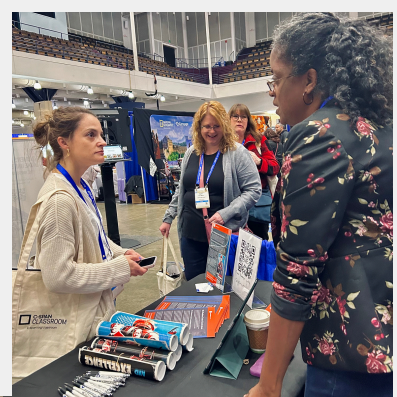
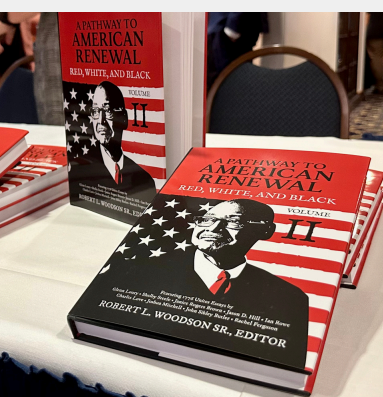
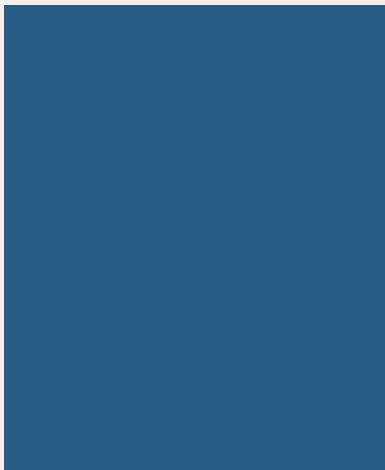


Annual Report



Letter from Our Leadership

Dear Friends of the Woodson Center,

We want to personally thank you for your belief in and support of the Woodson Center.

2024 was a year of growth and innovation for the Center and its affiliates. In a rapidly changing political and cultural landscape, the message and methods we have developed in our 40+ years of work to fight poverty, stop violence, and renew our civic life are needed more than ever.

This Annual Report highlights the substantial impact made possible by your investment in our 1776 Unites K-12 Black History & Excellence Curriculum, Community Affiliate Network (CAN), Voices of Black Mothers United (VBMU), and all our other programming.

Thanks to your generosity and commitment, we continue to resource our grassroots leaders, modern-day patriots who exemplify America's values in action, transforming schools and cities across the country.

Robert L. Woodson, Sr.
President and Founder

Dr. Will Crossley
Executive Vice President



Changing the Narrative on Race and Poverty

2024 was a year of new challenges and radical change for the nation. While pundits across the ideological spectrum spoke about a political “realignment” in the American people, the Woodson Center saw an opportunity to present our solutions to supposedly intractable social problems with even greater urgency.



In September, we proudly released ***A Pathway to American Renewal: Red, White, and Black Volume II*** (Emancipation Books), the long-awaited sequel to our best-selling 2021 essay collection *Red, White, and Black: Rescuing American History from Revisionists and Race Hustlers*. Edited by our founder **Bob Woodson**, the book contains brand-new essays from the Woodson Center's affiliated scholars and community leaders that constructively frame the continuing story of Black America not as a tragedy involving helpless victims, but as a model of renewal for the entire nation.

Through editorials and media appearances, Mr. Woodson, Voices of Black Mothers United (VBMU) Director **Sylvia Bennett-Stone**, and other Center affiliates brought the life-changing work of our grassroots leaders to the public eye, demonstrating how the principles developed throughout the Center's 43-year history continue to revitalize neighborhoods, restore families, and create economic opportunity — even in places where top-down interventions by government programs and larger non-profits have failed.

From the pages of national publications like *The Wall Street Journal* to local TV news and social media platforms, the Woodson Center made the case for bottom-up, community-led initiatives that will provide the genuine change and renewal Americans so clearly want.

Pathway to American Renewal

To celebrate the release of *A Pathway to American Renewal*, Bob Woodson joined former judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals **Janice Rogers Brown** and Brown University economist **Glenn Loury** in a panel moderated by Washington and Lee University professor and book contributor **Lucas Morel**. The trio discussed how America has changed since their youth in pre-Civil Rights America, the counterproductive discourse around race in elite media, the role of the Black Church in community and family life, and the real solutions that can uplift all low-income Americans regardless of skin color.

"Race is preventing us from focusing on the lack of meaning in the lives of our young people," said Mr. Woodson. "The celebration of American values in action. This is what we've got to return to. America very much wants a depository for their dreams, and we're trying to create it at the Woodson Center." The full panel discussion was aired on C-SPAN.

“The celebration of American values in action. This is what we’ve got to return to. America very much wants a depository for their dreams, and we’re trying to create it at the Woodson Center.”

