

[02-020] Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls Task Force Report
Source: Committee
Committee: [02] Referral to the 225th General Assembly (2022)
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Sponsor: Advocating for Black Girls and Women Task Force
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

The Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls Task Force recommends that the 224th General Assembly (2020) approve the following:

1. Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) to create educational resources for congregations to learn and interrupt practices and policies that perpetuate the adultification of black girls and criminalization of adolescent behavior, seeking the advice and input of the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC).

2. Direct the PMA, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Foundation, Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, Inc., and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to invest in training and in identifying trained antiracism facilitators who will provide a geographically accessible and affordable network for congregations and mid councils, and intentionally include gender and gender identity focused on black women and girls in antiracism and gender justice trainings.

3. Direct the PMA to

a. engage in the work of eradicating systemic violence against black women and girls in its work throughout all ministry areas;

b. create educational opportunities at denominational gatherings centered on systemic violence as it relates to black women and girls, seeking the advice and input of ACWC;

c. create opportunities for LGBTQIA+ identified black clergy to come together for fellowship, education, and mutual support for the work of ministry with a specific focus on trans black church leadership, recognizing that the PC(USA) does not currently have an ordained or installed openly black trans minister of Word and Sacrament;

d. offer support and grants for congregations working with black queer/trans organizations and engaging in work/programming directly addressing the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community;

e. provide resources for making gendered groups safe, spirit-filled places for black queer and trans women;

f. direct the PMA to join with nonprofit organizations, like Sister Reach (<https://www.sisterreach.org/>), to

(1) provide grants for a core group of Presbyterians from different congregations in various regions in the church to receive sex education and curriculum and inclusive reproductive justice training in order to share information with their local congregations, and

(2) support legislation that actively protects black queer and trans women/girls and speak out against legislation that harms this community.

4. Direct the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to

- a. develop theology and worship resources for educating congregations in Rites of Passage and a primer/introduction to black women and other women of color, including biblical and theological studies for lay people (reference the works of Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon);
 - b. become proactive in finding black women writers to develop theology, worship, and homiletics books and resources;
 - c. provide resources for awareness and sensitivity around intersections of race/gender/sexual orientation.
5. Direct Research Services in the PC(USA) to conduct a survey of Presbyterian black women, including black clergywomen, about their experiences within the denomination and hold regional focus groups with black clergywomen conducted by trusted, notable, black women facilitators, consulting with gender and racial justice staff in the PMA.
 6. Direct the Board of Pensions to create opportunities for black clergywomen to come together for fellowship, education, and mutual support, potentially in its CREDO program.
 7. Direct the PMA to continue and to increase its mission engagement efforts and appeals for Presbyterians to
 - a. support the Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon Scholarship Fund for the purpose of scholarships specifically for women of color to pursue educational studies, including doctoral studies; and
 - b. increase support for the Legal Defense Fund in the Office of Gender & Racial Justice for the purpose of supporting black women in achieving racial justice and legal defense.
 8. Direct the PMA to continue providing scholarships and financial aid for Master of Divinity students and start providing scholarships for Doctor of Philosophy and Theology students to increase the number of black Presbyterian women scholars.
 9. Acknowledge that the work done in this area is being done by the office with the smallest budget (Office of Gender & Racial Justice in Racial Equity & Women's Ministries in the PMA). Direct the PMA to increase budget support and equity for the Racial Equity & Women's Ministries area in the PMA.
 10. Acknowledge the current work being done to end Cash Bail by the Office of the General Assembly, Stated Clerk Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, and the Office of Public Witness. Support legislation efforts to end Cash Bail.
 11. Acknowledge and celebrate items that the General Assembly of the PC(USA) has passed, which provides for the full inclusion of the LGBTQIA+, including the affirmation of the trans community.

