DIVERSITY IN BUSINESS

2020

A SUPPLEMENT OF THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL
FRESNO | KINGS | MADERA | TULARE
www.thebusinessjournal.com

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

We want to hear from you.

If you have ideas for stories please submit them to Gabe Dillard at editor@thebusinessjournal.com

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

GORDON WEBSTER JR.

Welcome to the second annual issue of "Diversity in Business," The Business Journal's effort to shine a light on the variety of different cultures that make up the Central Valley business community.

As most people know, Fresno is a special place that boasts a diversity of races, languages, nationalities and cultures. In fact, out of the 501 most populous cities in the U.S., Fresno is the 58th most diverse, according to a study by personal finance website WalletHub.

The Central Valley has a long history of attracting people from different places and backgrounds, drawn to its economic opportunities, cost of living and unbreakable community bonds.

This supplement features a number of local success stories, such as the Planet Vegan food truck, Vision View Business Formation Center and the efforts of the Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation to make the business dreams of Spanish speakers come true. We also share a story of how the Valley Center for the Blind is putting visually impaired people back to work.

We hope you enjoy these stories that we hope open a window into this wonderful Central Valley and its diverse business community.

ON THE COVER
Reynaldo Villarreal
Karisma Senegal
Vianey Cobian
Windell Pascascio
Martell Udell
Robert January
Laneesha Senegal

SALES AND MARKETING MANAGER
ABNER GARCIA

MANAGING EDITOR
GABRIEL DILLARD

DESIGNERS
JESSICA SURRETT
RAM REYES

Table of Contents

Photo contibuted | Workers for Imperial Electric Service dig a trench for a project.

Pros, cons of 'Disadvantaged Business Enterprise' designation

STORY BY
EDWARD SMITH

Joelon Chinn got into mechanical design back in 2005. A graduate of Fresno State, he'd worked for Central Valley firms, consulting with architects on how to move air, water and electricity through a building.

In 2018, Chinn started a consulting firm of his own, JNL Mechanical Design, after fears the company he was working with was facing a buyout. A manager had challenged him into thinking that if the company was bought out, why would they keep him?

It got Chinn to thinking of starting a business to control his own opportunities.

For Windell Pascascio, president of Imperial Electric Service in Fresno, getting his electrical contracting license was a way to get a good job without going into debt with college loans. Born in Belize, Pascascio started out working on hydroelectric dams and now employs 18 people, all hired from the Central Valley, working throughout California.

The experiences of Black and minority professionals vary as diversely as their own stories. Programs such as the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) run by the California Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Transportation have helped some find success in bidding on state and private construction contracts. At the same time, efforts to break up what some view as a boys club of primary and subcontractors have their own shortfalls. And California's Proposition 209 has excluded any mention of race when it comes to who gets state contracts.

The roots of the DBE program lie in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to create nondiscrimination policies and to make federal transportation projects available to people of color. Contracts from federal dollars were not making their way to people of color or to women, said Tara Lynn Gray, president of the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce. The Black Chamber helps companies get their DBE and Minority Business Enterprise certifications, as well as a number of other certifications.

Private businesses as well as governmental agencies have their own targets of how much contracting dollars go to DBE-certified subcontractors.

For instance, Fresno Council of Governments has a three-year goal of granting 16% of its contracts to DBE-certified businesses. Since 2017, they've had varying levels of participation in their contracts, according to Tony Boren, executive director of COG. During the 2018/19 fiscal year, $351,406 or 21% of contract dollars, went to DBE companies.

Gray says that securing those contracting dollars is important because not only does that money fund well-paying jobs, DBE companies typically hire locally.

For the typically micro-sized businesses classified as DBEs, getting contracts for major transit jobs can be difficult.

In 1996, California's Prop. 209 prohibited governmental agencies from considering race when it came to employment or awarding contracts.

Because of this, DBEs and women-owned businesses lost $820 million annually in contracts with the State of California, according to a 2015 study by Equal Justice Society. Transit funding, including projects at airports, usually have a federal-funding component. Federal government standards declare that good faith be made to include DBEs into contracts.

The service industry relies on relationships, says Chinn. A contractor may be on a job for 18 months, requiring reliable subcontractors.

"The relationship factor in this completely makes sense," he said. But at the same time, some feel that money keeps going to the same sources.

"Contractors have a tendency to use people they know," said Gray. "We overlay race on that and you put contractors in the midst of people they don't know, they don't trust, they may harbor racial tensions against, there's not a shot — there's not an opportunity," said Gray.

Without the DBE certification, Pascascio says he can only competitively bid at jobs that only need an electrical contractor. On large transit jobs, most of the subcontracting work stays close to firms a prime contractor is familiar with. And without experience in those large jobs, it becomes hard to bid on other large jobs, perpetuating the cycle of exclusion. "We would be stuck at one tier," said Pascascio.

Getting qualified as a DBE takes months of work. After filing binders worth of birth certificates and financial documents, Chinn was excited about getting on the list of disadvantaged businesses, hoping it would give him some more opportunities on projects. Seven months into being certified and it hasn't yielded any prospects. "It hasn't even had me sniff at anything," Chinn said.

As a consulting firm, his work usually begins before the project goes out for prime contractors to bid.

Pascascio says unless there's an explicit requirement in the project language, that money doesn't make it to DBE businesses. If he's bidding as a prime, the DBE program can help. But as a subcontractor, it becomes harder to get his name out to the right people.

The law says that prime contractors who have secured state or federal money have to put forth a good faith effort to put contracts out to women and minorities. But that good faith requirement can be met with a mere phone call, said Pascascio.

In the Central Valley, DBE-qualified businesses have an especially hard time getting contracts. Of all the money awarded to DBEs, those in the Central Valley earn less than 1% of contracts being awarded across the state.

Project labor agreements also conflict with DBE agreements. Many PLAs say that subcontracts have to be done with union affiliates. And becoming a union shop can be expensive.

Some projects have community benefit stipulations put into them. State Center Community College District's West Fresno Campus, despite having a PLA written into it, says that for contracts less than $500,000, small businesses do not have to be associated with a union.

Chinn doesn't like bringing race into the picture. In his years in the Central Valley, he's turned to his elders in the mechanical design business for advice and help, all of whom were white. And he doesn't like the idea of forcing people to use his services. "It saddens me to see some of the stuff that happens in today's society, especially right now. We're so racially charged. I feel like we're not perfect, but I have a decision to make, and the decision I make is, how can I continue to grow?"

"It saddens me to see some of the stuff that happens in today's society... We're so racially charged"

Joelon Chinn

Photo contibuted | Joelon Chinn (left) works with Michaela Eropkin-Jinks (top) and Ulises Lira on a 10th grade classroom for the Patino School of Entrepreneurship.

Robert January (front right), a co-founder of Planet Vegan, with his crew in the kitchen of the food truck. January served in the U.S. Navy, went to culinary school, and has worked all kinds of cooking gigs over the years. With the help of his crew, he is bringing variety to vegan food options in the Central Valley.

'Support it if it's good'

Entrepreneur enters crowded food truck space with vegan flair

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
FRANK LOPEZ

As a kid growing up in Palmdale who would spend a lot of time home alone, Robert January taught himself to cook.

With his parents working, and a mother who is a great cook herself, January wasn't satisfied with eating Hot Pockets or other microwave meals — he wanted some good, real food. So he made it himself.

