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Business

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Joyce Watts

The Boujee Baker Builds A Sweet Future On East 12th Street

ALSO INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- State of the Dream 2026 Finds Black America Facing a Recession
- Health Crises America Urgently Needs to Address for Black Communities
- Kansas City Brewery Adds Chicken Restaurant
- And Much More Inside!

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Servicing the Greater Kansas City Area

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Inside This Issue

4

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

A Foreword From Our Editor
Saleem Rasheed, Jr.

7

FINANCIAL LITERACY

State of the Dream 2026 Finds Black America Facing a Recession Across Jobs, Housing, and Technology

8

HEALTH & WELLNESS

5 Health Crises America Urgently Needs to Address for Black Communities

11

ON THE COVER

The Boujee Baker: Joyce Watts Builds a Sweet Future on East 12th Street

14

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Kansas City Brewery Adds Chicken Restaurant as It Looks to Be the 'Neighborhood Hub' of 18th & Vine

Taking Care of Business...

As the Executive Director of Rasheed Communications and Editor of Taking Care of Business, a new innovative bi-monthly business news magazine, our hope is to bring to you local and national news coverage from the African American community. Our focus is on premier black-owned businesses, powerful women in business, minority small business owners, and startup companies. We distribute this bi-monthly publication commercially and residentially with a target circulation of 5,000 copies six times per calendar year.

We highlight corporations that reinvest in our communities and further advance African Americans and women up their corporate ladder. We also intend to expose those companies which do not. We would like to provide your business with the opportunity to expand your marketing and advertising promotions for the Summer. Our goal is to build bridges so that the businesses in our community will support each other more. We will continue to foster an environment that encourages customers to shop locally for goods and service as we work to strengthen our community.

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Saleem Rasheed, Jr.

Saleem Rasheed, Jr.
Executive Director



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STATE OF THE DREAM 2026 FINDS BLACK AMERICA FACING A RECESSION ACROSS JOBS, HOUSING, AND TECHNOLOGY

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA

Black unemployment surged to 7.5 percent by December 2025, a level that would signal a recession if it were reflected across the national workforce. But the latest “State of the Dream 2026” report makes clear the damage extends far beyond jobs. From broadband access and housing to artificial intelligence and federal workforce policy, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies finds that 2025 marked a sharp economic breakdown for Black America driven by policy reversals and the removal of long-standing safeguards.

Released this week, “State of the Dream 2026: From Regression to Signs of a Black Recession” draws on research from the Joint Center and partners including United for a Fair Economy, the Center for Economic Policy Research, the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, and the Onyx Impact Group. The report situates rising unemployment within a wider retreat from equity-focused policy across nearly every sector shaping economic opportunity.

Employment remains the most visible signal. Black unemployment rose from 6.2 percent in January 2025 to 7.5 percent by December. Black youth experienced severe instability, with unemployment spiking from 18.6 percent in September to 29.8 percent in November before falling back to 18.3 percent in December. The report finds that if Black workers had maintained their 2024 prime-age employment rate, roughly 260,000 more Black adults would have been working in 2025, including about 200,000 prime-age Black women.

The collapse of federal employment accelerated the trend. Roughly 271,000 federal jobs were eliminated in less than a year, hitting Black workers particularly hard because they have historically been overrepresented in government roles offering stable wages, benefits, and protections. Be-

fore the cuts, Black Americans made up nearly 19 percent of the federal workforce, compared with about 13 percent of the overall labor force.



“Federal employment has historically functioned as an important sector for Black workers,” the report notes, warning that buyouts, hiring freezes, and the dismantling of diversity-focused recruitment pipelines removed one of the most reliable pathways to middle-income stability.

Tax policy deepened the strain. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 made permanent tax cuts for high-income households and corporations while reducing investment in poverty-alleviating programs. Business preferences such as Section 199A, bonus depreciation, and estate tax benefits overwhelmingly favored wealthy households, while refundable credits that matter most to Black workers were left unchanged.

