



Equal Justice Society

IMPACT REPORT 2025

EQUAL JUSTICE SOCIETY

**Building an inclusive and multiracial democracy by
confronting barriers and historic harms to Black,
Indigenous, and marginalized people of all identities.**

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**LISA HOLDER
PRESIDENT**

Impact Report Equal Justice Society

2025

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EJS President Lisa Holder at our 25th anniversary gala on Dec. 5, 2025.

Message from Lisa Holder, EJS President

Twenty-five years ago, visionary civil rights leaders founded EJS to challenge the false narrative of a post-racial America and to defend equity policies vital for true equality. Today, as opposition resurges and the goalposts shift, we remain resolute—equitable access is still within reach.

EJS was built for this fight. EJS is the nonprofit ecosystem’s catalyst for tools, infrastructure, and alliances necessary to drive change, we continue bending the moral arc toward justice. We are committed to advancing evidence-based policies that level the playing field and foster a truly inclusive and multiracial democracy.

Our guiding principle, Harm Repair, recognizes that America cannot achieve inclusion without addressing 400 years of injustice toward Black and Indigenous communities. Reparations must go beyond financial compensation to dismantle systemic racism and build new, equitable structures that center marginalized people. Only then can true reconciliation and healing begin.

Our strategy champions reparations as a unifying force, protecting and expanding policies

along the Harm Repair continuum—from Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to multicultural education to reparations—while prioritizing Black Women’s health equity and education equity.

Despite rising challenges at home, we continue to be proactive and draw inspiration and allyship from global movements and activate diasporic people in the U.S. to leverage their lived experience of colonization and marginalization in America to inform the international discourse on decolonization, transitional justice, and global democracy.

EJS is committed to repairing the nation—advancing Black Women’s health equity, eliminating implicit bias, addressing racial inequities in the criminal-legal and healthcare systems, dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and fixing school discipline, and ensuring fair access to housing, education, and employment. Through truth telling, we will continue to dismantle white supremacy and build a truly inclusive and multiracial democracy. Thank you for joining us in this fight.

LISA HOLDER
President, Equal Justice Society

About EJS



From left to right: LaRita Y. Gibson-Smith, Anna Basallaje, Alexandra Santa Ana, Ginger Johnson, Lisa Holder, Keith Kamisugi, Heather Snedeker, Christina Alvernaz, Mona Tawatao, Tyler Kyser.

The Equal Justice Society is building an inclusive and multiracial democracy by confronting barriers and historic harms to Black, Indigenous, and marginalized people of all identities. EJS champions harm repair as a unifying force, protecting and expanding policies promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; cradle-to-career multicultural education; implicit bias research and development; and reparations, while prioritizing Black Women's health equity and fairness in education. The Oakland, California-based national legal organization is an innovator integrating social science, especially disparate impact and implicit bias, into legal and policy advocacy, public education, and thought leadership. EJS also engages the arts and artists in creating work and performances that allow wider audiences to understand social justice issues and struggles.

equaljusticesociety.org

San Francisco Foundation Spotlights EJS in 2025 Year-End Give Guide



"The Equal Justice Society works to transform our nation's consciousness on race by combining legal strategy, social science, and the arts to dismantle structural racism. Their unique, multi-pronged approach is their key differentiator; they don't just litigate in the courtroom but also use groundbreaking research on implicit bias and cultural advocacy to change hearts and minds. The San Francisco Foundation supports the Equal Justice Society because they are creating a future where our legal system and social structures are built on a true understanding of racial equity. A landmark achievement for the Equal Justice Society was the appointment of its president, Lisa Holder, to the California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans. Through its leadership on the task force and its ongoing advocacy, Equal Justice Society has continued to champion the cause of reparations and make California a model for other states."

sff.org



California Attorney General Rob Bonta message at EJS's 25th Anniversary gala on Dec. 5, 2025.

Message from Calif. AG Rob Bonta

California Attorney General Rob Bonta delivered a congratulatory message for the 25th anniversary of the Equal Justice Society (EJS). He commended the organization for its commitment to racial justice and democracy, particularly its work in school equity and its partnership with the California Department of Justice's Civil Rights Advisory Group.

The Attorney General acknowledged the founders and leaders of EJS - Eva Paterson, Charles Ogletree, and Lisa Holder - for their visionary leadership and dedication to racial justice and civil rights over the last 25 years. He congratulated the Civil Rights Enforcement Section and Michael Newman, whose ongoing work in California has been instrumental in the fight for equity and inclusion. He also mentions EJS's membership in his office's Civil Rights Advisory Group, which helps guide statewide strategies.

The Attorney General contrasted California's path with national trends, emphasizing the state's efforts to: defend Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives; protect constitutional rights and civil liberties; and secure federal funding for research and public health that supports these programs. He concluded with an urgent call for collective action to maintain a just society and maintained his commitment to working alongside EJS to protect democracy and advance racial justice for all Californians.



The Equal Justice Society operates at the vital intersection of a Grand Alliance, uniting legal advocates, social scientists, and artists to dismantle structural racism. By bridging these diverse sectors, the organization fosters a collaborative environment that strengthens the collective impact of the progressive movement. This interdisciplinary approach allows EJS to lead comprehensive strategies that address systemic inequality through litigation, policy reform, and narrative change.



Gov. Gavin Newsom, seated, signs SB 518 as members of the California Legislative Black Caucus look on. Pictured with Newsom are CLBC members State Sens. Lola Smallwood-Cuevas (D-Los Angeles), far left; Laura Richardson (D-San Pedro), second from left; Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego), second from right; and First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom, far right. Credit: Photo courtesy of the Office of Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Reparations