Still on the road of his culinary journey, January is still making really good (and healthy) food as a co-founder and owner of Planet Vegan. January founded the food truck with his business partners Joe Ellis and Mike McElroy.

Though just officially opened for about nine months, the food truck's vegan burgers and sandwiches are drawing enough foodies to form lines with a two-hour wait.

The wait is worth the taste.

Around five years ago, January was expanding his skills and taste palate at culinary school, and had been cooking at different gigs including for a catering company in Redondo Beach as well as some restaurants.

Before that, he was in the U.S. Navy for four and half years, and in that time he wasn't doing any cooking. At one point, January was trying to get out of culinary arts and into sports marketing, but it was Ellis that gave him the idea to get back in the kitchen to provide Fresno with more vegan options.

January started cooking vegetable based foods in 2018 with a friend who owned Veggie Fam, a vegetarian and vegan restaurant in North Hollywood.

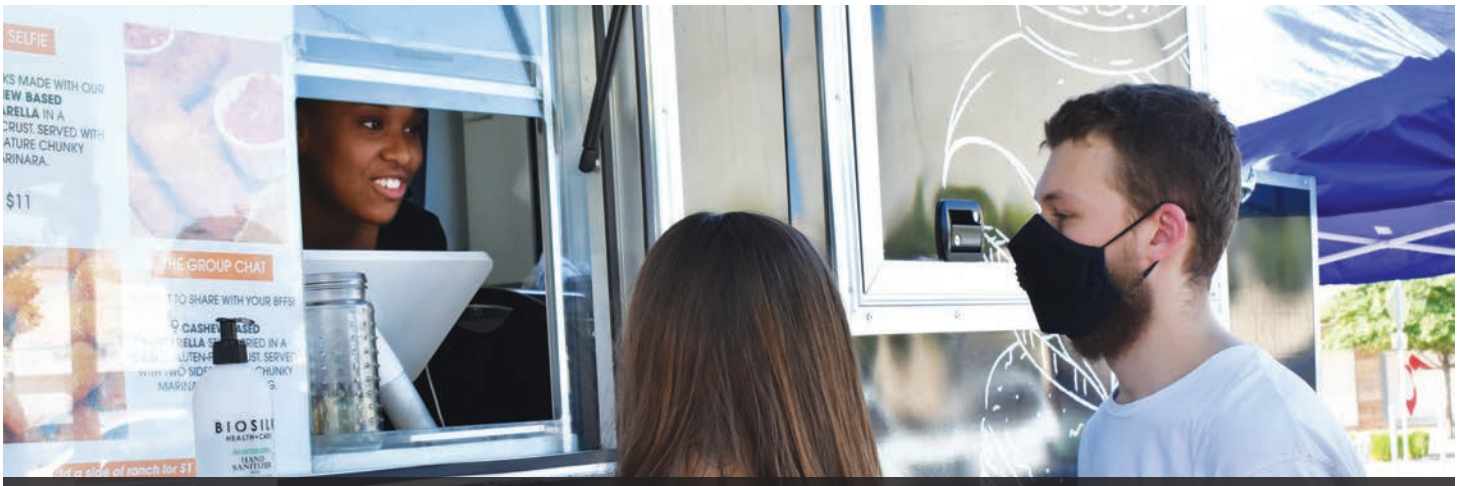
"I'm vegan myself," January said. "I've got a couple of friends that went vegan as well way before me. Working in North Hollywood and Los Angeles — being known worldwide as the vegan capital — opened my eyes to that community. That's when I started eating vegan food myself."

There are some other vegan and vegetarian options in the Fresno area including Raw Fresno and La Jacka Mobile taco truck. January is proud to help expand those options for the community, but there aren't many eateries that offer solely vegan food.

Even though January had been cooking for years, he said that when trying new things, mistakes will be made. It's a learning process, and one that is constantly happening to this day.

January and the crew at Planet Vegan maintain a minimalist philosophy of trying to get the small things right by using high quality and fresh ingredients, as well as organic local produce. With the cost of the Impossible

> **"No matter what the food is, it has to taste good. The plant-based lifestyle is definitely needed in everybody's community."**
>
> Robert January



A Planet Vegan employee taking orders from some of the first customers in line. Customers waited for over an hour in near triple digit weather in the parking lot in front of Tioga-Sequoia Brewing company to be the first in line for their vegan burgers and vegan chicken sandwiches.

Burger plant-based patties they use, a burger or sandwich from them is reaching gourmet styles and prices.

The local community was quick to eat up what Planet Vegan was serving down, and some are willing to wait for more than an hour before the truck even opens just to be the first in line. The word of mouth from customers also helps to bring more attention to the food truck.

Planet Vegan has posted up at locations in Visalia and all over Fresno, but lately, because of the accommodations provided by Tioga Sequoia Brewing Co. in Fresno, the truck has been setting up in front of the brewery to keep a consistent location that customers will know to frequent.

"No matter what the food is, it has to taste good," January said. "The plant-based lifestyle is definitely needed in everybody's community, and I think my community cooks really good. I love seeing fellow African-American entrepreneurs parallels and their success. Its cool seeing more diversity on the ownership and entrepreneur level, and hopefully that trend keeps going."

January said that community-based businesses are good for the places they are in, and with many mom and pop shops being pushed out by corporate entities, supporting local businesses is really important at this time, but he also stresses to be discerning of quality.

January and the rest of the crew do hope to open up a brick and mortar restaurant one day for Planet Vegan, but right now, they are just working to get their name out there and do the best they can do.

"Support what's good, don't just support something because its trendy," January said. "Buy food because it tastes good, not just because the owners are African-American. It might be in right now, but support it if it's good."

(Left to right) Ashantee Wren, Rosaline Graxiola, Unique Loftis, Laneesha Senegal, Karisma Senegal, Keshawna Nelson, Kattani Senegal

Vision without limits

Entrepreneur's goal to help create generational wealth for people of color

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
FRANK LOPEZ

Just 10 years ago, Laneesha Senegal was meeting with budding entrepreneurs at the Starbucks on McKinley and Peach avenues near the Fresno airport. It had space and Wi-Fi for the price of a cup of coffee.

Today, Senegal has 33,000 square feet to help businesses and entrepreneurs realize their dreams. Called the Vision View Business Formation Center, it's located at 4974 E. Clinton Ave., not far from the Starbucks where she started laying the groundwork for her own vision.

Senegal is the director of Helping Others Pursue Excellence (H.O.P.E), a non-profit vocational training and entrepreneurship program, as well as the CEO of Vision View Partners, which founded the business incubator in 2017.

Vision View offers meeting spaces and offices, as well as access to resources in legal matters, accounting, videography, grant writing, marketing and technical assistance.

As a mother who had her first child at 17, Senegal was involved in her own self-enterprise ventures. At the time, Senegal's financial situation was rough, and there were some nights when the power would go out and food cupboards were bare.

"I've always been determined, enterprising in creative ways — from doing hair to doing paperwork for people, writing grants," Senegal said of her work, which included securing tax credits and opportunities for business owners to get into their own commercial properties.

"While I was building wealth for those companies, I was living paycheck to paycheck. I said, 'If I can do this for everyone else, then I want to be able to do this for myself and my family.'"

Senegal wanted to go from enterprising to creating a business that would focus on helping others realize their visions.