Black-owned businesses faced a parallel contraction. Executive orders issued early in 2025 redirected federal support away from disadvantaged firms, lowered small, disadvantaged business contracting goals, and moved to dismantle the Minority Business Development Agency. The Joint Center estimates these actions threaten \$10 billion to \$15 billion annually in lost federal support for Black-owned firms. At the same time, the U.S. Treasury Department's Community Development Financial Institution Fund, a key source of capital for minority businesses, was defunded.

Beyond jobs and business, the report documents setbacks in broadband policy that risk widening the digital divide. The cancellation of the Digital Equity Act, the removal of mobile hotspots and school bus Wi-Fi from E-Rate eligibility, and weaker broadband pricing transparency requirements undercut efforts to expand internet access and adoption in Black households.



The information environment also shifted. While federal social media policy remained largely unchanged, platforms themselves pulled back on fact-checking and content moderation. The report notes that these platform-driven decisions reshaped the online information ecosystem, raising concerns about misinformation and its impact on communities that already face barriers to accurate and timely information.

Artificial intelligence policy marked another turning point. A new executive order titled "Removing Barriers to Ameri-

can Leadership in Artificial Intelligence" moved federal policy away from precautionary regulation toward a deregulatory, innovation-first approach. The report warns that unchecked AI deployment risks embedding bias into hiring, lending, housing, and public services without accountability.

Workforce policy changes further reinforced inequality. While apprenticeship programs expanded, initiatives designed to advance African American workforce participation stalled or were cut, setting the stage for reinforcing racial disparities rather than closing them.

Housing remains one of the most entrenched fault lines. U.S. Census Bureau data show Black homeownership at 45 percent compared with 74 percent for white households, a nearly 30-point gap that has persisted for generations.

"At a moment when hard-won rights and safeguards are being eroded, rigorous analysis is essential to building a fair economy," Joint Center President Dedrick Asante-Muhammad said in the report.

BLACK UNEMPLOYMENT TRENDS

- **2018–2019:** Black unemployment rates were consistently falling, ending 2018 around 6.5% and continuing down to 5.5% in 2019.
- **2020–2022 (COVID-19 Era):** Rates spiked during the pandemic-related recession (reaching 11.4% in 2020) but experienced a rapid recovery, with unemployment dropping to 5%–6% by 2022.
- **2023–2024:** The rate hit record lows, reaching 4.7% in April 2023.
- **2025–Present:** A significant spike occurred, with the rate climbing from 2024 levels to 7.5% in December 2025. This spike is linked to corporate DEI rollbacks, federal job cuts, and manufacturing losses.

Black workers continue to face significantly higher unemployment than white workers—often 1.5 to nearly 2 times higher. Black women have been hit especially hard, with unemployment rising to around 7.3%–7.5% by late 2025. At the same time, long-term unemployment is worsening overall, with more than 100,000 additional people unemployed for 27 weeks or longer by December 2025.





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Health Crises America Urgently Needs to Address for Black Communities



It's a critical time to spotlight the dire health disparities affecting Black Americans, from premature deaths to maternal care, and the urgent need for systemic reforms.

Racial and ethnic disparities continue to significantly impact the health care experiences of millions of Americans, with people of color often receiving worse care than their White counterparts. Racial and ethnic disparities affect millions of Americans, and oftentimes, the disproportionate impact on Black communities is starkest. Black patients received lower-quality care than White patients on 52% of quality measures according to a recent assessment by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. These disparities exist across crucial areas like heart disease, cancer, stroke, maternal health, pain management, and surgical care, underscoring persistent inequities in patient safety and treatment outcomes throughout the health system.

Here are 5 critical ways the US health care system is failing Black people that demand swifter action.



