

What Brands Need to Know About **COVID-19 & Being Black in America**

Insights & Implications

Our Imperative

George Floyd survived COVID-19, the virus that is killing Black people in the U.S. at nearly three times the rate of their white counterparts. He was then killed by another symptom of systemic racism: police brutality.

The Black community in the U.S. and allies are rallying the world's institutions - governments, NGOs and corporations - to dismantle institutional racism and advance equity to build a healthy and just society.



What We're Exploring

Based off internal focus groups, secondary research and our collective experience forecasting trends, **Edelman's Multicultural and Insights & Strategy teams** have explored how COVID-19 is impacting the health of Black communities, both physically and psychologically, from health care inequities to a deepening mistrust in government. And we've laid out what we anticipate brands should prepare for, from an influx in political action to a demand for meaningful corporate accountability.

1. A Tale of Two Pandemics

How COVID-19 is Exposing Inequality

How Racial Profiling Makes the Coronavirus Especially Dangerous for Black People

2. The Black Community in the New COVID Era

What we expect to see next

3. Show Up

How CEOs and Brands Can Earn the Trust of Black People

A Tale of Two Pandemics:
How COVID-19 Has
Exposed Inequality

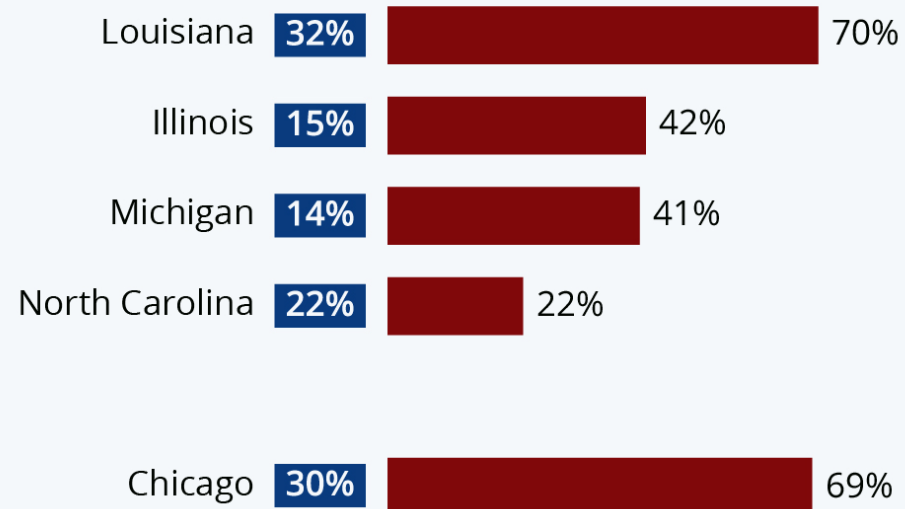


A TALE OF TWO PANDEMICS

COVID-19's Devastating Impact On African Americans

African American share of state/city populations and COVID-19 deaths (as of Apr 06, 2020)

■ Share of state/city's population ■ Share of COVID-19 deaths



Sources: 2010 Census, respective state/city health departments



statista

The spread of COVID-19 highlights the depths of racial disparity across the United States.

COVID-19 highlights the healthcare system's legacy of discrimination

COVID-19 has aggressively exposed longstanding disparities and inequities in the Black community. Black Americans are dying of COVID-19 at [nearly three times](#) the rate of white people.

Experts have long tied poorer health outcomes among Black patients to institutional racism. Implicit bias from doctors and the healthcare system places the Black community at a higher risk during the pandemic.

The U.S. healthcare system has a deep legacy of discriminating against and exploiting Black people. The ["Slave Health Deficit"](#) describes the generational impact of racial inequality in healthcare dating back to slavery. One of the most notable examples of medical discrimination is the 40-year [Tuskegee Experiment](#) in which researchers knowingly failed to treat 600 Black syphilis patients after penicillin was found to cure the disease in the 1940s.

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When America gets the flu, Black people get pneumonia.

- Focus Group Participant

WHAT IT MEANS

COVID-19 has made it clear: Black communities need targeted commitments, including adequate funding, culturally competent care, and increased access to healthcare, to help eliminate racial discrimination in healthcare and health research once and for all.



Disparate Access To Care Worsens Health Outcomes

Black people are more likely to be uninsured or live in communities with low-quality healthcare. Research shows that Black people receive worse medical care than their white counterparts – even when income, education and socio-economic status are taken into account.

Those who are uninsured may lack a usual source of care and not know where to get tested for COVID-19. They may also still choose to forego testing or treatment out of fear of the cost of medical care. Additionally, some may still face large out-of-pocket costs for care that these provisions might not cover, such as care received outside the hospital in-patient setting.



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Seeing the disparities and inequities within the system manifest so aggressively and acutely has been something that I think has affected a lot of people.

- Focus Group Participant

WHAT IT MEANS

Watching family, friends, neighbors, and an entire community suffer from historic disparities without government intervention has a potentially devastating impact on patients' physical and psychological wellbeing, adding to stress and deepening Black patients' mistrust of the healthcare system.