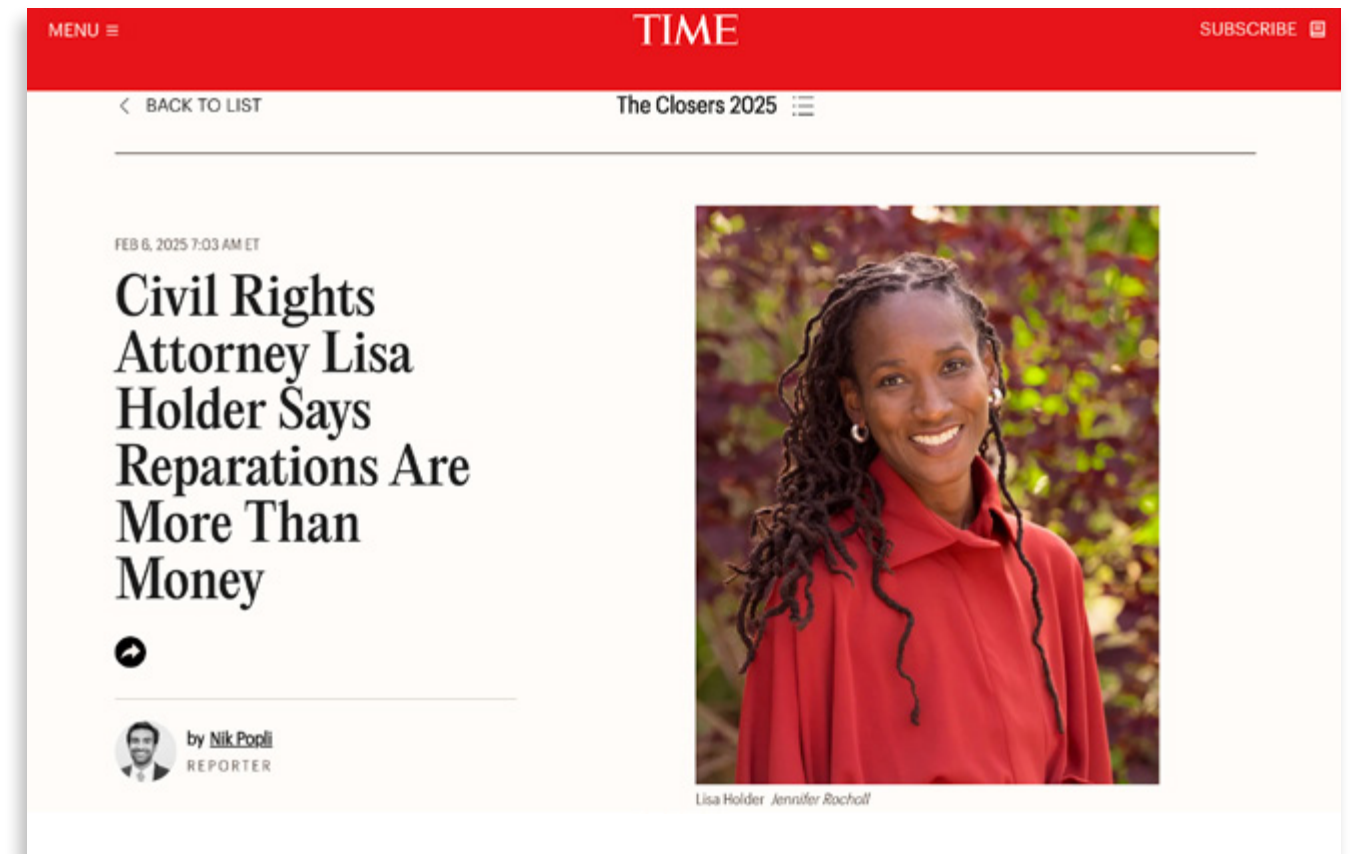
Repairing the Harm is the Highest Order Value for EJS and informs all of our work. EJS developed this framework, and it is now being adopted by educators and lawmakers across the country to advocate for reparations. Repairing the harm inflicted on Black communities over centuries is essential for reconciliation, healing, and a truly inclusive and multiracial democracy. Yet, many misunderstand reparations as financial payments alone. True reparations require systemic change to address deep-rooted inequities in education, housing, finance, employment, healthcare, and environmental justice—areas profoundly affected by enslavement, apartheid, racism, and discrimination. Reparations is not a divisive idea, but rather a unifying construct that paves the way forward to a multiracial, inclusive democracy. EJS has worked to shift this reductive narrative, emphasizing that reparations must include structural reforms. In 2021, California Governor Gavin Newsom appointed EJS President Lisa Holder to the California Reparations Task Force, which released a report with 115 recommendations for reparatory initiatives in 2023.

The Alliance for Reparations, Reconciliation, and Truth

EJS is a co-founder and co-convenor of The Alliance for Reparations, Reconciliation, and Truth (ARRT), a multi-racial, multi-sector alliance advancing reparations in California. The Alliance’s mission is to educate the public about reparations; amplify the California Reparations Task Force’s report and its recommendations; achieve broad-based, multi-racial public support of reparations; and grow the base of multi-racial and multi-sector allies who support reparations in California.

2025 California Legislative Session

EJS co-leads legislative advocacy efforts on behalf of ARRT, working with the California Legislative Black Caucus to pass reparations bills based on the 115 recommendations for

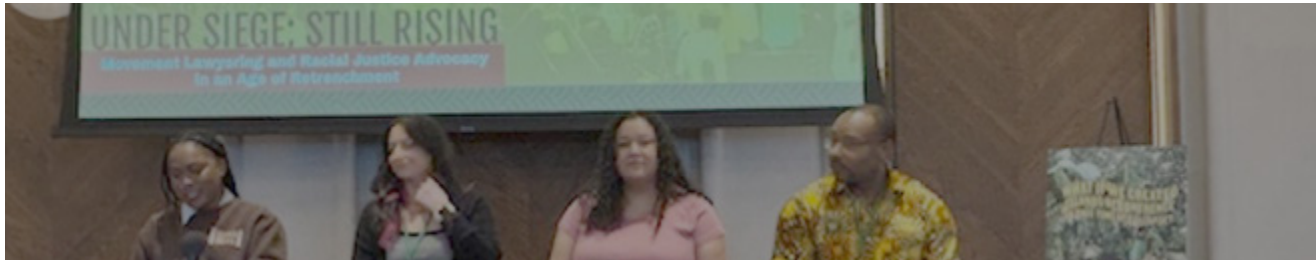


repair laid out in the California Reparations Task Force Report. EJS is involved at every step of the legislative process: from deciding which task force report recommendations to introduce during the legislative session, to drafting the language of the reparations bills, making sure they are constitutionally sound and can survive legal challenges; working with the Black Caucus to introduce the bills to the floor; serving as primary witnesses testifying on behalf of the bills; and organizing the public to contact their representatives and Governor Newsom to voice their support of the bills.