Because she didn't have internet at home, Senegal used the Starbucks to research ways to access resources and grants and learn the entire structure of how to start a business. While there she saw others working to climb out of poverty and she recognized the need for space for people to build their businesses.

Senegal didn't think a lack of resources should be a barrier for people who wanted to become entrepreneurs.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic only cemented in Senegal's mind the impact of the digital divide and how lower-income communities and people of color lack access to capital.

Senegal said many people in similar positions to her can't come up with the overhead costs to lease office space, and don't have the luxury of being able to build credit or access loans.

"I see that access to capital is one of the major barriers preventing us from being able to grow and get to that next level," Senegal said.

Senegal had to save for years and borrow from family. She didn't take a salary for a number of years, investing all she could back into Vision View.

Senegal applied for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), but because the company doesn't have an infrastructure model that many businesses and corporations have, it did not qualify.

Many Black-owned enterprises have their families working in the business, Senegal said, and they don't always have a business structure where they are earning a salary because of a lack of revenue, meaning they did not have a

payroll structure that qualified for PPP.

"I have over $2 million dollars in property—collateral. I've owned my own homes for 18 years. I have cash in the bank to show I was credit worthy. We have a track record of paying our business debts, but at the same time, I was reduced to a credit score," Senegal said.

At this point, Senegal said Vision View needs to attract more corporations, foundations and donors that have access to capital and would be willing to take a risk with them.

Senegal has been building the groundwork for almost a decade, and since the grand opening of Vision View three years ago, the center has launched more than 80 businesses and helped about 120 businesses grow in scale and with their office needs.

Vision View President Randall Cooper said that while the Covid-19 pandemic did bring attention to the lack of access to capital in the Black community, the issues brought on by the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police also helped bring attention to the plight of Black people in the U.S.

"Floyd brought all these things to the forefront and allowed the community to be able to express their concern about not having access to wealth. They're trying to get more attention to get more resources in. Harvard, Planned Parenthood and other major companies got millions of dollars because they were the main clients of the banking institutions," Cooper said.

A major goal at the forefront of Senegal's mind is to create generational wealth for people of color. According to a survey from Consumer Finances, the net worth of a typical white family is $171,000, ten times greater than that of Black family ($17,150) in 2016.

Senegal has seen the generational wealth in the Central Valley with farmers, manufacturers, restaurant owners, automotive dealers, developers and more. And she knows how hard it has been for Black people to build that, historically.

> "I see that access to capital is one of the major barriers preventing us from being able to grow and get to that next level."
>
> Laneesha Senegal

She wants to help change it.

"A lot of the time Black families are consumers, so I'm really determined to change the mindset of what wealth looks like," Senegal said. "Wealth is not having a fancy car or $300 dollar Jordan shoes. I'm working to change the mindset and expose my young family to what generational wealth looks like, and actually invest in them to learn the business models so they can inherent the labor of what we started."

There are three buildings in the 33,000 square foot complex of Vision View, and Senegal and the team are looking for investment to renovate the middle building to make more space for offices.

The current goal for Vision View, with help from the United Way and the Fresno DRIVE initiative to invest in neighborhood development, is to recruit 100 low-wealth investors that will make a commitment to invest in commercial property or real estate property across the city.

While Senegal has endured many hardships throughout her life, her five children are always there for support and motivation. She graduated from Fresno Pacific University with a Bachelor's degree in organizational leadership in 2012 and wants to inspire and motivate her children as they do for her.

Karisma Senegal helps her mother at Vision View, and she is also working to create more real estate opportunities for lower-income people and people of color. She is inspired by her mother to be the best she can be.

"Seeing her go to Starbucks and then to do her entrepreneurial work, and I wanted to become the person that she wanted me to be for myself," Karisma said. "My mom is somebody I look up to. She is a leader. She is resilient. She's never stopped through any hardship she's been through. I want to give back."

Photo contibuted | Vallevivionda Ayala, technical director for the VNA Show, runs the camera. The program has been active in boosting Hispanic-owned businesses in the Central Valley area during the pandemic.

Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs take higher profile in pandemic

STORY BY
DONALD A. PROMNITZ

Fresnan Vianey Cobian knew from an early age that she wanted to be on TV.

She started 10 years ago with an internship at Cocola Broadcasting Co. and also studying journalism, but her hard work paid off when she got a reporting job for Telemundo. It took her to Monterey and Sacramento, but eventually, homesickness caught up with her. However, a simple reporting job would no longer do for Cobian — she wanted to strike out on her own — and start a business with everything she'd learned.

Now, she's running her own weekly morning variety program — The VNA Show — which airs on Saturday mornings on the Estrella and Azteca over-the-air broadcast stations. And as Covid-19 continues to impact businesses, she's now using her platform to help.

Out of her studio at Cocola Broadcasting Co., Cobian brings local, Hispanic-owned businesses on to market their companies and products in Spanish. To further boost them, high profile Latin American artists and entertainers are also interviewed, so while viewers may tune in for the personalities they love, they're exposed to companies in their area — and the publicity comes without charge.

"I believe that if you give something without expecting anything in return, the universe will work in your favor," Cobian said. "Most of my interviews, if not all of them, are basically free — to help in this time."

According to Cobian, it seems to be working. The exposure has helped. One business she cited as an example — Artisina Reyes — has seen its sales of Mexican pottery and other art go up 60%. She keeps some of their pieces in her office, a thanks for her help.

That's the reward for me, to know that things work out for the people that I interview,"

But Cobian isn't alone in reaching out and helping Hispanic businesses in weathering the crisis. It's also been the main focus for the Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation, headed by CEO Dora Westerlund. While Westerlund says the Foundation's doors are open to everyone, their main specialization has been helping Hispanic-owned businesses gain access to vital resources like licensing, permits and financial assistance, along with walking them through advertising and other aspects of running a company.

Meanwhile, though the pandemic and caused some disruption, Westerlund says they've been hard at work making lemonade out of the situation by utilizing the Internet to expand their outreach.

Prior to the pandemic, for example, the conferences for the Hispanic Foundation were almost exclusively held in English. Upon switching to online engagements since shelter-in-place began, Westerlund explained they've had more than 30 webinars. Now, half of these are being conducted in Spanish, meaning a wider outreach to Hispanic businesses. It's been especially important as the Foundation has entered a partnership with the Mexican Consulate in Fresno to provide resources to businesses. Since their partnership began in February, it's more than quadrupled their Spanish-speaking clientele.

"In the past, monthly, we would see the ballpark of 30 businesses that were completely Spanish-speaking," Westerlund explained. "Right now we're seeing 120 — up to 150 businesses that are just Spanish-speaking."

It's been a good time to help businesses promote themselves as well, and the Hispanic Foundation has used the opportunity to help businesses with online marketing — especially on social media — as it becomes an increasingly important means of letting customers know they're still ready to do business.

They've also started their Womenpreneur and Latinapreneur programs, with a combined total of 174 joining the two cohorts. They've been able to reach out to women-owned businesses not only in Fresno, but from San Francisco to Los Angeles. And as the Hispanic business community has grown in the past few years, they've taken to the web to promote it and explain the need for organizations in the Valley to work with and reach out to it.

"It's not only important because it's growing — it's important for other sectors as well," Westerlund said. "Because now they have this community that keeps on growing and you have to target this opportunity that is out there for businesses that are growing."

