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Title: The Forgotten People: Honoring the Voices of Black Rural Americans

Research Priority: Economic Opportunity

Summary

This capstone project examines Black Rural Americans' historical significance and ongoing struggles, emphasizing their past and present challenges. Its goal is to elevate the priority of Black Rural Americans in societal and legislative considerations, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their experiences are acknowledged in shaping future policies. The capstone scrutinizes existing policies that are ostensibly neutral in terms of 'race and place,' assessing their effectiveness in addressing the specific needs and lived experiences of Black rural Americans. By grounding recommendations in current data, this capstone also contributes actionable insights for policy reforms that can better address the nuanced challenges faced by this community. Additionally, the project includes examining insights gathered through surveys and interviews conducted by the author, providing firsthand perspectives to enrich the understanding of the experiences and aspirations of Black rural Americans.

Introduction

Despite comprising approximately 19 percent of the total population, rural Americans have received scant attention regarding policy and legislative initiatives addressing the disparities they encounter, and Black rural Americans have been almost completely ignored.¹ The neglect extends across different administrations. Notably, former President Barack Obama openly acknowledged that, in formulating economic plans, his administration inadvertently overlooked the repercussions on rural America.² This admission underscores a systemic oversight that has impacted rural Americans' well-being. Moreover, political analysts posit that the electoral success of former President Donald Trump can be attributed to his effective rapport with rural America — highlighting the significance of addressing the concerns of these communities in national policies.³

Approximately 37.9 million people in the United States currently grapple with poverty, with a significant majority residing in rural areas.⁴ Of the 6.3 million Americans facing unemployment, 28 percent belong to rural communities.⁵ Over the past decade, 21.6 million new jobs have been generated.⁶ However, a staggering 87 percent of these opportunities emerged outside of rural

¹ America Counts Staff. (August 9, 2017). United States Census Bureau.

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-america.html#:~:text=Conversely%2C%2097%20percent%20of%20the,Census%20Bureau%20%2D%20Opens%20as%20PDF.>

² Curtis, C. (August 15, 2011). President Obama: Our Biggest Challenge Right Now Is Putting People to Work. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/08/15/president-obama-our-biggest-challenge-right-now-putting-people-work>

³ McCormick, J. (January 12, 2024). Trump's Hold on Rural America Is Key to His Resilience. The Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/politics/elections/trump-iowa-caucus-rural-voters-598fc324>

⁴ Shrider, E., Creamer, J. (September 12, 2023). Poverty in the United States. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2023/demo/p60-280.html>

⁵ Press Office. (February 2, 2024). *The Employment Situation — January 2024*. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (May 2012). Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>

America. Despite overall improvements in health, education, and economic outcomes across the nation, rural Americans have yet to witness a parallel enhancement in those outcomes as well.

Both Black and white rural Americans live in similar circumstances; however, their experiences can be vastly different at times — with Black rural Americans confronting even more pronounced disparities than their white counterparts.⁷ Much of the existing research and policy predominantly center on the narratives of white rural Americans, leaving a substantial void in our understanding of the unique challenges, opportunities, and cultural dynamics faced by Black individuals residing in rural areas.⁸ The lack of comprehensive research and policies raises critical questions about the inclusivity and equity of academic and political inquiries into rural life. Due to the prevalence of these disparities, political scientists and researchers have recommended that the United States create “race and place” intentional policies that will help Black rural Americans. *Race-intentional* policies focus on legislation that centers around a person’s race or takes their race into account, while *place-intentional* policies consider a person’s geographical location.⁹

The remainder of this capstone focuses on the disparities Black rural Americans face compared to their white rural counterparts and explain why “race and place” intentional policies are needed.

Background

Economic Disparities

The depiction of rural America by the media, academics, and lawmakers has contributed to a prevailing association whereby the general perception aligns rural areas predominantly with white Americans.¹⁰ Black Americans have been left out of their rural narrative for generations. However, Black rural Americans' experiences and contributions are the cornerstone of explaining the current era of rural America.¹¹ The enduring effects of slavery and segregation persistently influence both white rural Americans, who have historically enjoyed advantages, and Black rural Americans, who have faced significant disadvantages.¹² Historically, being Black in rural America has resulted in the loss of many lives and a denial of the right to pursue happiness. In fact, lynchings were most prevalent in small towns where Black individuals often posed economic competition to local white residents. The latter, resentful of any economic and political

⁷ Grundy, S., Prusaczyk, B. 2022. *The Complex Intersection of Race and Rurality: The Detrimental Effects of Race-Neutral Rural Health Policies*. National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9081055/>

⁸ Grundy, S., Prusaczyk, B. 2022. *The Complex Intersection of Race and Rurality: The Detrimental Effects of Race-Neutral Rural Health Policies*. National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9081055/>

⁹ Grundy, S., Prusaczyk, B. 2022. *The Complex Intersection of Race and Rurality: The Detrimental Effects of Race-Neutral Rural Health Policies*. National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9081055/>

¹⁰ Illing, Sean. (April 17, 2024). Rural America doesn’t mean white America” — here's why that matters. Vox Media. <https://www.vox.com/conversations/2017/4/24/15286624/race-rural-america-trump-politics-media>

¹¹ Gurly, L. (May 2016). *Who's Afraid of Rural Poverty? The Story Behind America's Invisible Poor*. The American Journal of Economics and Sociology. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45129313>

¹² Walters, R. (2012). *The Impact of Slavery on 20th-and 21st-Century Black progress*. The Journal of African American History. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5323/jafriamerhist.97.1-2.0110>

progress made by Black individuals, frequently resorted to such violence.¹³ Lynchers were rarely apprehended and, if arrested, convictions were infrequent. The terrorization and discrimination that Black rural residents experienced have impacted every aspect of their well-being as a people, from their economic development to education, health care, and even civic engagement. When it comes to economic mobility, Black rural Americans have faced economic assault for generations.

