



CIVIL RIGHTS & DISABILITY RIGHTS

**A CELEBRATION OF
INTERSECTIONALITY**



**Disability
Rights**
Michigan



**YOU MUST NEVER
BE FEARFUL ABOUT
WHAT YOU ARE DOING
WHEN IT IS RIGHT.**

Rosa Parks, First Lady of Civil Rights

Learn how the intersection of race and disability has impacted the fight for civil, Disability, and human rights.

Take a journey through history. Learn about the intersection of racial and disability rights and what it means for equity and justice today.



BY DISABILITY RIGHTS MICHIGAN



Harriet Tubman (born Araminta Ross) was born into slavery. Although it is presumed to have been around 1822, enslavers did not keep birth records of enslaved people, so the exact year of Harriet Tubman's birth is unknown.

You've probably heard about Harriet Tubman because she escaped slavery in the south and returned several times to help others flee it via the infamous Underground Railroad. You may not have heard that, as a teen, she developed a form of epilepsy. This disability manifested because an enslaver threw a two-pound metal weight at another enslaved person trying to escape, hitting her in the head with it instead. The resulting injury made her prone to frequent headaches and seizures.

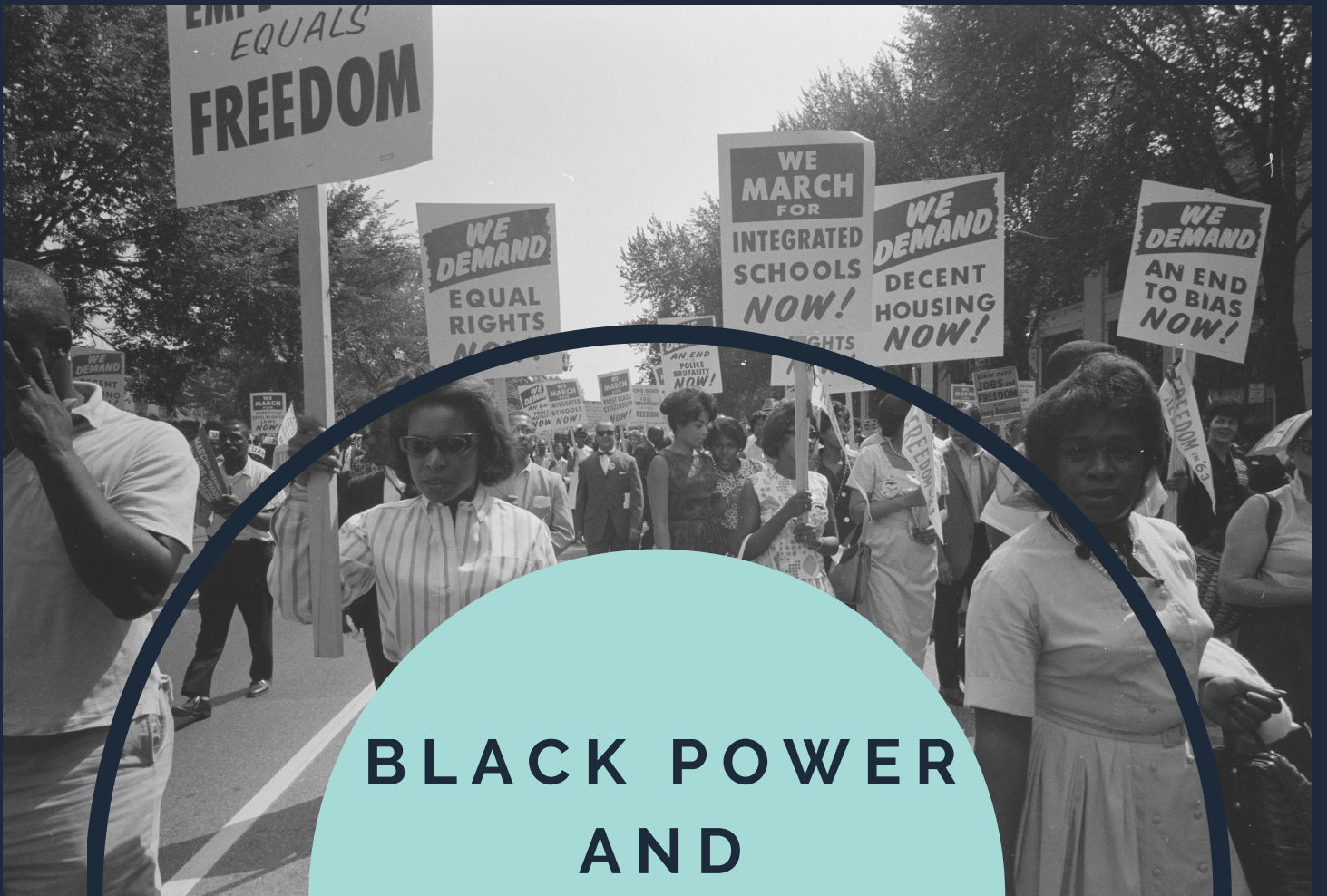
Most accounts of Harriet Tubman's legendary activism as a Conductor of the Underground Railroad do not include any reference to her disability. Despite these omissions, she was open and vocal about having one.



Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977), who had multiple disabilities, including polio, was the daughter of sharecroppers.

She was involved in many Civil Rights activities. For instance, she organized a strike for Black cotton pickers and helped form the National Women's Political Caucus. Helping register Black Americans to vote was perhaps her most notable activism.

People celebrate Fannie Lou Hamer's legacy to the Civil Rights Movement, Disability Rights Movement, and Women's Rights Movement across the spectrum of marginalized groups.



**BLACK POWER
AND**

**THE DISABILITY
RIGHTS
MOVEMENT**



If it weren't for the Civil Rights Movement, the Disability Rights Movement, and resulting civil rights protections for individuals with disabilities would probably never have existed.

The Civil Rights Movement inspired individuals with disabilities to fight against segregation and for full inclusion under the law. Public institutions would often segregate or exclude people with disabilities from participation in public education, employment, or in using public services, such as public transportation. They took their cues for how to advocate for themselves from Black civil rights activists, many of whom had disabilities themselves.

Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act was the first federal civil rights legislation for individuals with disabilities. It prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance, including public schools, public transportation providers, and many others.



Although the Federal Rehabilitation Act was enacted in 1973, the government failed to issue the regulations of Section 504 for years. People with disabilities grew tired of repeated delays, so they took extreme measures to pressure the government to sign and publish them.

Those measures are known today as the 504 Sit-in. A sit-in is when a group of people occupies a place as a protest. Roughly 150 people with various disabilities occupied the San Francisco HEW (Health, Education, and Welfare) building.

They refused to leave until President Jimmy Carter's administration agreed to sign and implement Section 504. **They remained in the building for 25 days, making it the most prolonged nonviolent sit-in of a federal building in history.**



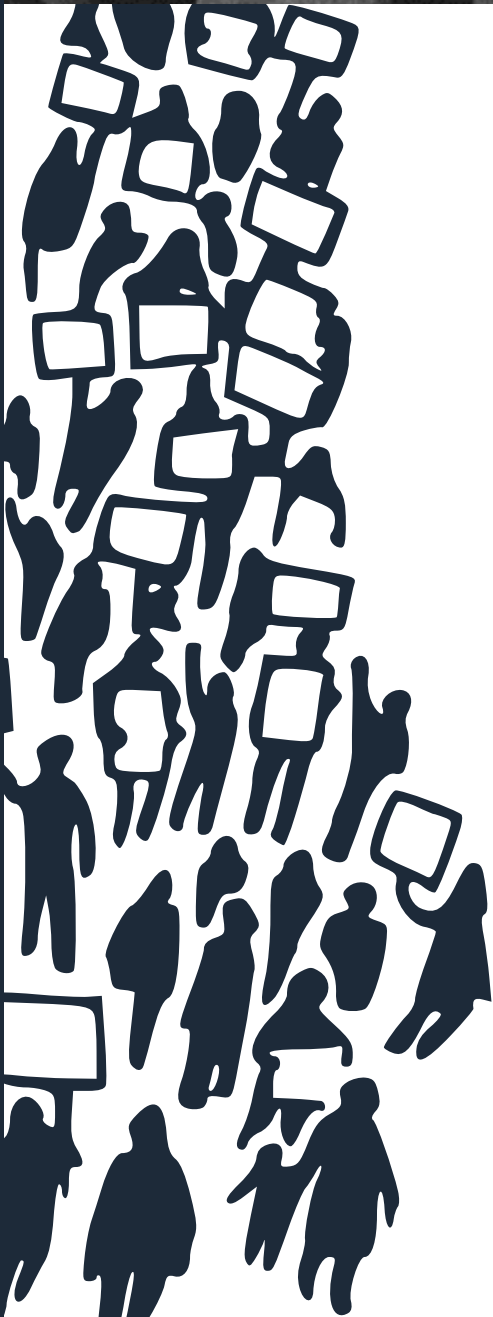
BRAD LOMAX

Among the leaders and organizers of the 504 Sit-in was **Brad Lomax** (1950-1984), who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in his teens and was a wheelchair user.