2025 was a pivotal year for reparations awareness, and EJS played a key role in advancing the movement in California. Gov. Gavin Newsom signed numerous reparations bills into law including groundbreaking infrastructure bills as follows:

SB 437 (Weber-Pierson): requires the California State University to explore options to determine how to confirm an individual’s status as a descendant. Also requires the CSU to establish a process for conducting or verifying genealogical research to confirm eligibility for reparative claims before the start of the 2029-2030 academic year, and to start this research before the start of the 2026-2027 academic year. The determinations made by the CSU will operationalize lineage verification processes by building systems to scale and institutionalizing them.

SB 518 (Weber-Pierson): creates the Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery, housed within the Civil Rights Department; requires the bureau to verify an individual’s status as a descendant and requires proof of an individual’s descendant status to be a qualifying criterion for benefits. The bill is directly in line with the final recommendations put forth by the California Reparations Task Force, which called for measures that provide practical and meaningful steps to repair the damage caused by centuries of discrimination and systemic injustice. The new law tasks the bureau with verifying lineage



Alongside EJS staff, Justin Hansford presents at the National ARRT retreat. Hansford is Executive Director of the Ogletree Reparatory Bar Association, Howard Law Professor and Executive Director of the Thurgood Marshall Center. He is also the United States representative to the United Nations Permanent Forum of People of African Descent (PFPAD).

eligibility, creating a Genealogy Division, an Education and Outreach Division, and a Legal Affairs Division, with the flexibility to expand the agency's scope as needed.

In just two legislative sessions, 14 reparations bills have been signed into law in California, and over \$20M in the state budget has been allocated for reparations implementation and arts education, a historic achievement and testament to the impact of EJS and ARRT's comprehensive reparations advocacy and organizing strategy.

2026 Outlook: ARRT has several policy-focused working groups made up of reparations advocates from over 30 racial justice organizations, cultural associations, and civil rights legal groups. EJS, via the healthcare working group, is prioritizing drafting and advancing bills aimed at building a healthcare system rooted in care instead of profit, and that will ensure all Black Californians receive adequate and culturally competent healthcare from birth through end-of-life, enabling physically, mentally, and emotionally thriving communities. EJS, via the unjust legal system working group, is also prioritizing drafting and advancing bills to remove the final vestiges of legalized, state-sanctioned slavery from California's state constitution and prison system, while working towards creating a new criminal legal system that isn't rooted in anti-Blackness or sustained by the disproportionate targeting of Black Californians.

In addition to these 2026 legislative priorities, EJS is advocating for the passage of [AB 2599 \(Weber-Pierson\)](#): This bill would require certain industries, including textile, tobacco, railroad, shipping, rice, sugar, financial, and insurance companies, to certify under penalty of perjury whether their historical records show involvement in slavery-related activities, such as buying or selling enslaved people, financing or insuring those transactions, or using enslaved people as collateral. The bill would also require the state to create a public online platform by January 3, 2028, where these affidavits and related data would be available.

Reparations teach-in series & multi-generational movement building

To deepen public education around reparations, and to include a multi-generational approach in our power building strategy, EJS piloted a college reparations teach-in series



On June 26, 2025, Oakland-based civil rights attorney Lisa Holder speaks at the State Capitol, urging Gov. Gavin Newsom to commute the sentences of individuals on California's death row. CBM photo by Antonio Ray Harvey.

in 2025. EJS hosted "A Debt Owed: A Teach-In on Reparations" at Berkeley Law, engaging over 40 law students in dialogue about the legacy of racism in California, the need for reparations, and strategies for movement-building within the legal and policy fields.

2026 Outlook: Following its success, EJS will expand the series to the University of Washington in Q1 of 2026, with a curriculum centered on reparations and Indigenous sovereignty — a first-of-its-kind program linking Black reparations with Land Back principles to explore pathways toward collective liberation.

EJS aims to expand our national reparations teach-in series into a quarterly program in 2026, hosting events at universities in different regions of the country. This series will engage hundreds of college students in political education, strengthen our multigenerational and multiracial coalition, and bring greater national visibility to reparations as a critical issue, especially at a time when Black history and racial justice education are being actively suppressed. We plan on hosting these sessions on at least two HBCU and two PWI campuses

Criminal-Legal System Reform

The California Reparations Task Force Report contains 115 recommendations for policy changes and reparations implementation. Chapter 19 of the report specifically recommends abolishing the death penalty to address systemic racism within the criminal-legal system, and argues that the death penalty is unconstitutionally applied, disproportionately targets Black people, and is rooted in historic racial bias.

In 2025, EJS continued to advocate for the end of the death penalty in California. President Lisa Holder was a keynote speaker at the California Anti-Death Penalty Coalition "Commute The Row" rally at the capitol. The rally's purpose was to appeal to the Governor to end the death penalty.

2026 Outlook: EJS is bending the arc towards justice considerably, as the Governor and his team assess progressing from a death penalty moratorium to full abolition by the end of his term.

In the News: EJS President Lisa Holder, Other Leaders Push Governor to Commute All Death Sentences



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Our Fragile Democracy:

The Role of State Attorneys General in Upholding the Law in Times of Crisis

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
ROB BONTA
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Thursday, June 5, 2025
2:00 p.m. (PST)

JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
100 N. Central Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90012

JANM
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DEMOCRACY CENTER

Our Fragile Democracy:

The Role of State Attorneys General in Upholding the Law in Times of Crisis

FEATURING
LISA HOLDER
EQUAL JUSTICE SOCIETY

Thursday, June 5, 2025
2:00 p.m. (PST)

JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
100 N. Central Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Shifting the Narrative: Thought Leadership

EJS provides thought leadership to shift the statewide and national narrative on reparations.

Lisa is an advisor to several states who followed California's lead and created reparations task forces of their own. New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and Washington, D.C. all consult with Lisa on best practices for drafting their reports and introducing legislation that is Constitutionally sound. With more states to follow suit in the next few years, the national narrative around reparations is shifting from a framework of scarcity to one of abundance and possibility.