Rationale

This report has been prepared in response to the immediate effects and long-term consequences of interpersonal and institutional violence perpetrated against black women and girls in U.S. society and in the PC(USA). This intersectional (race/gender) and multidimensional (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) violence manifests in dehumanizing expressions of black womanhood (e.g. pejorative stereotypes) and in theopolitical sanctioned and socially accepted practices of disenfranchising (e.g. policing, silencing, making invisible, criminalizing). The dehumanizing tropes are intended to negate black female identity and the disenfranchising practices serve to restrict black female access to resources and opportunities otherwise afforded to those who enjoy hegemonic race/gender/sexual privilege. For example, society attributes sex as a natural role to black women and girls, thus black girls are stereotyped as hypersexualized.¹ This sexualizing of black womanhood has its roots in U.S. chattel slavery to absolve white men of raping young black girls, who

were instead cast as evil, lascivious seductresses. The hyper-focus on the black female body attempts to control black female access to places/spaces hegemonically determined for “whites only” and also serves to diminish black female intellectual abilities and achievements, thereby re-inscribing generalized notions of black inferiority/white superiority. This continued dehumanization and disenfranchisement of black women has a deleterious effect upon the overall well-being of black women, the black community, and U.S. society as an interconnected communal body of the human family. For members of the household of faith, this dehumanization-disenfranchisement behavior necessitates critical reflection upon ecclesial themes such as theological anthropology (humanity’s relationship with the divine and the interrelationship of the human community), upon biblical passages such as love for our sister whom we see, and love for God whom we have not seen (1st John 4:20), and upon theological doctrines and church practices that relegate women to second-class status and an afterthought. Provided herein are the background, recommendations and rationale, biblical/theological framing, historical and contemporary sociopolitical contexts, and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) history informing the recommendations of this task force on the five issues highlighted to address the varied concerns about the direct and indirect violence perpetrated against black women and girls. Included also are select bibliographic resources from which educational materials can be developed to denounce the many and varied gross misunderstandings undergirding the policies and practices affecting this demographic of the American populace and from which the Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls Task Force advocates for acceptance of these recommendations.

Rationale

The Disparities Experience by Black Women and Girls Task Force offers recommendations and rationales to the 224th General Assembly (2020) for corrective action specifically to address these five areas of concern: (1) adultification of black girls, (2) toxic theology/gender equality for black women in ministry, (3) reproductive justice/human rights, (4) LGBTQIA+ equality, and (5) the elimination of cash bail practices. This report is an invitation to the faithful to take seriously the critical issues confronting black women and girls in U.S. society and in the PC(USA), and to embody through praxis the words of womanist ethicist, the Reverend Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, the first black woman to be ordained in the PC(USA) who reminds us that as stewards charged with the sacred responsibility of justice-praxis for members of our species, our true worship of God is evidenced in a love ethic that is expressed in mutual equality, a process of making genuine, demonstrable, honest-to-goodness right-relating connections with all living things.²

Adultification of Black Girls

The courts have ruled that children have diminished culpability as compared to adults. However, when black children display what psychological, developmental, and educational theorists have otherwise determined to be “age-appropriate” behavior, different standards of assessment are applied and far more serious consequences can result. For example, when seven- and eight-year old black siblings fought on an Ohio school bus, both were arrested and taken into custody. Additionally, an eight-year-old black girl in Illinois was arrested for acting out in 2013; a six-year old black girl was arrested in Florida in 2012 for having a tantrum; and a twelve-year-old black girl from Orlando was threatened with expulsion from a Christian Academy in 2013 unless she changed her natural hair style. These behaviors are not uncommon for young school age children. Yet, for young black girls, arrest and expulsion are extreme, life-altering, life threatening, and no doubt frightening, traumatizing, and all too common outcomes for otherwise typical age-appropriate behaviors. These examples, moreover, demonstrate that black bodies are routinely policed for adherence to comfortability and conformity to standards of dominant cultural ideals of behavior, beauty, and even place in so-called “white spaces.”

As these few incidents demonstrate, blacks are perceived differently—as “nonconforming” to some arbitrarily imposed dominant cultural standard and as a “threat” both to white comfortability and to the hegemonic status quo, thereby warranting punishment for such infractions. In fact, repeated research documents an anti-black bias across disciplines in this country. For example, research conducted at the University of Virginia revealed an anti-black bias in pain management. Similarly, a 2017 report by Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality revealed an anti-black bias against young girls demonstrating age-appropriate behaviors. In the