1. Premature Deaths

Black Americans experience avoidable or premature deaths at 2 to 3 times the rate of any other racial and ethnic group across every US state.³ Avoidable mortality—

deaths before age 75 from preventable conditions like diabetes, certain cancers, infections, injuries, and drug overdoses—remains alarmingly high in the US compared with other nations, with Black Americans disproportionately impacted. According to the 2025 Scorecard on State Health System Performance published by the Commonwealth Fund, in 2023, the national rate was 278 per 100,000 people younger than age 75, but this burden was not evenly distributed.⁴

In 42 states and the District of Columbia, Black residents were at least twice as likely to die early from preventable causes as the group with the lowest rate. In 32 of those states, they were at least 3 times as likely. These inequities are closely tied to structural factors such as lower insurance coverage, reduced access to quality care, socioeconomic challenges, and the lasting effects of discriminatory policies.

Drug overdose deaths, although slightly declining nationally since the COVID-19 pandemic peak, continue to disproportionately affect Black communities. Many with substance use disorders still lack treatment: 77%, based on data from 2022. Addressing avoidable mortality for Black Americans requires systemic reforms that expand access to care, confront social determinants of health, and invest in community-based prevention and treatment.

2. Infant Mortality

Across the country, the mortality rates for Black infants are double those of White infants. Current data show infant mortality in the US worsened in 20 states between 2018 and 2022, reversing a long-term trend of improvement. While the national rate generally declined in recent decades, it rose between 2021 and 2022. In 2022, the infant

mortality rate for babies born to Black women was 10.9 deaths per 1000 live births, more than double the rate for White infants (4.5).

Addressing these disparities requires timely prenatal care, health education for caregivers, and expanded access to community-based maternity care models like group prenatal care and doula services. States that expanded Medicaid eligibility have seen greater declines in infant mortality.

3. Maternal Deaths

Black women's risk of maternal cardiac death is more than triple that of White women, with Southern states exhibiting the highest regional rates.⁵ Maternal deaths from cardiovascular disease (CVD) in the US more than doubled between 1999 and 2022. Researchers identified 7581 maternal deaths from CVD, often from preventable causes, indicating the need for improved risk screening, access to high-risk obstetric care, and targeted interventions to reduce racial and regional disparities in maternal heart health.

More than half of maternal deaths occur after childbirth, highlighting the need for better postpartum care.⁴ Access to maternal and reproductive health care remains under threat, particularly in states with abortion bans.

4. Breast and Ovarian Cancers

Black women experience alarming disparities in cancer care, especially for ovarian and breast cancers. They are significantly more likely to be diagnosed with advanced-stage disease than their White counterparts. These disparities stem from systemic inequities in care access and are compounded by geography, CK Wang, MD, hematologist-oncologist and the chief medical officer of COTA, explained in an interview with *The American Journal of Managed Care*[®].⁶ States with restrictive abortion laws also have the highest mortality rates from breast and cervical cancers. Ovarian cancer, already difficult to detect, disproportionately affects Black women who often face barriers to early diagnosis and specialist care.

"What's more difficult for a disease such as ovarian cancer is the fact that there are very few gynecologic oncologists here in the US. In fact, the latest estimates show that there are only 1300 to 1500 gynecologic oncologists practicing in

the [US], and that is significantly smaller than the demand," he said. "Not only do we see the historical racial disparity, but when you see this big disconnect when it comes to access to care, that's when the trend becomes very troublesome."

Adding to the concern is a decline in obstetric-gynecology residency applications following the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, particularly in states with abortion restrictions. This shortage is likely to shift cancer detection to primary care providers and treatment to general oncologists, potentially worsening outcomes for uninsured, underinsured, or marginalized patients who lack timely surgical intervention and expert care. These trends underscore an urgent need to address workforce shortages, restore reproductive health care access, and invest in equitable cancer care.

5. Insurance Coverage and Provider Access

Although the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has increased health coverage across racial and ethnic groups, disparities persist. Uninsured rates remain significantly higher among Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native residents compared with White and Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander counterparts in most states. As of 2024, Black and Hispanic Americans are still disproportionately affected in the 10 states that have not participated in the ACA's Medicaid expansion.



These disparities are deeply rooted in decades of policy decisions leading to economic marginalization, educational inequities, and housing segregation. The 10 states that haven't expanded Medicaid continue to have the largest racial and ethnic coverage gaps, leaving many Black and Hispanic Americans without affordable care.