EJS President Lisa Holder's Speaking Engagements:

- TIME 'Closers' Reception Keynote
- Bay Area Asset Funders Network Conference Panelist
- Housing Rights Center 'Housing Summit' Keynote
- University of California-Berkeley Geography Department Commencement Keynote
- The Japanese American National Museum and California Attorney General Rob Bonta 'Democracy Town Hall' Panelist
- The California Anti-Death Penalty Coalition 'Commute the Row Rally' Keynote
- The Alliance for Reparations, Reconciliation, and Truth 'The 14th Amendment Under Fire: A Black August Conversation' Panelist
- Howard University School of Law '22nd Annual Wiley A. Brandon Symposium' Keynote
- California Employment Lawyers Association Annual Luncheon Keynote

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

What California's task force found

In its Dec. 20 editorial "[Wes Moore is right about reparations](#)," the Editorial Board called Maryland's commission to study Black reparations "foolish" because it is "too complicated to ascertain whose ancestors wronged whom more than 150 years ago."

The [California Reparations Task Force](#), of which I was a member, [found](#) that though slavery "was our nation's 'original sin,' emancipation did not bring an end to the atrocities and deprivations visited upon African Americans. Through lynching and other Codes, Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement, exclusion, and neglect in every facet of life, the nation perpetuated the legacy of slavery. Africa with the persistent consequences of this

WaPo letter to the editor by EJS board member Don Tamaki

Keith Kamisugi January 6, 2026 ejs

EJS board member Donald K. Tamaki, a former member of the California Reparations Task Force, responded to The Washington Post's editorial on reparations in Maryland. The Post [published](#) Don's response (below) on December 30, 2025.

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EJS Board Member Don Tamaki's Speaking Engagements:

- Past Forward podcast interview
- Full Spectrum Features Production Interview with the University of California-Davis
- California Real Estate Association 'Fair Housing and Diversity Forum Palm Springs' Panelist
- Northern California Day of Remembrance Speaker
- Black Freedom Fund Philanthropic Convening Speaker
- Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Ruud, and Romo Law Offices Presentation
- United Methodist Church Convening Speaker
- Civil Rights Committee of the Northern California Western Nevada Pacific District of the Japanese American Citizens League Convening Speaker
- Live Free National Network of Black Clergy and Churches Convening Speaker
- League of Women Voters of Oakland Annual Membership Meeting Speaker
- 'Voices of Change' San Francisco Japanese American Citizens League Annual Members Meeting Speaker
- Japantown Task Force Presenter
- Nikkei Progressives Presenter
- California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Speaker
- 'Common Sense Rejoinders to the Five Most Common Arguments Against Reparations' Stupski Foundation Seminar Presenter
- Densho Presenter
- University of California Berkeley 'Race, Ethnicity, and Public Policy' Course Lecture

In the Media



2026 Outlook: EJS will focus its narrative change thought leadership on education, culture shift, and advancing a training curriculum for mainstream media members to course correct their coverage of reparations and democracy defense. The goal is to educate the media on the wins in these fields, moving them away from their zero-sum-game playbooks and scarcity frameworks to storytelling on racial justice, harm repair and multiracial inclusive democracy constructed within abundance frameworks that focus on progressive wins and proactive agendas.

Education Equity

In 2025, EJS litigated several education equity cases in California. Additionally, in partnership with UC Berkeley, EJS President Lisa Holder served as the Principal Advisor to develop the California Black Studies Curriculum for secondary education. EJS takes a holistic approach to address education equity in California.

Litigation - Black Parallel School Board v. Sacramento City Unified School District: To address disproportionate discipline/mistreatment and physical segregation of Black students with disabilities and all students with disabilities. The plaintiffs (a community organization and parents), District, and independent monitor worked together to implement the May 2023 settlement, holding frequent meetings with community members. The agreement is designed to reduce disproportionate discipline and segregation of students with disabilities by requiring evidence-based alternatives to punishment and greater classroom integration. Key policies include improving data systems to measure and track progress, hiring reading and other specialists to boost academic success and promote integrated learning environments, and implementing bias-check tools to ensure fairness in classrooms and on campuses in responding to student behavior.

2026 Outlook: The fight to create and sustain school district systems that are fair and equitable for students with disabilities and Black students with disabilities will continue throughout the settlement enforcement period, which began in September 2024 and has been extended to the fall of 2030.

Litigation - Cancel the Contract v. Antelope Valley Union High School District (North Los Angeles County): To address the District's disproportionate discipline and mistreatment of Black students and all students with disabilities.

2026 Outlook: Following a major court victory in 2024, that stopped the school district's use of an unlawful discipline matrix and transfer instrument that disproportionately pushes Black and Latinx students out of school or into continuation schools, community education and litigation efforts will continue as we prepare for the trial in the fall.

Litigation - R.W. v. Thurmond: Students/parents and a community organization sued the State Superintendent and California Department of Education, who oversee all California local school districts, for failure to meet their constitutional and statutory duty to address racially discriminatory discipline practices that disproportionately harm Black and Latinx students.

2026 Outlook: EJS is working with plaintiffs and co-counsel to prepare for trial (Phase 1) set for April 2026.



The California Black Studies Curriculum

In 2025, as part of our continuing work to dismantle the pre-K to prison pipeline and level the cradle to career educational landscape, EJS continued to advance efforts to translate the reparations report into a K-12 curriculum for all public schools in California. Lisa Holder serves as an advisor to the Berkeley educational professors working group that is building the **Black Studies/Freedom Schools Curriculum**. EJS views reparations as a pedagogical framework for Black student liberation from the stigmatic harms of unequal discipline, arbitrary standardized testing, and pedagogies that continue to center White supremacist historical narratives and erase the lived experience of Black people.

2026 Outlook: We will continue to advise and advance the Black Studies Curriculum in 2026.

Click [here](#) to subscribe to updates on our education equity work.

Race-Neutral Admissions Challenged in California

Smith v. Regents of the University of California: Ushering in a new era of fair, equitable, and truly inclusive admissions standards in California universities

In 2021, EJS and co-counsel, on behalf of students, student groups, and community organizations, reached a milestone settlement agreement with the Regents of the University of California school system to broaden access to their campuses by eliminating consideration of SAT and ACT scores from admissions and scholarship decisions. The settlement ensured that standardized test scores would not be considered in the admissions process through at least 2025. The SAT and ACT reward affluence and exclude many underrepresented minority students and students with disabilities from higher education opportunities.