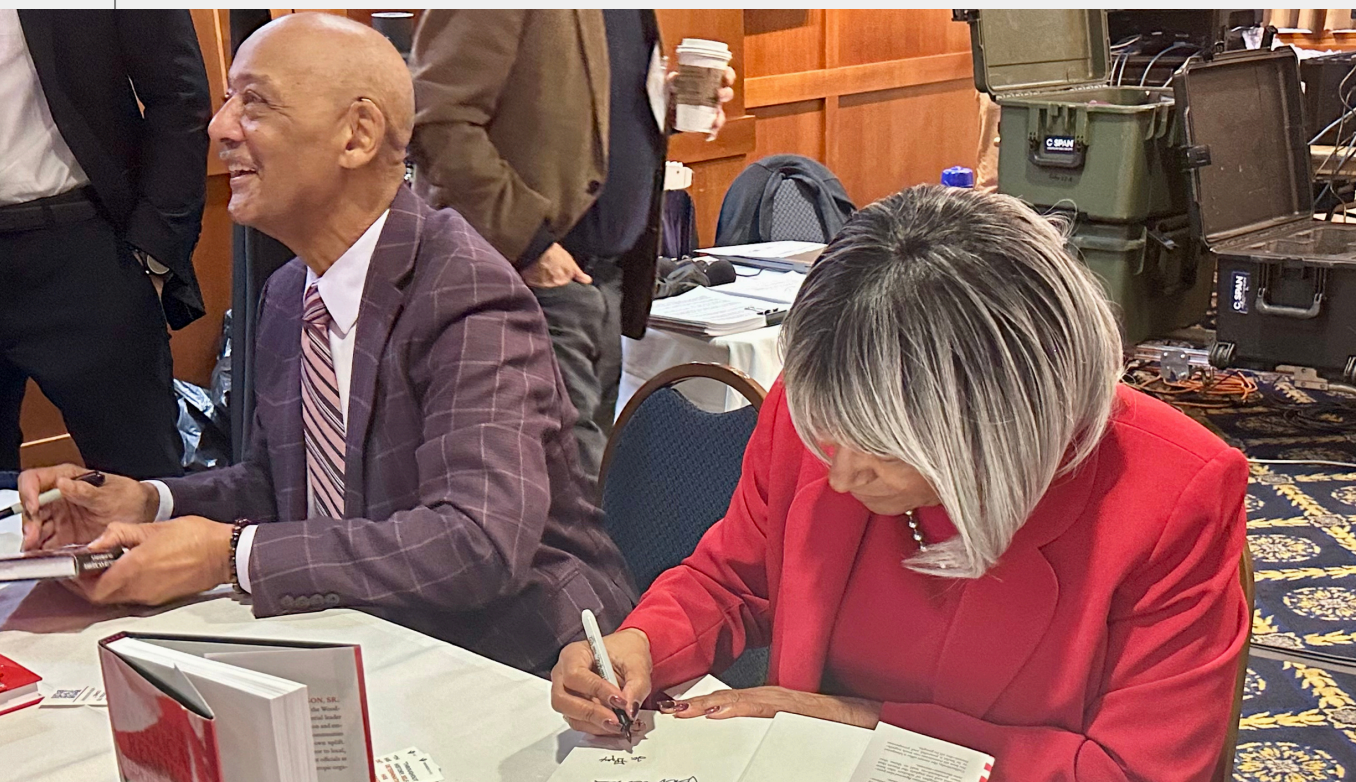
A Pathway to American Renewal expands the scope of Volume I to include not only prominent scholars like sociologist **John Sibley Butler**, education reformer **Ian V. Rowe**, and noted author **Shelby Steele**, but also the street-level perspective of grassroots leaders from the Center’s **Community Affiliate Network (CAN)**, who use personal stories of overcoming adversity and their hard-won knowledge to help heal their communities and provide models of success for all Americans. The book received a positive review in *The Wall Street Journal* from **Jason L. Riley**, who drew insights from the essays to explain the demographic political realignment that emerged in the 2024 election.



Scan the QR code
to watch the panel
discussion.



Scan the QR code
to read the Wall
Street Journal
article.



“We All Have a Role to Play”: Building Trust to Stop Crime and Heal Communities

The Woodson Center has long understood that low-income communities already possess the necessary “antibodies” to cure violent crime in their midst: grassroots leaders, armed with the necessary resources to implement proven solutions, who work alongside law enforcement and local government to ensure that the seeds of neighborhood renewal take root. In 2024, we shone a light on both the devastating toll of violence and our successes in creating peace.

“The problem can only be solved internally. It’s not going to be solved by making white people more fair and just,” Bob Woodson told C-SPAN while discussing his February op-ed for *The Wall Street Journal*, which examined the steep decline in homicides after the violent 1990s. “It’s going to be solved by addressing the crisis of values within the community.”

In his WSJ essay, Mr. Woodson argued that the crime wave of the early 1990s “activated community ‘antibodies,’ local leaders and the neighborhood organizations they formed to address these problems ... Cities began to heal from the inside out when residents took control of their streets.”

“To rebuild our urban centers, we must first restore peace. We’ve done it before and must do so again.”

“To rebuild our urban centers, we must first restore peace. We’ve done it before and must do so again.”



Scan the QR code to read the Wall Street Journal article.

In March, the Woodson Center came alongside the grieving family of **Mahogany Jackson**, a young woman tortured and murdered in a shocking crime that received little attention outside of her home of Birmingham, Alabama. The Center donated \$3,000 dollars to Ms. Jackson's 3-year-old daughter and her mother, **Gail Maddox**, and helped establish a benefit account to assist her family.

"Mahogany Jackson was tortured and murdered in the most brutal way possible, and we must remember her name," said Bob Woodson. "We hope that our efforts will help in some way to alleviate the burdens on Mahogany's family of this horrific attack."

"We have to be funding and supporting programs that directly assist survivors of violent crime, and that intervene and teach our youth that there's a better way than a life of gang violence or using guns to solve problems."

In addition to these efforts, VBMU Director Sylvia Bennett-Stone penned an op-ed for Fox News exposing the shocking trend of casually filming violence. She pleaded on behalf of bereaved mothers everywhere: "If you see a video of a murder or torture online ... and you casually share this video, know that you are an accomplice to this crime. And if you see this content and do nothing about it ... know that you are part of the problem."

"I'm asking you to join me. Use your voice for good. Do your part to help your community heal. We all have a role to play – and together, we can stop this ongoing cycle of trauma and violence."



Scan the QR code to watch the feature about Mahogany Jackson.



Scan the QR code to read Sylvia Bennett-Stone's article.



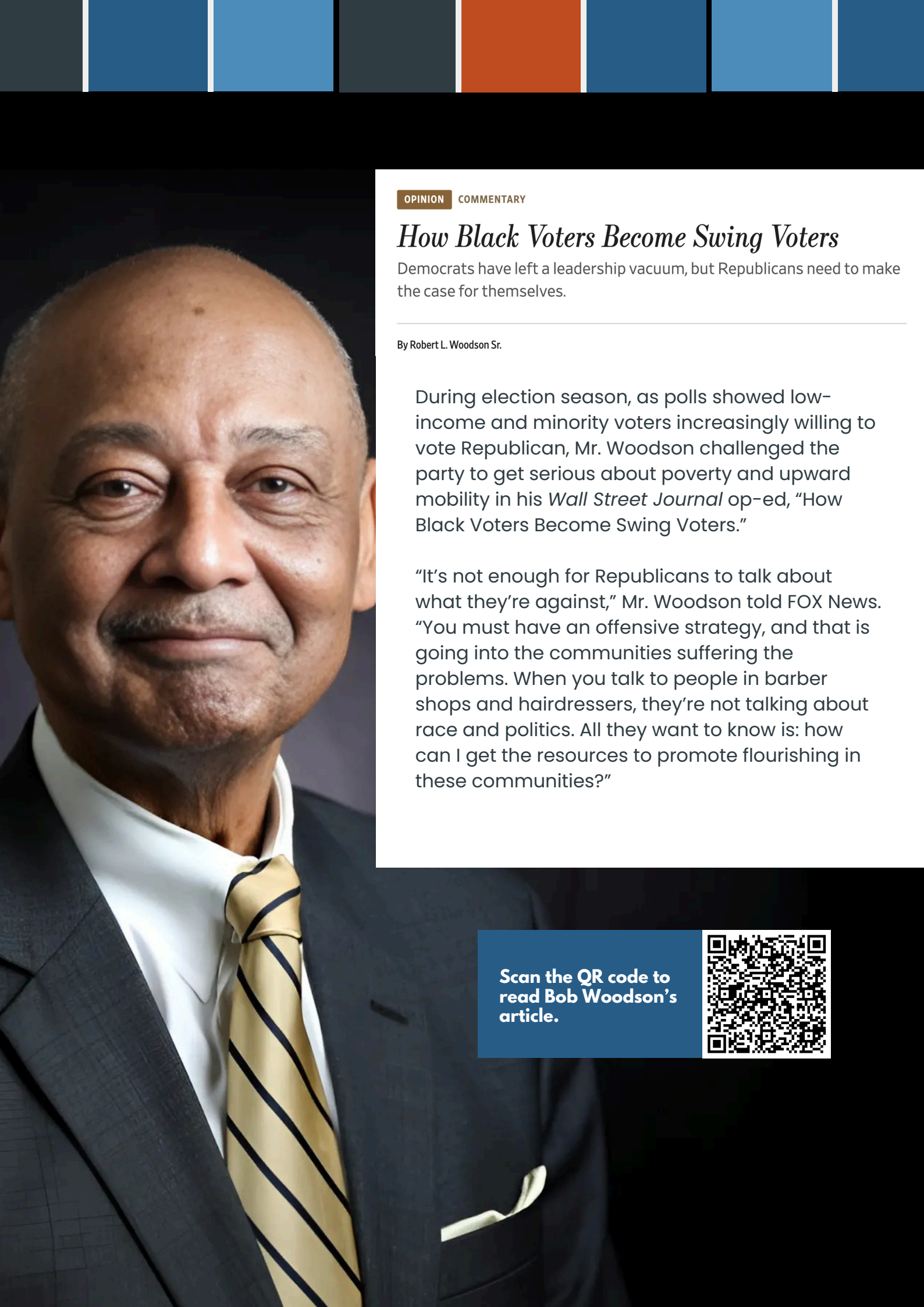
“Because We Can, We Must”: Restoring Civic Life for a Brighter Future

