

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY RACIAL JUSTICE

AT THE FRONTLINES



LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHO WE ARE & HOW WE MEET THIS MOMENT

The African American Policy Forum (AAPF) stands at a critical crossroads in the fight for democratic inclusion. For nearly three decades, we have served as an unparalleled intersectional think tank, tracking and uplifting threats to racial and gender justice in real time, while constructing the analytical frameworks and organizing infrastructure needed to defend our multiracial democracy.

Leveraging our unique foundation—rooted in rigorous research, deepened by strategic partnerships with movement builders, and informed by ongoing engagement with notable leading thought leaders—we were uniquely positioned this year to drive meaningful change. Operating as both scholars and organizers, truth-tellers and bridge-builders, we successfully created a dynamic space where the analytical power of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality was translated directly into real-world strategies for social change.

Throughout the year, we delivered:

- **An essential hub of activity** to document and respond to myriad attacks on Black women.
- **Critical talking points, race-forward messaging and polling insights** that coordinated the movement's narrative strategy.
- **Timely, evidence-based reports** that shaped public discourse and policy debates.
- **Accessible tools and public education materials** developed from complex academic frameworks to facilitate coordinated action.
- **Virtual and in-person learning opportunities**, providing a critical on-ramp for thousands of constituents eager to engage.
- **Trusted, dynamic spaces** for leaders across sectors to learn from one another and strategize **collective resistance to defend our democracy**.

This year has further emphasized the critical importance of AAPF's unique positioning at the intersection of legal scholarship, grassroots organizing, cultural work, and youth leadership development. Our ability to convene diverse stakeholders—from legal advocates to artists, educators to community activists, established scholars to young researchers, the #SayHerName Mothers Network to movement leaders—proved essential for mounting effective resistance to coordinated attacks on democracy. In a moment when the very idea of multiracial democracy faces existential threats from the highest levels of government, AAPF has demonstrated that combining rigorous intersectional analysis, bold cultural intervention, strategic coalition-building, sustained remembrance, attention to wellness, and investment in youth leadership all together creates the foundation for effective and sustained resistance.

On behalf of AAPF,
Kimberlé Crenshaw



OUR WORK THIS YEAR

This past year, we witnessed unprecedented assaults on civil rights infrastructure, Black history, and the very foundations of democratic participation. Where others saw overwhelming chaos, we saw an urgent call to action, and we mobilized our coalition infrastructure while maintaining our commitment to rigorous education, cultural intervention, and youth leadership development. We are proud to have hosted over 20 events that attracted over 11,000+ attendees. As this year closes, we remain steadfast at the frontlines of racial justice to defend our democracy.



Developing Critical Frameworks of Analysis and Race-Forward Messaging



Centering Black Women's Lives and Leadership

Providing Onramps to Activation



Building Resistance Networks and Strategic Alliances

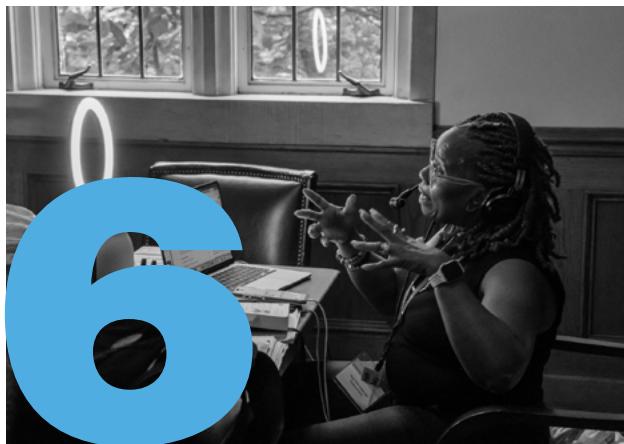




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Blending Culture, Art, and Politics through Artivism

Engaging a multi-modal approach to drive awareness across platforms



Developing the Next Generation of Leadership



Conclusion: Key Lessons and Looking Forward



Media highlights

CENTERING BLACK WOMEN'S LIVES & LEADERSHIP

Throughout 2025, AAPF sustained a space for centering Black women's experiences, leadership, and humanity in the face of illiberal backlash and threats to democracy often marginalize questions of racial and gender justice.