And when the economy eventually comes back online, it'll be the promotional efforts of the community that aids Hispanic businesses the most in returning to prosperity.

United Health Centers
of the San Joaquin Valley

WE PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE
HEALTH SERVICES

UHC is Now Conducting No-Cost COVID-19 Testing

- Internal Medicine
- Family Medicine
- Dental Care
- Behavioral Health
- Immunizations
- Chiropractic
- Substance Abuse Program
- Tele-Dermatology
- Podiatry
- Laboratory/X-Ray
- Pharmacy
- OB-GYN
- Perinatal Care
- Optometry
- Health Education
- Women's Health

*** ENROLLMENT SERVICES AVAILABLE * FREE TRANSPORTATION**

We accept most insurances, as well as; Medi-Cal, Medicare, Tricare, Private pay and provide Sliding Fee Discounts.

Aceptamos la mayoría de seguros y proporcionamos tarifas ajustables dependiendo de sus ingresos.

Please visit our website to request an appointment

unitedhealthcenters.org

Or call

800.492.4227

COMING SOON 2020

Blackstone Avenue, Fresno
Kings Canyon Avenue, Fresno
Tuolumne Street, Fresno
Herndon Avenue, Clovis

@UNITEDHEALTHCENTERS

OUR LOCATIONS

Corcoran, Dinuba, Fresno, Earlimart, Fowler, Huron, Kerman, Lemoore, Mendota, Orange Cove, Parlier, Raisin City, Reedley, Sanger, Selma

WHO WE ARE

OUR BOARD MEMBERS: James Archie (President), Debra Bradley (Vice President), Corey Jackson (Treasurer), Dr. Cassandra Little (Secretary), T'Shaka Toure, Brandon K. Gary

Tara Lynn Gray
President & CEO

Tonya Archie
Chief of Staff

Kaya Herron
Director of Community Engagement and Advocacy

Shatera Sangster
Marketing & Communications Manager

Craig Patton
Production Coordinator

WHAT WE DO

As an organization, the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce and Chamber Foundation operates at the intersection of economic justice, civil rights and supplier diversity. We build relationships, ask the hard questions, stretch the powers that be, and confront systemic barriers with the express intent of building the wealth and health of the Black community. Using the existing policies and regulations to engage, educate, and empower our constituency, we do more than curate a list of businesses to refer to the general public. Our value lies in how we deliver our services, advocating for policy change in procurement and protections, developing and growing our members into the suppliers our marketplace and communities so desperately need.

Our small business development programs include D3: Discover, Develop, Deliver, which focuses on construction contractors; DirectConnect which focuses on investor-owned utilities; ProspHer Women of Color serving female entrepreneurs; the Entrepreneur's Mindset serving justice impacted individuals, and dfree Financial Literacy for all. In each of these programs, we do bi-directional work with agencies, utilities, and corporations to learn what it takes to do business with them, create interventions, and advocate for investments for our small businesses with those targets in mind.

Currently, more than 65% of Fresno's population identifies as non-white, yet white small business owners account for nearly 70% of all small businesses despite the fact that small businesses are being started by women of color at higher rates. Furthermore, small businesses in low-income census tracts accounted for 16% of all business in the region, but received only 7% of the total number and value of CRA-reported loans under $100,000. Our programs address the needs of this growing demographic by providing them with resources, investments and guidance for their success. As we continue to pursue racial equity in our economy, we are implementing several new strategies to improve both the size and number of small businesses owned by Black people as part of the DRIVE 10 year investment plan. As leaders of the Betting Big on Small Businesses Owned by Women & People of Color initiative, working alongside the Central Valley Community Foundation, community groups, and other stakeholders across the region, we will continue to engage, educate, and empower small businesses as well as create overdue change for our community at large.

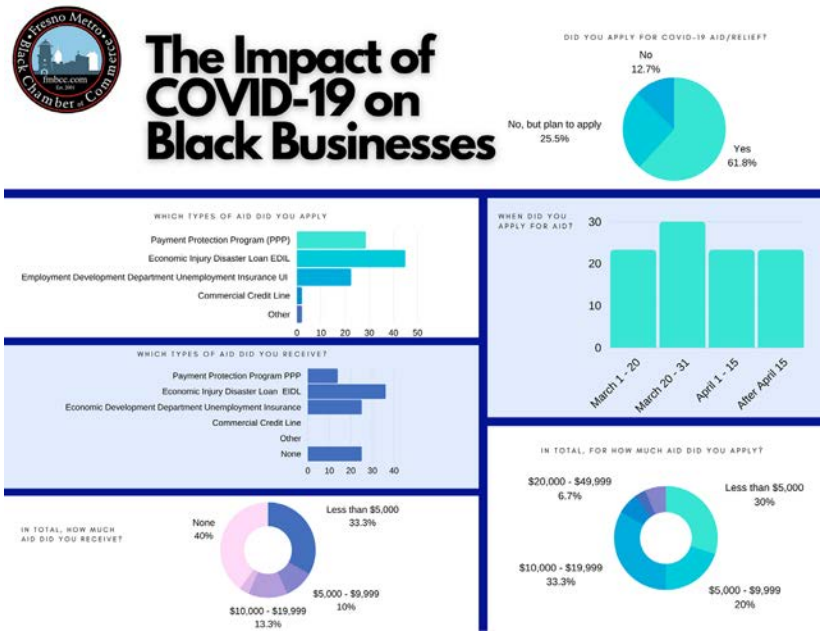
ENGAGE. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.

INFLECTION POINT

The global pandemic has laid bare the systemic inequality that we have been working to address for the last 19 years, and is removing barriers to finally addressing anti-Black racism in America. It's full impact on our community is yet to be seen but we can and must use this time to make positive change.

Racism structures access to opportunities, assigns value based on race, is created and maintained by people and institutions, and perpetuated by every system in our country. That's why recovery will not be enough and a return to the status quo is not an option. Black-owned businesses receive less than 5% of all public contracting dollars. We must become anti-racist, reinvest and rebuild by putting those on the bottom at the top of the list. To put it simply, prioritize investments, in procurement and programs, based on the racial equity impact they will have on the Black community and subsequently all other communities of color.

Divest from policing and invest in supports and interventions. Invest in education, health care, quality affordable housing, water infrastructure, green technology and the jobs that are so desperately needed will follow. Then take the next step and hire, retain, promote and invest in Black people and their families. Only then will we bring an end to the persistent poverty, disproportionate rates of unemployment, childhood asthma, infant and maternal morbidity, and mass incarceration stealing the health, wealth and future of our community.



IMPACT OF OUR WORK

The Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce has proven to be an amazing asset for Full Circle Brewing Company during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a member of FMBCC, we were able to capitalize on resources immediately attending the first webinar Fresno had with the SBA to access information on federal assistance programs. This seminar, along with guidance from Tara Lynn Gray throughout the process, helped us navigate the PPP application process and secure a grant. This funding has allowed us to retain staff, pivot to online sales and delivery (www.fullcircle2go.com) and stay afloat during this unstable and difficult time for small business owners. With FMBCC you aren't just a member, you are a part of their family. Another tool in your toolbox that serves as a tireless advocate for your business through their various roles, even purchasing and marketing our product through their impressive network. Our partnership continues as we are about to release our "Black is Beautiful" beer alongside thousands of breweries across the nation and world in an effort to bring together brewers and beer drinkers alike to raise awareness to the injustices that many people of color face each and every day. Proceeds from this beer will be allocated to the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce's African American Student Assistance Fund allowing us to support the next generation of Black leaders. Through our work together, I believe that we can continue to keep equity at the forefront of economic development conversations and increase the number of minority owned businesses in the Greater Fresno area under the genuine and thoughtful leadership of the FMBCC team.