Lomax founded the Washington D.C. Chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and used his leadership to join the forces of civil rights and disability rights activism.

The BPP not only provided hot meals for the 504 occupants with disabilities in the nearly month-long sit-in, but they also helped to promote the movement.

An anonymous BPP reporter interviewed one of the sit-in participants - a blind, Black man from San Francisco, Dennis Billups. The result was the following transcription, featured in the BPP's April and May 1977 newspaper issues:





...to my brothers and sisters that are Black and that are handicapped: Get out there, we need you. Come here, we need you. Wherever you are, we need you. Get out of your bed, get into your wheelchair. Get out of your crutches, get into your canes. If you can't walk, call somebody, talk to somebody over the telephone; if you can't talk, write; if you can't write use sign language; use any method of communication that is all – all of it is open.

We need to do all we can. We need to show the government that we can have more force than they can ever deal with – and that we can eat more, drink more, love more and pray more than they ever knew was happening....

We shouldn't have to fight for our rights, ...they should already be there. But since we have to fight for them, we have an infinite amount of strength to walk. The government only has one strength to walk, they only know about the paper and file system....We are all in the light, and we should think of ourselves as being our rights.

Dennis Billups, Black, Disabled, 504 Sit-in Participant



INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT

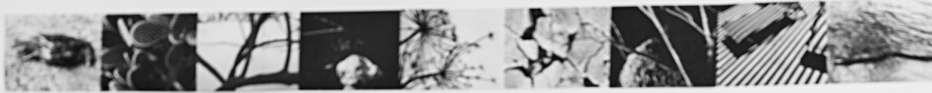
In addition to the Civil Rights Movement, the Disability Rights Movement joins intersecting movements. One of these significant and ongoing movements is the Independent Living Movement, defined as “a worldwide movement of disabled people working for equal opportunities, self-determination, and self-respect.” (Wikipedia)

Johnnie Lacy, a Black, Disabled woman who was one of the founding members of the first Center for Independent Living in the country, spoke to the intersectionality of race and disability. Lacy had polio and paralysis. She attended San Francisco State University to study speech-language pathology. Still, the university did not allow her to be part of the school or even participate in her graduation. Lacy later spoke about the head of the department’s attempt to block her from being part of the school.

Lacy later contradicted the low expectations of those who underestimated her. She became the Director of Community Resources for Independent Living in Hayward, California. She also served on the California Attorney General’s Commission on Disability, Hayward’s Commission on Personnel and Affirmative Action, and the Mayor’s Disability Council for the city and county of San Francisco.

According to Independence Now, “She often spoke of being excluded from the Black community due to her disability and from the disability community due to being a person of color.” Her voice perfectly highlights the continuing need to celebrate the accomplishments of individuals with disabilities while celebrating Black History.

... my final and departing shot to him was that if I were just a woman, he could not do this to me; if I were only a person of color, he would not be able to do this to me; the only way that you are able to take this unfair advantage is because I have a disability.



INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT

Many historians have failed to accurately depict the accomplishments and contributions of people of color and individuals with disabilities to our shared history. Black, Disabled activist, journalist, and community organizer, Ola Ojewum, spoke out against this erasure. Her NBC News Think essay, "Why Black History Month needs to feature the stories of the disabled," states:

We should do more to ensure that history recognizes the influence of disabled history makers. Since our society fails to do enough to acknowledge both communities' significant contributions, it is up to us to amplify Black disabled voices and both groups' histories. After all, Black history is disability history.



WHY INTERSECTIONALITY MATTERS TODAY

As cited in "Understanding the Policing of Black Disabled Bodies" on americanprogress.org:

"In the United States, 50 percent of people killed by law enforcement are disabled." Additionally, police arrest more than half of Disabled, Black citizens by the time they turn 28—double the risk compared to their white Disabled counterparts.