Access to high-quality primary care is crucial for reducing inequities, yet predominantly Black and Hispanic communities often face a shortage of providers and facilities. Research shows that patients of color have better care experiences and outcomes when matched with clinicians of similar racial or ethnic backgrounds. However, barriers like provider shortages, high costs, and systemic discrimination often drive many to emergency departments for conditions that are manageable in primary care. For example, Black Medicare beneficiaries are more likely than White beneficiaries to be hospitalized for preventable complications of chronic diseases, indicating missed opportunities for timely care.

To truly advance health equity, strengthening primary care infrastructure in underserved communities is paramount. Investing in community-based care, expanding Medicaid, and supporting a more diverse clinical workforce are essential steps toward ensuring everyone has access to high-quality, equitable care, regardless of race or zip code.

Key Takeaways

- Black Americans experience higher rates of premature deaths and infant mortality due to structural factors and reduced access to quality care.
- Maternal deaths among Black women are significantly higher, with cardiovascular disease being a major contributor, necessitating improved risk screening and postpartum care.
- Disparities in cancer care for Black women, particularly in breast and ovarian cancers, are exacerbated by systemic inequities and workforce shortages.
- Despite the ACA's impact, insurance coverage disparities persist, with Black and Hispanic Americans facing higher uninsured rates and limited access to primary care.

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The Boujee Baker: Joyce Watts Builds a Sweet Future on East 12th Street

Fresh-baked favorites, loyal customers, and family roots fuel growing Kansas City bakery

By Jeanene Dunn

When Joyce Watts unlocks the doors at The Boujee Baker, her day has already been underway for hours. Most mornings begin between 4:30 and 5:30 a.m., when the ovens come on and the smell of fresh bread, cinnamon rolls, and cheesecake starts to fill the shop at 2311 East 12th Street in Kansas City, Missouri.

For Watts, the early mornings are worth it. Baking has been part of her life for decades, and today she's turned that passion into a thriving neighborhood business known for homemade desserts, hearty comfort food, and a welcoming atmosphere that keeps customers coming back.



A Long Road Back to the Oven

Watts' journey to The Boujee Baker began years earlier. In 2005, she and her sisters opened Big Momma's Bakery, a family venture that introduced her to the realities of running a food business. Over time, the bakery changed locations, including a move to Crown Center, and eventually closed as life and family responsibilities pulled everyone in different directions.

Years later, Watts found herself baking again from home, filling orders for friends and customers who remembered her work. In 2021, she began rebuilding the business from her kitchen, determined to start fresh with a new name and a new vision.

The rebrand became official in 2019, when Watts chose the name The Boujee Baker, inspired by a clothing business run by her niece.

"I wanted something different that was my own," she said. "People still remembered Big Momma's, but I wanted a new start and something people wouldn't confuse with the old business."

After searching for an affordable and suitable space, Watts



"I like everything to be fresh," Watts said. "We make our dough, our cookies, our cheesecakes — everything. When people come in, I want them to know it was made right here."

opened the current storefront in May 2025 along East 12th Street, a location she chose for its visibility and neighborhood feel.



Cheesecake, Cinnamon Rolls, and a Loyal Following

The Boujee Baker's menu reflects Watts' love of classic comfort food made from scratch. Customers stop in for cinnamon rolls, cookies, sandwiches, soups, and her signature cheesecakes, which have become the shop's best-selling item.

"Cheesecake is number one," Watts said. "Once people try it, they come back for it again and again."

The shop has built a strong following, with some customers visiting daily — not just for food, but for conversation and community.

Her husband also plays a key role in the business, helping prepare items like corned beef and smoked chicken, while the shop's growing loyalty program now includes more than 800 members.

Catering Adds Another Layer to the Business

In addition to walk-in customers, catering has become an important part of the business. Watts regularly prepares large orders for companies, churches, and special events, sometimes baking for dozens of people at a time.

"We do a lot of catering," she said. "Some days we'll have big orders going out along with everything we're making for the shop, so it keeps us busy."