Arthur Moye
CEO
Full Circle Brewing

FMBCC was a critical partner in receiving the Economic Injury Disaster Loan! As a newly established nonprofit, I didn't think I would qualify and had no intention of applying. Tara Lynn Gray, President and CEO of FMBCC, believes in my mission and encouraged me to apply multiple times–via text and email–I had direct support from the boss! She encouraged me to attend the informational webinars, sent me information to review, and answered specific questions I had, so I could complete my application successfully. I qualified for a loan! The funds have been absolutely critical in supporting my organizations' ability to serve Black mamas and babies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shantay R. Davies-Balch
President/CEO | BLACK Wellness & Prosperity Center
www.black-enterprises.com

OUR ASK OF YOU

We are calling on you to align your actions with your words, partner with and support the organizations doing the work, and put your money where your mouth is. If you take nothing else from this, remember that prior to COVID-19; Black nonprofits and community-based organizations received only 1.4% of all philanthropic dollars, Black-owned businesses received less than 5% of all public contracting dollars, and small businesses owned by Black women earned approximately $25,000 per year. Our future can and must be different. Help us actively create change, opportunities and success for all.

The fragility of DACA

Employers advocate on behalf of 'Dreamer' employees

STORY BY BREANNA HARDY

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has been a source of hope for its recipients, and has added rich cultural experiences to America's workforce.

With the Trump Administration fighting against the program, some employers have taken the opportunity to become advocates for their employees covered by DACA. A recent Supreme Court decision to not terminate DACA has momentarily kept "Dreamers" safe.

One Fresno manufacturing business owner said it's a matter of living day-to-day. She requested anonymity to protect her employee, a DACA recipient.

She said that at the beginning of the pandemic, it was especially confusing to figure out what DACA's financial relief options were.

"I was reaching out to my friends that are lawyers and other people that had experience with DACA to see what kind of programs there might be, or what our options were — what her options were — because we didn't want to lose her as an employee," she said.

The business owner said that she tries to live without fear of the unknown.

"There's just a lot of uncertainty that you have to let go of," she said. "We do what is in our control, and then we try not to worry about it, because worrying isn't going to do any good."

Kristina McKibben, a lawyer at Community Justice Alliance in Sacramento, said that people are in limbo. They're trying to apply between the Supreme Court's decision to keep the program valid, and the next time the Trump Administration tries to terminate it.

"The delicate nature of this protection has just been really gut-wrenching," McKibben said.

Once "Dreamers" received unemployment during the pandemic, McKibben stressed the importance of its benefits.

"These are really, really important protections that people need to have access to, so to prioritize eliminating DACA during a global pandemic is especially cruel," McKibben said.

The DACA program defers the deportation of childhood arrivals and provides recipients with a work permit. Opponents of the program argue that it hurts American workers, but supporters recognize recipients' work ethic; many recipients were brought here as young children and grew up in America.

These employees bring differing perspectives from other countries into America's workforce, McKibben said.

> **"The delicate nature of this protection has just been really gut-wrenching."**
>
> Kristina McKibben

"They come with these really rich experiences and diverse interests, and so that applies beautifully to these different industries that they work in. And as soon as their work permit expires, the employer is left with this really difficult position where they may not be able to employ them any longer," McKibben said.

However, employers also have the opportunity to advocate for their employees who face obstacles. For one current DACA recipient, her boss's response made the difference.

She is a personal banker who was forced to take a leave of absence because her DACA card was sent to the wrong address. She requested anonymity due to the uncertainty of DACA's termination.

"I actually have a really, really good branch manager, so she actually was with me throughout the whole process, and she constantly kept calling HR, trying to figure out a way around the problem," she said.

The waiting period left her out of her job for nearly three months.

Although she had all the paperwork showing her application was approved and that she was able to work, her company required her physical DACA card.

Employers can also help their employees by joining forces to find avenues of protection. If companies allow, the "Dreamer" said that it would be helpful for employers to accept the letter from the Department of Homeland Security as proof and eligibility to work.

Though her branch manager could not find a way around allowing her employee to work, she became personally invested.

"She actually waited for me for three months; she did not, you know, hire anybody else; and they even gave her the option to transfer another banker from another location and she didn't take that banker," she said.

The "Dreamer" expressed her gratitude to come back to her own position that was held for her while on leave of absence.

"I was really lucky in that sense, because I know, you know, not a lot of people have that kind of management, so I'm grateful for her," she said.

McKibben expressed concern about the fragility of the program, and questions the amount of protection people have if it is terminated before recipients' DACA expiration dates.

McKibben said, "If this executive order comes out tomorrow, and DACA is officially terminated, those people — they're kind of left with a work permit that expires on one date, but do they still have that benefit, or is it completely taken away from them?"

"It is such a delicate form of relief that can be taken away at any time," McKibben said.

The hidden toll of California's Black exodus

STORY BY LAUREN HELPER, CALMATTERS

In a quiet corner of Elk Grove, where the maze of subdivisions and shopping centers gives way to open fields, Sharie Wilson has spent the last three years building her dream home.

It's nothing like the neighborhood where she grew up in South Central L.A. But in this Sacramento suburb, her family owns a modern farmhouse set on 2.5 acres, with a stately U-shaped driveway and a Pan-African flag over the front door. In the backyard, there's a basketball court inlaid with the logo of her hair care company, DreamGirls.

Still, Wilson has to justify her family's success. Neighbors have asked her husband, who works at the local water district and runs his own apparel company, what sport he plays. Or how the couple really paid for their house. "Hopefully once people keep seeing it, they stop seeing the color and start seeing us as humans," said Wilson, a 41-year-old mother of six boys.

Wilson is one of around 275,000 Black Californians who have left high-cost coastal cities in the last three decades, sometimes bound for other states or cities, but more often to seek their slice of the American dream in the state's sprawling suburban backyard. Many transplants pack up for the promise of homeownership, safety and better schools. Housing-rich Elk Grove has gained nearly 18,000 Black residents since 1990 — a 5,100% jump mirrored by increases around the San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta, Southern California's Inland Empire and the Central Valley.

At the same time, Black renters have been disproportionately forced out of cities as costs and evictions climbed; the Black population has plunged 45% in Compton, 43% in San Francisco and 40% in Oakland. While a version of this geographic scramble is playing out for working and middle-class people of all races, the distinct obstacles that Black residents encounter in new communities raise the question: How far do you have to go today to find opportunity — and are some things ever really possible to leave behind?

"Part of what we're seeing is the kind of anti-Black racism that has followed Black folks wherever they go," said Willow Lung-Amam, an associate professor of urban planning at the University of Maryland. "You still face the same kind of structural barriers."

CONTINUED | 19

Reynaldo Villareal has been working at Valley Center for the Blind for the last five years as an assistive technology instructor and recently became the supervisor of its recently launched call center.

