

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

# Attending to the Early Childhood Needs of Infants and Toddlers

Lessons from Black Families and their Babies

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Fellow, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute  
Founding Director, Equity Research Action Coalition

Presentation at the Early Childhood Investigations  
February 24, 2022



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A graphic with a dark blue background and white text. On the left is a portrait of Iheoma U. Iruka, and on the right is a portrait of Kamyé Hugley. The text in the center reads 'SPEAKERS', 'Iheoma U. Iruka', '&amp;', and 'Kamyé Hugley'.

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Thank you for the invitation!

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# Honoring Native Lands

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I LIVE, WORK, AND BUILD MY FAMILIES' ECONOMIC WEALTH ON THE LUMBEE TRIBE TAKEN THROUGH COLONIZATION AND ATTEMPTED ERADICATION BY SETTLERS.  
LUMBEE TRIBE PROVIDES PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO ALL TRIBAL MEMBERS WITHIN THE AREAS OF CUMBERLAND, HOKE, ROBESON, AND SCOTLAND COUNTIES IN NC.



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# Honoring Black Bodies

- Many parts of the US was built by enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants, and only within the past generation were Black people afforded full rights.
- Today, Black individuals and People of Color disproportionately work as service staff across the country. This community is largely responsible for the maintenance of our daily lives, the food and food service available, child care, health care, and many other basic necessities that make our lives easy. The wealth of our nation is due to the forced free labor of these Africans.

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When you think about it, our children exist in a duality of 'the land of opportunity,' and 'the home of racism and debilitating inequities.'

#BlackBabiesMatter  
National Black Child Development Institute President and CEO  
Dr. Leelah Alvarado



IT IS EASIER TO BUILD STRONG CHILDREN THAN TO REPAIR BROKEN MEN.  
FREDERICK DOUGLASS

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### Take Home Message



- Need to address the **dual pandemics** being experienced by Black families and children.
- Must attend to the **cultural assets** of Black communities in policymaking and research
- **Antiracist policies** must center justice and whether policies address historical and current inequities of Black communities
- Engage and activate the **Black Child National Agenda**
- We must center our **excellence, heritage, and ancestral knowledge** in our research practice, and policies to meet the humanity of Black children, families, and communities.



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## Ground setting



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## Science of Early Development

- Early experiences are essential for **building brain** connections that underlie healthy development.
- Early adversity can change the **timing of critical periods** of brain development.
- Healthy development of the child begins in the **preconception period**.
- **Supportive relationships** between the child and the adults in life are **essential** and buffer against stress.



Source: National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). *Vibrant and Healthy Kids: Aligning Science, Practice, and Policy to Advance Health Equity*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/54666>

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### Lessons from the Science of Early Development

The influence of access to basic resources prenatally is powerful and limit chronic stress and help close racial and economic disparities.

Both institutional racism and interpersonal experiences of discrimination can influence the health and well-being of both children and adults in many ways.



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Source: National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *Unburdened: Healthy Kids, Healthy People: Action, Practice, and Policy to Advance Health Equity*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17126/2016>



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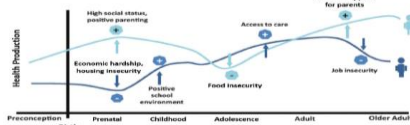
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### Advancing child health, development, and learning starts prior to birth and matters throughout the life course.



**FIGURE 1-1 Variable health trajectories: Life course approach.**  
NOTE: This figure includes several examples; however, there are many other variables that impact health trajectories (see Chapter 3).  
SOURCE: Adapted from Halfon et al., 2014.

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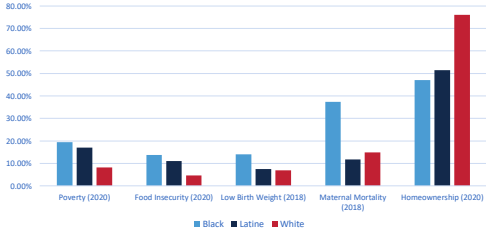
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### Black households make up about ~13% of the US population but make up the largest or second largest racial/ethnic group in 19 states & DC.