#SayHerName Campaign: This campaign provides analytical frameworks to understand the ways in which Black women's, girls', and femmes' lives are taken by state-sanctioned police violence. It has also created spaces and communities focused on remembrance and advocacy.

- ▶ **#SayHerName Book Tour:** This summer tour commemorated a decade of resisting Black women's invisibility in conversations about police violence. We conducted panels in New Orleans, Martha's Vineyard, and Atlanta featuring Professor Crenshaw, select actors reading family testimonies, and our signature call-and-response ritual honoring over 50 girls, women, and femmes killed by law enforcement. Audiences participated in speaking names, pouring water libations, and placing name cards into small plant jars hand-assembled by AAPF staff—all to create powerful communal acts of remembrance and resistance.
- ▶ **Freedom to Play Wellness Day with the SHN Mothers Network:** This event highlighted the importance of wellness, joy, play, and community for Black women (especially those in grief) while affirming that Black women's joy is resistance itself. The inaugural Freedom to Play Wellness Day, launched in New York City

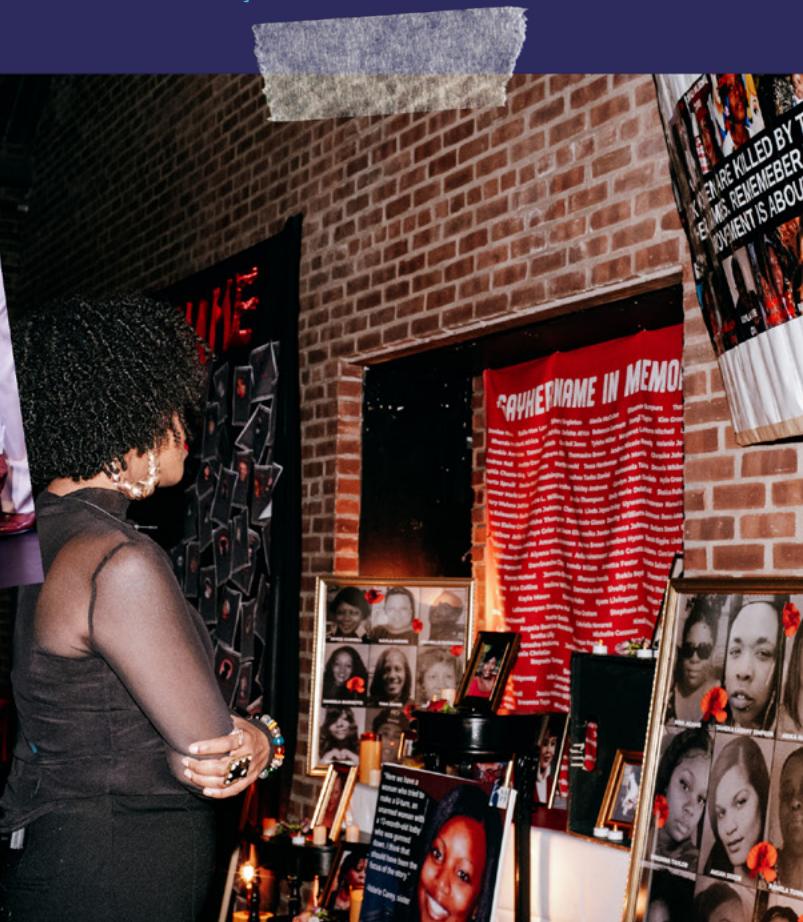


this past October, taught us that attending to the holistic wellbeing of those engaged in struggle (and carrying the weight of grief) is not a luxury but a necessity.