Georgetown report, a mostly white female participant group perceived black girls ages 5–14 as more adult and thus less innocent of the same childhood activities as their white peers. This age misperception known as “adultification,” assumes black girls are older than their actual age. Implied in this age misperception is the assumption that black girls “know better,” which somehow justifies more frequent and even harsher punishments for actual age-appropriate behaviors. As such, black girls can end up with an expulsion or arrest record for simply engaging in 5-, 10-, and 12-year-old activities. In fact, black girls frequently experience discipline for subjective reasons such as disobedience/defiance, detrimental behavior, and third-degree assault, and are punished more harshly including suspensions, which are connected to higher dropout rates and increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system.³ This age mischaracterization leaves black girls three times more likely to be removed from their homes, to be placed in state custody than their white peers, and to receive more severe dispositions even after accounting for seriousness of offense, prior record, and age.⁴ This age misperception also assumes black girls “know more” thereby requiring less nurturing, less protecting, less support, and less comfort. As a result, black girls receive less consoling after a disturbing incident, have less access to mentoring relationships, have fewer advocates or defenders on their behalf, and have fewer leadership opportunities.

As adultification of black girls adversely affects healthy identity formation and risks access to a future unencumbered by false charges, suspensions, etc., the rationale for this recommendation is to bring attention to the problem young black girls face as a result of adultification, to provide mentoring resources and leadership opportunities to young black girls in order to counter the adverse effects of adultification, and to heighten personal self-awareness of unconscious race/gender biases in perpetuating this practice.

Toxic Theology/Gender Equality in Ministry

According to Dr. Katie Cannon, it is important to trace the origin and expansion of the church because the same general schemes of oppression remain prevalent and because as life-affirming moral agents, we have a responsibility to study the ideological hegemony of the past so that we do not remain doomed to the recurring cyclical patterns of the hermeneutical distortions in the present (i.e. violence against women, condemnation of homosexuality, spiritualizing scripture to justify capitalism).⁵ Our rationale, therefore, begins with the toxic theology that dehumanized and disenfranchised black women in the past and that still informs beliefs and behaviors toward black women in society and in the church today.

Traditional theological discourse denied all women full fellowship in the human family as image bearers of the living God. In fact, the doctrine of the imago Dei has been misinterpreted to benefit male authority and to render women subservient in their defective humanity.⁶ This toxic theology, however, has been particularly problematic for black women whose God-given identity according to Genesis 1:27 was transformed from image of God to property by a false claim of blacks as the descendants of Ham cursed by Noah to be servants. Dehumanized and disenfranchised as an inanimate object/commodity, black women were exploited and abused physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. For example, black women were exploited sexually for their ability to reproduce human capital and physically for their ability to labor in the field or in the house, both for the purposes of individual and institutional wealth-building of colonial powers. History records that white men physically raped black women to increase the cash crop of enslaved black bodies. Yet history overlooks that white women mentally and emotionally raped black women via verbal assaults. White women beat and killed black women in ways so disturbing that historians judged white women barbaric.¹ The plantation legend nevertheless enveloped white mistresses in an aura of light and vulnerability, goodness and agreeableness.¹ In fact, white women emerged from the slaveholding era as the epitome of genteel, virtuous womanhood, and a standard-bearer to which black women are expected to acquiesce.

As chattel, black women were not recognized as human theologically, socially, or legally, nor were they narrators of their own story. As such, they were pejoratively characterized as promiscuous, foreboding, strong, bad, and angry. Unflattering media images of black womanhood have been popularized: Aunt Jemima—an overweight, unattractive, asexual; Sapphire—a loud, overbearing, emasculating, angry woman; Tragic Mulatta—a self-hating biracial representative of empire/empire building; Welfare Queen—the castrating matriarch who

bilks hardworking white taxpayers; and Topsy—the lazy, mischievous, child-like, black who must be watched at all times. Not one of these depictions of black femininity in the hegemonic imagination is entitled to sociopolitical protection, legislative defense, or even sympathy, unlike white women who, as Brittney Cooper observes, the whole world rises in defense of their tears.⁷ The reimagining of black humanity into property that can be placed in the house or in the field just as someone places a vase or a cup of sweet tea from the nation's slaveholding past still informs the theo-political beliefs and behaviors toward people of African descent as evidenced by the frequent calling of police on blacks in coffee shops, parks, and Airbnb. In fact, legal scholars note that by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of color including holders of high-echelon jobs and police-community encounters serve as daily reminders.⁸