After slavery officially ended in 1865 in the United States, slave owners in many southern rural areas neglected to inform previously enslaved Africans of their newfound freedom while still exploiting their labor without compensation.¹⁴ When they did acknowledge the end of slavery in rural areas, it was replaced by sharecropping. Sharecropping was a contractual arrangement for plantation owners and newly freed Black Americans. The owner would allow Black Americans to work their land in exchange for a portion of the crops.¹⁵ After being freed from slavery, Black farmers were often forced, either through violence, coercion, or deceit, to sign exploitative contracts. These agreements required them to work the land and give a portion of their crops to white landowners, maintaining the control that white planters and overseers had before the Civil War. Black farmers were also compelled to take out high-interest loans to buy essential items at inflated prices, restricting them to growing only the designated cash crop. As a result, families frequently found themselves unable to pay off their debts each season, leading to a cycle of debt that was nearly impossible to break free from.¹⁶ Sharecropping began the onset of many Black rural Americans' financial issues. Black Americans were an easy target to be exploited, especially with being newly free and having a lack of information.

On January 12, 1865, Union General William T. Sherman met with twenty Black leaders to inquire about their desires for their community. In response, the pastors expressed their wish for land and the opportunity to reside among themselves — separate from white communities to avoid the ongoing terrorization inflicted upon their people. On January 16, 1865, General Sherman subsequently signed Field Order 15, a directive allocating 400,000 acres of Confederate land for individuals who were formerly enslaved.¹⁷ The equitable distribution of land along the Southeast coast meant that each family would receive 40 acres of cultivable land. Some of the formerly enslaved people managed to obtain their promised 40 acres of land. However, the subsequent assassination of President Abraham Lincoln resulted in many Black residents not receiving their reparations even though they, their parents, and their grandparents were forced to provide free labor for centuries.

¹³ Bailey, A. K., Tolnay, S. E., Beck, E. M., & Laird, J. D. (2011). *Targeting Lynch Victims: Social Marginality or Status Transgressions?*. *American sociological review*, 76(3), 412–436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411407736>

¹⁴ Davis, D. (Spring 2010). *Slavery and Emancipation in the Nation's Capital*. National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/spring/deslavery.html>

¹⁵ Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. (2013). *The Truth Behind '40 Acres and a Mule.'* *The Root*. Retrieved from <https://www.theroot.com/the-truth-behind-40-acres-and-a-mule-1790894780>

¹⁶ Equal Justice Initiative. (December 23, 2016). *Racialized Poverty – The Legacy of Slavery*. <https://eji.org/news/history-racial-injustice-racialized-poverty/>

¹⁷ Myers, Barton. (September 30, 2020). *Sherman's Field Order No. 15*. *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/shermans-field-order-no-15/>

After years of trying to make a living for themselves, several Black rural Americans were thriving. They were able to establish their own business in their communities.¹⁸ However, in the late 1890s to early 1900s, Black residents experienced another type of assault. While many are familiar with the Tulsa Massacre in rural Oklahoma, there are numerous stories of other racial violence and destruction against Black rural Americans. For instance, Wilmington, North Carolina, was a thriving Black-majority town led by Black elected public officials. White residents, jealous of their economic power, attacked the citizens and killed 300 Black people in Wilmington, North Carolina on November 10, 1898.¹⁹

White racists also used terror to steal land from Black landowners. By 1910, more than 210,000 Black people owned land, totaling 14 million acres.²⁰ In addition to terrorist acts to steal land, many rural areas created policies and legislation, such as the Torrens Act, which facilitated the legal seizure of land owned by Black individuals by white people.²¹ However, some Black Rural were able to find other ways to keep some of their land and create some form of economic mobility, even if it was small progress.²²

Hungry for economic opportunities, Black rural residents found jobs outside of the agricultural sector and started working in factories and mines — which often had the worst conditions and were the most dangerous positions to hold.²³ As a result, several Black residents were injured and killed. The compensation for these positions was extremely low and still did not allow Black rural residents to have a decent living.

Education Disparities

Education has also been a target for oppression against Black rural Americans. During the era of slavery, Black Americans were deliberately denied the opportunity to learn how to read or write.²⁴ In fact, it was considered a crime for enslaved individuals to be caught reading, and even white people faced legal consequences for teaching Black people how to read.²⁵ The state of Alabama specifically signed into law in 1833 that “any person or persons who shall attempt to teach any free person of color, or slave, to spell, read, or write, shall upon conviction thereof of

¹⁸ Joseph, Peniell. (November 13, 2023). How Black Americans Kept Reconstruction Alive. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/12/how-long-reconstruction-period-black-americans/675805/>

¹⁹ LeRae, Umfleet. (2009) *A Day of Blood: The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot*, based on report prepared in 2006 for the Wilmington Race Riot Commission, posted at:

<https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/1898-wilmington-race-riot-report/2257408>

²⁰ Newkirk, V. (September 2019). *The Great Land Robbery*. The Atlantic.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/09/this-land-was-our-land/594742/>

²¹ Keenan, S. (October 27, 2016). Smoke, Curtains and Mirrors: The Production of Race Through Time and Title Registration. Law Critique. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-016-9194-z>

²² Keenan, S. (October 27, 2016). Smoke, Curtains and Mirrors: The Production of Race Through Time and Title Registration. Law Critique. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-016-9194-z>

²³ Contractor, H. Overton, S. (February 2020). An Introduction to The Future of Work in The Black Rural South. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. https://jointcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Intro_To_FoW_In_Black_Rural_South_2-26-20-539pm.pdf

²⁴ Span, C. M. (2005). *Learning in Spite of Opposition: African Americans and their History of Educational Exclusion in Antebellum America*. Counterpoints, 131, 26–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42977282>

²⁵ Foster, M. (1990). The Politics of Race: Through the Eyes of African-American Teachers. Journal of Education, 172(3), 123-141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205749017200309>

indictment be fined in a sum not less than two hundred and fifty dollars.”²⁶ The fine would approximate around \$7,600 when adjusted for inflation in today's currency. In North Carolina, it was a crime to also give pamphlets and books to slaves in fear that they would be able to read information from abolitionists about slavery. The assault on education and literacy was a way to ensure Black people remained subordinate to white people. White Americans believed that educating Black people would make them more dangerous.