Black workers are overrepresented in lower-wage, highly expendable jobs

Black populations are overrepresented as essential and service workers, making them more susceptible to catching the virus and experiencing economic hardship due to COVID-19.

The overrepresentation of Black workers in essential jobs means they are unable to work from home and self-isolate like many other Americans. Workers of color, particularly Black Americans, have long been overrepresented in the lowest-paying service and domestic occupations placing them at an extremely high risk of contraction of COVID-19.

According to research from the Current Populations Survey, Black workers were more likely to be employed in essential services than white workers, with 37.7 percent of Black workers employed in these industries compared with 26.9 percent of white workers. This disparity is even clearer when you look at the healthcare industry. Black workers are about 50 percent more likely to work in the healthcare and social assistance industry and 40 percent more likely to work in hospitals, compared with white workers.

WHAT IT MEANS

This systemic inequity demonstrates just one way Black communities are more likely to suffer from both health and economic threats as a result of the pandemic.



The Danger of Protective Face Masks

There is an undeniable history of police brutality in the Black community, with Black men experiencing higher rates of racial profiling by law enforcement than any other group. With the CDC strongly recommending that people wear face masks in public to protect themselves from COVID-19, many Black people – particularly Black men – worry these guidelines will expose them to increased harassment from police officers and other law enforcement officials.

In March, before the CDC issued its recommendation, two Black men in surgical masks filmed themselves as a police officer kicked them out of a store in Wood River, Illinois. In the video, which has been viewed more than 250,000 times on YouTube, the officer can be seen following them around. Racially-motivated incidents like these have sparked concerns among members of the Black community on whether wearing a face mask will protect them or put them in harm's way.

WHAT IT MEANS

Racially-motivated incidents like these have exposed another can't-win situation for Black communities – the “choice” between exposure to a deadly virus by forging a life-saving mask or wearing one and becoming a target for violence.



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My roommates and I had to stop at a gas station. We were all wearing masks. I was the only one getting strange looks. I realized I was the only Black man in the group.

- Focus Group Participant



The Black Community in the new COVID-19 Era

Here's our forecast of the trends we can expect in our new reality.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Black Consumers Will Demand Increased Corporate Accountability

Companies will step up to recognize racial disparities in COVID-19 cases.

Companies are collaborating with Black organizations to provide relief in the wake of the pandemic. United Way partnered with BET to produce a telethon that raised more than \$15 million to support Black communities impacted by COVID-19. The telethon drew support from companies, such as Unilever, Toyota, McDonald's, Procter & Gamble, AmEx, WW (formerly Weight Watchers), Morgan Stanley, the NBA, Popeyes, and Facebook, among others. As part of a \$7 million initiative to help communities hardest hit by COVID-19, PepsiCo partnered with the National Urban League and its local affiliates to address health and economic needs in Black communities.

Going forward, brands will be specific in their outreach to Black communities to gain audience trust and build authentic connections.



I think there are a lot of grassroots initiatives and efforts from within the Black community being put forth and I think that is amazing, but these efforts also need to come from allies. We need allies to champion for us as well.



- Focus Group Participant

What it means

Corporations must respond to the Black community's and allies' call for equity by not only changing their internal corporate culture via inclusion and diversity efforts at every level, but by vocally and materially supporting Black interests.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Mistrust of the Healthcare Establishment Will Drive Demand for Black-Owned Health Centers

Research shows that physicians of color provide better care to patients of color

Black people often struggle to find doctors who understand their physical, cultural and mental health needs, leading to underdiagnoses and undertreatment of life-threatening sicknesses. Research shows that health outcomes for Black patients are better when they are treated by Black doctors. In the new COVID era, there will be a rise of Black-owned healthcare centers that provide culturally competent care to respond to long-standing racial disparities in healthcare.

“Generally, I do not like hospitals. Now I am even more weary of going to the hospital regardless of anything that might be going on.”

- Focus Group Participant

What it means

Black people will make an even more concerted effort to be seen by Black physicians which may lead to an increase in Black-owned health centers that specifically treat the Black community. In response, we can expect to see an emergence of tailored insurance products and an increased in Black healthcare research.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN A POST-COVID WORLD

The Rebirth of the Church

New perspectives have emerged as friends and family strengthen spiritual connections virtually.

The pandemic has strengthened religious faith among the community. A [new survey](#) by Pew Research Center found that 56 percent of those attending historically Black churches said their faith has grown stronger during the pandemic. With the ability of Black communities to trust the government declining as the same communities shoulder the weight of an economic collapse, attendance of online church services is rising, creating new on-ramps for houses of worship to tend to mental and spiritual suffering and fill gaps left by government and healthcare officials.

To authentically engage and show up for Black audiences, corporations must collaborate with and support faith-based community service providers, as well as Black-owned health and wellness centers, as they lead in the effort to rebuild from the devastation of the pandemic.

“Once quarantine is over, I may start to go back to the physical gathering space, but it has been cool to experience virtual faith gatherings from my own home to fellowship with other people in a different way.”