Contemporary racism manifests interpersonally, institutionally, and insidiously as microaggressions, defined as routine experiences that blacks experience as racist, but appear normal to the dominant culture. For black women, microaggressions manifest in overt and covert ways including: sexualizing, excluding, policing, silencing, erasing, appropriating their intellectual contributions without attribute, and the presumption of knowing/staying in “our” place lest police are called for sitting, walking, driving, or barbecuing while black reminiscent of the Jim/Jane Crow segregation laws that dictated where black bodies could eat, sit, swim, relieve themselves, or be buried. Womanist scholar, Kelly Douglas Brown, assesses this normative white gaze toward blacks noting, the moment the black body steps out of its chattel space, it is an imminent threat to cherished white property.⁹ The traditional raced/gendered theology and sociopolitical practices necessitated a nuanced response. Pioneering black women created womanist discourse that was by/for/about black women in order to counter the inherited toxic theology characterized by the Reverend Dr. Katie Cannon as the substantial omission of black women from theological discourse from male theologians using analytical concepts and frameworks that take the male experience as the norm.¹⁰

The effects of U.S. chattel slavery still linger—yielding racist/sexist oppression that requires sacred spaces for black women to share experiences and to support one another in the ministerial journey. They also need resources to educate themselves and the community about healthy ways to respond to routine microaggressions, and to expand their knowledge of the contributions of persons of color, black feminists, womanists, and black LGBTQIA+ scholarship. Thus, the rationale for highlighting this issue is to give voice to the dehumanizing and disenfranchising experiences of black women in U.S society and in the PC(USA) and to provide resources and collaborative opportunities to enhance their personal and professional ministerial presence, consistent with womanist interpretive lens, an effective but underused pedagogy pioneered by the Reverend Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon and others.

Reproductive Justice

Reproductive justice encompasses the human right not to have a child, the right to have a child and to parent a child in a safe and healthy environment, and the right to have access to needed resources (i.e. quality medical care to ensure a healthy birth and to a living wage to materially meet the needs of the childrearing). Access to resources is justified on the grounds that safe, dignified fertility management, childbirth, and parenting constitute a fundamental human right. Reproductive justice also recognizes transgender concerns since the definitions of womanhood, birthing, and mothering do not fit neatly into the male-female binary.¹¹ In fact, some trans people have abortions, use birth control, and give birth.¹²

Reproductive justice has roots in the nation's colonizing past. During U.S. chattel slavery, black women's forced sexual intercourse increased the cash crop of enslaved black bodies for capitalist gain. Once these offspring no longer increased the wealth of slave-owning whites, laws were enacted to encourage the sterilization of poor black women. Medicaid actually paid for the sterilizations of poor women up to 150,000 annually; in fact, in 1980 a disproportionate number of the 700,000 sterilizations performed were on women of color.¹³ Moreover, thirteen states attempted to pass laws sterilizing women for having too many children while receiving day-care, housing assistance, welfare, or Medicaid.¹⁴ Today, “dog-whistle politics” enable politicians to attack select segments of the population using code words (e.g. thug, anchor baby, and welfare queen) rather than explicit racist/sexist language to refer to black males, Latino/a, black women, and to misinform the

mases. For example, despite the racialized stereotype of teen pregnancy as a black phenomenon, white teenage pregnancy rates are rising in states that mandate the toughest restrictions on sex education, birth control, and abortion access.¹⁵

Thus while the rationale for addressing reproductive justice is to provide sex education, curriculum inclusive reproductive justice to black women, the entire Presbyterian community would benefit in knowing the history of and evolving advocacy on reproductive justice, rights and resources available, sexual health and well-being, and to become better informed about agencies and other resources providing programming on this topic.

Intersection of Race, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

PC(USA)'s position is to welcome all gender identities into church membership. However, we still live in a society where people choose to cherry pick biblical texts to justify excluding full participation of LGBTQIA+ persons in the household of faith, gainful employment, marriage, parenthood, and even the purchase of a wedding cake (e.g. Masterpiece Cakeshop). In fact, the LGBTQIA+ community remains under sociopolitical and theological assault. In 2016, North Carolina passed legislation requiring trans people to use bathrooms corresponding to the gender on their birth certificate. In December 2019, the Trump administration removed sexual orientation from the antidiscrimination policy of the Interior Department.¹⁶ And in 2020, United Methodists are proposing a church split over LGBTQIA+ inclusion. These ongoing assaults on the personhood, sexual identity, and human rights of LGBTQIA+ persons necessitate training about the many and varied issues affecting their daily lives. For example, trans people report harassment and discrimination and a general lack of competence about trans healthcare issues.