However, after the abolishment of slavery, Black rural Americans could seek out education opportunities. Many of the first schools created for Black children were in Black church buildings.²⁷ The Freedmen’s Bureau also established many schools as well. These schools did not have the proper resources, and many were in very poor conditions. Black preachers and advocates of the Black community made it their duty to teach the masses of Black people so they could improve their conditions in life. Basic education topics such as reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught to kids and adults alike. Unfortunately, many of those schools were burned down by white individuals, depriving Black students of alternative educational options.²⁸

Black rural residents were also prevented from exploring opportunities in higher education and were not allowed to attend most American universities.²⁹ Though cities like Boston and Chicago allowed Black Americans to attend American universities in the early 1800s, Black rural residents did not have this same access and support. The Second Morrill Act of 1890 created more access to college education for Black rural residents by requiring states that supported racial segregation in schools to create and fund public institutions for Black students.³⁰ Several Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were formed in rural America during this time, such as Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University in Huntsville, Alabama and Savannah State University in Savannah, Georgia. Though the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision made it legal for American universities to prevent Black people from matriculating, *Brown vs. Board of Education* declared that “separate was not equal” in 1954, forcing rural American universities to admit Black people to public colleges. Despite this ruling, the universities in many rural areas still denied Black people entry. It was not until the 1960s that colleges and universities in most rural areas allowed Black people to enroll.

Health Disparities

Beyond the assault on economic opportunities and education, Black rural Americans have faced particularly challenging healthcare circumstances. History exposes the extraordinarily cruel treatment that Black individuals have endured in the United States within the medical field. In

²⁶ Maddox, C. (January 12, 2022). Literacy By Any Means Necessary: The History of Anti-Literacy Laws in the U.S. Oakland Literacy Coalition. <https://oaklandliteracycoalition.org/literacy-by-any-means-necessary-the-history-of-anti-literacy-laws-in-the-u-s/>

²⁷ Poole, T. (1988). *The Role of Church in Black Education*. The Western Journal of Black Studies. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/8469f8dc7f19b4326ac328e0fd28ec28/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1821483>

²⁸ Butchart, R. E (2010) *Black hope, white power: emancipation, reconstruction and the legacy of unequal schooling in the US South, 1861–1880*, Paedagogica Historica, 46:1-2, 33-50, DOI: 10.1080/00309230903528447

²⁹ Harper, S., Patton, L., & Wooden, S (2009) *Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts*. The Journal of Higher Education, 80:4, 389-414, DOI: 10.1080/00221546.2009.11779022

³⁰ Craig, L.A. (1992). *Raising among themselves”: Black educational advancement and the Morrill act of 1890*. Agric Hum Values 9, 31–37 (1992). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02226501>

Alabama, from 1845 to 1849, Dr. J. Marion Sims developed new surgical techniques by conducting medical experiments on enslaved women.³¹ Dr. Francois Marie Prevost conducted experiments on enslaved Black women in rural Louisiana during the 1830s to practice cesarian surgeries. Dr. Ephraim McDowell also conducted experiments on enslaved women to develop treatments for ovarian cancer. The experiments performed on Black individuals caused intense pain as no anesthesia was administered. These doctors and scientists held the reprehensible belief that Black people experienced less pain than their white counterparts.

Even after the emancipation of Black Americans, white scientists and doctors persisted in these practices. In rural areas, there were instances where Black people would disappear, having been captured for experimentation. At times, entire communities were harmed to advance medical research and agendas. An infamous example is the Tuskegee syphilis experiment in rural Alabama, where Black residents infected with syphilis were misled into believing they were receiving treatment for the disease.³² However, instead of being treated for syphilis, the treatment was withheld from Black residents so that white doctors and scientists could study the disease. Access to genuine healthcare was rare for Black rural residents, and the unscrupulous actions of some doctors eroded their trust in healthcare professionals.

Criminal Justice System and Civic Engagement

In conjunction with the aforementioned disparities and injurious practices perpetrated against Black rural residents, the criminal justice system has demonstrably failed this demographic egregiously. The origins of modern policing in the United States can be traced to slave patrols established in many rural areas during the late 1600s and early 1700s.³³ South Carolina is thought to have provided the foundation for this type of policing of Black people as The Negro Act of 1740, legislation enacted in South Carolina, significantly restricted the lives and activities of enslaved individuals.³⁴ The primary purpose of this law was to control and suppress the enslaved population, reinforcing the institution of slavery. One of the notable provisions of the act was the requirement for white citizens to actively enforce restrictions by forming patrols.

The patrols were mandated by law to monitor and control the movements and activities of enslaved Black individuals. This created a system of organized surveillance and repression, leading to increased terror and brutality against the Black population. The patrols were authorized to use violence as a means of maintaining control, and they often engaged in acts of intimidation, harassment, and punishment against enslaved individuals. Patrollers also had the authority to stop, question, and punish any Black person without cause.³⁵

³¹ Wall L. L. (2006). *The medical ethics of Dr J Marion Sims: a fresh look at the historical record*. Journal of Medical Ethics, 32(6), 346–350. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jme.2005.012559>

³² Brandt, A. M. (1978). *Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study*. The Hastings Center Report, 8(6), 21–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3561468>

³³ Spruill, L. H. (2016). *Slave Patrols, "Packs of Negro Dogs," and Policing Black Communities*. Phylon (1960-), 53(1), 42–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/phyllon1960.53.1.42>

³⁴ Rasmussen BB. (2010). *Attended with Great Inconveniences: Slave Literacy and the 1740 South Carolina Negro Act*. PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America. 2010;125(1):201-203. doi:10.1632/pmla.2010.125.1.201

³⁵ Rasmussen BB. (2010). *Attended with Great Inconveniences: Slave Literacy and the 1740 South Carolina Negro Act*. PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America. 2010;125(1):201-203. doi:10.1632/pmla.2010.125.1.201

The state of Georgia followed suit, modeling its patrol system after South Carolina and creating similar laws. One notable law was the Georgia Slave Code of 1848, which outlined the rights and restrictions imposed on enslaved individuals.³⁶ This code granted expansive powers to slave patrols, as seen in South Carolina, to use force and violence to control the enslaved population — codifying the dehumanization of Black people and reinforcing racial hierarchy.