Our decades of work to lift up low-income neighborhoods have made it clear that marriage and family formation are essential to building social capital and lifting people out of poverty.

In March, Bob Woodson laid out these truths in *National Review*, expanding on Brad Wilcox’s insightful new book *Get Married*. Mr. Woodson argued that homegrown leaders can help raise marriage rates — and that stable marriages and families are the cornerstone of thriving communities: “[S]trong marriages are the irreplaceable building blocks of healthy families and communities. And more importantly for the work I have done for decades, strong marriages are crucial in the effort to overcome generational poverty and revitalize struggling communities,” wrote Mr. Woodson.

“If you look on the walls of the Woodson Center conference room, you will see photographs of scores of grassroots leaders, many of them former gang members ... As part of their redemptive journey almost all of them, in addition to exiting lives of crime, formed marriages and families that have stood the test of time.”





OPINION COMMENTARY

How Black Voters Become Swing Voters

Democrats have left a leadership vacuum, but Republicans need to make the case for themselves.

By Robert L. Woodson Sr.

During election season, as polls showed low-income and minority voters increasingly willing to vote Republican, Mr. Woodson challenged the party to get serious about poverty and upward mobility in his *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, “How Black Voters Become Swing Voters.”

“It’s not enough for Republicans to talk about what they’re against,” Mr. Woodson told FOX News. “You must have an offensive strategy, and that is going into the communities suffering the problems. When you talk to people in barber shops and hairdressers, they’re not talking about race and politics. All they want to know is: how can I get the resources to promote flourishing in these communities?”

Scan the QR code to
read Bob Woodson’s
article.





She Leads: Voices of Black Mothers United

Founded in 2021, Voices of Black Mothers United (VBMU) continued to expand its transformative, life-saving programming in 2024, providing solutions to the challenges facing our nation in crime reduction and police reform, including family outreach, advocacy, and support; violence prevention and awareness education; homicide trauma intervention and services referrals; and Promoting Positive Policing (PPP) practices. VBMU now includes mothers in 10 states, all of whom have lost children to homicide.



These courageous women possess a unique moral authority born from unspeakable tragedy. But too often that authority is exploited by bad actors who advance policies that, time and again, have made communities less safe and less prosperous. That's why VBMU supports mothers across the country who speak up for peace and trains them in implementing proven violence-reduction strategies in their communities — and also helps these women connect with one another to grieve and heal.

Thanks to the support of the Woodson Center, bereaved mothers like **Michelle Green** in Orangeburg County, South Carolina have been able to establish their own violence prevention organizations. Since enrolling in our training program, Ms. Green has filed her 501(c)(3) paperwork and now provides mentorship to at-risk children and families in local public schools. Ms. Green partners with the Orangeburg County Sheriffs Office, Department of Public Safety, and School District, and has also leveraged her Woodson Center seed grant to secure funding from her county and the Department of Justice.

Once established, VBMU programs are having significant impact on crime in their communities. VBMU Wisconsin Regional Lead **Nakeyda Haymer** became Racine County's first full-time violent crime reduction coordinator in 2022. Racine faced severe youth crime challenges, including violent incidents like a shooting at a funeral. With guidance and training from VBMU Director Sylvia Bennett-Stone, Ms. Haymer built trust with grieving families, school leaders, clergy, law enforcement, and the community, acting as a liaison to address shared concerns. Her proactive approach led to a significant reduction in violence, with a 34 percent decrease in shots fired, a 70 percent drop in gunshot victims, and zero homicides in the first half of 2024.

In July, Bob Woodson and Sylvia Bennett-Stone joined CBS 42 News to discuss the success of VBMU initiatives in reducing violent crime in Racine County, and how that success could be repeated in Birmingham, Alabama. In the first half of 2024, the Community Oriented Policing (COP) Houses VBMU helped facilitate and program in Racine contributed to a 73 percent reduction of shots fired and a 35 percent reduction in people being shot.

"They are run by the police, but they are centered on the most high-crime neighborhoods," said Ms. Bennett Stone. "What we have done is taken that to another level by actually bringing community programs into the COP Houses."

"We built that kind of trusting relationship between the community and the police," said Mr. Woodson, "not by lecturing to people but by coming out and interacting and being mentors to these kids."

VBMU hosted local events in conjunction with national outreach efforts to continue to raise awareness about the problems of violence facing their communities and the proven solutions they can help implement. In April, VBMU mothers across the country hosted **National Crime Victims' Rights Week** programming to shine a light on the experiences of victims and survivors. In August, **National Night Out** programming honored law enforcement and fostered stronger ties between police and the communities they serve. In October, VBMU moms led students in non-violent conflict resolution pledges for the **Day of National Concern**.



Scan the QR code to
watch the video.