LGBTQIA+ youth contemplate suicide at three times the rate of heterosexual youth and harassment or abuse increases the likelihood of self-harm. Black women were 91 percent of transgender and gender nonconforming people killed by violence. Nearly half (47 percent) of black transgendered people have been incarcerated, a rate that is 10–15 percentage points higher than the rate for all black folk,¹⁷ and 15 percent of trans people live on less than \$10,000/year, a rate of poverty that is four times the national average.¹⁸

Contemporary dehumanization and disenfranchisement practices affecting black LGBTQIA+ persons are rooted in colonial experiences where the enslaved, male and female, were objectified, sexualized, and raped. While rape was a common method of torture used by white slavers to subdue recalcitrant black women,¹⁹ white males also raped black males as a show of hegemonic domination. This practice known as “buck busting” was done publicly, as a means of demonstrating social control over and humiliating black males. Through these and other forced acts of humiliating genital exposure (e.g. scant clothing, forced intercourse via breeding farms, nakedness on auction blocks), blacks learned to be ashamed of their bodies and of their sexuality. Adding toxic masculine theology via misappropriation of biblical contexts to inherited body shaming and a sociopolitical context that assaults the personhood, sexual identity and human rights of the LGBTQIA+ further dehumanizes and disenfranchises members of this community. Educational resources must be provided to assist LGBTQIA+ persons and allies in understanding sexual identity and in securing safe spaces, job support, healthcare, etc. This recommendation for LGBTQIA+ equality is intended for that purpose.

Cash Bail and Legal Support

The Supreme Court ruled in *Bearden v. Georgia* that punishing someone for poverty violated the equal protection clause. Therefore, an indigent defendant cannot be jailed for an inability to pay fines unless s/he willfully refuses. Nevertheless, to retrieve funding shortfalls caused by the Reagan administration tax cuts, municipalities across the country use public policies that target poor children, women, and homeless. For example, public policies require “resource officers” to be placed into public schools, many with “zero-tolerance policies” causing children to be arrested for age-appropriate behavior rather than reprimanded or respected for difference. There are public policies that target poor women who can be evicted for calling 911 too many times for relief from domestic violence situations, and that target the homeless for public urination and for sleeping outdoors.²⁰ Today, poor people's inability to pay the bloated fines and fees criminalize poverty in an unwinnable cycle,²¹ and increases the likelihood that persons plead guilty to crimes they did not commit just to

get out of jail. Guilty pleas generate revenue (e.g. for-profit prisons, food servicing, etc.), but also creates other problems (i.e. housing, employment, etc.) for the incarcerated and their families. Moreover, cash bail practices increase the likelihood of conviction if the case goes to trial and increases the likelihood of false confessions in order to be released. In fact, Georgetown law professor, Peter Edelman, reports that 50 percent of defendants not detained before trial over a ten-year period were convicted versus 92 percent of those who had been detained and that clients take a plea in order to get out rather than fight the case while sitting in jail, even if they have a great defense or are totally innocent.²²

Due to widespread policing of black bodies and the illegal enactment of stop and frisk policies across the country, cash bail practices adversely affects blacks at a higher rate than other demographics and necessitates intentional, well-researched education by dedicated advocates. For example, African Americans are detained at rates nearly five times greater than whites and at cost of \$9 billion per year.²³ In fact, between 2000 and 2014, local jail populations grew by 19.8 percent with pretrial detention accounting for 95 percent of that growth.²⁴

Cash bail practices destroy lives, cause job loss, separate families, and even kills. The highly publicized Sandra Bland case is a tragic example of this policy. Neither she nor her family had \$500 bail for an alleged “routine” traffic stop. She was jailed and found dead in her cell three days later. Her experience and that of untold thousands like Ms. Bland demand attention and revocation of this cash bail practice.