After the abolition of slavery, the emergence of Jim Crow laws and Black Codes continued the legacy of controlling and subjugating Black rural residents.³⁷ These laws reinforced segregation, sanctioned violence against Black people, and restricted voting rights. The 14th Amendment granted African American men the right to vote and, as a result, Wilmington, North Carolina's local government had a majority Black presence. However, there was rhetoric coming from white women that their womanhood was threatened by Black men. A prevalent but unfounded fear amongst white people was the notion that Black people would gain power and eventually overthrow white societal dominance. This fear and hate led to the white residents attacking Black men and preventing them from voting in the next election. They were able to push out all the Black elected officials and overthrow the Wilmington government.³⁸

During the Civil Rights Era, white racists continued to terrorize Black people in rural areas who tried to engage in the election process and advocate for themselves. To this day, Bloody Sunday which occurred on March 7, 1965, is a widely regarded historical day commemorating the peaceful protesters who were met with violence by local and state law enforcement in Alabama. Black rural residents, led by the late Congressman John Lewis, marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, to advocate for their right to vote. The march was also initiated to protest the severe beating and murder of civil rights activist Jimmie Lee Jackson, who had been shot and killed in a peaceful protest in Marion, Alabama.³⁹

The end of slavery also marked a significant shift in the United States, with the quest for free labor endured through a disturbing metamorphosis — mass incarceration. As the nation grappled with the aftermath of the Civil War during the Reconstruction Era, newly freed Black people faced not only racial challenges but were also pushed toward systemic incarceration.⁴⁰ Black Codes were instrumental in justifying the arrest and imprisonment of Black individuals for trivial or fabricated reasons.⁴¹ In rural areas, these laws disproportionately targeted Black people,

³⁶ Martin, I. M. (1961). *Civil Liberties in Georgia Legislation 1800-1830*. The Georgia Historical Quarterly, 45(4), 329–344. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40550241>

³⁷ Roback, J. (1984). *Southern Labor Law in the Jim Crow Era: Exploitative or Competitive?* The University of Chicago Law Review, 51(4), 1161–1192. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1599563>

³⁸ LeRae, Umfleet. (2009) A Day of Blood: The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot, based on report prepared in 2006 for the Wilmington Race Riot Commission, posted at: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/1898-wilmington-race-riot-report/2257408>

³⁹ Kelly, W. E. (2011). Justice revisited: the catalyst of the voting rights act of 1965. Journal of the Alabama Academy of Science, 82(1), 14+. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A264366297/AONE?u=anon~9bc525db&sid=googleScholar&xid=718c1ac8>

⁴⁰ Pettit, B., & Gutierrez, C. (2018). *Mass Incarceration and Racial Inequality*. American journal of economics and sociology, 77(3-4), 1153–1182. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12241>

⁴¹ Roback, Jennifer. "Southern labor law in the Jim Crow era: exploitative or competitive?" The University of Chicago Law Review 51, no. 4 (1984): 1161-1192.

subjecting them to a cycle of incarceration and forced labor reminiscent of the antebellum period. Vagrancy laws, for instance, criminalized unemployed individuals, providing a pretext for arresting and exploiting Black labor. Convict leasing, a practice that emerged during Reconstruction, allowed prisoners to be leased to private entities for labor.⁴² This legalized form of slavery enabled landowners, corporations, and businesses to exploit incarcerated individuals, many of whom were predominantly Black, for economic gain. The economic interests of white, rural elites fueled a system that used the criminal justice system to continue taking advantage of Black people through free labor, post-slavery. This revelation is not unexpected, given that Confederate states articulated their dependence on free slave labor for economic prosperity and quality of life when seceding from the United States.

Current Economic Disparities

Today, economic conditions in the United States have not improved much for Black rural Americans and have, in fact, worsened in the past several years. Thirty-seven percent of Black rural Americans live in poverty compared to only 12.7 percent of white rural Americans.⁴³ In 1910, Black Americans owned roughly 14 million acres of land. Today, that number is a little less than 2 million. By 1997, more than 90 percent of Black Americans' land, mostly concentrated in rural areas, was stolen or lost. Between 1992 and 2002, 94 percent of Black farmers lost their land or parts of it, three-times the rate at which white farmers lost their land.⁴⁴

In the 1970s, rural Black people also had more employment opportunities to choose from compared to today.⁴⁵ At the time, approximately 40 percent of jobs available in rural areas were in manufacturing, agriculture, and mining. In contrast, Black rural residents in the early 1900s worked in those same three occupations without the need for a formal education. However, today less than 16 percent of jobs are in manufacturing and agriculture, with manufacturing being almost non-existent due to a mass exodus of companies choosing to move out of rural areas. In other cases, many of the factories shut down completely.