In 2025, President Trump's blatant campaign to take over higher education to realign it to his regime's white supremacist framework raged on. A key strategy of Trump's war on higher education was to attack any program or policy that his repression regime labels as promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, or accessibility. As with other race/status-neutral programs and policies, UC's moratorium on considering standardized test scores in admissions now sits in the crosshairs.

2026 Outlook: There are currently at least two cases in federal court brought by anti-affirmative action, anti-equity outfits that challenge UC admissions policies. The Trump DOJ has intervened and is now a party in one of the cases and may also intervene in the other case.

EJS's grave concern is that these cases can lead to an undoing of our success in Smith, enable the plaintiffs' harmfully expansive misrepresentation of the Supreme Court's decision in FFA v. Harvard (for which EJS and partners submitted an amicus brief cited by Justice Sonia Sotomayor in her dissent) to take hold, and threaten all equity and fairness-promoting programs and policies in higher education.

EJS is monitoring these two cases against UC closely and coordinating with student groups and civil rights lawyers and organizations on a course forward. Though small in size, EJS is currently leading this effort, drawing from its expertise, as demonstrated impact in the groundbreaking Smith settlement agreement, and our multigenerational support in this fight as recognized by the University of California Student Association, which awarded EJS its "Coalition Partner of the Year" award in 2021 after the Smith settlement.

Health Equity

In 2025, EJS worked to address racial health inequities — specifically, Black Women’s health inequities — via litigation and community education focused on narrative change.

Litigation: In a historic and first-of-its-kind lawsuit, EJS, co-counsel Lieff Cabraser, and other partners sued L’Oreal, Revlon, and other hair relaxer manufacturers for marketing their toxic products to Black Women and Girls as young as five, causing an increase in reproductive system cancer rates in Black Women who used their products by up to 600%. There are thousands of individual cases in this class-action litigation, In RE: Hair Relaxer Marketing, Sales Practices, And Products Liability Litigation, et al. v. L’Oreal USA, Inc., et al.

In a major win for the 11,000 plaintiffs in the Illinois federal court multidistrict litigation, the court largely denied the defendants' motion to dismiss in September 2024, allowing claims of economic harm from cancer-inducing hair relaxers to proceed. The case is now in the discovery phase, with EJS and other plaintiffs' counsel working to uncover what companies knew about the product's risks while helping plaintiffs document their experiences and health impacts.

2026 Outlook: The court will soon determine which cases will go to trial first, with bellwether trials expected in 2026 after extensive preparation, including medical expert testimony on the link between hair relaxers and cancer. The outcomes of these bellwether cases in 2026 will be critical to the future of the multidistrict litigation will fare in the coming years.

Health Equity Newsletter

In collaboration with Lief, Cabraser, Heimann & Bernstein LLP, EJS publishes a monthly Health Equity Newsletter. This publication features articles by EJS, Lief Cabraser staff, and health expert guest contributors on critical health equity issues like reproductive choice, maternal health, and the intersection of racial and environmental justice. Additionally, the newsletter highlights significant national news related to health equity. EJS will continue to co-publish this important and impactful newsletter in 2026.

You can read this year's editions of the Health Equity Newsletter [here](#).

Click [here](#) to subscribe to the Health Equity Newsletter.

HEALTH EQUITY NEWSLETTER

October 2023
Vol. 1, No. 5

Welcome to Health Equity, a monthly newsletter advocating for racial health equity and environmental justice in the United States, brought to you by Equal Justice Society and Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein LLP

FDA ACTION SHOWS IMPACT OF EJS/LIEFF CABRASER LAWSUITS

By Lisa Holder, President, Equal Justice Society



LISA HOLDER



LISA HOLDER

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is planning to [propose a ban](#) on formaldehyde (FA) and other FA-releasing chemicals (e.g., methylene glycol) as an ingredient in hair straightening products, as reported by [CNN](#) and other media outlets.

Because of racism against natural Black hair, many Black women use hair relaxer and related products at a higher rate than other women to relax their hair, likely putting them at a higher risk of developing uterine cancer, ovarian cancer, and other negative health outcomes.

This movement by the FDA is in part motivated by lawsuits against manufacturers of hair relaxer products, such as those filed by the Equal Justice Society and Lief Cabraser, and the advocacy of U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley and U.S. Rep. Shontel Brown.

The EJS and Lieff Cabraser represent over one hundred women who have

been diagnosed with cancer after using hair relaxers. Their lawsuits are consolidated with thousands of others in federal court in Chicago in front of Judge Mary M. Rowland, which allows plaintiffs to litigate collectively against the companies responsible for these products. Judge Rowland created a Plaintiff's Leadership Committee to manage the collective litigation, and appointed Lieff Cabraser partner Kelly M. Dermody to serve on the Plaintiff's Executive Committee.

In 2020, the global Black Hair care market was estimated at \$2.5 billion, with the hair relaxer market alone estimated at \$718 million in 2021. It is estimated that as many as 90% of Black women in the United States have used relaxer products.



The National Institutes of Health published an October 2022 study showing a connection between hair relaxer usage and uterine cancer, with even higher cancer rates if relaxers were used frequently (i.e., four or more times/year). This follows other studies which have raised concerns about the toxicity of ingredients in hair relaxers.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

**By Emily Harwell (Mvskoke),
Attorney, Lief Cabraser**



EMILY HARWELL
(MVS KOKE)



EMILY HARWELL
(MVSKOKE)

inhabitants of North America. The land continues to be of great importance to the Indigenous People of Turtle Island. We have a responsibility to acknowledge and make visible our relationship to Native peoples. The process of colonization is ongoing and still adversely affects Native Americans. We recognize that every member of our community has, and continues to benefit from, the use and occupation of this land. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging Native American communities and by affirming their sovereign rights as first peoples. On October 9, 2023, communities throughout the United States celebrated Indigenous People's Day. Instituted in Berkeley, California in 1992, Indigenous People's Day is a holiday that celebrates and honors Indigenous American peoples and combats the erasure of Indigenous peoples in contemporary society. The holiday is often celebrated with Native food, performances, art, music, and traditional ceremonies.

DEI Protection and Expansion

Building litigation infrastructure for DEI protection & expansion

EJS is leading the way in proactively building up the legal infrastructure in California to protect and expand reparations and other programs on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion-to-Reparations Continuum.