Presbyterian History

The Presbyterian church has a complicated history with blacks in America. For example, Presbyterians, like Methodists and Baptists, were on both sides of the enslavement debate. Although both slavery and the institution’s most vocal critics were denounced at the 1850 assembly, the church eventually split. The Presbyterian church was again divided participation in and support of blacks during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. According to Frederick Heuser, many Presbyterians supported peaceful civil rights protests, but many did not.²⁵ In addition, Heuser adds:

The 1950s and 1960s were decades when Presbyterians, like Americans in general, had to come to terms with the racism that had been deeply embedded in American society since the founding of the United States. That racism assumed a new level in the years following the American Civil War. Despite the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the U.S. constitution, the concept of separate but equal affirmed by the Supreme Court in the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896 became a part of the American mindset and legal landscape. Interestingly, Associate Supreme Court Justice John M. Harlan, a Presbyterian, had argued against the majority decision in the *Plessy* case, claiming the constitution as colorblind.²⁶

In 1983, with the reunification of the northern and southern branches, black Presbyterians faced questions of cultural differences, identity, and ethnic-specific missions. Over the years, various committees have been charged with examining and instrumental in informing the Presbyterian church family of challenges uniquely faced by its black membership. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) again stands at a crossroads as America is sharply divided over race, gender, and sexuality. PC(USA) must choose on which side of history she stands on these issues that sociopolitically and theologically adversely affect black women and girls—like New School Abolitionists forging a path forward for the poor, dehumanized, and disenfranchised and thus embracing the recommendations of this task force or like others of that bygone era that concluded any further action would not be for the edification of the church.²⁷

Appendix 1

Select Bibliographic Resources

Following is a partial listing of scholarly resources that were used in the preparation of this report and that can be used to develop educational material to address the five issues of concern highlighted in this report.

- Althaus-Reid, Marcella. *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2000.
- Cannon, Katie Geneva. "Intellectual Faith Practitioners: African American Theological Education in the Twentieth-First Century." In *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2012, 32(1), 17–24.
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- Gonzalez, Michelle A. *Created in God's Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007.
- Hattery, Angela J. and Earl Smith. *Policing Black Bodies: How Black Lives Are Surveilled and How to Work for Change*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/a-national-epidemic-fatal-anti-trans-violence-in-the-united-states-in-2019>.
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Endnotes

1. Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake, Thalia González. *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*. (Washington: Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2017), 5.
2. Katie G. Cannon. "Intellectual Faith Practitioners: African American Theological Education in the Twentieth-First Century." In *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Spring 2012, 23.
3. Epstein et al, 9.
4. Epstein et al, 12.

5. Katie Geneva Cannon. *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 46.
6. Michelle Gonzalez. *Created in God's Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007), 168.
7. Brittney Cooper. *Eloquent Rage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 175.
8. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 12.
9. Kelly Brown Douglas. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 116–17.
10. Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 127.
11. Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger. *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Oakland: University of California, 2017), 196.
12. Ross and Solinger, 197.
13. Ross and Solinger, 51.
14. Ross and Solinger, 50.
15. Ross and Solinger, 177.
16. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sexual-orientation-interior-department-ethics-guidelines_n_5dff99e3e4b0b2520d0ca480.
17. Angela J. Hattery and Earl Smith, *Policing Black Bodies: How Black Lives Are Surveilled and How to Work for Change*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 147.
18. Hattery and Smith, 148.
19. bell hooks. *Ain't I a Woman? Black Woman and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 18.
20. Peter Edelman. *Not a Crime to Be Poor: The Criminalization of Poverty in America* (New York: The New Press, 2017), xiv.
21. Edelman, xvii.
22. Edelman, 50–51.
23. Edelman, 46–47.
24. Edelman, 49.
25. Frederick J. Heuser. "Presbyterians and the Struggle for Civil Rights." In *Journal of Presbyterian History*, Spring/Summer 2012, 90(1):8.
26. Heuser, 8.
27. Hugh Davis, "The New York Evangelist, New School Presbyterians and Slavery, 1837–1857." In *American Presbyterians*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring 1990), 15.

Other Comments

Advice and Counsel on Item 02-20—From the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) advises the 224th General Assembly (2020) to approve this report.

As this report's recommendations reflect, the church is in need of a more robust approach in its advocacy for ending the oppression of black women and girls. Having a short-term study helps balance prior attention by the church to the situation of young black men and boys, although the history of uneven or limited funding for these efforts should be cautionary, and the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee may be able to complement ongoing program work overall. This report has an intentionality around education, resources, and prophetic voice that leans into the future of what our denomination could be and how we as people of faith move ourselves into the work of dismantling systems of oppression. Partnering with grassroots organizations as well as "supporting legislation that actively protects black queer and trans women/girls" offers holistic organizing and ecumenical partnerships that can serve as an example to the larger church.