- ▶ **11th Anniversary #SayHerName Performance of #SayHerName: The Lives That Should Have Been** debuted at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, CA. Written by **Kimberlé Crenshaw, Julia Sharpe-Levine, a.k.payne** and **G'Ra Asim**, the play invites us to reimagine the lives of Black women, girls and femmes in an alternative realm in which their deaths never happened. This year, AAPF and the Foundation for Systemic Change hosted an anniversary staged reading in December. With opening remarks from **New York Attorney General Letitia James**, this year's reading featured a star-studded cast in-



cluding emcee and two-time Tony Award-winning actor, **Kara Young**, **Jon Michael Hill** (Tony Award nominee, *Purpose*), **Qween Jean** (Designer: *Liberation*, *Cats: The Jellicle Ball*, *Oh Happy Day*, *Saturday Church*), **DeWanda Wise** (*Furlough's Paradise*, *Love, Brooklyn*), **Tonya Pinkins** (*Caroline, or, Change*, Tony Award winner for *Jelly's Last Jam*), and **Moses Ingram** (*Sunset Baby*, *The Queen's Gambit*), among many others. This special performance was directed by **Awoye Timpo** and was followed by a powerful conversation between Kimberlé Crenshaw and four of the featured mothers in the play: **Gina Best**, mother of India Kager; **Rhanda Dormeus**, mother of Korryn Gaines; **Frances Garrett**, mother of Michelle Cusseaux; and **Sharon Wilkerson**, mother of Shelly Frey. We also were honored to be joined by Mothers **Valarie Carey**, sister of Miriam Carey, **Ashley Carr**, sister of Atatiana Jefferson, **Tamika Palmer**, mother of Breonna Taylor and **Debra Shirley**, mother of Michelle Shirley.





DEVELOPING CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS OF ANALYSIS & RACE-FORWARD MESSAGING

The coordinated attacks on Critical Race Theory and Intersectional frameworks, which reveal how systems of oppression are connected, confirmed that those invested in maintaining oppression understand that such analyses threaten their power. The fact that they remain under sustained attack validates their power and importance—and deepens our commitment to advancing race and gender-forward frameworks across all our work, from our podcast programming to our in-person teach-ins.

- Our latest research, [Anti-Blackness is the Point](#), cuts through the noise to show how **anti-Blackness** and **misogynoir** are vehicles for our alarming political slide. This report demonstrates our commitment to proffer accurate and cutting-edge analyses of the structural components and implications of our wider political landscape. At AAPF, we recognize that it is only through proper diagnoses that a counter-assault can be effectively mounted. In addition to an Under the Blacklight event featuring Tim Wise, Eddie Glaude, and Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor in conversation with Kimberlé Crenshaw, AAPF also provided briefings on the report together with [talking points and other resources](#) to partner organizations, including the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the National Urban League.
- The **Executive Disorder Project**, launched immediately after the inauguration, featured explainer videos with world-renowned scholars

on authoritarianism, race, and democratic backsliding. This video series accumulated 300,000+ views, reaching audiences desiring accessible frameworks for understanding civil rights assaults. By making complex analysis accessible, we successfully injected AAPF's frameworks concerning the centrality of gendered and racial injustice into mainstream conversations about threats to American democracy.

- Our **Egregious Acts** series of infographics juxtaposed extreme examples of anti-Blackness with corresponding actions promoting white supremacy to highlight the ways that anti-Blackness is fueling the multifront assault on democracy. The infographics focused on four sites: the first sixty days of the Trump regime's executive orders and federal agency actions; attacks on Black history and memory; the assault on higher education; and perpetuation of state violence against Black women and girls.

Egregious Acts of Anti-Blackness and White Supremacy in the First 60 Days: https://bit.ly/First-60Days_EgregiousActs

Egregious Erasures of Truth and History: <https://bit.ly/EgregiousErasures>

Egregious Acts of Anti-Blackness and Media Complicity in the Assault on Higher Ed: http://bit.ly/EgregiousActions_HigherEd

Egregious Acts of Police Violence and Public Silence: #SayHerName Updates

PROVIDING ONRAMPS TO ACTIVATION

In these politically charged times—especially as institutions falter—we create a vital, uncompromised space for open debate. We convene respected scholars and advocates to offer nuanced conversations built on historical context and legal analysis.

➤ Through our **Under the Blacklight** series, we've engaged over 150,000 live attendees across five years in accessible conversations examining the vital connection between intersectional justice and democracy. Through multiple distribution channels, we placed critical frameworks into mainstream conversations, accumulating nearly six million views across our various digital platforms in the 11 months, reaching audiences hungry for accessible analysis of civil rights threats. We invite everyone to join the **conversation on the future of civil rights and multiracial democracy**.