The Woodson Center was also pleased to host its fourth annual **Mothers' Retreat** in Washington, D.C. in November. "She Leads: Unleashing Potential" gathered 11 mothers in the nation's capitol to provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, confidence building, and empowerment. The moms learned practical strategies for event marketing, business etiquette, and measuring donor impact to better manage and grow their local organizations, and heard inspirational talks from Woodson Center leaders Bob Woodson and **Will Crossley**.

"A Sense of Hope": National Crime Victims' Rights Week

National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) challenges America to ensure that all victims of crime receive justice and provides an opportunity for those whose lives have been upended by violence to speak out for public safety. Throughout the country, VBMU affiliates hosted community events focused on combating neighborhood violence and encouraging healing.

VBMU Regional Lead **Jessica Barnes Brown**, whose son Censere was murdered in 2018, knows that her example inspires others who have suffered unthinkable loss. "When people see me in this capacity, no one knows I lost a child to gun violence. So when they see me, they get a sense of hope," Ms. Barnes Brown told reporters at the NCVRW event she organized in Birmingham, Alabama. "'She's doing it. I can do it, too,' and go on and offer encouragement and strength and just different ways to heal, grow, and keep it moving."



**Scan the QR code to
read the article.**



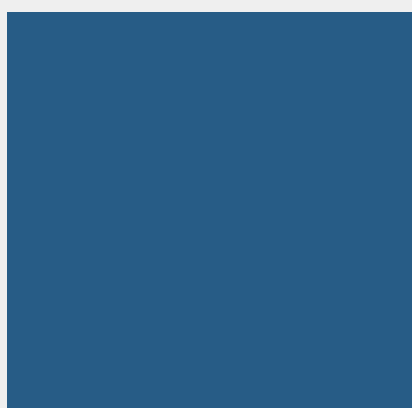
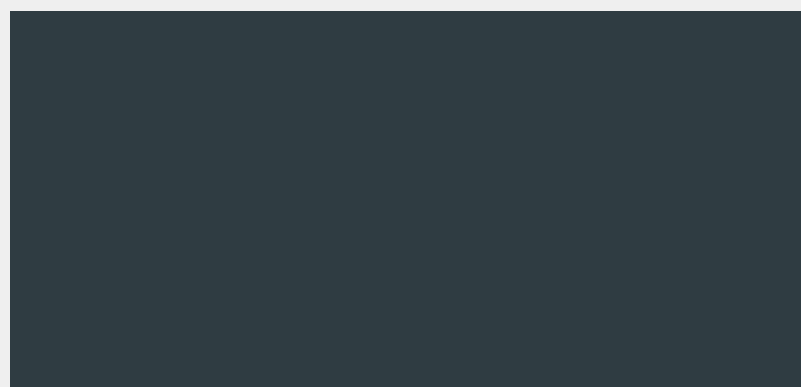
In Nashville, Tennessee, VBMU Regional Lead **Clemmie Greenlee** hosted “Healed People Heal People” for NCVRW. Community leaders from local organizations, pastors from local churches, as well as Metro Nashville Police Department Commander **Anthony McClains** were in attendance. Ms. Greenlee said, “I want [the mothers] to know... we know why you’re here, we know why you’re crying.”

In Memphis, Regional Lead **Marsha Wilson** was joined by Sylvia Bennett-Stone to provide resources and support for parents who have lost children to gun violence in Memphis, and to help prevent violence by intervening early. “A lot of parents are aware that their 14-year-olds have a gun,” said Ms. Bennett-Stone.

The mothers dressed in military fatigues as a symbol of their commitment to ending the wave of homicides that swept through Memphis last year. “We are in combat right now,” said Ms. Wilson.



Scan the QR code to
read the article.





“At the end of the day, children want structure. They need discipline, and they want to feel loved.”

– Sylvia Bennett-Stone



VBMU Virginia State Lead **Shana Turner** of Norfolk wrote in The Virginia-Pilot about the experience of losing her son, Shaq, to homicide in 2017. "Ever since then, I've devoted my life to preventing senseless killings like the one that took my son from me," wrote Ms. Turner.

"I've walked door-to-door with police chiefs in vulnerable neighborhoods. I've helped mothers retrieve their murdered son's remains for a funeral in their hometown, pay for a headstone, and start a scholarship in their son's name. I've gone to local homes at 1 a.m. to help talk unstable boyfriends out of keeping loaded guns near the bed."

For Ms. Turner, the toll of this difficult work shows why she finds VBMU to be such a blessing. "They wanted to help me continue the work I was already doing to reduce violence and help grieving mothers ... and they wanted to support women all across the country who'd suffered as I had. They had built a safe space for grieving mothers to speak out on behalf of their children and their peers. They were perfectly aligned with my goal to end the vicious cycle that had killed my son."

“

I've devoted my life to preventing senseless killings like the one that took my son from me.

– Shana Turner



“Our goal is to make sure that all survivors know that there is support.”

NCVRW events were also held by VBMU Regional Leads **Beverly Smith** in Washington, D.C.; **Yvonne Pointer** in Cleveland, Ohio; **Michelle Green** in Orangeburg, South Carolina; **Toni Cormier** in Houston, Texas; and **Zanetia Henry** in Waynesboro, Mississippi.

“Our goal is to make sure that all survivors know that there is support. There are resources, and there is help,” said Ms. Henry. “In doing so, we, along with our major partners — Woodson Center Voices of Black Mothers United — we are coming together out here to make sure that our survivors have what they need, and understand and know that they are not alone — that we are not alone.”





1.1 Million Viewers

“They Support You and We Support Them”: National Night Out

In August, cities across America celebrated a National Night Out (NNO), during which VBMU Regional Leads participated in events for community members to enjoy a fun, safe evening with neighbors and meet local leaders and law enforcement. News coverage of these events featuring VBMU leaders reached an estimated 1.1 million viewers.

Racine, Wisconsin hosted their NNO featuring a variety of family-friendly activities, games, food, and informational booths on safety and crime prevention. NNO is more than just an enjoyable night, said Regional Lead Nakeyda Haymer: “It’s a movement that encourages ongoing collaboration and dialogue between the police and the community.”

VBMU honored local police officers during the NNO kick-off event at Lakeside Community Oriented Policing (COP) House. “This event is crucial for building trust and mutual respect between the police and the communities they serve,” said Ms. Haymer, “which are essential for improving public safety.”



**Scan the QR code
to read the article.**

In Birmingham, Alabama, Regional Lead Jessica Barnes Brown awarded commendations to police officers during NNO and led community safety presentations. "It's important to victims and families to know the police department is with you," said Ms. Barnes Brown. "They support you and we support them. We want to work together to combat violence."

Regional Lead **Rhonda Knight** awarded six Metro Atlanta officers at the area's NNO. "We like to recognize people in our community who have done outstanding things," said Ms. Knight, "especially our officers of course, to show that we're able to work as a community and as law enforcement together to make a difference."

