



By **John Harris Jr.**
VILLAGER Columnist

Michael Lofton: Bridging The Gap



Michael Lofton, CEO/Founder of the African American Youth Harvest Foundation & African American Youth and Family Resource Center

(VILLAGER) - Michael Lofton saw a pressing need and felt a personal commitment to serve residents in Greater Austin. His solution was the African American Youth Harvest Resource Center located at 6633 Hwy 290 East.

“Nowhere in the United States, not just Texas, can you find 25 Black non-profits under one roof like this,” said Lofton, CEO/Founder of the African American Youth Harvest Foundation & African American Youth and Family Resource Center. “Not just businesses per se, but how can we bring folks in here that will provide services to our community in the areas of mental health, substance abuse and re-entry? There are so many needs based on the institutional and structural racism that exists.”

Lofton calls it a “one-stop shop,” offering a multitude of resources to youth and families.

“How do we address systemic issues that we as Black folks

face every day without having to go to 15 different places? This is a one-stop shop holistic approach to addressing the needs of Black people,” Lofton said. “That’s who we’re focused on but anybody can walk through the door and get services. Cultural connectivity is important. You can go to Jewish centers. You can go to Asian centers. You can go to Hispanic centers. This is an African American center.”

The range of programs and services include but are not limited to: Mental health counseling; substance counseling; trauma informed care with more than 20 different training certifi-

cations; mentoring and group mentoring programs; STEM programs; home health care programming; family case management; employment and employment training; re-entry employment training and employment assistance; legal services; scholarship opportunities; summer youth employment training; youth backpack and school supply program; Thanksgiving turkey baskets to 750 families annually; financial literacy programs; youth entrepreneur programming; all family support services from City of Austin Public Health.

The African American Youth and Family Resource Center is also

a service provider for the City of Austin.

“If your lights are off, we will help you get your lights cut back on,” Lofton said. “If you’re having trouble paying your rent or mortgage, we will assist you with

that. If you need food, if you need clothes, if you need food stamps ... we have legal services. There’s nothing in this building we don’t have resources for.”

On site Non-profits include: 212 Catalysts;

African American Leadership Institute; Austin Achieve Public Schools; Austin Legal access, Austin Urban Technology Movement; Best Choice Mobile Notary; Best Men’s Health Clinic; Buddies for Senior Independence Foundation; Building Promise USA; D’Affluenza; Diakonos Ministries; Dr. Calvin Kelly & Associates; Drug Class; Gary Bledsoe Law Firm; Manor ISD; Mission Accomplished; New Hope MBC; On Point Re-entry; Peter Daniels - TherapyWorks; Re-Entry Self-Sufficiency Pilot Initiative; Saffron Trust; Serenity Wellness; State NAACP Conference; Victoria Dorsey Drewy Professional Counseling Services; Women in Jazz.

Contact the African American Youth Harvest Foundation Resource Center at (512) 428-4480 or www.aayhf.org.

Study Reveals Staggering Toll of Being Black in America: 1.6M Excess Deaths Over 22 Years

by **Liz Szabo** | KFF Health News

(KFF) - Research has long shown that Black people live sicker lives and die younger than white people.

Now a new study, published Tuesday in JAMA, casts the nation’s racial inequities in stark relief, finding that the higher mortality rate among Black Americans resulted in 1.63 million excess deaths relative to white Americans over more than two decades.

Because so many Black people die young — with many years of life ahead of them — their higher mortality rate from 1999 to 2020 resulted in a cumulative loss of more than 80 million years of life compared with the white population, the study showed.

Although the nation made progress in closing the gap between white and Black mortality rates from 1999 to 2011, that advance stalled from 2011 to 2019. In 2020, the enormous number of deaths from covid-19 — which hit Black Americans particularly hard — erased two decades of progress.

Authors of the study describe it as a call to action to improve the health of Black Americans, whose early deaths are fueled by higher rates of heart disease, cancer, and infant mortality.

“The study is hugely important for about 1.63 million reasons,” said Herman Taylor, an author of the study and director of the cardiovascular research



Angela Wyatt, daughter of Thomas Wyatt, and granddaughter of T. L. Wyatt passed away in 2021 from complications of Covid-19. She was 30 years old.

institute at the Morehouse School of Medicine.

“Real lives are being lost. Real families are missing parents and grandparents,” Taylor said. “Babies and their mothers are dying. We have been screaming this message for decades.”

High mortality rates among Black people have less to do with genetics than with the country’s long history of discrimination, which has undermined educational, housing, and job opportunities for generations of Black people, said Clyde Yancy, an author of the study and chief of cardiology at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine.

Black neighborhoods that were redlined in the 1930s — designated too “high risk” for mortgages and other investments — remain poorer and sicker today, Yancy said. For-

merly redlined ZIP codes also had higher rates of covid infection and death. “It’s very clear that we have an uneven distribution of health,” Yancy said. “We’re talking about the freedom to be healthy.”

A companion study estimates that racial and ethnic inequities cost the U.S. at least \$421 billion in 2018, based on medical expenses, lost productivity, and premature death.

In 2021, non-Hispanic white Americans had a life expectancy at birth of 76 years, while non-Hispanic Black Americans could expect to live only to 71. Much of that disparity is explained by the fact that non-Hispanic Black newborns are 2½ times as likely to die before their 1st birthdays as non-Hispanic whites. Non-Hispanic Black mothers are more than 3 times as likely as non-Hispanic

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