We anticipate legal challenges from the right against the historic reparations bills that the California Legislature passed in 2024 and 2025. When we drafted the bills, we intentionally used language that was Constitutional and able to withstand legal challenges and are confident our reparations progress will survive these legal challenges. We are also closely monitoring anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion lawsuits; particularly, two cases against the University of California Regents challenging their admissions criteria, which includes a weighted interest in admitting a diverse incoming class. We are committed to using litigation as a tool to protect affirmative action and other initiatives on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion-to-Reparations Continuum.

The legal infrastructure that we are building to protect and expand reparations is multi-sector and includes:

- Attorney General Rob Bonta, who recently participated in a democracy town hall with EJS President Lisa Holder, hosted by the Japanese American National Museum Democracy Center.
- The California Department of Justice Civil Rights Enforcement Division, which actively engages with EJS on democracy and reparations protection, and spent two years researching and compiling information for the California Reparations Task Force, including Lisa Holder, to include in their Report.
- The Law Firm Anti-Racism Alliance, a respected and esteemed collaborative of nearly 300 top law firms working with legal services organizations to address systemic and structural racism in the law.
- The Charles Ogletree Reparative Bar Association, a pro bono panel of attorneys, including Lisa Holder as an Advisor, sharing resources and knowledge on protecting and expanding initiatives on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion-to-Reparations Continuum.
- Public counsel for cities like Los Angeles, which aims to implement reparations programs of their own.
- Alphonso David and the Global Black Economic Forum, which targets the structures and systems that stand in the way of economic justice for the Black diaspora.
- The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights D.C. and San Francisco chapters, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that is led by the nation's top attorneys as agents for change in the civil rights and racial justice movement.

2026 Outlook: EJS has the power to marshal California's most powerful legal resources to protect the wins and the momentum we have catalyzed over the past two years, and we are prepared to litigate if necessary. In the meantime, we will continue to build up this multi-sector legal infrastructure.



Tom Saenz Maldef executive director and Cal Attorney Gen. Bonta.

Democracy Defense

Litigation- Washington v. Trump: EJS joined the NAACP and League of Women Voters in an amicus brief submitted to federal appeals courts in support of four cases that challenge President Trump's January 20, 2025, executive order seeking to revoke birthright citizenship for individuals born in the United States to undocumented persons or temporary legal residents. It is the only amicus brief in support of the birthright citizenship cases that explicitly centers racial justice, and EJS was invited to join this amicus brief based on our mission and body of work toward racial justice and equity. The brief asserts that birthright citizenship is not a matter of political debate or preference, but rather a right rooted in the purpose of the Reconstruction Amendments that establishes and protects the full personhood and civil rights of Black Americans and other historically excluded groups. The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law is counsel for EJS and the other amici.

In February 2025, district courts in all four cases granted a nationwide preliminary injunction stopping enforcement or implementation of the executive order. But in June, the Supreme Court granted the Trump administration's request to partially pause three of the district court rulings and rejected the concept of universal or nationwide injunctions. However, the high court did not decide the substantive question of whether the birthright citizenship order is constitutional.

2026 Outlook: As an amicus in all four birthright citizenship cases, the Equal Justice Society is proud to stand for the fundamental rights of children and families and to protect the pillars of our democracy in this continued fight. For now, birthright citizenship remains intact. EJS, along with the rest of the nation, awaits the Supreme Court's decision as to whether it will be granting review on the constitutional question.



Poet-in-Residence Michael Tyler speaks at EJS's Juneteenth Event.
Photo Credit: Pablo Lago Dantas

Poet-in-Residence

In politically repressive environments, the arts are a resilient and accessible platform for resistance. EJS utilizes the arts in our fight for free expression and democracy expansion. In 2024, EJS implemented our pilot Poet-in-Residency program.

In 2025, we were proud to continue to elevate the work of our Poet-in-Residence, renowned author Michael Tyler. Michael Tyler is a New York Times bestselling author, accomplished speaker and sought-after thought leader dedicated to promoting belonging, implicit bias education, and social transformation through his poetry books, commentaries, and readings.

Throughout the year, Michael Tyler contributed thought provoking, powerful original works on subjects including autocracy in American democracy, Black Motherhood, Independence Day, Black History, and American idealism. We are excited to welcome him back as our Poet-in-Residence in 2026.

[Read Tyler's poetry](#)



Pictures from EJS's Juneteenth Event. Photo Credit: Pablo Lago Dantas

Events and Campaigns

EJS hosted two major events in 2025. Our annual Juneteenth gathering on June 21st in Los Angeles, a magnificent art exhibition called "Through Our Own Gaze: Decolonizing and Reclaiming Black Femininity", featured an art exhibition focused on Black Women's health equity, highlighting issues of Black maternal health, Black reproductive choice, Black Women's bodily autonomy, and decolonizing and reclaiming the narrative of Black femininity. For photos and video from the event, click [here](#).

EJS 25th Anniversary

On December 5th we hosted our 25th Anniversary Gala at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. This milestone event brought together long-time supporters to celebrate and honor 25 years of EJS impact and achievements since civil rights icon Eva Paterson co-founded EJS in 2000. We honored three Champions of Justice: juvenile justice and civil rights attorney Michael Harris; the Civil Rights Enforcement Section of the California Department of Justice, who helped to compile and author the California Reparations Task Force; and constitutional lawyer, scholar, and keynote speaker Kimberly West-Faulcon. The gala program featured a special video commemoration, and we danced the night away to the soulful sound of The Coolerators, Eva Paterson's cover band. These events were powerful opportunities to disseminate truth, reflect, celebrate, and continue the fight for justice.