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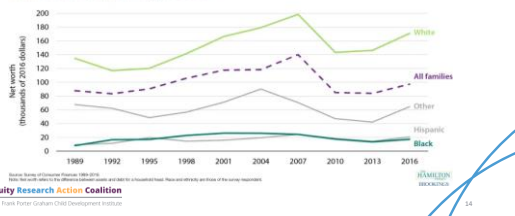
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Black and Hispanic median net worth is 8-10X less than White families.

Median Net Worth by Race/Ethnicity, 1989-2016



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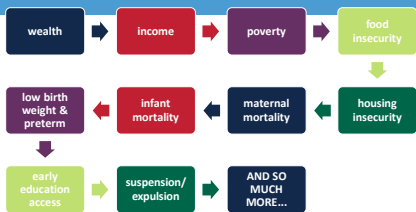
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Disparities start prenatally and after birth....



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Black children, in particular, are likely to be in lower quality rated programs regardless of auspice.

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of quality rating of child care arrangements of children at about 4 years of age, by type of arrangement and race/ethnicity: 2005-06

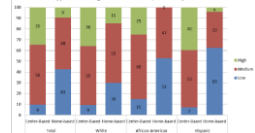


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of quality rating of Head Start centers for children at about 4 years of age, by race/ethnicity: 2005-06



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Barnett, W. S., Carlson, M., & Johns, D. (2013). Equity and excellence: African American children's access to quality preschool. Rutgers University, National Institute for Early Education and Research, Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes.

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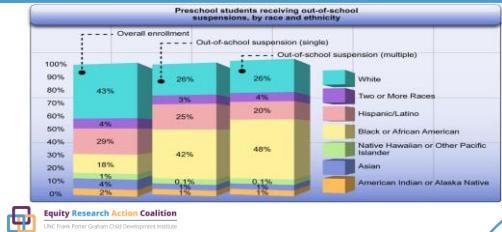
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Black children make up 18% of public preschool but make up almost 50% of suspension/expulsion rates; information is unavailable for private programs.



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3-Part Series

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3Ps Framework of Protecting, Promoting, and Preserving

- Black families and babies are biologically and socially vulnerable to the ACEs of racism
- Black families and children continue to strive and thrive
- Policies are needed that
  - **preserve** Black children's cultural heritage and family unit
  - **protect** them from harm and trauma, and
  - **promote** their health, economic stability & mobility

Original Research

**Attending to the Adversity of Racism Against Young Black Children**

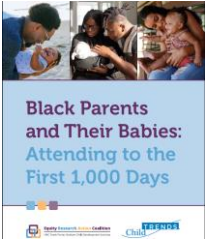
Breonna U. Irwin<sup>1</sup>, Tavis R. Darden<sup>1</sup>, Nicole Gardner-Nahel<sup>1</sup>, Neeka Bakula-Chikara<sup>1</sup>, Amber Sanborn<sup>1</sup>, and Nicole A. Tebbe<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**  
The first 1,000 days is one of the most important times for children's development. As a highly ignored adversity, understand all aspects of Black children's lives before birth and throughout their lifetimes, racism affects their development more than any other factor. Racism—through structural, institutional, interpersonal, experiential, and cultural—negatively impacts the health, learning, and well-being of Black children, their babies, and their caregivers. Using the Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Compensations for Minority Children and Critical Race Theory frameworks, this article discusses how racial disparities in early experiences and resources connected to Black children and their caregivers are due to white supremacy and anti-Black racism. We call for action based on prevention, protection, and promotion to address white supremacy and combat anti-Black racism through racial equity and culturally grounded science and policymaking.

Keywords: racism, adversity, Black children, early childhood, health, learning, well-being, caregivers, equity, justice, social determinants of health, structural racism, institutional racism, interpersonal racism, cultural racism, white supremacy, anti-Black racism, white supremacy, racism, racial equity, and culturally grounded science and policymaking.

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Black families and babies experience multiple adversities prior to and after birth. There is also a growing understanding of the cultural wealth that Black families use to navigate against structural racism and other racialized experiences.