Master Deputy James Wilson, who coordinated several community events over the last three years, was recognized for his efforts. "It's an honor," said Wilson. "The fact that they chose us to represent their organization as well and honor us with this, it does mean a lot."



**Scan the QR code
to read the article.**





"The More We Try to Help, the More it Helps Us Heal": Day of National Concern

Since 1996, students across America have observed the October 16 Day of National Concern by pledging never to bring a gun to school or use one to settle a conflict.

Asking young people to personally commit to public safety and educating them on the devastating effects of violence, the Day of National Concern provides an important opportunity for VBMU to share its message of peace with at-risk children and teens — as well as their parents. VBMU moms throughout the country led students in the Pledge Against Gun Violence, and took the opportunity to identify specific schools and students who could benefit from continued youth mentorship and development programming.



This year, VBMU Director Sylvia Bennett-Stone and Woodson Center CAN Affiliate **Rev. Jesse Turner** led young people in Pine Bluff, Arkansas in the Student Pledge Against Gun Violence. Ms. Bennett-Stone and local mother **Rovetta Haltiwanger** shared their stories of loss to help students understand the devastating impact of gun violence.

"Hopefully we can get through to them that one minute of bad choices can lead to a lifetime of pain," said Ms. Haltiwanger. Rev. Turner added that many of the kids in the audience knew other young people who were victims of homicides. But the pledge lets them know that there are people who care about them.

"The more we try to help, the more it helps us heal," said Ms. Bennett-Stone. "It's a symbol of hope."



**Scan the QR code
to read the article.**

Meanwhile, VBMU Metro Atlanta Regional Lead Zanetia Henry visited McEachern High School to push its students toward positive resolutions, sharing the story of the loss of her son, DreCharles, to homicide. "When [my son's] life was taken, his voice was taken," said Ms. Henry. "We wanted to get in here and start [a] conversation. Hopefully, we'll be able to come back and continue this conversation and include parents."

Over 120 students took a pledge against gun violence for the Day of National Concern at McEachern High, committing to resolve disputes peacefully and encourage others to do the same.



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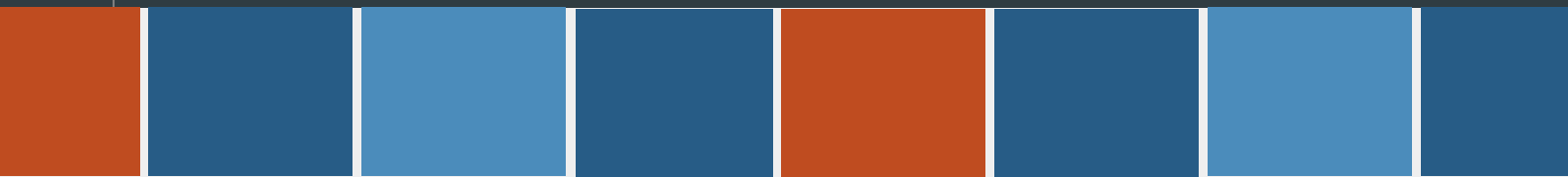


Healing Agents: Community Affiliate Network (CAN)

Our Community Affiliate Network (CAN) continued to grow in 2024, allowing grassroots leaders around the country to learn from one another and receive technical assistance and training from our Neighborhood Leadership Development Institute (NLDI).

CAN is the cornerstone of the Woodson Center's grassroots efforts to revitalize neighborhoods and restore families: hundreds of organizations and nonprofits across the country that collaborate, share best practices, and inspire one another. These men and women are trusted members of their communities who actually live in the neighborhoods they serve.

Affiliates are eligible to receive **Mini-Grants** of up to \$5,000 and can participate in our NLDI training, which helps these organizations scale up effectively and find new partners and sources of funding. This growing network has hundreds of active affiliates from across the nation, providing solutions to problems ranging from violence interruption and youth education to marriage counseling and prisoner re-entry.



“Throughout the Woodson Center’s 43 years in existence, we have found time and again that the neighborhoods with the most challenging problems produce the most powerful success stories.”

“Beyond Grateful”: John and Daria Barry Foundation Grant

In October, the Woodson Center was thrilled to receive a \$2.1 million dollar grant from the John and Daria Barry Foundation to support local leaders who have demonstrated success in overcoming problems such as poverty, violence, and failing schools in their neighborhoods. The foundation, established by John Barry, CEO and Chairman of Prospect Capital, continued its generous support of the Woodson Center’s mission and helped ensure the impact of programs like CAN will continue to expand with each new year.

“The John and Daria Barry Foundation’s generosity will directly support grassroots heroes whom the Woodson Center has identified as healing agents in their communities. We are beyond grateful for the Barrys’ assistance,” said Bob Woodson.

“Throughout the Woodson Center’s 43 years in existence, we have found time and again that the neighborhoods with the most challenging problems produce the most powerful success stories. These heroes exemplify the Woodson Center’s mission of promoting resilience against the odds and overcoming adversity, and the Barrys’ leadership and foresight will help us replicate their success at scale – transforming communities from within,” Mr. Woodson said.