[Watch the Anniversary Gala Recap](#)

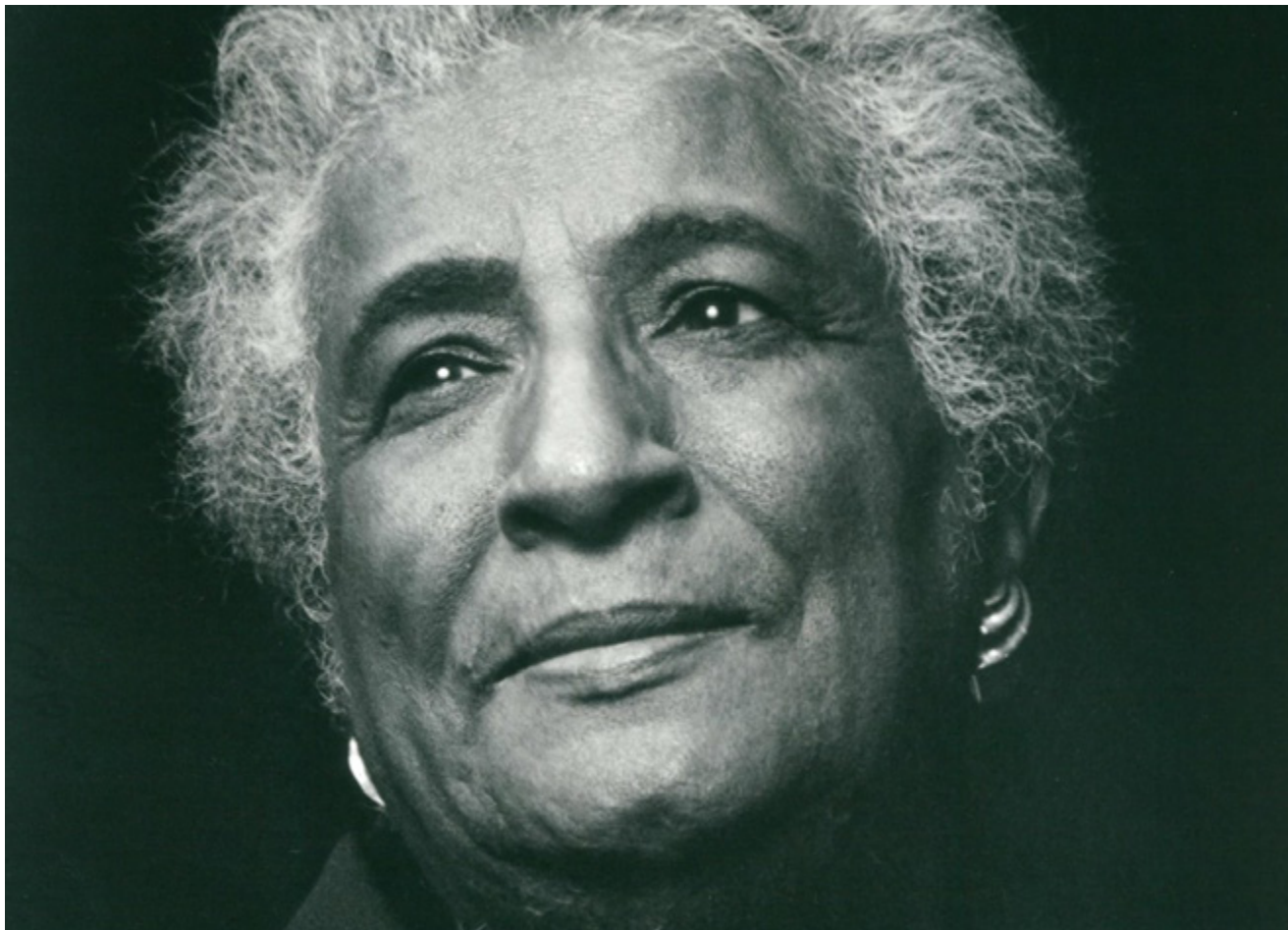
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Judge Constance Baker Motley.

Motley Fellowship

EJS is supporting the next generation of civil rights lawyers through the Judge Constance Baker Motley Civil Rights Fellowship. Judge Constance Baker Motley, a monumental figure in the fight against racial injustice, broke barriers at every stage of her esteemed career. Born on September 14, 1921, her life was a testament to legal skill and courage, and her powerful legacy lives on even after her passing in 2005. She was the first African American woman to serve on the federal bench and the first to hold the title of chief judge. Her influence was profound even before rising to the bench: she served as associate counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, co-authoring the briefs for the landmark case [Brown v. Board of Education](#). A trailblazer in politics as well, she became the first African American woman elected to the New York state senate (1964) and the first to serve as Manhattan borough president (1965).

To ensure Judge Motley's work carries on, EJS created the Judge Constance Baker Motley Civil Rights Fellowship in 2006. The mission: to nurture the talents of emerging progressive lawyers, empowering them to transform anti-discrimination law and policy for a new era.

In 2025, EJS was proud to welcome Vanessa Holman, a third-year law student from NYU School of Law, who was instrumental in the drafting and passing of California's 2025 reparations bills. This groundbreaking policy work has made a lasting impact on the lives of millions of Black Californians.

As EJS's Founding President Eva Paterson notes, Judge Motley's legacy continues to inspire: "Her incredible life is not only marked by how many barriers she broke on behalf of women and Black Americans, but also the considerable legal skills and talents she brought. When Judge Motley heard about the goals of EJS at a conference of Black federal judges in 2008, she said 'Now I can relax' – a sentiment that has motivated us to be our best."



"I chose to pursue a legal career to center the voices and concerns of those most impacted by the legacies of violence that continue to shape inequality; I feel fortunate to be part of an organization and fellowship that so closely reflect these values. The Motley fellowship's mission to support a new generation of movement lawyers rooted in community and interdisciplinary work deeply resonates with me. Through my work, I hope to carry forward the legacy of Judge Motley, whose career opened doors for generations of young lawyers of color like me. As a Motley fellow with EJS, I've been fortunate to contribute to many areas of case work, an invaluable investment in my skill development and varied interests at this stage of my career."

- Vanessa Holman

2026 Outlook: EJS plans to bring on its next Constance Baker Motley Fellow in 2026, with the position expanding to a two-year fellowship.