➤ **AAPF x AGs on the Road:** New Orleans & Martha's Vineyard, MA. We were proud to curate a series with several Attorneys General on how states can leverage the law in defense of civil rights and democracy. Beginning in July at Netroots Nation in New Orleans, AAPF convened a keynote panel entitled **"Preemptive Alliances: Attorneys General in Defense of Democracy,"** featuring California Attorney General Rob Bonta, Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, and New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin. In August, we filled the historic Union Chapel at Martha's Vineyard with more than 350 attendees who came to witness the fighting spirit of five Black attorneys general from across the nation. **Under the Blacklight Live, "Preemptive Alliances: Black Attorneys General On The Frontlines For Civil Rights"** featured Attorneys General Andrea Joy Campbell of Massachusetts, Keith Ellison of Minnesota, Aaron Ford of Nevada, Letitia James of New York, and Nick Brown of Washington how they are using state power to counter the erosion of civil rights, state autonomy, and racial justice under the current administration.

➤ Also, in Martha's Vineyard, more than 100 attendees joined us in person and more than 2,500 online for ["Beyond Dog Whistles: How Anti-Blackness Is Destroying Our Democracy and What We Must Do To Resist,"](#) (with an accompanying [infographic](#)) co-sponsored with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). Kimberlé Crenshaw moderated a conversation between ASALH President **Kaye Wise Whitehead** and three distinguished panelists: **Melanie Campbell**, President & CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP) and Convener of Black Women's Roundtable; **Lisa M. Coleman**, President of Adler University; and **Evelynn Hammonds**, Harvard Professor of the History of Science and of African and African American Studies. The panel explored the role of anti-Blackness in fueling the assault on our democracy through attacks on history and memory, higher education, scientific consensus about what race is and isn't, and voting rights.

➤ **Future of Civil Rights & Democracy lecture series:** AAPF and the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS) at Columbia Law School convened two installments of this series this fall, which invited leading thinkers, policy makers and activists from inside and outside of the law to consider the key questions behind the erosion of our civil rights infrastructure and the authoritarian turn in our democracy.



➤ The following sessions were moderated by AAPF Executive Director, **Kimberlé Crenshaw:** **Why Authoritarians Fear Education** (featuring **Jason Stanley** and **Randi Weingarten**), and **Why Authoritarians Fear Democracy** (featuring **Carol Anderson**, **Nancy MacLean** and **Janai Nelson**): These towering figures in philosophy, history, education, and the law discussed the methods and strategies authoritarians use to assault historical memory, stoke fears of racial "others," reverse critical victories on the road to equality (such as the Voting Rights Act), and soften up the public's resistance to fascism. The events were well attended by Columbia University students and faculty, providing this community—currently besieged by the Trump regime's backlash to higher education—an opportunity to assess and better understand the threat facing America.



BUILDING RESISTANCE NETWORKS & STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

We actively construct infrastructures of resistance. Our **Democracy Defenders Strategic Convenings** bring together thought leaders, racial justice and democracy organizations, unions, and key stakeholders. We **bridge artificial divides**, co-create shared understanding, and develop clear strategic priorities to preserve multiracial democracy.

- When the administration targeted the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), we rapidly organized the [Freedom to Learn National Week of Action](#)—convening over 50 partner organization, 2,000+ online participants while 300+ marched through DC, encircling the National Museum of African American History and Culture in a powerful #HandsOffOurHistory rally that generated significant media coverage. A [video](#) and [infographic](#) sounded the alarm about the white nationalist aims of the assault on truth, history, and memory. We built momentum throughout the week to culminate in a powerful May 3rd demonstration in Washington, D.C., where hundreds publicly declared their commitment to protecting Black history and defending democracy
- Our **Freedom to Learn Strategic Convening** united key stakeholders from civil rights, human rights, philanthropy, and pro-democracy organizations to engage with leading scholars of race and democracy and strategize responses to illiberal assaults on democracy. This New York City gathering bridged artificial organizational divides, co-created shared understanding through dialogue as well as an impactful [video](#) and [infographic](#), and developed clear strategic priorities for preserving multiracial democracy.
- Building on this momentum, we partnered with Tennessee state representative Justin Jones for our second annual **Democracy Defenders Summer Seminar and Summit** in Nashville, TN. Over five energetic days of learning and community building in July, we brought together activists, educators, scholars, and advocates to explore urgent topics such as the current threats to American democracy, the historical ties between fascism and anti-Blackness, and the strategies necessary to combat these regressive movements. Combining scholarship with strategic learning and skill building, participants came out of the Summit with new tools and renewed optimism about the possibilities for resisting authoritarianism and white supremacy in America. [The Democracy Defender](#) [password: Newsroom!] was our on-the-ground news platform featuring content produced by our very own talented and diverse cast of students, scholars, and activists.