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**Black Parents and Their Babies - Data**



- 768 Black families/caregiver
- Surveyed between April – March 2021
- Average household income of \$56,097
  - higher than the 2019 median income for Black households of \$45,438
- 7% immigrant caregivers
- Majority English-speaking households
- Representing 43 states and DC

- Survey focus areas
- Surveyed families about their experiences with racism and discrimination, financial security, mental health, wellbeing, early care and education options

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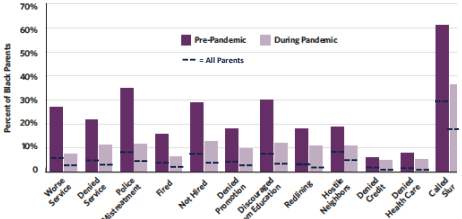
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**More Black parents report experiences of discrimination than other parents.**

Figure 1. Black Parents of Babies: Experiences of Discrimination



Note: N = 235, RAPID-EC surveyed between August 24, 2020, and March 8, 2021.

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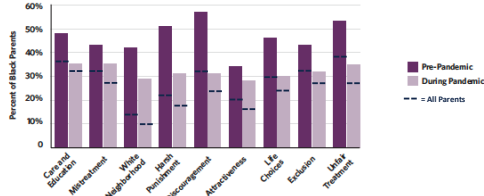
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More Black parents have concern about their child's racialized experiences than other parents.

Figure 3. Black Parents of Babies: Concern for Children



Note: N = 235, RAPID-EC survey between August 24, 2020, and March 8, 2021.



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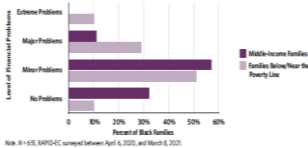
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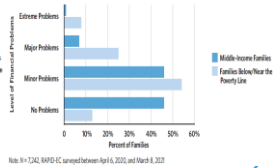
About 40% of Black families in poverty experience major/extreme financial problems compared to 30% of non-Black families in poverty.

Figure 9. Financial Strain During Pandemic among Black Families with Babies



Note: N = 155, RAPID-EC survey between April 6, 2020, and March 8, 2021.

Figure 10. Financial Strain During Pandemic among All Families with Babies



Note: N = 132, RAPID-EC survey between April 6, 2020, and March 8, 2021.



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More parents in poverty report missing well-baby visit than middle-income families. Black families likely to miss due to vaccine hesitancy, transportation, and ECE access.

Table 4. Reasons for Delaying Well-baby Checkups for Black Families and All Families with Babies

|  | Black Families with Babies |               | All Families with Babies |               |
|--|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------------|
|  | Below/Near Poverty         | Middle-Income | Below/Near Poverty       | Middle-Income |
| Missed Well-Baby                         | 33.58%                     | 29.91%        | 35.72%                   | 23.38%        |
| Reason for Delay*                        |                            |               |                          |               |
| Concern for COVID-19                     | 79.50%                     | 81.45%        | 75.58%                   | 74.20%        |
| Inability to Find Early Care & Education | 16.75%                     | 5.88%         | 13.94%                   | 8.55%         |
| Time Away from Work                      | 8.00%                      | 9.50%         | 5.67%                    | 4.81%         |
| Cost                                     | 6.00%                      | 6.33%         | 6.28%                    | 4.81%         |
| Caring for Family                        | 10.5%                      | 2.71%         | 6.28%                    | 3.87%         |
| Vaccine Hesitancy                        | 15.25%                     | 9.95%         | 9.88%                    | 4.81%         |
| Doctor Cancellation                      | 9.25%                      | 9.50%         | 10.90%                   | 9.23%         |
| Transportation                           | 7.25%                      | 0.90%         | 3.25%                    | 0.55%         |
| Other                                    | 8.25%                      | 12.66%        | 14.34%                   | 22.37%        |

Note: Black families with babies N = 401; full sample with babies N = 7242; RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and March 8, 2021. \*Based on those who reported delaying their child's health care.