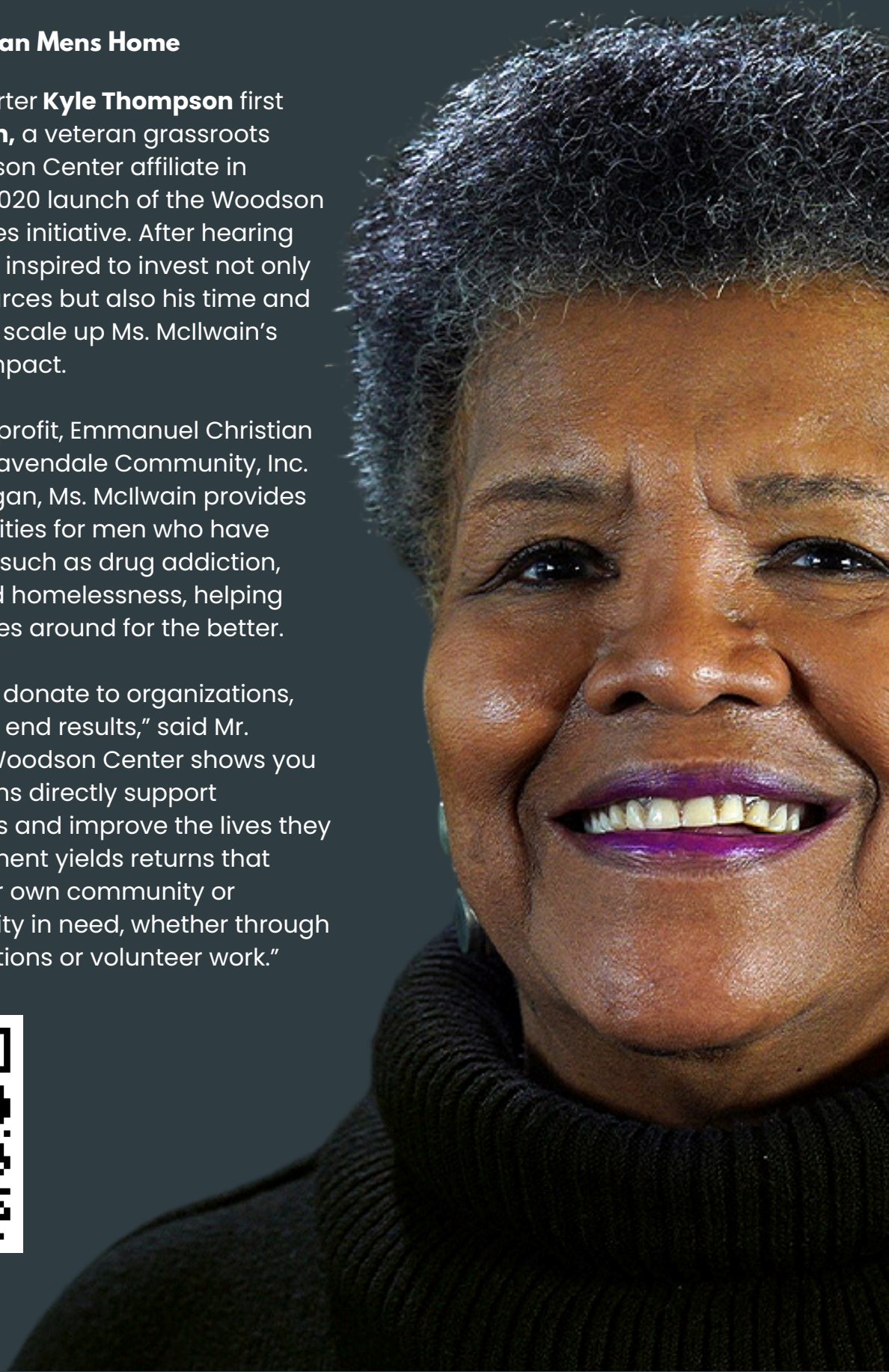
Veteran Affiliates

Emmanuel Christian Mens Home

1776 Unites supporter **Kyle Thompson** first met **Toni McIlwain**, a veteran grassroots leader and Woodson Center affiliate in Michigan, at the 2020 launch of the Woodson Center's 1776 Unites initiative. After hearing her speak, he was inspired to invest not only his financial resources but also his time and effort into helping scale up Ms. McIlwain's operations and impact.

Through her non-profit, Emmanuel Christian Mens Home c/o Ravendale Community, Inc. in Roseville, Michigan, Ms. McIlwain provides housing opportunities for men who have faced challenges such as drug addiction, incarceration, and homelessness, helping them turn their lives around for the better.

"Most people that donate to organizations, they don't see the end results," said Mr. Thompson. "The Woodson Center shows you how your donations directly support grassroots leaders and improve the lives they serve. This investment yields returns that benefit either your own community or another community in need, whether through financial contributions or volunteer work."



Community House

Veteran CAN Affiliates Gary and Patricia Wyatt helped host a National Night Out event in Akron, Ohio. They worked with neighborhood and church leaders to pack and distribute backpacks with school supplies to the students in their community. Despite the downpour from a summer storm, the Wyatts were able to serve hundreds of local youths.

Mayor **Shammas Malik** presented a rain-soaked but welcoming proclamation from the City of Akron to the Wyatts and their North Hill Community House, acknowledging the role of volunteers in making the event possible. In September, local news Signal Akron declared the Community House and its food pantry a “treasure,” praising Gary Wyatt’s dedication to helping hungry people regardless of language, complexion, or politics.



Christian Families Against Destructive Decisions (CFADD)

Apostle Tommy Quick is the Senior Pastor and Founder of The Promised Land Church of God in Christ in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and the creator of Christian Families Against Destructive Decisions (CFADD), a family formation program that has shown remarkable success in encouraging marriage, counseling married couples and young parents, educating families in financial literacy, and mentoring young men who have grown up without fathers.

The Woodson Center is committed to programs like CFADD that recognize the social good of stable, monogamous marriages and family formation — not as a mere lifestyle choice, but as the foundation of a fruitful, joyful future that benefits the long-term health of the whole community.



Rising Affiliates



Andrew Lee, DC Strings (Washington, D.C.)

2023 CAN mini-grant recipient **Andrew Lee** is the artistic executive director of DC Strings workshop, a non-profit organization bringing music to all parts of DC, particularly in underserved communities.

"Music is a remedy to the challenges our young children face, especially gun violence," said Mr. Lee, reflecting on a tragic incident: a person had been shot on the steps outside of the concert venue where his students had just finished performing. In the city, music offers a safe haven for students from all backgrounds to harmonize not just musically, but also in their shared experience.

"The Woodson Center CAN Mini-Grant is very important to us; it is a lifeline. We were able to purchase instruments for all our students."



Kandice Freeman, Way To Live Foundation (Prince George's County, Maryland)

2023 mini-grant recipient **Kandice Freeman** is a professional gardener and the founder of Way To Live Foundation in Prince George's County, MD. Way To Live's mission is to make healthy lifestyle choices accessible, affordable, educational, and fun using biblical principles.

Ms. Freeman founded her organization after navigating a personal crisis –the sudden loss of her cousin to violence– and confronting severe health challenges herself. “I found myself at an intersection of tragedy and trauma,” said Ms. Freeman, “wanting to stop this violence epidemic, by showing youth and families that there is an alternative way to live.

“Thanks to the Woodson Center CAN mini-grant, we launched our new initiative, Good News Garden, a book we created to teach and inspire people – specifically those living in low-income communities – how to grow their own food.”



Men of Valor (Nashville, Tennessee)

Men of Valor is a comprehensive program that works with men when they are in prison and when they get out—even after parole, an aspect that differentiates Men of Valor from other prison and reentry programs. Based in Nashville, Tennessee, the program is “committed to winning men in prison to Jesus Christ and discipling them. Our purpose is to equip them to re-enter society as men of integrity, becoming givers to the community rather than takers.”

In 2024, the Woodson Center was pleased to award Men of Valor a \$5,000 Presidential Grant to help expand their life-changing work.

Men of Valor was founded as a “one-man show” by the late **Carl Carlson** in 1997. Carlson, a Vietnam War veteran, transformed the pain of an abusive childhood and prison sentence into an innovative healing ministry. Today, Men of Valor has a staff of 14, supported by 120 volunteers. The program’s recidivism rate is below 15 percent, much better than the national average.