BLENDING CULTURE ART & POLITICS THROUGH ARTIVISM





AAPF maintains our strategic presence at premier cultural venues like the **Sundance Film Festival**, **South by Southwest** and the **ESSENCE Festival of Culture** because we know that cultural change precedes and sustains political change.

- For the fifth consecutive year, we presented **The Story of Us** at Sundance with a panel discussion featuring leading activists and artists. Acknowledging that cinematic storytelling shapes how most Americans think about the nation—from The Birth of a Nation’s glorification of the KKK to the blacklisting of artists who challenged power—we resurrected the histories of insurgent storytellers who have attempted to tell a more inclusive story of America. **The Story of Us Dispatch**, a multimedia guide to the history behind the readings, with videos of the live performances, won an Anthem Award for Education, Art & Culture Platform, validating our approach to cultural intervention.
- Later in the summer, we unveiled a new iteration of The Story of Us during our seminar in Nashville. Dubbed “**The Sounds of Us**,” this event, hosted at the National Museum of African American Music illuminated the often unacknowledged Black roots of country, folk, and other roots music. Our panel discussion—including insights from musicians and historians **Jake Blount**, **Amythyst Kiah**, and **Amanda Ewing**—addressed how the erasure of these critical Black contributions deepens social, political, and racial division, ultimately contributing to the coordinated anti-woke backlash gripping the nation. We also took time to honor the extraordinary contributions of four legendary Nashville civil rights activists and Freedom Riders whose work has profoundly shaped our nation.