HBCU Law Internship

The summer of 2025 was the inaugural year for EJS’s new HBCU Law Internship, a summer internship program geared towards law students enrolled at one of the nation’s six HBCU law schools. As an organization dedicated to advancing racial justice in all spheres of life, we strongly believe in cultivating environments to foster the academic and professional growth of Black law students and other law students of color. EJS’s HBCU internship program offers the legal intern position to students of communities who have historically been left out of legal practice and educational opportunities in California

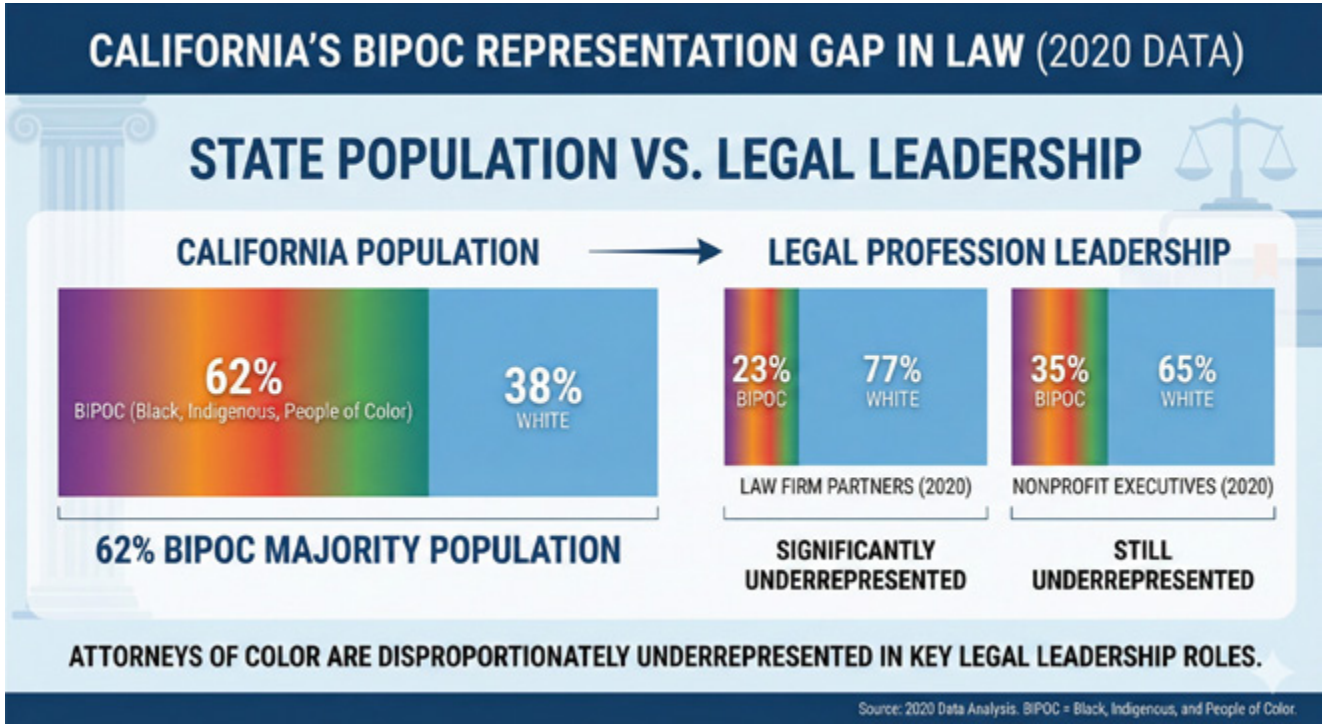
In California, attorneys of color are still significantly underrepresented in the legal profession, despite the fact that the state’s population is comprised of 62% Black, Indigenous, and people of color. In 2020, attorneys of color accounted for only 23% of all law firm partners, and only 35% of nonprofit executives. Our HBCU internship serves as a pathway for HBCU law students to network, receive mentorship, and gain access to legal jobs in California.

In 2025, our first HBCU intern was Nneka Nwabueze, a rising 2L at Howard University School of Law. Nneka was an excellent asset to the EJS team and conducted critical research for us. She also authored a memorandum outlining the history of HBCUs and exposing the discriminatory conditions that prevented and stymied the development of HBCUs in California.



“My experience as an EJS HBCU Racial Justice intern was deeply meaningful and affirming. I felt supported in bringing my full self to the work while gaining hands-on experience in racial justice advocacy and efforts to protect policies that promote diversity, alongside people who genuinely care about equity and community impact. This internship reinforced my commitment to pursuing justice-driven work in my legal career.”

- Nneka Nwabueze



2026 Outlook: EJS plans to bring on its next HBCU law student intern in 2026.

Our Impact

3,562,410

Number of Black and Latinx students in CA public schools that are impacted by EJS litigation

\$20,000,000

Funding for reparations implementation in California by Gov. Gavin Newsom

639

Number of endorsers of the California Reparations Task Force Report or generally of the study of reparations.

3,092

Number of subscribers to EJS newsletters. Click [here](#) to subscribe.

11,000

Number of women plaintiffs seeking justice in the EJS hair relaxer litigation against L'Oreal and Revlon

8,500

Number of letters that were sent and hand-delivered to Governor Newsom in support of the reparations bills. The Alliance for Reparations, Reconciliation, and Truth (ARRT), of which EJS is a co-convenor and co-founder, co-lead this organizing effort.

Financials

Total Revenue: \$2,469,373

Total Expenses: \$2,258,232

Program Expenses: \$1,797,506

Fundraising Expenses: \$240,711

Administration Expenses: \$220,015



From left to right: LaRita Y. Gibson-Smith, Anna Basallaje, Alexandra Santa Ana, Ginger Johnson, Lisa Holder, Keith Kamisugi, Heather Snedeker, Christina Alvernaz, Mona Tawatao, Tyler Kyser.

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'That Moment Is Upon Us'

By Michael Tyler, EJS Poet-in-Residence

First, we must face the moment with a resolve that has been sobered,
By the harrowing confirmation about the paternity of our pride;
When the undisputed truth of our iniquitous ill-conception
Reveals the base and foul collusions who are the parents of our shame.

Then, we must take ourselves to task, with probing dedication,
To ask the painful questions that swab the surface of our past,
So we can culture facts and fiction to code the helix of our traits,
And finally alter the mutations that cause the evils that we spawn.

Because the hour of the outbreak of the plague for every virtue,
Whose conscience stealing virus kills the feeling in our hearts,
And replicates with fury to imperil and impair
Every moral inclination for what is human and humane —

That moment is upon us and the countdown has begun,
For the prowess of every science to pledge allegiance and proceed,
To find what's rooted deep within us from our origins and beyond
That has evolved to enable our existence to this day.

For what is most innate and inherent within our most essential selves,
The nascent strand of intuition inside every gene of truth and faith,
Lies the cure for the corruption that defies our protests and our prayers,
That can inoculate our hope and save the dying soul of the nation.

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