdul Rahman](#) is the Founder and Executive Director of Black Sunlight, where she is leading the efforts on a multimillion-dollar Solar for All Project to facilitate access to clean, affordable energy for low income Indiana residents. She has been a local, state, and national NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program leader for over 10 years.

[Roishetta Ozane Sibley](#) founded The Vessel Project of Louisiana, a mutual aid and environmental justice organization leading the fight against the Calcasieu Pass 2 (or CP2) Project in Louisiana. The organization successfully won a temporary pause in the permitting process.

[Stacey Long Simmons](#) led the National LGBTQ Health Taskforce to make sure the LGBTQ community has access to care in the context of COVID-19 and climate change.

[Dorceta Taylor](#) wrote Green 2.0: The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations. Dr. Taylor studied 191 conservation and preservation organizations, 74 government environmental agencies, 28 environmental grant-making foundations, and 21 environmental professionals. The report concludes that there is a significant gender and ethnic gap in the ranks of environmental

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organizations, a gap that needs to be addressed if the movement is to remain relevant in a nation with rapidly shifting demographics.

[Destiny Watford](#), at 17, led the successful effort to block the building of a polluting incinerator in her backyard of Curtis Bay, near Baltimore. She was recognized with the Goldman Environmental Prize.

[Beverly Wright](#) was born and raised in New Orleans. Dr. Wright has experienced and witnessed the polluting effects of Cancer Alley – an 85-mile stretch of land between Baton Rouge and New Orleans that is home to over 150 petrochemical plants and refineries — her entire life. She founded and leads the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, which also provides a training program for hazmat clean-up after petrochemical disasters.

[Rhianna Gunn Wright](#) is the former Director of Climate Policy at the Roosevelt Institute and one of the architects of the Green New Deal. A Rhodes Scholar, she lives outside of Chicago and is currently writing her first book. She recently wrote an article explaining how the taxation system works against Black Americans. She looks specifically at the aftermath of the January 2025 Eaton fire in Altadena, California – a community with many Black-owned homes.

[Elizabeth Yeampierre](#) leads a local community organization, UPROSE, organized with neighbors and other partners to spearhead what would become the first community-owned solar cooperative in New

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York State—an 80,000-square-foot rooftop solar garden that residents of Sunset Park can subscribe to own. This will save around 200 households and small businesses on their utility bills and will provide clean energy for the first time to these families. Essentially, the community found a way to transition to an energy source that would lessen the fossil fuel pollution they had been exposed to for decades—which had caused high rates of asthma and other disease—and built a community-owned and designed alternative that would ensure community empowerment, health, and wealth. She is also the Co-Chair of the Climate Justice Alliance and the co-founder of #OurPowerPRnyc.

### **CONCLUSION**

The proposed policy solutions advocate for systemic change across various sectors to address intersectional inequalities.

*Recommendations* include empowering local governance, reducing corporate influence in politics, ensuring representative leadership, and prioritizing public health with a focus on maternal and child health care for Black women. The policies also aim to foster economic equity through affirmative action, universal basic income, job training, support for disadvantaged businesses, fair trade, workplace inclusion, and affordable housing. Furthermore, the recommendations call for just immigration reform, criminal justice reform, and a transition to clean energy through stringent regulations, renewable energy investments, community solar, utility shut-off moratoriums, expanded net metering, offshore wind development, targeted clean energy investments in disadvantaged communities, and increased LIHEAP funding. The list of ten energy justice leaders models what it looks like to begin to enact the recommendations listed..... and have the communities they serve reap the benefits. We can achieve a truly equitable and sustainable energy future through a comprehensive, transformative agenda undergirded by these policies and their parent principles.



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## END NOTES

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