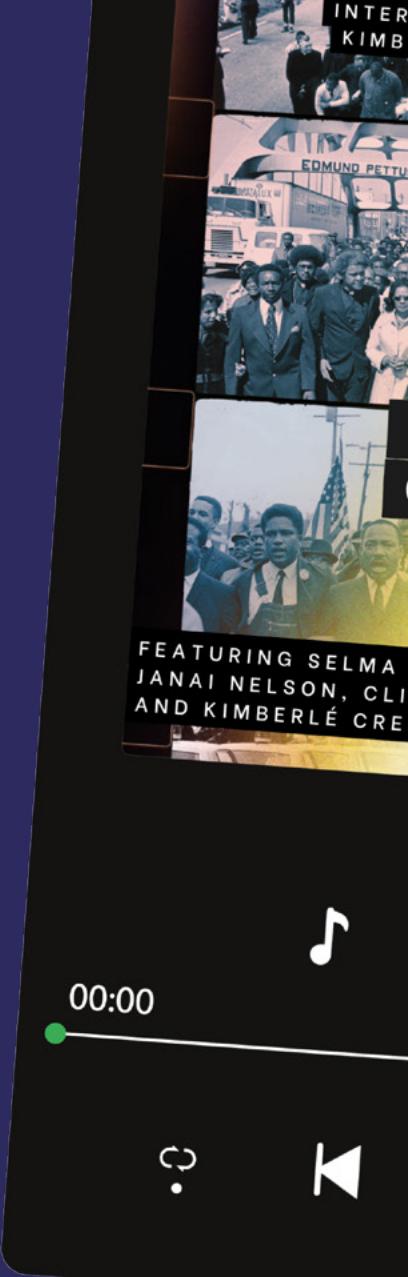


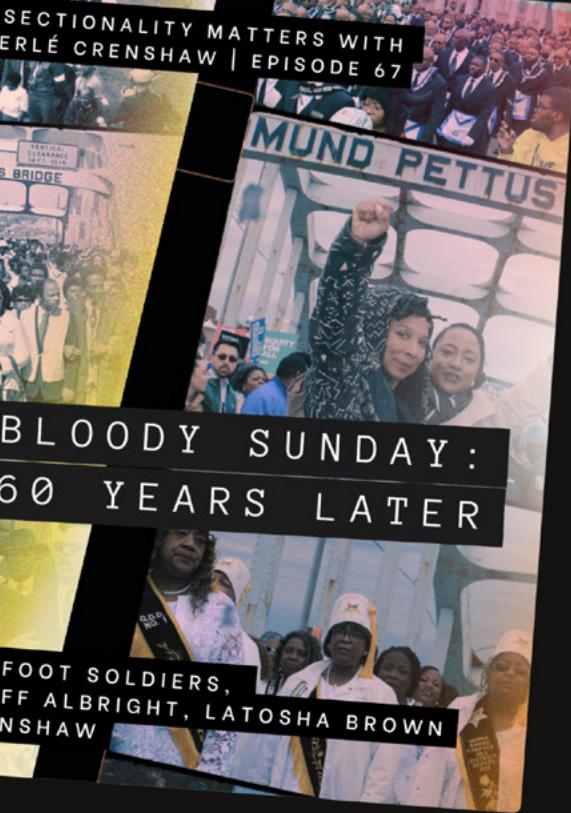
ENGAGING A MULTI-MODAL APPROACH TO DRIVE AWARENESS ACROSS PLATFORMS

Through underground radio shows across the country, award-winning podcast *Intersectionality Matters!*, and a variety of short and long-form videos, AAPF has maintained a diversified online presence, connecting with a wide array of listeners across the digital landscape.

► The *Intersectionality Matters!* podcast remains in the top 1% of podcasts in 2025, with over 140,000 downloads this year alone. Combining pop culture coverage with urgent conversations about the role of anti-blackness and misogynoir in dismantling American democracy, the show provides rigorous analysis in an accessible, everyday media format. This year's episode "**Bloody Sunday, 60 Years Later**" won Silver at the Anthem Awards in the category of Human & Civil Rights Journalism, validating our approach of democratizing critical scholarship to help audiences understand contemporary threats to democracy. The team also launched "**United States of Amnesia: The Real Histories of Critical Race Theory**," a new series debunking the myths about CRT and DEI that have dominated mainstream media headlines.

► The **2025 Liberation Calendar** offered an intentional Black History Month daily practice designed to build resilience by reflecting on and reclaiming our history. Through daily emails, social media posts, and a downloadable Google calendar, participants engaged with content aligned with themes such as Resisting, Imagining, and Rejoicing. Liberation Calendar highlighted the on-going fight for Black history, Black-authored books, and Black knowledge in defense of the freedom to learn and our civil rights legacy.





United States of Amnesia





DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERSHIP

- Since our pathbreaking report **Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected** sparked a national conversation about the punitive disciplinary policies that negatively impact Black girls in our nation's schools, our **Black Girls Matter** initiatives have cultivated a crucial organizing space for critical conversations about Black women, girls', and femmes' experiences in school, work, and beyond through intersectional advocacy and community-driven programming. As part of this initiative, the Young Scholars Program and Her Dream Deferred served to provide the tools for the incoming generation of scholars, activists, and leaders.
- In its fifth year, the **Young Scholars Program** welcomed a new cohort for a four-week multi-phased research and leadership opportunity organizing young Black women and girls to develop research and policy analysis skills. Fifteen participants—our second largest cohort of 12 young scholars and 3 ambassadors—worked alongside AAPF researchers to develop multidisciplinary, intersectional approaches to assessing various dimensions of the lives of Black girls, women, and femmes. Year-long programming sought to develop networks of peer support while preparing scholars to serve as the next generation of civic leaders. This year's projects focused on a number of societal impacts in their communities, algorithmic bias in AI, period poverty, and spiritual reclamation.
- **Her Dream Deferred:** The Young Scholars Program continued its leadership summit for the second year during Her Dream Deferred 2025. In collaboration with Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy, the Young Scholars presented a panel to high school students on college readiness, community care, and the importance of culturally-informed research and academia.
- Our **Democracy Defenders Fellows** program brought together 17 students and youth advocates to deepen their understanding of the multifrontal assault on democracy, voting rights, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies. At the end of the Seminar and Summit, the fellows reinvigorated their passion for on-campus activism, with many laying the groundwork for a mutual aid and banned book drive initiatives to combat misinformation and promote access to education within their local communities.
- AAPF's **Summer Fellowship Program** is a leadership development opportunity committed to providing meaningful research and advocacy experience to dedicated individuals. Fellows were assigned to specific campaigns and initiatives most aligned with their academic background, interests and professional experiences. AAPF project leads and team members mentored and advised fellows on various projects.