Black rural residents confront a threefold higher rate of rejection for bank loans compared to their white counterparts, as indicated by the Hope Policy Institute.⁴⁶ Black rural Americans were also found to receive significantly lower loan amounts compared to their white counterparts and face elevated interest rates. Compounding this issue, payday loans specifically target Black rural Americans who struggle to secure conventional loans, imposing an exorbitant 400 percent annual interest rate on their modest loans — contributing to a recurring cycle of debt for many Black rural residents. A substantial portion of the United States' economic expansion can be ascribed to

⁴² Pettit, B., & Gutierrez, C. (2018). *Mass Incarceration and Racial Inequality*. American journal of economics and sociology, 77(3-4), 1153–1182. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12241>

⁴³ Economic Research Service. (November 15, 2023). *Rural Poverty & Well-Being*. U.S Department of Agriculture. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/>

⁴⁴ Hinson, W.R., Robinson, E. (2008). *We Didn't Get Nothing: The Plight of Black Farmers*. *St* 12, 283–302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-008-9046-5>

⁴⁵ Fast Focused Research. (January 2020). *Many Rural Americans Are Still "Left Behind"*. Institute For Research on Poverty. <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/many-rural-americans-are-still-left-behind/>

⁴⁶ Miller, Sara. (July 19, 2023). *Black Households Face Higher Mortgage Denials than White Applicants*, Research Finds. Hope Policy Institute. <http://hopepolicy.org/blog/black-households-face-higher-mortgage-denials-than-white-applicants-research-finds/>

the technology job sector, with 98 percent of such jobs concentrated in urban areas.⁴⁷ The limited availability of technology-related positions in rural areas is predominantly occupied by white rural residents, encompassing 85 percent of all rural tech jobs. The challenge of attracting technology companies to most rural areas stem from inadequate internet and broadband connectivity, further hindering economic development in these regions.

Current Education Disparities

Examining the rural economic gap necessitates attention to be given to the enduring educational disparity prevalent among Black residents in rural America. The historical legacy of slavery and segregation in the United States has left a profound and enduring impact on the realm of education.⁴⁸ Because several generations of Black people were not allowed to read and several colleges in rural areas restricted their admittance, many Black rural students today are the first generation of their family to graduate from high school and college. Rural students, in general, are less likely to attend college than their counterparts residing in urban areas. The historical inequalities embedded in the education system have contributed to higher dropout rates among Black students in rural America. Disparities in resources, quality of education, and systemic challenges have created an environment where Black students are more likely to disengage from high school — limiting their future opportunities and perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.⁴⁹ In rural areas, Black students face a higher likelihood of suspension and expulsion from high school in comparison to their white counterparts.⁵⁰ Additionally, Black students often face unwarranted criminalization for behaviors that would be perceived as typical childish conduct. The majority representation of white educators in rural America perpetuates the continued prevalence of biases.

Access to education is further impeded by transportation issues, as many Black students in rural areas face difficulties in commuting to school. Limited transportation infrastructure restricts their ability to access educational resources, extracurricular activities, and after-school programs — placing them at a disadvantage to their white counterparts with more convenient access.

The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed and exacerbated existing educational disparities. Black rural students faced heightened challenges due to limited broadband access — hindering their ability to participate in remote learning.⁵¹ In certain rural school areas, only half of the students had internet they could rely on, and one out of every five students had no internet at all.⁵² As

⁴⁷ Chow, M., Goldschlag, N. (February 14, 2023). *High-Tech Industries Are Concentrated in Five Coastal Metro Areas*. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/02/where-in-the-united-states-are-the-high-tech-jobs.html>

⁴⁸ Chezare A. Warren & Justin A. Coles (2020) *Trading Spaces: Antiracism and Reflections on Black Education Futures*. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 53:3, 382-398, DOI: 10.1080/10665684.2020.1764882

⁴⁹ Gazeley, I. (2010) *The Role of School Exclusion Processes in the Re-Production of Social and Educational Disadvantage*. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 58:3, 293-309, DOI: 10.1080/00071000903520843

⁵⁰ Workman, J. and Wake, D. (2022) *Discipline Disproportionality in Rural Schools in the South*. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 34, pp.85-107.

⁵¹ Peyton, N. (August 26, 2020). Black and rural students left behind as U.S. schools go online. Thomson Reuters Foundation. <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/long-read/black-and-rural-students-left-behind-as-us-schools-go-online>

⁵² Peyton, N. (August 26, 2020). Black and rural students left behind as U.S. schools go online. Thomson Reuters Foundation. <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/long-read/black-and-rural-students-left-behind-as-us-schools-go-online>

schools transitioned to online platforms, the digital divide became more pronounced, leaving many Black students disconnected from vital educational resources and opportunities.

Current Healthcare Disparities

Healthcare disparities among Black rural residents in the United States reveal a troubling narrative of systemic neglect and inequity. Black rural residents face many disparities related to several diseases and complications. Diabetes is a pervasive health concern affecting millions of individuals worldwide. However, when examining the impact of diabetes on rural populations in the United States, stark disparities emerge: According to national health surveys, the prevalence of diabetes in Black adults in rural areas is approximately 14.7 percent in comparison to 8.2 percent of white adults.⁵³

One key factor contributing to the diabetes disparities is the socio-economic landscape of Black rural communities. Limited access to nutritious food options and the prevalence of apartheid disproportionately affects these areas. Black residents often face economic challenges, leading to a higher reliance on affordable yet unhealthy food options, thereby increasing the risk of developing diabetes and other illnesses.⁵⁴ Black rural residents also encounter barriers that impede timely diagnosis and effective management of diabetes. Studies reveal that Black individuals are less likely to receive early diabetes screenings, leading to delayed diagnoses and increased complications.⁵⁵

Even after diagnosis, disparities persist in the management and outcomes of diabetes for Black rural residents. Access to quality healthcare services, including diabetes education programs, are limited in rural areas. Consequently, Black individuals face challenges in effectively managing their diabetes, resulting in higher rates of complications, hospitalizations, and adverse health outcomes compared to their white counterparts. Cultural factors also play a role in diabetes disparities. Black rural communities may experience cultural insensitivity in healthcare settings, impacting the effectiveness of diabetes management programs. Additionally, historical systemic biases in healthcare provision contribute to mistrust, further hindering preventive measures and early interventions. Black residents in rural areas have valid reasons for harboring mistrust toward the healthcare system, given historical instances of mistreatment by medical professionals. Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, strokes, and cancer all stand as significant health concerns for Black rural Americans. A 2021 report found that a disproportionate prevalence of each of these diseases is found in Black individuals in rural settings.⁵⁶

⁵³ Chung, Hyeran, and Mary Arends-Kuenning. 2022. "Racial, Ethnic, and Urban/Rural Differences in Transitions into Diabetes: Evidence from the Health and Retirement Survey Biomarker and Self-Reported Data." *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*, 37(1): Article 5. Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jrss/vol37/iss1/5>

⁵⁴ Breland, J., McAndrew, I. Gross, R., Leventhal, H. Horowitz; C. (October 2013) *Challenges to Healthy Eating for People With Diabetes in a Low-Income, Minority Neighborhood*. *Diabetes Care* 2895–2901.