- Focus Group Participant

What it means

We can expect to see an increase in virtual community organizing via the church, eliminating geographical and denominational barriers for churches and creating opportunities for an increased national Black church presence.

The church will find new ways to respond holistically to the Black community's most pressing needs, including virtual mental health check-ins with members and integrated physical screenings.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Continued Inaction will Create the Era of the Black Candidate

Black communities are becoming increasingly engaged in local government as a result of state responses to COVID-19's disproportionate impact.

An April 2020 [BlackPAC poll](#) reveals that the disproportionate health and economic impact of COVID-19 on Black communities, and a desire to fight back against voter suppression efforts, has intensified urgency around voting. While Black voters were already motivated to turn out to the polls in November, lack of trust in the federal government response to the virus has fueled a strong desire to participate. This participation won't end at the polls. Increasingly, members of the Black community frustrated with perceived political inaction, will take matters into their own hands and run for office.

The poll also revealed that Black voters are becoming more engaged in local politics to drive change. New data on multicultural communities in the Edelman Trust Barometer underscores the increased importance of local government, as Black respondents reported that they trust state and local government more than they trust federal government.

"I'm definitely paying closer attention to the National Governors Association. It seems like governors have the most authority when it comes to responding to Coronavirus."

- Focus Group Participant

What it means

COVID-19's disproportionate impact on Black communities has fueled Black voters who were already motivated by ongoing disparities to turn out to the polls this November.

With the status quo creating a life or death situation for Black communities, the increased focus on local government may mean an increase in Black candidates at the state and local level and a louder call for representation at the federal level.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Make Way for Black-Owned Streaming Platforms

Building on overwhelming social media engagement during COVID-19, Black entertainers, investors, and media outlets will begin to own streaming platforms to connect directly with audiences and circulate dollars within the community.

With several scheduled events and conferences cancelled or taking place virtually, Black-owned and hosted events moved online to continue building community. From DJ D-Nice's "Club Quarantine" to Swizz Beats and Timbaland's Verzuz Instagram Live music battles, Black creators have created new ways to keep the community engaged at a distance.

Taking cues from companies like Tidal, which has successfully disrupted the tradition of white owners making money off Black artists, the pandemic will usher in a new era of Black-owned media. In the new COVID era, we will see the rise of Black-owned streaming platforms that will allow Black content creators to have complete control over their work, how it's disseminated, and ad revenue.

"I am in the same live with Michelle Obama and we are both commenting saying that is "my jam." I love the fact that every celebrity and every regular person are all doing the same things from our couch."

- Focus Group Participant

What it means

Brands will leverage relationships with Black content creators to gain access to these new Black-owned streaming platforms and deepen relationships with Black audiences.

Show Up:

How Brands Can Earn the Trust of Black People in the Wake of the Pandemic

8 WAYS BRANDS CAN SHOW UP FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Be of Service. Brands should be of direct service to under-resourced communities who are impacted by COVID-19 the most. Brands should take note of or provide support to pre-existing campaigns like [Taraji P Henson's The Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation](#) or [Beyoncé's BEYGOOD foundation](#), both of which are offering services that directly benefit the Black community. Consumers and employees are taking note and will remember which companies directly supported their communities.

Acknowledge Disparities. Brands must acknowledge the racial and socioeconomic disparities that affect Black communities are experiencing this crisis and avoid using language that suggests the pandemic is affecting all communities equally.

Keep Community First. People are relying on unique ways to connect with the world around them while social distancing. Any communications strategy that Brands develop should be community-first and culture-led through observing preexisting trends within Black culture and including active community voices at the decision-making table without co-opting or appropriating movements.

Inform the Public. Brands should leverage their authority and media presence to curate reliable, culturally competent information that informs members of the Black community about the crisis, how to protect themselves, and the progress being made – including by boosting the voices of active community members without co-opting their movements. Unilever's Dove brand [released a video](#) on social media that illustrated proper hand-washing techniques while its parent company announced \$100 million in product donations, including 200,000 face masks to New York City hospitals to support healthcare workers.



8 WAYS BRANDS CAN SHOW UP FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Support Black businesses. Black business owners are especially vulnerable to the economic devastation stemming from COVID-19 and are most likely to lose out on government aid. In the wake of the pandemic, brands should strengthen their supplier diversity and ensure Black-owned businesses are in their network.

Start from the inside out. Black employees are essential to a brand's success and represent a segment of its consumer base. To demonstrate their value as colleagues and consumers, Brands should prioritize internal initiatives that allow employees to thrive both inside and outside the workplace.

Survey Black consumers. Brands can better understand how the pandemic has affected Black consumers by conducting a survey that will ultimately help inform future strategy. The survey should include questions that gauge sentiment, needs, expectations, and trends.

Strengthen your impact. Brands can build on their efforts to support Black people and their families by investing in partnerships with trusted local or state-based organizations who are driving change in their communities and advancing initiatives that connect to your brand's purpose - whether that's addressing affordable housing, educational equity or job preparedness.



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