

THE POSITIVE COMMUNITY



FOCUS ON

SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR ALL!

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FIGHTING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE SHIFT FROM BENEFICIARY TO BURDEN BEARER

By Jennifer Jones Austin



For every good reason, when we think of the fight for justice for people of African descent in a land once foreign to us, but now as much our home as anyone else's—save indigenous people—we recall the tireless work and sacrifices of Harriet Tubman; Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, Nat Turner, Richard Allen, W.E.B. Du Bois, Dorothy Height, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, James Meredith, Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hammer, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, Shirley Chisholm, John Lewis, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, and hundreds more. Their individual and collective actions made possible our freedom from both physical and mental bondage. Their sacrifices paved the way for us to one day live as full-fledged Americans with all the civil and human rights that attend. They set us on a path—trusting the nation—and more importantly, we would never turn back.

Because of them, no longer are African Americans legally enslaved to work without pay, though we still are disproportionately paid less for our labor. Because of their great works, it is illegal for law enforcement to detain and arrest us without probable cause, yet today our communities are over-surveilled and arrest and prosecution rates are disproportionately higher for alleged crimes by Black persons compared

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to whites. Their actions led to the ending of segregation in public schools with the promise of equal education, but still our children are taught in predominantly Black schools with significantly fewer resources. Fewer than two out of 10 Black children are proficient in reading and math. They promised we would receive our 40 acres and a mule, but still today we have been neither compensated for our ancestors' labors nor ensured our fair share, reinforcing systemic and widening wealth gaps between Blacks and whites. With some giving their lives, they secured our legal right to vote with the Voting Rights Act of 1964, but with the United States Supreme Court having gutted the law in 2013 and since then 29 states passing nearly 100 restrictive laws that detrimentally impact us most, we must fight again just to preserve this civil right.

We are the descendants and direct beneficiaries of all the good that resulted from the hard work, sweat, tears, and

blood shed by our ancestral leaders and doers. And just as they bore the burdens of pressing for equal opportunity and fairness, we must do the same. If we are to stave off further erosion of the gains made for our good and realize true equality, equity, and opportunity, we must embrace this moment and our responsibility. Now, we are burden bearers.

This special edition of *The Positive Community* brings forth the voices of both faith leaders and leaders of faith engaged in the pursuit of justice. Their steadfast works in the fields of education, health and mental health, religion, community development, civic engagement, criminal justice, and economic insecurity indicate they both understand and embrace their roles as burden bearers. Their contributions to this publication provide critical perspectives on the issues that present some of the greatest challenges for Black Americans, and actions that can and should be taken to alleviate and ameliorate them.■