Lost sight, not drive

Program provides job opportunities for the visually impaired

STORY AND PHOTOS BY FRANK LOPEZ

Reynaldo Villarreal has always been a hard and smart worker.

As a young child, he would help his parents use the home computer. He liked to open up, tinker with and repair electronics.

Villarreal also has the gift of gab that is especially helpful in the work he does today.

He is also the only visually impaired person in his family.

At 6-years-old, Villarreal was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP), an inherited eye disease that causes severe vision impairment including decreased vision at night or in low lighting, and loss of peripheral vision.

The impairment hasn't slowed Villarreal down from becoming an assistive technology instructor at the Fresno-based Valley Center for the Blind (VCB), where he has worked for the last five years. He helps other visually impaired people use computers, tablets and other types of assistive technology.

Founded in 1973, VCB's mission is to provide assistance to blind and visually impaired persons in achieving more independence and opportunities through skills training programs, social support programs and job opportunities.

In May, VCB launched a call center, giving visually impaired and blind individuals an opportunity to work.

Villareal also serves as the call center supervisor, which, with his gift of gab and fluency with assistive technology, makes him the perfect person for the role. He actually volunteered for six months before he officially got hired — going in every day to assist with tutoring and answering.

Martell Udell works at the Valley Center for the Blind (VCB) call center and had before been a client of the VCB's services since 2018. Udell said working there has helped him regain his confidence after losing his vision, and feels it has helped him grow on his career journey.

"I'm grateful for where I'm at now," Villareal said. "I want to pass that along to people. To say, 'you're not alone, there's opportunity here. Let's learn about them and get you up and running.'"

In high school, Villareal took part in a job-shadowing program through the California Department of Rehabilitation that put him to work for the City of Fresno's One Call Center, directing calls for all sorts of city matters. This helped him get the job he has today.

Villarreal's high school also helped him get a job at Foot Locker, which was a challenge, as the Manchester Mall location had never worked with a visually impaired person. Though it was difficult to work there with his impairment, he did learn to explain what works for him and what doesn't, and how to adapt on the spot so that it was not more difficult for his employers to accommodate him.

There is a stereotype that people carry of the visually impaired, Villareal said, that is of the totally blind person wearing glasses, but it's a broad spectrum. Villareal said that only 10% of individuals with a visual disability see total darkness with the rest being able to see some shadows or light.

The VCB is partnered with Beyond Vision, an agency dedicated to finding employment opportunities for individuals who are visually impaired. Beyond Vision holds the contract for providing customer service. There are four other non-profits involved, but due to privacy agreements, they cannot be named.

The call center gave seven workers at the VCB a job, in addition to Villareal, who said the team handles many calls a day, with one worker taking 128 calls in a span of three days.

The call center created through the contract consists of 40 seats, with the remainder occupied by visually impaired individuals from all across the U.S.

Shellena Heber, VCB executive director, acknowledges the troubles some visually impaired people have to go through to participate in the program. An employee at VCB catches a bus at 3:30 a.m. to commute from Visalia to Fresno every day, but even with such challenges, he puts in the effort to get to work.

"If you're someone with a certain level of skill and intellect, and know that you can be doing more than you are doing, its motivating," Heber said. "If we could find more companies to provide these opportunities to more people, it's a win-win for everybody. You're getting more people off of unemployment. People with vision loss will have something to do everyday and it's productive seeing that end goal and having a good job."

Martell Udell, an employee at the VCB call center, had worked in fast food, clubs and bars before he lost his vision. He has been a client of VCB since 2018.

"It gives me a sense of value and self worth to know that I am able to do what any sighted person — or completely able bodied person — can do," Udell said. "For a long time I was doubting myself and my abilities. The training that I've received at VCB has helped me grow as a person and reach my full potential. This is definitely a stepping stone that could help me reach the next level of my career goals."

Through the VCB and his work there, Villareal has gotten into a career he excels in, moved out of his parents' house and can provide for his wife and son, as well as prepare for a little girl they are expecting.

Villareal said employees with vision loss bring great value to any employer, as they are constantly having to "troubleshoot" the world around them, and figuring out how to make things work easier.

"Vision loss is an inconvenience, but it's not the total package," Villareal said. "You're going to get intelligent people when you bring someone with a visual impairment — someone that is driven. Everyone here is driven for work. Their vision loss causes them to having to prove themselves even more — having them go the extra mile. And they do it."

"It gives me a sense of value and self worth to know that I am able to do what any sighted person — or completely able bodied person — can do."

Martell Udell

Jim Vang cuts vegetables for an order. Wayside Noodle is one of many Asian American-owned businesses trying to get by as the second shutdown continues.

Southeast Asian business owners struggle on many fronts

STORY BY DONALD A. PROMNITZ
PHOTOS BY RAM REYES

As the reopening of California picked up in June, things started looking up at Wayside Noodle in Fresno's Fig Garden Village shopping center, as indoor dining was brought back and customers began trickling back in.

At the beginning of Gov. Newsom's stay-at-home order, Wayside's business dropped down to about 30% of its pre-pandemic levels, as dining was reduced almost exclusively to takeout and delivery. However, business quickly picked up again for the Vietnamese restaurant when dining in was once again permitted. Business jumped to 60%, but as a second order to halt dining in was passed, business dropped again.

Wilmer Vang, a manager with Wayside Noodle, said the backtracking has been frustrating, and they're concerned things could only get worse.

"My main concern is just how else will we have to deal with this pandemic. And what if there is something worse that's coming along?" Vang said. "We might have to take more precaution because the cases are rising."

The fallout of the virus has hit farms especially hard. Many Southeast Asian farms grow specialty crops popular in Laos and other parts of the region, but as restaurants lose customers, they drop the demands for their crops to replenish inventory.

"I lost big time this year," said Chongyee Xiong, a Hmong farmer in Sanger who's facing a total loss for 2020. "Like I told my wife, I took the savings from working at Clovis Unified, threw it right here and lost.

The Southeast Asian business community in Fresno can be traced back to the mid-'70s with the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Many of them — like the Hmong — had been allies to the United States and found themselves fleeing persecution by the incoming communist government because of it. Others simply wanted a better life in a free country.

But many of them may lose that opportunity due to circumstances that are completely out of their control.

Regardless of ethnicity, business owners across the Valley and the country have felt the pressure from Covid-19 and the economic burdens it's caused. Like the rest of the business community, Asian Americans have experienced the usual pandemic-related setbacks of lockdowns, social distancing, staffing issues and scared customers. But according to Blong Xiong, executive director of the Asian Business Institute and Resource Center (ABIRC) in Fresno, Asian Americans have other obstacles as well that are adding considerable difficulty to their efforts to survive.

One issue especially common with the first generation Asian community is the language barrier. This is especially the case for those who were already adults upon arriving in the United States. The problem only becomes worse, Xiong added, when one considers that running a business requires an added list of terminology for them to have to learn. In other words, there's English, and then there's "Business English."

"It's like when you go to court," Xiong said. "It's a different language. You don't speak 'Legalese' in your normal, day-to-day life."

Meanwhile, the problem is further exacerbated by the barrier in technology, which Xiong said is being felt especially now. Before, he explained, there might have been difficulty in translating their business-related needs to English, but federal, state and local resources were available, meaning help could be just a drive away. Now, they're noticing these offices close due to the pandemic, as more and more of them work from home. This causes the language issue to double, or even triple.