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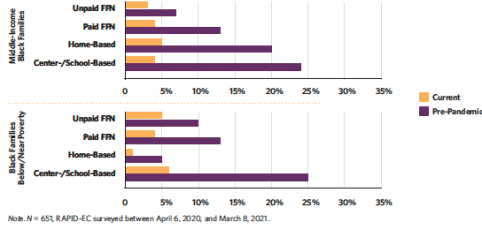
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Most Black parents reduced use of out of home care during pandemic, especially in centers. Similar use of center/school based compared to FFN and home-based programs.

Figure 11. Changes in Nonparental ECE During Pandemic among Black Families with Babies



Note. N = 651 RAPID-EC surveyed between April 6, 2020, and March 8, 2021.

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Key Findings

- Racism and discrimination remain a concern for Black families and their babies, along with economic instability and access to early care and education options.
- Black families with babies face economic insecurity and material hardships.
- COVID-19 caused disruption in parents' and babies' health care, well-being, and early care and education placements.
- Black families begin promoting their babies' racial identity early.

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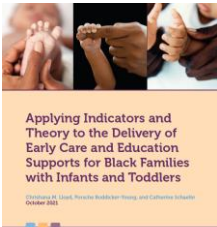
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Cultural wealth are forms of capital that children of color bring with them that are often unrecognized or unacknowledged

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### Six cultural capital categories: Applied through State of Babies Yearbook

Figure 1. Six cultural capital categories from Yosso (2005)

- Aspirational capital** refers to one's ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, "even in the face of real and perceived barriers." Utilization of this form of capital enables people to remain steadfast in working toward better situations, even without the means to attain those goals.
- Navigational capital** refers to skills and abilities that can be used to maneuver through environments that are unresponsive, hostile, or in opposition to people of color.
- Social capital** refers to people and other resources that can be accessed to support educational or professional access, growth, and advancement.
- Linguistic capital** refers to a variety of communication (storytelling, visual art, music, poetry, etc.) and language skills, as well as the intellectual and oral traditions of people of color.
- Familial capital** refers to the personal, family, and communal relationships and resources that can be accessed via blood kinship and community networks.
- Resistant capital** refers to the knowledge and skills used to seek social justice and equal rights and to challenge inequality and oppression.



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### State of Babies Yearbook: Good Health Domain Navigational and Familial Capital

- Familial Capital** = draw on extended networks of family and friends to help them care for themselves and their children during particularly stressful times, including access to support, resources and information
- Navigational Capital** = families seek other ways to meet their needs outside of system due to history of hostile interactions and inadequate supports

Table 3. Mental Health Prior to and During the Pandemic for Black Families and All Families with Babies

|                                | Anxiety      |                 | Depression   |                 | Stress       |                 | Loneliness   |                 |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
|                                | Pre-Pandemic | During Pandemic | Pre-Pandemic | During Pandemic | Pre-Pandemic | During Pandemic | Pre-Pandemic | During Pandemic |
| <b>Black Parents of babies</b> |              |                 |              |                 |              |                 |              |                 |
| Below/Above Poverty            | 62.64%       | 75.67%          | 56.76%       | 68.89%          | 58.60%       | 65.27%          | 77.23%       | 83.55%          |
| Median Income                  | 45.57%       | 60.57%          | 55.52%       | 69.97%          | 71.69%       | 85.24%          | 83.97%       | 96.37%          |
| <b>All Parents of babies</b>   |              |                 |              |                 |              |                 |              |                 |
| Below/Above Poverty            | 48.34%       | 64.36%          | 54.47%       | 70.59%          | 65.27%       | 81.69%          | 81.57%       | 90.25%          |
| Median Income                  | 42.32%       | 64.33%          | 40.24%       | 62.65%          | 73.97%       | 91.67%          | 79.42%       | 89.95%          |

Note. Black families with babies: N = 655; Full sample with babies: N = 12,442; MARCH-1C surveyed between April 6, 2020, and March 8, 2021.