As one alumnus of the program said, “Men of Valor has provided me housing, they provided me with a social security card ... I didn’t have that since I was 14! They make sure we have everything we need.”





Dr. Keli Christopher, STEM Greenhouse (Grand Rapids, Michigan)

Dr. **Keli Christopher**, CEO and Founder of STEM Greenhouse in Grand Rapids, MI, is reaching vulnerable students in underperforming schools with STEM education and exposure to STEM careers. Dr. Christopher was the first Black person to earn a Ph.D. in Agricultural Engineering from the University of Illinois and the third Black woman globally to hold such a degree.

She left her engineering job in 2014 to start STEM Greenhouse and address the immediate need she saw in her community: “I established STEM Greenhouse to uplift schools with low proficiency levels in math and science, where teacher shortages [in math and science] and low parental involvement are common.”

“The Woodson Center mini-grant was incredibly helpful in expanding our math program,” said Dr. Christopher. “Alongside this financial support, the capacity-building training they provided will enable us to apply for additional funding, helping us to reach and prepare many more children for bright futures in STEM career fields.”



**Rev. Charlene Turner Johnson, B.A.S.S.
(Highland Park, Michigan)**



Building Assets to Strengthen Society (B.A.S.S.) is based in Highland Park, Michigan and led by Executive Director **Rev. Charlene Turner Johnson**. B.A.S.S. builds upon the assets of residents and institutions to create positive community development including youth development, affordable housing, civic engagement, and economic development. Since 2006, Rev. Turner Johnson has been determined to transform Highland Park – one of the poorest, most drug-afflicted cities in Michigan – into a safe and prosperous community.

B.A.S.S. operates an 8,000-square-foot business incubator, The Connector, that “will link entrepreneurs and residents to resources and technology to help them solve prevalent community issues,” said Rev. Turner Johnson.

“Two years ago, I reached out to the Woodson Center for help because major foundations required financial audits for larger grants – and at that time, we did not have the funds to pay for it. The Woodson Center provided a significant donation to cover the expense of obtaining a financial audit. This audit was the key to receiving the larger grant that facilitated our expansion...and put us on the path to receiving additional larger grants to support our programs.”



Brian Wade and Brian Wade, Jr., LOOP (Elyria, Ohio)



Loving Others On Purpose (LOOP) is a substance abuse recovery program in Ohio that credits its phenomenal success to more than just excellent clinical care. LOOP addresses the underlying reasons that people abuse drugs in the first place: their need for meaning, purpose, love, and belonging.

Ohio's drug overdose rate places it regularly in the top ten or even top five states in the country, leaving behind thousands of grieving families and communities each year. LOOP sows seeds of healing and hope, restoring the lives of people struggling with addiction. This nonprofit is a family operation, led by **Brian Wade** and his son, **Brian Wade, Jr.**

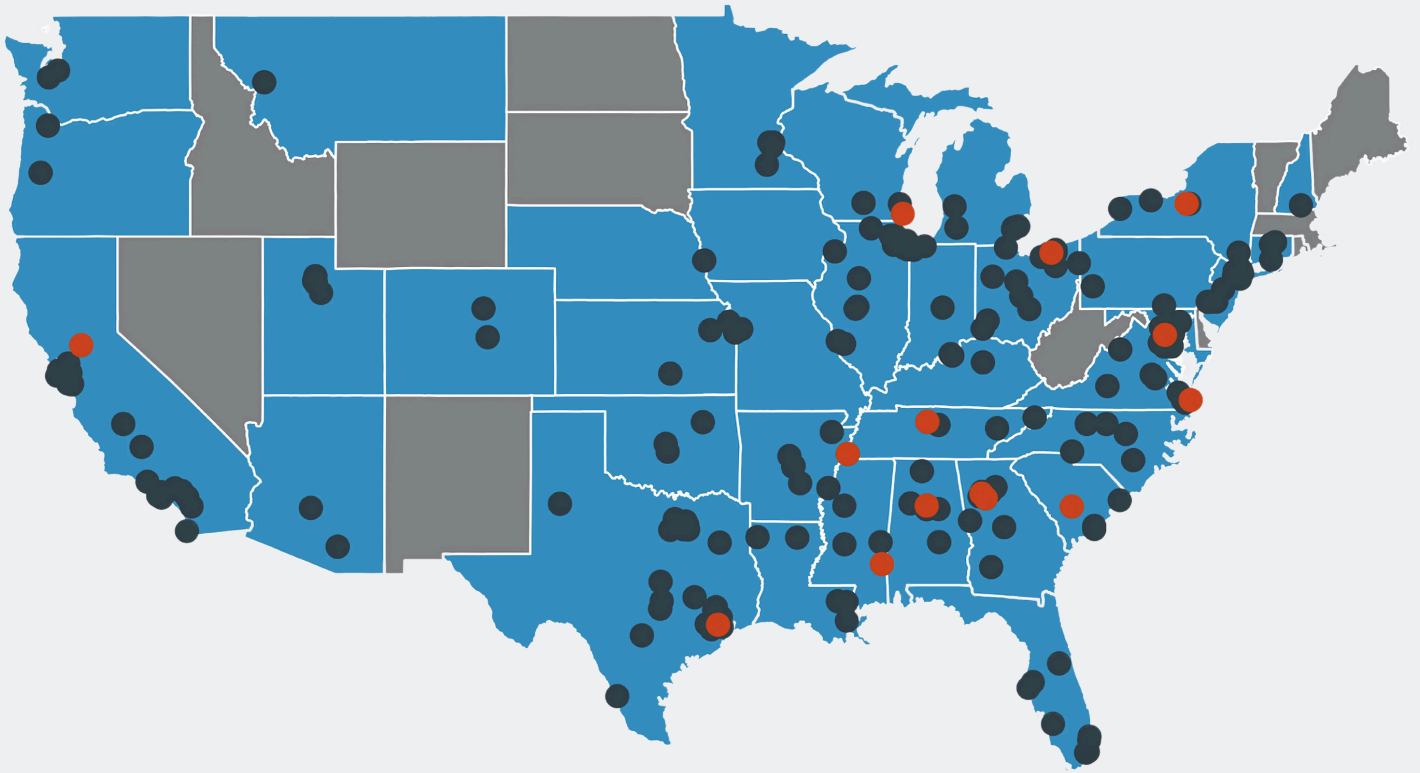
The elder Brian stepped into this full-time calling without any funding streams, founding a small rescue home and street ministry in 1999. This initiative transformed the lives of over 60 individuals engaged in self-destructive and criminal behaviors, including drug abuse and prostitution. In 2017, Brian Jr. relaunched his father's ministry, officially expanding to six recovery homes across two holistic programs: The Alpha House (men's recovery) and The Georgia House (women's recovery).