It's made access to financial aid all but impossible in some cases.

"Because before then, you had the language issue, but you could at least still meet people face-to-face, try to communicate that way and move around that way and bring staff that represent the community," Xiong said. "But now you can't even do that."

The ABIRC also reported cases of racial discrimination in the Valley. The problem was especially prevalent in the first wave of the virus. Profanity and racially charged graffiti has been found on cars and the walls of stores in the Southeast Asian businesses. However, Blong Xiong said this has died down greatly with recent events regarding race relations.

Others, like Vang, said the local community, which has treated them as equals, has supported them.

Jim Vang prepares a to-go order at Wayside Noodle in Fresno's Figarden District. Southeast Asian American-owned businesses have been hit hard by Covid-19, often facing language barriers that add onto their problems.

"I can see that going on around the world, but then here specifically, we did not get that much discrimination," Vang said. "We're just human beings and so they just saw us as human beings rather than someone carrying a virus."

And while, the situation is hard, people like Blong Xiong and businesses like Wayside are determined to keep fighting.

"It's like when you go to court. It's a different language. You don't speak 'Legalese' in your normal, day-to-day life."

Blong Xiong

Young NAACP leadership inspires the community

STORY BY BREANNA HARDY

George Floyd's murder ignited a nationwide cry for justice, sparking protests in cities nationwide. Fresno's protest on May 31 was organized by some of the city's youngest advocates: Fresno State's NAACP chapter.

NAACP's mission encompasses fighting for equality and eliminating race-based discrimination. It is the nation's oldest civil rights organization. At Fresno State, NAACP's work focuses on a themed social issue. Since it's an election year, the fall semester will largely focus on civic engagement and voter empowerment.

D'Aungillique Jackson, president of NAACP chapter at Fresno State, referenced the difficulty of finding and keeping young black members.

The chapter was established in 2012, but didn't last.

"When you just look at the demographics and how spread out we are, especially on college campuses, it is very, very hard for us to keep membership and to keep our units alive," Jackson said.

She said that most NAACP units, especially at the collegiate level in California, actually have less than a two-year lifespan.

The chapter is the largest on the West Coast with just 58 members, highlighting both the driven nature of Jackson and her team, and the need for young black members on the West Coast.

Jackson said it's hard to find people interested in social justice.

"When you take that and you try to narrow it down to young black people who are interested in doing this work, it's very hard," Jackson said.

Fresno State's NAACP chapter started its reactivation process in 2017, and after the rigorous process, it was approved in February 2020.

Soon after, the world would head into a global pandemic, and George Floyd's murder would ignite local cries for justice.

"We actually planned the protest in less than 48 hours," Jackson said.

Jackson said that she and other NAACP members wanted to spearhead the Black Lives Matter movement in Fresno after seeing multiple white people attempt to lead protests. She emphasized the importance of white allies allowing Black people to lead justice movements.

"We didn't expect over 3,000 people to show up, I can tell you that much; I think us doing our best, I anticipated maybe 300 people," Jackson said.

Desirae Washington, owner of Take 3 in Downtown Fresno, met the NAACP chapter at the protest, and has expressed her support ever since.

Washington said it was refreshing to have young energy leading the conversation about race and justice.

"It's always great when someone with a higher energy level than you have takes on a responsibility like this to educate our community, and to start driving conversations about the change that needs to happen in our city," Washington said.

She noted their ability to set intentions and make their goals clear. It allowed for the city to come together under their leadership.

Ashley Rojas, executive director of Fresno Barrios Unidos, said that the protest was a display of turning grief into action.

Fresno Barrios Unidos quickly established a relationship with NAACP, especially when it came to the Black Lives Matter protest in Downtown Fresno.

"It was a really brilliant display of young people taking leadership, not waiting to be invited, but instead just owning their power and really mobilizing a community," Rojas said.

She stressed the importance of allowing young people to lead, and investing in black leadership that is fighting for change in the community.

She said that Generation Z is challenging the status quo and society's sense of normalcy, and they deserve to be at the forefront of bettering the future.

"I firmly believe that young people will not only lead our movements, but heal our communities," Rojas said.

The Fresno State NAACP's work is not limited to one single demonstration downtown; it is a constant work to effect change in our city.

"Ultimately I believe organizations are about change, and even in leadership I don't think that things should stay stagnant," Jackson said.

> "It was a really brilliant display of young people taking leadership, not waiting to be invited, but instead just owning their power and really mobilizing a community."
>
> Ashley Rojas

BLACK EXODUS | **FROM 13**

In adopted hometowns, Black Californians face newer, subtler forms of segregation. Old regimes of legal housing and job discrimination have given way to predatory loans, shifting patterns of disinvestment and flare ups of racism or violence in areas that once promised a level playing field, reports from UC Berkeley, UCLA and social services groups have found.

Now, as Black Lives Matter protests collide with anxiety about COVID-19's disproportionate Black death toll and anxiety about a coming wave of evictions, at issue is whether these overlapping crises will accelerate California's Black exodus or force a reckoning both inside and outside major cities.

HOMECOMING

Wilson had never been to Elk Grove before she moved there in 2002 to start a family. She'd never been called the n-word before she moved there, either.

By 2017, after years of working a day job in sales and doing hair late into the night, her own salon in Old Town Elk Grove was thriving. She went back to L.A. often to dream up business ideas with her sister and make sure her kids weren't too far "out of the loop" on Black culture. But one day, a stylist at Wilson's salon found a note jammed in the door. It was riddled with racial slurs and said to "get out soon."

"It didn't make me want to leave," Wilson said. "It made me want to force them to understand who I am, what I'm about, and that I add value to this community just like everybody else."

In 2000, just before Wilson left L.A., California had the country's second-largest Black population at more than 2.2 million people. But under the surface, a seismic shift was happening in where people lived, the opportunities they chased and the social networks they relied on.

After white flight, Black flight had accelerated in the 1980s. Outer suburbs like Palmdale, Antioch and Elk Grove saw exponential growth.

The state went from a high of 7.7% Black in 1980 to 5.5% Black in 2018, Census data shows, even as it added 15 million residents who were mostly Latino, Asian or multi-racial. Nearly 75,000 Black Californians left the state in 2018, according to a CalMatters analysis of federal estimates, compared to 48,000 Black people who moved in. The three most popular states for Black ex-Californians were Nevada, Texas and Georgia, reflecting both a national reversal of last century's Great Migration and movement to emerging middle class hubs for Black homeownership, education and entrepreneurship.

Photo by Anne Wernikoff for CalMatters | Sharie Wilson in the kitchen of her remodeled Elk Grove home on June 22, 2020. Wilson says that when they bought the home it was the 'worst on the block' but was able to turn it into a space that she's proud of.

SOUTHERN LIVING

The first time Cierra Washington-Griffin left California was in 2010, when she was 23 and fresh off a breakup. Three days on a Greyhound from her hometown of Sacramento to Fort Benning, Georgia, gave her plenty of time to think about starting over.

Within a month, she had a car, a job at a hotel and a two-bedroom duplex that cost $450 a month — a rapid shift to financial independence that had seemed impossible back home. She also didn't have to change her voice to "sound white" like when she applied for work in affluent California suburbs. "It was just so much simpler there," said Washington-Griffin, now 33.