⁵⁵ Aggarwal, R., Chiu, N., Loccoh, E. C., Kazi, D. S., Yeh, R. W., & Wadhera, R. K. (2021). *Rural-Urban Disparities: Diabetes, Hypertension, Heart Disease, and Stroke Mortality Among Black and White Adults, 1999-2018*. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 77(11), 1480–1481. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacc.2021.01.032>

⁵⁶ Aggarwal, R., Chiu, N., Loccoh, E. C., Kazi, D. S., Yeh, R. W., & Wadhera, R. K. (2021). *Rural-Urban Disparities: Diabetes, Hypertension, Heart Disease, and Stroke Mortality Among Black and White Adults, 1999-2018*. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 77(11), 1480–1481. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacc.2021.01.032>

Current Criminal Justice Disparities

The criminal justice system in the United States is marred by disparities that disproportionately affect Black rural Americans. Black rural Americans contend with the harsh reality of over-policing, where law enforcement presence is disproportionately high in their communities. Racial profiling exacerbates this issue, leading to unwarranted stops, searches, and arrests. The systemic bias ingrained in policing practices perpetuates a cycle of distrust between Black rural residents and law enforcement agencies. One of the stark injustices within the criminal justice system is the glaring sentencing disparities faced by Black rural Americans. Research consistently reveals that Black individuals receive longer sentences than their white counterparts for similar offenses.⁵⁷ This discrepancy not only perpetuates systemic racism but also contributes to the overrepresentation of Black individuals in the prison system.

Black rural Americans often face biases in the criminal justice in the form of receiving incarceration over probation compared to their white rural counterparts.⁵⁸ While probation is considered a more rehabilitative approach, Black individuals are more likely to be sentenced to jail time instead. This not only perpetuates a cycle of incarceration but also denies individuals the opportunity for rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Additionally, the financial burden of bail bonds presents another hurdle for Black rural Americans entangled in the criminal justice system. Many find themselves unable to afford bail, leading to prolonged pretrial detention. This further amplifies the disparities in the justice system, as it disproportionately affects those without the financial means to secure their release. With that being said, the criminal justice system's treatment of Black rural Americans reflects a broader issue—the criminalization of poverty. Limited access to quality legal representation, coupled with socio-economic challenges, creates an environment where individuals are more likely to face harsh penalties—contributing to the perpetuation of systemic inequalities.

Current Legislation

In acknowledging and delving into the history of Black rural Americans, there is a clear argument for policies and practices to address this specific population. There has been some legislation to address the unique challenges rural Americans face. However, most of these bills are not race and place-specific. One piece of legislation is the Rural Health Care Connectivity Act of 2021. This was introduced by Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI) and aims to expand access to telehealth services in rural areas by allowing healthcare providers to use telehealth across state lines without obtaining additional licenses. The bill also seeks to increase funding for telehealth infrastructure in rural communities. In reviewing the bill, no statements specifically addressed the unique needs of Black rural communities.

The Rural Prosperity Act of 2021 was another piece of legislation that was introduced to tackle issues in the rural community. This legislation was introduced by Senator Jon Tester (D-MT). This bill focuses on economic development in rural areas by providing funding for small

⁵⁷ Mitchell, O., Mackenzie, I. (December 2004). The Relationship between Race, Ethnicity, and Sentencing Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis of Sentencing Research. Report Submitted to the Department of Justice. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/208129.pdf>

⁵⁸ Hinton, E., Henderson, L., & Reed, C. (2018). *An unjust burden: The disparate treatment of Black Americans in the criminal justice system*. Vera Institute of Justice, 1(1), 1-20.

businesses, agriculture, and infrastructure projects. It also seeks to improve access to broadband internet in rural communities. One of the major concerns with this bill is that it does not consider how Black rural Americans have been historically denied bank loans and the ways that Black rural Americans can be denied funding.

The Rural Education Access Act was introduced by Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI). This bill purpose is to improve access to education in rural areas by funding schools and educational programs in rural communities. It also seeks to address the teacher shortage in rural schools by incentivizing teachers to work in rural areas. This bill also neglects the disparities between Black and rural Americans as well.

Lastly, Senator Mark Warner (D-VA) introduced the Rural Jobs Act. This bill aims to create jobs in rural areas by providing tax incentives for businesses to invest in rural communities. It also seeks to improve access to capital for small businesses in rural areas. This bill is also a race-neutral bill and does not address the disparities of Black rural Americans.

Congressman Bishop and Davis introduced H.R. 8198, Heirs Education and Investment to Resolve Succession of Property Act. This bill attempts to mitigate some of the historical injustices as it relates to land loss related to heirs' property. Although this legislation doesn't explicitly talk about Black Rural Americans, it has provided safeguards that will help Black Americans in the long run.

Survey and Interview Methods

The survey instrument and interview questions were designed to align with the research objectives, focusing on understanding the issues perceived as most critical by Black rural Americans. The survey questionnaire comprised two main sections: demographic questions to contextualize responses and open-ended questions allowing participants to express their views freely. The target population for this survey included Black residents in rural areas across the United States. A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure a diverse representation. Participants were invited to participate through community outreach, social media platforms, and local organizations, promoting inclusivity. The survey was administered electronically using Microsoft Forms, allowing for a convenient and accessible platform for participants. Information about the survey's purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary participation was communicated clearly. Informed consent was implied through voluntary survey completion. Survey responses were collected from January until July of 2024.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather insights from Black rural Americans on economic development, healthcare, education, and criminal justice topics. Participants were recruited from rural communities across the United States using purposive sampling to ensure diverse perspectives. The interview questions were designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions regarding these key areas. Interviews were conducted remotely, based on participant preference and feasibility. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent.