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WHY INTERSECTIONALITY MATTERS TODAY

"Improving Health Outcomes for Black Women and Girls With Disabilities" cites disturbing statistics about poor, often fatal, health outcomes stemming from systemic racism and ableism in the American healthcare system. It also discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic has caused far more illness and death for Black, Disabled individuals than white individuals with or without disabilities. This imbalance is partly due to less access to vaccines.

"People with disabilities also experience accessibility barriers at vaccine distribution sites. These barriers may include physical inaccessibility for people with mobility-related disabilities. Moreover, millions of older adults, low-income people of color, and people with disabilities who are at higher risk of contracting the virus do not have cars, do not drive, do not live near public transit, or are homebound."

If you know someone who can't leave their home and needs a vaccine, DRM can help! Let an event staff member or volunteer know, or call us at (517) 487-1755.



WHY INTERSECTIONALITY MATTERS TODAY

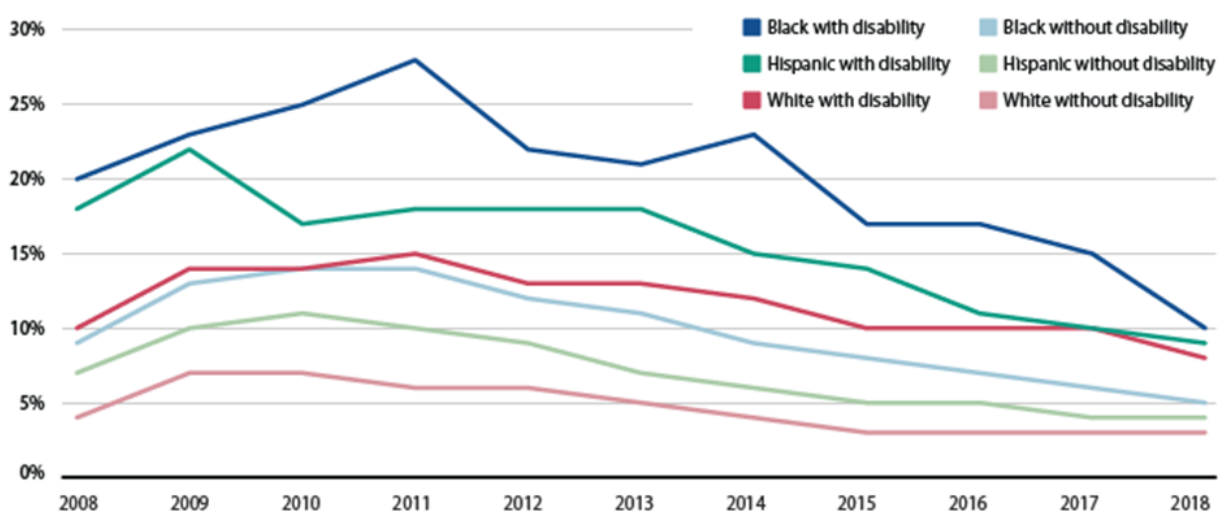
Ableism and racism have long caused Black and Disabled individuals to have higher unemployment rates.

As cited in “Race, Ethnicity, and Disability; The Financial Impact of Systemic Inequality and Intersectionality” by the National Disability Institute, a 2020 study of job loss during the pandemic found:

"All groups, regardless of racial/ethnic group or disability status, experienced considerable job loss between January and May 2020 [...]. Black individuals with disabilities suffered the highest rate of losses."

FIGURE 1

The unemployment rate for people with disabilities remains extremely high
Prime age unemployment rate, by race, ethnicity, and disability status



Note: Prime age refers to individuals ages 25 to 54.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from Steven Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, 2018 Current Population Survey; Version 6.0" (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2018), available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/>.



Image credit: americanprogress.org - The State of the U.S. Labor Market: Pre-February 2019 Jobs Day Release

DISABILITY, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

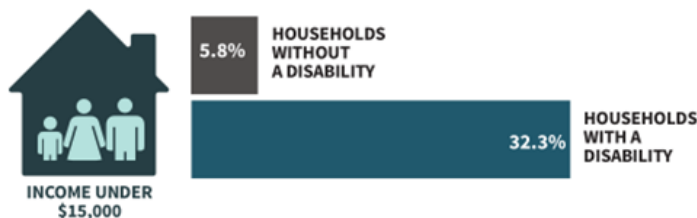
Income, Banking, and Credit Inequality Infographic

National Disability Institute's analysis of data from the 2019 FDIC Survey of Household Use of Banking and Financial Services highlights the financial inequalities faced by persons with disabilities, particularly those that are also Black or Latinx. Unfortunately, not enough data was available to provide precise estimates for persons with disabilities who are Asian, Native American/Alaska Native, or Hawaiian Native/Other Pacific Islander.

