

## The Case for Earmarking Federal COVID Funding Specifically to Oregon's Black communities

I was just as shocked as many other Americans when U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams asserted that African Americans were being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 because of the cultural differences between Black Americans and non-Black Americans. The Surgeon General's statement was a personal responsibility narrative that simplifies a layered and complex issue. It is my position that the primary driver behind Black Americans bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic is directly attributable to their wealth positionality, not personal responsibility.

As Sandy Darity, a Duke University professor of economics, public policy, and African American studies stated, "Black Americans constitute approximately 13% of the nation's population but only possess 2.6% of the nation's wealth. This translates into an average gap per household of about \$800,000. This immense differential means that under emergency circumstances, Black families have considerably less resources to function as a cushion and they do not have the resources to have access to the best health care or the best preventative measures to insure one has better health. And as a consequence, we're seeing these staggering numbers associated with racial disparities and the mortality from COVID-19. For example, in the state of Louisiana, Blacks make up 32% of the population but 70% of the deaths from coronavirus." The vast and entrenched wealth disparities that exist between Black Americans and white Americans is directly attributable to the multi-generational plunder and oppression of Black Americans via slavery, convict leasing, Jim Crow, redlining, and lynching. As well as the handouts that white America received from the federal government including 160-acre land grants via the Homestead Act, New Deal and Fair Deal Legislation, white mob violence against Black Americans, the G.I. Bill, and Federal Housing Administration loans that were denied to Black Americans.

Contrary to popular belief, poverty is the deadliest pre-existing condition in Portland's Black community specifically and amongst Black Oregonians at large. According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy 30.6% of African American Oregonians live in poverty. In 2013, the median net worth of Black households was \$11,000 while the median net worth of white households was \$141,900. Governor Brown must infuse Black communities across this state with money from federal coronavirus funding to help them not only survive the coronavirus pandemic but to thrive once the pandemic has ended.