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### State of Babies Yearbook: Strong Families Domain "Crowded Housing" Familial and Social Capital

- Familial Capital** = living with extended family members or others during a child's early years can potentially and positively support parents' and children's mental health and well-being
- Social Capital** = pool social and economic resources to support educational and employment opportunities



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### State of Babies Yearbook: Positive Learning Domain Linguistic and Resistant Capital

- **Linguistic Capital** = people of color utilize a variety of communication styles and methods to stimulate intellectual growth, and storytelling is culturally-grounded
- **Resistant Capital** = messages parents use to ensure children can cope in a racialized society (i.e., racial/ethnic socialization)

Table 6. Discussions about Challenges and Advantages of Race Reported by Black Families and All Families with Babies

|  | Discussed Challenges |                 | Discussed Advantages |                 |
|--|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
|  | Pre-Pandemic         | During Pandemic | Pre-Pandemic         | During Pandemic |
| <b>Black Parents of Infants &amp; Toddlers</b> |                      |                 |                      |                 |
| Below/Near-Poverty                             | 56.47%               | 64.97%          | 35.62%               | 44.04%          |
| Middle-income                                  | 31.52%               | 39.05%          | 23.87%               | 28.86%          |
| <b>All Parents of Infants &amp; Toddlers</b>   |                      |                 |                      |                 |
| Below/Near-Poverty                             | 32.75%               | 34.24%          | 34.74%               | 37.87%          |
| Middle-income                                  | 15.64%               | 17.69%          | 26.67%               | 35.44%          |

Note. Black families with babies N = 235; Full sample with babies N = 3324; RARDEIC surveyed between August 24, 2020, and March 8, 2021.

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### Key Findings



- Inform service provision and policies for Black families and babies that draw on cultural assets and uses a strengths-based perspective.
- Critical to rethink how to understand, explain, and activate current indicators.
- Consider how existing indicators might fall short by not attending to context, culture, or assets.
- Need for broad indicators that are applicable for different populations, but also equitable and centered on positive Black experiences.



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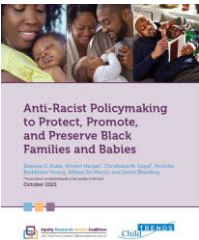
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The 3Ps Protect, Promote, Preserve Framework can help public officials to combat anti-Black racism in policy and programs by applying a racial equity lens.



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### Preservative Policies

- No policy or policy approaches that support the cultural heritage, language, family preservation, and positive racial identity of Black families and babies.
- **\*\*Attend to increasing wages and compensation of ECE workforce.**

Table 1. Alignment between the 3Ps Framework, *critic of family and child policy and program areas and state policies reviewed by the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Clearinghouse*

| 3Ps Framework: Preservation         |   |    |
|-------------------------------------|---|----|
| Racial and Ethnic Cultural Identity | Early Education (e.g., curriculum workforce coaching) | No |
|                                     | Child Welfare (e.g., child care)                      | No |



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### Findings

- Need for research as well additional policy and program refinement to begin to address and dismantle systemic and anti-Black racism and bias in policy for Black families with young children
- Need for research and policies focused on economic mobility and wealth generation
- Still limited research and policies that address the cultural preservation of Black families, children and communities



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Where do we go from here?



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### 10 Policies

1. Maintain Child Tax Credits and Income Supports
2. Address Racial Disparities in Wages and Career Advancement Opportunities
3. Invest in Black-Owned and Black-Led Businesses, Organizations, and Institutions
4. Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act
5. Expand Health Insurance
6. Expand Universal Access to Early Care and Education
7. Address Harsh and Unfair Discipline Practices
8. Ensure Equity in Early Intervention and Special Education
9. Ensure Culturally Responsive Curricula and Practices through Workforce Development and Training
10. Pass Reparations

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### take home message #WeShallOvercome

- Need to address the **dual pandemics** being experienced by Black families and children.
- Must attend to the **cultural assets** of Black communities in policymaking and research.
- **Antiracist policies** must center justice and whether policies address historical and current inequities of Black communities.
- Engage and activate the **Black Child National Agenda**.
- We must center our **excellence, heritage, and ancestral knowledge** in our research practice, and policies to meet the humanity of Black children, families, and communities.

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