Data Analysis

Raw data from the survey responses were reported without undergoing statistical analysis. The goal was to present a qualitative overview of participants' perceptions and experiences. Open-ended responses were carefully reviewed and categorized thematically to identify recurring patterns and central themes. The survey and interview questions adhered to ethical standards, ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and responsible data handling.

Results

Participant Demographics

The survey included twenty participants identifying as Black rural Americans either currently living in rural America or who used to live in rural America. The participants were in the Southeast region of the United States. Ninety percent of the respondents had a college degree. The participant distribution included seventy-seven percent women and twenty-three percent men. A unanimous sentiment emerged regarding the perception of neglect, with one hundred percent of participants expressing the belief that Black rural Americans are neglected and forgotten. When asked about the most pressing issues in Black rural America, sixty-five percent identified economic development as their primary concern for Black rural Americans. Twenty percent of the participants stated education was the most pressing issue, and the remaining fifteen percent stated healthcare as the most crucial issue. Regarding President Joe Biden's administration's effectiveness on addressing rural issues, forty-five percent of participants acknowledged some progress but expressed a collective opinion that more efforts could be made to address the concerns of Black rural Americans. Thirty percent of the respondents stated they did not know enough information on his efforts for rural America, and twenty-five percent stated they were dissatisfied with how the administration has handled rural America. Additionally, sixty-five percent of Black rural Americans stated they would be voting for Joe Biden, while thirty-five percent stated they are currently undecided.

A prevailing concern was inadequate broadband and internet access in rural areas. Participants overwhelmingly indicated that Black rural Americans face challenges in accessing sufficient internet. One hundred percent of the respondents indicated that Broadband access in rural communities was inadequate. Some of the respondents went into detail and stated how this lack of broadband access has hindered their employment opportunities and their children's education. In an interview with Ms. Lafaye Taylor, a Senior Business Analyst and Black rural American, she stated that access to broadband is crucial for the development of Rural America, especially for Black Americans. Ms. Taylor stated that for Black rural Americans to even take advantage of some of the programs available to them they must first be able to access the internet. When asked about what the government could do to improve rural America, fifty percent of the respondents stated that the government should provide more funding and resources to Black rural Americans. Thirty percent of the participants stated that government officials should engage in more conversations with rural Americans to understand and address their needs. Twenty percent of the respondents stated they were unsure what should be done now. Participants largely attributed the challenges faced by Black rural Americans to federal, state, and local governments, with forty-five participants indicating a collective perception of shared responsibility. Twenty-five percent of the participants stated it was the local government's fault for the state of Black rural America; fifteen percent stated it was the state government, ten percent stated it was the federal government alone fault, and five percent stated corporations were responsible. Some additional

insights from the interviews included Dr. Kuanita Murphy, who is the founder of a magazine and award ceremony that highlights rural leaders in the states of Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Dr. Murphy discussed in detail the significance of getting resources to rural communities. Dr. Murphy mentioned how companies like Walmart would not give grants to leaders and organizations in rural areas because there was no Walmart in the small towns. However, people from small towns do travel to the nearest Walmart and shop at the business. Rural residents are denied many resources because of rules that do not consider the disparities in rural areas.

In response to instances of feeling disadvantaged, one hundred percent of participants cited experiences related to jobs and opportunities as areas where they perceived a distinct disadvantage due to their identity as Black rural Americans. Eighty percent of the participants indicated that job opportunities were extremely limited in rural areas, while twenty percent stated there were no job opportunities in their rural areas. Scout Smith, former Rural Caucus Chair of the Democratic Party of Georgia also explained how there are not many opportunities for Black people in rural areas. As it relates to healthcare services satisfaction in rural areas for Black Americans, eighty percent said they were dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the healthcare services. Twenty-five percent of the participants stated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and five percent stated they were satisfied with healthcare services. Regarding the quality of educational resources and opportunities for Black students in rural schools, fifty percent rated it as fair, while twenty percent deemed it poor, twenty-five percent rated it as good, and five percent stated it was excellent. The rating scale was excellent, good, fair, and poor. In an interview with Mr. Bob Fuse, former Congressional District 2 Chair for the Democratic Party in Georgia, discussed how local school boards were even being segregated. Many of the Black children in rural counties attend the public school system, and many of the white children in rural counties attend private schools or charter schools. The money is taken from the public school funds and put in the charter schools where the majority of those students are White.

A recurrent theme emerged when participants were asked to describe the similarities and differences between white rural Americans and Black rural Americans. Ninety-five percent expressed the view that the experiences of these two groups were notably different, with white rural Americans having more access to opportunities and resources, including a reference to generational wealth. Five percent of the participants stated that conditions were similar.

Recommendations

Creating race and place intentional policies is essential for dismantling systemic inequalities. Historically, generic policies have often overlooked the unique challenges faced by Black rural Americans. By intentionally focusing on race, policymakers acknowledge and address the historical disparities rooted in systemic racism. Simultaneously, recognizing the importance of place ensures that policies consider the specific needs and dynamics of rural communities, preventing a one-size-fits-all approach. The historical neglect and systemic disparities faced by Black rural Americans necessitate intentional and targeted policies at the federal, state, and local levels to address their unique challenges. By focusing on race and place, policymakers can create impactful strategies that foster economic, educational, and healthcare equity for this marginalized group. However, getting race-place legislation passed could be difficult in the current political climate. Congresswoman Adams (NC-12) introduced the Justice for Black Farmers Act of 2023 and only had one Republican cosponsored the bill, showing it does not have bipartisan support.