Specific funding requests are often seen as the province of those with program responsibility, while General Assembly commissioners are to focus primarily on policy direction. In the pandemic context in which this is written, however, with its disproportionate impact on communities of color, the report's direct approach may be helpful. There are a number of antiracism programs in the Presbyterian Mission Agency, above all the Matthew 25 initiative, but none seem to be enacting the kind of bold work the report proposes.

Advice and Counsel on Item 02-20—From the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee (REAC)

The Racial Equity Advocacy Committee advises the 224th General Assembly (2020) to approve Item 02-20.

The Racial Equity Advocacy Committee strongly advises the approval of the report. Martin Luther King Jr. prophetically proclaimed, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Black women and girls experience injustice daily, and we the church must answer our call to dismantle this injustice and inequity.

Advice and Counsel on Item 2-20—From the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC)

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns advises the 224th General Assembly (2020) to approve Item 02-20.

Black girls are overrepresented along the entire exclusionary school discipline system, including, but not limited to, suspension, expulsion, referrals to law enforcement, and arrest. Across the nation, girls of color have described experiencing discipline in response to their expressions, presentation, and/or identity, instead of in response to an actual threat to school safety.¹

According to the most recent U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Data, black girls are seven times more likely to be suspended from school, and four times more likely to be arrested on school campus. Punitive practices and policies in schools fuel systemic inequities and outcomes based on race and gender and have profound consequences for black girls: rather than promote safety and well-being, these practices disproportionately push black girls out of school and further into the margins. Black girls who have been subject to punitive school policies and practices are at an increased risk of coming in contact with the juvenile and criminal courts and leaving school altogether, ultimately impeding their ability to achieve future success and lead successful and healthy lives.²

To this end, the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns urgently requests that the 224th General Assembly (2020) approve Item 02-20.

Endnotes

1. Monique W. Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: The New Press, 2016).
2. Ibid.

Office of the General Assembly Comment on Item 02-20, Recommendation 2

COGA has recommended that this item be referred to the 225th General Assembly (2022). However, should the assembly determine that this item of business is core and critical to our governance and sustainability, and needs to be considered by the 224th General Assembly (2020), OGA provides this comment.

Training materials, frames, approaches, and opportunities within and outside of the Office of the General Assembly, and those done in collaboration with other agencies of the church, regularly include gender, gender identity, and black women and girls in their content and consideration. Educational approaches seek to be antiracist and reject centering whiteness and white supremacy. OGA is responsible for and to a connectional church structure that is ecclesial, ecumenical, and constitutional. The *Book of Order* invests an accountability function for councils regarding their implementation plans for inclusion and equity in committees on representation. While the Constitution requires attention to diversity and inclusion in every council above session (G-3.0103), it does not require the same approach in every setting. Any assembly directive that seeks to do so defies the realities of contemporary church and society.

While all agencies are responsible to work on these issues internally, it is well beyond the purpose or mission of any of them to identify facilitators for congregations and mid councils to do the same. The OGA is not resourced adequately to take this task up and would be challenged logistically to maintain such a network. There are resources in church and society (not accessible to all geographic areas and not necessarily affordable) and while it may be possible to provide a clearinghouse function (gathering a list that is made public), vetting persons and organizations to ensure “a geographically accessible and affordable network” for councils below the General Assembly level is beyond staff capacities. Ecumenical cooperation is another resource in this kind of resourcing, as we are not unique in our demographic realities and the need for more education and praxis in antiracism and its intersecting isms. Every church setting is called to uphold the foundational principles including those for unity in diversity (F-1.0403).

Regular resourcing of equity and inclusion work denomination-wide is included in mid council newsletters, trainings, workshops in national and regional events, consultations, and coaching provided for leaders and groups.

Current OGA work:

- Trouble the Water (a series of four short films and curricula on antiracism targeted to PC(USA) structures/functions). Episodes are titled: Why Church? Why Now?; Whiteness; Racial Identity; and Intersectionality and Disruption. The series was developed by OGA and PMA and will be available for release in 2020.
- EQUIP modules (anticipated 2020) are being built for the Equity and Representation office in the areas of disability concerns (Disability and the Way of Jesus), antiracism/anti-oppression materials for applications in denominational life (Trouble the Water), and general equity and inclusion skills. Equip is accessed at <http://equip.pcusa.org>.