CONCLUSION KEY LESSONS & LOOKING FORWARD

As Dr. King reminded organizers during the Civil Rights Movement, we must remain calm while standing up for what we know is right. AAPF has proven that we can meet urgent crises while building for the long term. The attacks we are facing are sophisticated and comprehensive—targeting not just policies but history, culture, education, sites of memory, and the very frameworks we use to understand injustice—and AAPF has been on the frontlines to ensure that the left-wing response is as equally robust.

The broader war on Black history, Black frameworks, and Black bodies represent authoritarian attempts to control the past in order to control the future. But as we demonstrated this year, there is a deep hunger for truth-telling, for rigorous education grounded in intersectional frameworks, for spaces of remembrance and healing, and for coordinated action in defense of our multiracial democracy. AAPF is positioned to continue this essential work as part of a long-term commitment to building the multiracial democracy we deserve.

The question is not whether this work is needed; the authoritarian backsliding makes that painfully clear. The work ahead will be challenging, but we face it with clarity about what is at stake, with proven strategies for resistance, strong partnerships across sectors and communities, and the next generation of leaders already engaged in the struggle.





THIS IS THE
WORK OF
OUR TIME
& AAPF
IS HONORED
TO BE
PART OF IT.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

In focus: National Week of Action in defense of Black history



USA TODAY

Civil rights leaders rally around National Museum of African American History



"We should be clear that these efforts are intentional. Our opponents are trying to erase Black history, Black voices and Black lives," Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, executive director of the African American Policy Forum, one of the groups leading the effort, said in an April 28 statement. "As a result, they are undermining democracy."