From trays of desserts to full meal orders that include sandwiches, soups, and baked goods, the catering side of the business has helped The Boujee Baker reach new cus-

tomers while giving Watts the chance to showcase the variety of items she makes from scratch.

"People will order for an event, and then they come back to the shop later," she said. "That's how a lot of our new customers find us."

Growing the Business — Without Losing the Heart

Running a small bakery comes with long hours and constant work, but Watts says adaptability has been the key to staying open and moving forward.

Looking ahead, she plans to extend shop hours during the spring and summer months, offer breakfast throughout the day, and host cookie- and cake-decorating classes for children.

With fresh bread in the oven and a steady stream of regulars walking through the door, The Boujee Baker is proof that experience, persistence, and a love for baking can turn a neighborhood shop into something truly special.

The Boujee Baker is open Monday-Saturday, from 7 am to 3 pm.

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KANSAS CITY BREWERY ADDS CHICKEN RESTAURANT AS IT LOOKS TO BE THE 'NEIGHBORHOOD HUB' OF 18TH & VINE

By Taylor Wilmore



Vine Street Brewing is welcoming a restaurant partner, the founder of Urban, into its space, combining chicken and beer into a new concept: Vine Street Chicken Co. Kansas City.

Vine Street Brewing is cooking. The Black-owned brewery at 2000 Vine is welcoming a new restaurant partner into its space, reuniting beer and bites under one roof.

The concept, Vine Street Chicken Co. Kansas City, comes through a partnership with chef Justin Clark, founder of the popular Troost Avenue culinary hotspot Urban, bringing fried and grilled chicken into the 18th & Vine kitchen. A soft launch is coming soon, with food available.

“We got Black-owned businesses coming together and opening during Black History Month,” said Kemet Coleman, co-founder of Vine Street Brewing Co. “The idea of chicken and beer is a concept that Ludacris had, so it’s that hip-hop element that we lean into.”

Food has been part of Vine Street Brewing’s DNA from the very beginning. The original vision for the 2000 Vine project included a full food concept, Coleman said, which was a major factor in the decision to move into the space. When a previous restaurant left the 2000 Vine space more than a year ago, it created a noticeable gap in the overall experience.

“Since then, we’ve been asking ourselves how to get food back into the building,” Coleman said.

Vine Street experimented with food trucks, but consistency and reliability proved difficult. Rather than rushing into a solution, the team waited for a partner who could align with the brewery’s standards.

“We were looking for the perfect partner for us,” Coleman said. “Someone who was looking to make the whole building feel like one identical concept, but also had quality food and great customer service.”

That alignment came naturally with Clark, he added.

“Justin and I have been friends for several years and been supporting his businesses for a while,” Coleman said. “He was interested in doing something 18th & Vine, and so we just kind of made it real.”



Inside the new Vine Street Chicken Co. space at 2000 Vine.

The menu focuses on comfort food that’s easy to order and enjoy.

“They’ll have chicken sandwiches, half chickens, legs, thighs, tenders,” Coleman said. “I’m excited about the sauces that you can add to them.”

Ordering will be quick and casual. Customers will place orders at self-service kiosks, pick up their food when it’s ready, and settle in wherever they like throughout the taproom.

Once the kitchen is fully integrated, Coleman sees the pairing possibilities as a major next step.

"That's when we really go to the next level," Coleman said. "Pairing the beers with the food and then the music and stuff. We feel like we're about to hit on all cylinders. It's going to be Vine Street 2.0."

Vine Street Brewing Co. also plans to expand into the center portion of the building, creating additional indoor space for dining, DJs, listening parties and watch events, especially with the World Cup approaching.

"One of our big goals is to be in the living room of Kansas City," Coleman said. "Come and get good food, good beverage, good family, good friends, good times."

With dining back in the mix, Coleman hopes neighbors who may have drifted away now have one more reason to return.

"Adding food gives them another reason," he said. "We're ready to become that neighborhood hub that 18th & Vine is missing."



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