Her grandmother was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, and she sees things differently. Barbara Washington followed family from St. Louis to California in the 1970s, at the tail end of the migration that brought hundreds of

thousands of Black people to California from the South. Washington settled in Richmond, part of the Bay Area's jobs-rich former "war corridor," a center of Black life forged by discriminatory housing practices.

Washington worked as a nurse, and by the time her children were having children in the '80s, the Bay Area seemed too fast. They moved to the "cow town" of Sacramento, and she never regretted moving to California.

"We wanted something different for the kids," Washington said on a recent 100-degree day at a park in Elk Grove, where she moved after the house she rented in Sacramento was sold.

"See, that's weird though," said Washington-Griffin, who moved back in last year with plans to leave again but now is unsure. "I feel like it's better out there, especially for people of color, in the South."

Her grandmother shook her head. "I don't think so," she said.

RACIAL WEALTH GAP GROWS

Timing is everything in California's winner-take-most economy. The longer it takes Black residents to cash in when times are good and the harder they're hit when things turn bad, the wider the state's racial wealth gap grows.

In Los Angeles, white households have a median net worth of $355,000, compared to $4,000 for Black households, according to an analysis by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. Studies in the Bay Area have shown that homes are twice as valuable in white neighborhoods.

For those who move in hopes of changing those daunting numbers, the challenge today is finding a "window of opportunity," said Deirdre Pfeiffer, an associate professor of geography and urban planning at Arizona State University. Her research found that some L.A. transplants to the Inland Empire did find upward mobility in the '80s and '90s. But it's been difficult to maintain because of a slowdown in building and patterns like a racial "tipping point" in suburban real estate, where white residents tend to flee as areas diversify. From there, in some cases, property values sink, tax rolls shrivel and public services like schools start to decline.

Even for many Black Californians who did manage to buy property, the financial crisis a decade ago was crushing. Cities where Black families bought houses in large numbers became epicenters of the foreclosure crisis. Antioch's foreclosure rate of 2,446 per 100,000 residents was "hundreds of times higher than most of Silicon Valley" about an hour away, Alex Schafran wrote in his 2018 book "The Road to Resegregation: Northern California and the Failure of Politics."

After the Fair Housing Act outlawed redlining and other legal forms of housing discrimination 50 years ago, author Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor writes that they were replaced by a system of "predatory inclusion," where Black residents were targeted for bad loans and higher interest rates on properties less likely to sharply appreciate. Homeownership became even more elusive after the last crash, when investors bought up thousands of houses and turned them into rentals.

'RUBBER-BAND STATE'

LaShai Daniels didn't know how much to worry about real estate if she wanted to stay close to home. Last fall, the 48-year-old Oakland native lost her job and had to leave her apartment in Vallejo. She lived in her car and sometimes stayed with friends — "a rubber-band state" between housed and unhoused.

"I never knew that you could take your IRA and buy property with it," said Daniels, who has worked in medical billing and payroll for more than two decades. "If no one educates you, you don't know these things."

Though Black people make up less than 6% of California's total population, about 40% of the state's homeless residents are Black. Increasing death rates and shorter life expectancies were growing concerns even before COVID-19.

Just before the virus hit this spring, Daniels decided to do whatever it took to get a hotel. She spent days working a new job in payroll and nights at an extended-stay hotel in Emeryville. It cost $3,200 the first month, but it didn't require applications and credit checks like an apartment. She's now an organizer with Black-led activist group Moms 4 Housing, which has helped pay hotel bills during the pandemic. One day, Daniels hopes to open a shelter in the name of her son, who was killed at 17 by a 15-year-old with a gun.

"You don't know where you can go and be safe," Daniels said. "It's just sad now that we've come so far to still be in the same place."

STAY OR GO?

Derek King knew he had to leave Compton when the gunfire stopped scaring him. It was 1985, and he was 15 hanging out with friends when someone started shooting into a house next door.

"We just took a step away and kept talking about Magic Johnson and the Lakers," said King, now a 50-year-old father of four.

His ticket out came when he joined the military in 1993, just after the cops indicted for beating Rodney King were acquitted. He settled in Apple Valley and now serves as assistant superintendent of a charter school. The desert communities that make up Victor Valley have their issues — it's been tense lately, and none of the politicians look like him — but King mostly found what he was looking for in a sprawling home with a tennis court, a pool and clear views of the surrounding hills.

Tensions are high after the late May death of Malcolm Harsch, 38, who was found hanging from a tree near a Victorville library. Protests broke out, and the state opened an investigation into the case and another hanging death of a 24-year-old Black man in Palmdale. Harsch's family later said he died by suicide.

Photo by Nigel Duara for CalMatters | Derek King, 50, moved to Apple Valley from Compton after serving eight years in the U.S. Army. King says the high desert has its own variety of racial issues, but knew he wanted his children to have a different childhood than his experience in South Central LA.

Victorville's Black population has quadrupled since 1990, but it's emblematic of many fast-growing exurbs where local institutions don't keep up with a changing population. Most of the big Black-led social service providers and political advocacy groups are still back in the city.

In L.A. Council District 8, which encompasses Crenshaw, Leimert Park and Baldwin Hills, a 2018 survey aimed to decipher a 42% drop in the area's Black population in recent years. UCLA Lecturer Kenya Covington led the survey of more than 250 people and found that 30% didn't expect to be living there in another five years.

"We're probably not going to see that trend slow," Covington said. "It's probably going to intensify."

If history holds true, many transplants will follow a path a lot like the one Kinaya Anderson took from Carson to the high desert outside Victorville, where she works for a nonprofit. She left in 2000 to get away from gang violence and made a stop in Sacramento to work for the state, which she alleged in a lawsuit was marred by racial discrimination.

Though Anderson knows now that "no place is perfect," one relic from South Central — since rebranded as South L.A. — helps reassure her decision. It's a photo of her son at age 13 with three other boys. Within four years, one was killed by gang violence, the other two incarcerated for retaliating.

One of the two men still calls her from jail, a haunting question usually on his mind: Would things have been different if he left, too?

Lauren covers the state economy for CalMatters, with a focus on jobs and business regulation. Nigel Duara and Matt Levin contributed to this story.

SOCIALIZE WITH US

Join our conversation on social media and become an integral part of the news process. Talk to us, pitch us story ideas, tell us what we've missed and tell us what you think.

@TBJFRESNO

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL
FRESNO | KINGS | MADERA | TULARE
www.thebusinessjournal.com

Like, Tweet, Share, Tag, Follow

m³CUBED TECHNOLOGIES

MONITOR-MAINTAIN-MANAGE

WE STAY **VIGILANT** SO YOU CAN STAY **CONNECTED.**

From everyday technology management, server maintenance and data backup to complex security solutions, we've got your business covered. At M Cubed Technologies, we support clients in 25 different states and 3 countries. We have offices in Fresno, CA and Lawrence, KS with 365-day support, 24/7 emergency help and service specially tailored to your business needs.

- FULL SERVICE IT
- FIREWALL / SPAM FILTERING
- BACKUP SOLUTIONS CONSULTATION
- HOSTED SERVERS
- TECHNOLOGY SALES
- CONSULTATION
- DATA/SERVER BACKUP
- SERVER MAINTENANCE
- CYBER SECURITY CONSULTATION

MCUBEDTECHNOLOGIES.COM • 559.512.0610