To mitigate these issues in this day and time, legislators should ensure safeguards are in place to help alleviate the historical and current injustices Black Rural Americans face. One example is H.R. 8198. Congressman Bishop (GA-2) and Congressman Davis (NC-01) introduced H.R. 8198, Heirs Education and Investment to Resolve Succession of Property Act. This bill attempts to mitigate some of the historical injustices as it relates to land loss related to heirs' property by using the term underserved. This bill reauthorizes and enhances the existing re-lending program aimed at resolving issues related to heirs' property, which has profound implications for Black Rural Americans who have historically faced challenges with land ownership and succession. At its core, H.R. 8198 seeks to extend the authorization of the Heirs Property Intermediary Relending Program from 2023 to 2028. This program has been instrumental in providing financial assistance to resolve property ownership and succession issues. By extending its authorization, the bill ensures the continuation of support for individuals dealing with complex land ownership situations, which is particularly crucial for Black Rural Americans who often encounter unique obstacles in managing and retaining their land.

One of the most impactful aspects of H.R. 8198 is the establishment of cooperative agreements with eligible entities to provide free legal and accounting services to underserved heirs. These services are essential for addressing issues related to ownership and succession of farmland and forest land that has multiple owners. Specifically, the bill allows for assistance in transitioning land to agricultural production, maintaining current agricultural operations, and resolving real property claims to meet eligibility requirements for various programs administered by the Secretary.

The inclusion of these cooperative agreements is particularly significant for Black Rural Americans, who have historically been disadvantaged in accessing legal and financial resources. By providing these services at no cost, the bill helps alleviate the financial burden on individuals and families striving to maintain ownership and productive use of their land. This assistance is vital in addressing the legacy of land loss and economic disenfranchisement experienced by many Black communities. H.R. 8198 includes robust provisions for the administration and oversight of cooperative agreements. Eligible entities must provide annual reports to the Secretary detailing their progress and effectiveness. This requirement ensures accountability and helps maintain high standards for the services provided. Additionally, the Secretary has the authority to terminate agreements if an entity fails to demonstrate success, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the program and ensuring that resources are used effectively.

The passage of H.R. 8198 would be a significant step towards mitigating historical injustices faced by Black Rural Americans in land ownership and succession. Although this legislation doesn't explicitly talk about Black Rural Americans, it has provided safeguards that will help Black Americans in the long run. Beyond passing legislation like H.R. 8198, there are several additional steps that both the government and businesses can take to support Black Rural Americans. These include addressing the following:

1. Economic Empowerment: To promote economic progression, governments should implement initiatives that encourage entrepreneurship and job creation in rural areas. Establishing small business incubators, providing low-interest loans, and offering training programs tailored to the needs of Black rural Americans can stimulate economic growth.

Additionally, prioritizing infrastructure development in rural regions can attract investments, leading to increased opportunities.

2. **Education Equity:** Investing in educational resources and opportunities for Black students in rural schools is crucial. Governments should allocate funds to improve infrastructure, enhance curricula, and provide professional development for educators. Establishing scholarship programs and mentorship initiatives can further support educational advancement, ensuring that Black rural Americans have access to quality learning experiences.
3. **Healthcare Access:** Addressing healthcare disparities requires a multifaceted approach. Governments should allocate resources to build and maintain healthcare facilities in rural areas, ensuring accessibility for Black rural residents. Implementing telehealth programs can overcome geographical barriers, providing vital medical services to underserved communities. Moreover, incentivizing healthcare professionals to work in rural areas can strengthen the healthcare workforce.
4. **Broadband Infrastructure:** Recognizing the significance of internet access, policymakers must invest in broadband infrastructure in rural regions. Bridging the digital divide is essential for education, economic opportunities, and healthcare access. By providing subsidies for broadband expansion and collaborating with private entities, governments can ensure that Black rural Americans are not left behind in the digital age.
5. **Community Engagement:** Governments should engage directly with Black rural communities to develop effective policies. Establishing community advisory boards and conducting regular town hall meetings can facilitate dialogue, ensuring that policies align with the needs and aspirations of the residents. Involving community members in decision-making fosters a sense of ownership and ensures interventions are culturally sensitive.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by Black rural Americans are deeply entrenched in historical injustices and systemic inequalities that have evolved over time. The shift from slavery to mass incarceration, economic disparities, and educational and healthcare inequities underscore a persistent legacy of disenfranchisement. Despite some legislative efforts aimed at rural development, many existing bills have not sufficiently addressed the specific needs of Black rural communities. For instance, while the Rural Health Care Connectivity Act of 2021, the Rural Prosperity Act of 2021, and the Rural Education Access Act aim to improve conditions in rural areas, they often fail to address the unique and compounded challenges faced by Black rural residents.

However, H.R. 8198, the Heirs Education and Investment to Resolve Succession of Property Act, represents a promising step towards addressing some of these long-standing issues. By focusing on heirs' property, which disproportionately affects Black rural Americans due to historical land loss and legal barriers, this legislation aims to provide crucial support in resolving property ownership and succession challenges. The bill's provisions for extending the authorization of the Heirs Property Intermediary Relending Program and establishing cooperative agreements for free legal and accounting services are vital. These measures offer practical assistance to Black rural Americans striving to retain and manage their land, addressing a critical aspect of economic and social disenfranchisement.

Nevertheless, while H.R. 8198 provides an important framework for mitigating historical land loss, broader and more comprehensive policies are needed to fully address the multi-faceted issues faced by Black rural Americans. To effectively tackle economic empowerment, educational equity, healthcare access, and broadband infrastructure, targeted and race-specific interventions are essential. Initiatives such as establishing small business incubators, investing in rural education, expanding healthcare facilities, and improving broadband connectivity are necessary to bridge the gap created by systemic neglect.

Additionally, fostering community engagement through advisory boards and town hall meetings can ensure that policies are aligned with the actual needs of Black rural residents. By integrating the insights and experiences of these communities into the policymaking process, the government can develop more effective and culturally sensitive solutions. In this way, the ongoing legacy of inequity can be addressed with a holistic and inclusive approach that recognizes and remedies the specific challenges faced by Black rural Americans.