These safe havens seek to model functional living with stable families, peaceful and secure homes, and a strong work ethic. "We address the addiction epidemic by taking in addicts at the emergency level and supporting them through reentry into society," said Brian Jr.

"We will be using the funds donated to us by the Woodson Center to continue to expand our organization across the 88 counties of Ohio and have an even greater impact." In December, LOOP added a new location to its Georgia House program to accommodate growing demand from women struggling with addiction and seeking options for recovery.



Woodson Center Impact



Over 450
Community Affiliates
In 37 States

Over 20
VBMU Moms
In 10 States

American Heroes: 1776 Unites

Since its launch in 2020, our 1776 Unites initiative and free **Black History and Excellence Curriculum** have been key to promoting the broader work of the Woodson Center and educating students of all ages about the principles that work is built upon.

This past year took those efforts to a new level.

Our lessons have now been **downloaded over 200,000** times by educators and students from classrooms of all kinds. 2024 programming included the launch of our first professional development course for educators, **“Empowering Black History: Theory and Practice”**; the release of our newest lesson, on trailblazing opera impresario **Mary Cardwell Dawson**; and the first installment of our animated series American Heroes, on the inspiring life of escaped slave, Civil War veteran, and United States Congressman **Robert Smalls**.



200,000+

DOWNLOADS

We helped raise our national profile by maintaining a presence at professional events for educators. The Woodson Center had a booth at the 2024 **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)** annual conference in Boston, Massachusetts, where staff and affiliated teachers promoted our curriculum to receptive teachers from a wide variety of institutional and philosophical backgrounds. We also sponsored Woodson Center Visiting Fellow and CEO of Vertex Partnership Academies Ian V. Rowe to speak at the conference about our curriculum and why its vision of American history and values will challenge and inspire students.

In addition to NCSS, the Woodson Center promoted its curriculum at the influential **Texas Council for the Social Studies Conference** in October.



New Lesson: Mary Cardwell Dawson, America's First Black Opera Impresario

Our new lesson introduces students to **Mary Cardwell Dawson (1894-1962)**, founder of America's first Black-led opera company and mentor to many groundbreaking musical talents. In an era when activism and the arts collided, Dawson's organizing skills and passion for opera paved the way for hundreds of Black performers to launch their musical careers.

The Woodson Center was proud to develop this lesson in collaboration with scholar and Dawson expert **Dr. Karen M. Bryan** of **The Denyce Graves Foundation (DGF)**, allowing us to tell a story that students and teachers can't find anywhere else. DGF is a nonprofit dedicated to greater inclusion in the performing arts and the promotion of "hidden voices" from the musical past, founded by accomplished opera singer **Denyce Graves**. We hope to pursue more partnerships like this for curriculum development in the future.

Along with producing new lessons, we continue to bring existing material to more learners of all ages. Even in the summer, classes of all kinds are still in session, and we used the occasion of the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics to promote two existing lessons on trailblazing black American athletes: **Jesse Owens** and **Alice Coachman**. Both lessons were developed with the assistance of Olympics historian **Stephen L. Harris** and were our most popular downloads of the summer.



New Connections: Professional Development and Oregon Open Learning Hub

Our “Empowering Black History: In Theory and Practice” professional development course in January and February featured readings, lectures, and discussion on the “why” and “how” for teaching stories of achievement against the odds, many of which are highlighted in the Woodson Center’s Black History and Excellence library of supplemental lessons. The course concluded with an opportunity for students to speak with Ian Rowe and Bob Woodson.

In August, curriculum team member **Tina Webb** presented our professional development course at the Howard County, Maryland Public School Professional Learning Day. She introduced two sessions of local educators to our curriculum and the empowering philosophy behind it, reaching high school teachers unfamiliar with our message.

As the new school year began, we announced that our curriculum is now a suggested resource on the **Oregon Open Learning Hub**, the “open educational resource (OER) repository” for the state’s department of education.

Collaborations like this helped us break **200,000 total downloads** by the end of 2024. Our presence on platforms like OER will help us dramatically increase those numbers and reach a wider spectrum of teachers and students.



"American Heroes" Will Change How Students See Their History.

Our animated story of the life of Robert Smalls is just the first step in bringing this dynamic vision of American history to students and teachers. In 2025, the Woodson Center releases its first series of animated "American Heroes" shorts about the remarkable men, women, and communities featured in our curriculum. These stories will bring history to life and put your students' minds in motion like never before.

Series episodes will include the stories of lawman Bass Reeves, aviator Bessie Coleman, track star Alice Coachman, and naturalist Benjamin Banneker.





Values-Aligned Institutions

The Piney Woods School: A Living Monument

The Piney Woods School in Rankin County, Mississippi continues to be one of the Woodson Center's most important values-aligned partners. The nation's oldest independent, historically-black boarding school is a living monument to the values that have lifted low-income people out of poverty throughout American history: faith, resilience, and a spirit of excellence.

For over a century, Piney Woods has helped transform young people from all walks of life by educating the "head, hands, and heart" of its students. In February, the documentary *Sacred Soil: The Piney Woods School Story* premiered on Hulu, giving viewers an inside look at the ever-evolving story of Piney Woods and showing how its mission continues today.

In April, Bob Woodson celebrated his birthday by visiting the Piney Woods campus and spending time with its students, many of whom come from challenging backgrounds but flourish in the clear, purpose-driven environment the school provides.

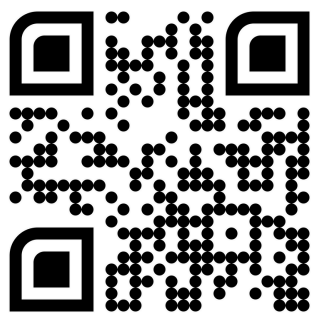
"I am blessed that we have supporters who believe in the heart of our mission, supporting values-aligned institutions like The Piney Woods School," said Mr. Woodson. "Hearing firsthand from students about the transformative impact on their lives is a testament to the Center's support. Without it, many coming from challenging economic backgrounds would not have had the chance to experience a school that nurtures self-dignity and determination, paving the way for a future full of possibilities."

In the summer, Woodson Center and Piney Woods School supporter **Mr. Gregg Kunes** hosted twenty students from Piney Woods at his home in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin over the summer for a day of exploration, enrichment, and fun. For some of these students, attending Piney Woods was their first experience stepping beyond their urban neighborhoods into an agricultural environment. Thanks to Mr. Kunes' generosity, they were not only introduced to a new setting but also exposed to various career paths, including car dealership ownership and hotel management—broadening their aspirations for the future.

The Woodson Center is committed to Piney Woods and its students, offering new and nurturing experiences that build determination and dignity. We are grateful to Mr. Kunes and our supporters everywhere for making the life-changing work of the Woodson Center and Piney Woods possible.



WOODSON CENTER



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