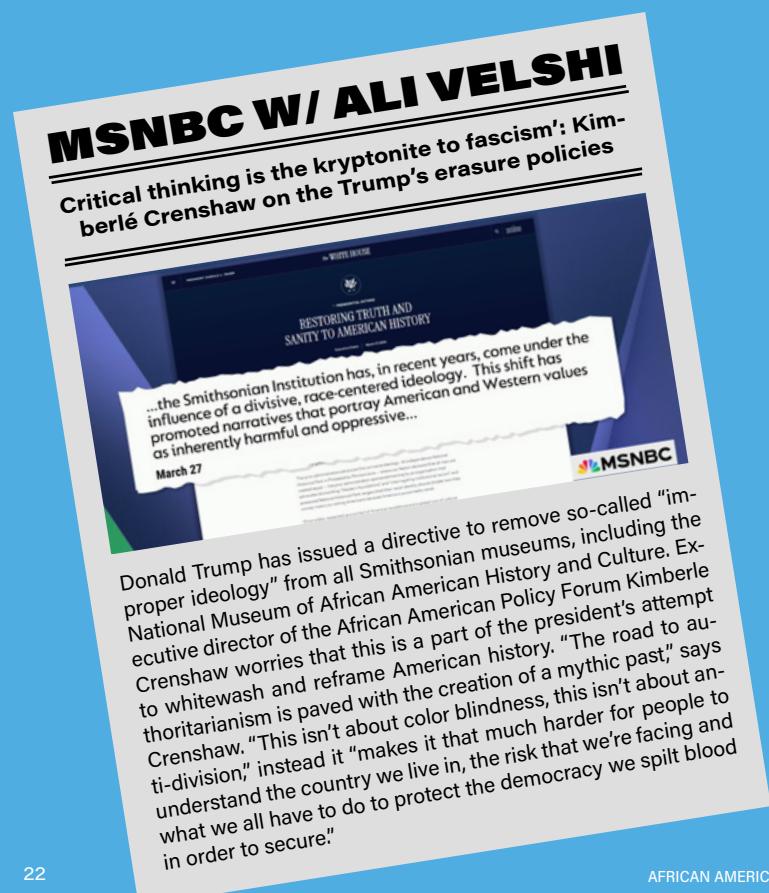


The Guardian

These activists are 'flooding the zone with Black history' to protest Trump's attacks on DEI

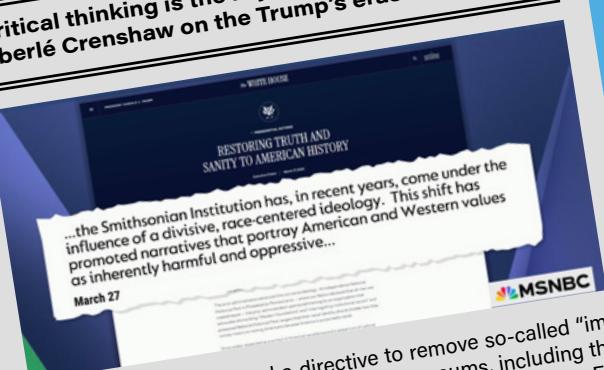


"Our goal this week has been to flood the zone, as we call it, with Black history," Crenshaw said about the campaign. "We have long understood that the attacks on ideas germinating from racial justice were not about the specific targets of each attack [but are] an effort to impose a specific narrative about the United States of America, one that marginalizes, and even erases, its more difficult chapters," she added.



MSNBC W/ ALI VELSHI

Critical thinking is the kryptonite to fascism': Kimberlé Crenshaw on the Trump's erasure policies



...the Smithsonian Institution has, in recent years, come under the influence of a divisive, race-centered ideology. This shift has promoted narratives that portray American and Western values as inherently harmful and oppressive...

March 27

Donald Trump has issued a directive to remove so-called "improper ideology" from all Smithsonian museums, including the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Executive director of the African American Policy Forum Kimberlé Crenshaw worries that this is a part of the president's attempt to whitewash and reframe American history. "The road to authoritarianism is paved with the creation of a mythic past," says Crenshaw. "This isn't about color blindness, this isn't about anti-division," instead it "makes it that much harder for people to understand the country we live in, the risk that we're facing and what we all have to do to protect the democracy we split blood in order to secure."



The New York Times

National African American Museum Faces Uncertainty Without Its Leader



"Our opponents are trying to erase Black history, Black voices and Black lives," said Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a law professor and executive director of the African American Policy Forum, who is helping to lead the effort to protect the museum.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REST OF THE YEAR

The New Republic

Anti-Blackness Isn't Part of Trump's Agenda

—It's the Very Heart of It

Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw says anti-Blackness is an essential tool in Trump's authoritarian playbook.

Time Magazine

The Battle for Our Memory Is the Battle for Our Country

Five Years Later: America Looks for a Way Forward After George Floyd

The New York Times

How the Trump Administration Might Target D.E.I. in Public Schools

A letter from the administration promised to withdraw funding from schools that allow certain D.E.I. programs. But what counts as D.E.I. may prove murky.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading Black studies and legal scholar, said the administration was reaching well beyond established legal precedents, and argued that schools should not rush to accept the administration's interpretation that civil rights law allows curriculum restrictions. She warned against what she called "anticipatory obedience — the idea we are going to give more than we are being asked to because we want to be safe."

The Guardian

Why Trump's 'anti-woke' attack on the Smithsonian matters

Joy Reid Show on AAPF's Anti-Blackness report
(We'll insert the WIRED story when it publishes, likely tomorrow)

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Time Impact Dinner Honoree

Inaugural WBUR Festival, in conversation with NYT's Jamelle Bouie

CBC Foundation's Sojourner Truth Award

National Urban League Annual Conference