INCOME INEQUALITY

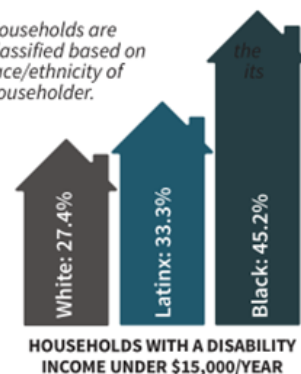
PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH AN INCOME UNDER \$15,000 PER YEAR

The percentage of households with an annual income of less than \$15,000 is **5.6 times higher** in households with a disability (i.e., with a householder that has one or more disabilities) than those without a disability.



A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF BLACK AND LATINX HOUSEHOLDS WITH A DISABILITY HAVE AN ANNUAL INCOME OF LESS THAN \$15,000

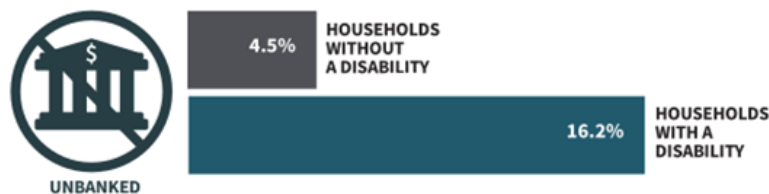
Households are classified based on race/ethnicity of householder.



BANKING INEQUALITY

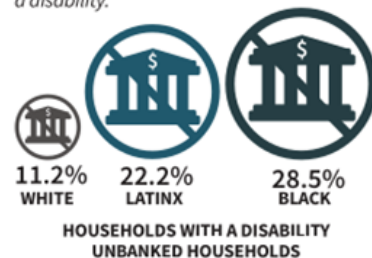
PERCENTAGE OF UNBANKED HOUSEHOLDS

The percentage of unbanked households (i.e., no person in the household has a bank account) is **more than 3 times higher** in households with a disability.



HIGHER PERCENTAGES OF BLACK AND LATINX HOUSEHOLDS ARE UNBANKED

Compared to White households with a disability, the percentage of unbanked households is **2.5 times higher** in Black households with a disability, and almost **twice as high** in Latinx households with a disability.



CREDIT INEQUALITY

A household has an "unmet need for credit" if one or more of the following is true:

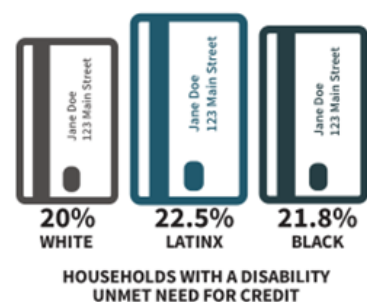
- Household used a nonbank credit product;
- Household was denied a Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover credit card or a personal loan or line of credit from a bank (or not given as much credit as requested); or
- Household did not apply for a Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover credit card or a personal loan or line of credit from a bank because of concerns about being turned down.

PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH "UNMET NEED FOR CREDIT"

The percentage of households with unmet need for bank credit is **1.7 times greater** in households with a disability than in those without a disability.



IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH A DISABILITY, A MARGINALLY HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF BLACK AND LATINX HOUSEHOLDS WITH A DISABILITY HAVE AN UNMET NEED FOR CREDIT COMPARED TO WHITE.



WHAT DISABILITY LOOKS LIKE:

BLACK ENTERTAINERS AND CELEBRITIES WITH DISABILITIES, PAST AND PRESENT



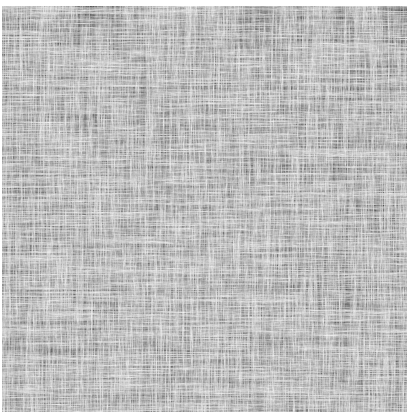
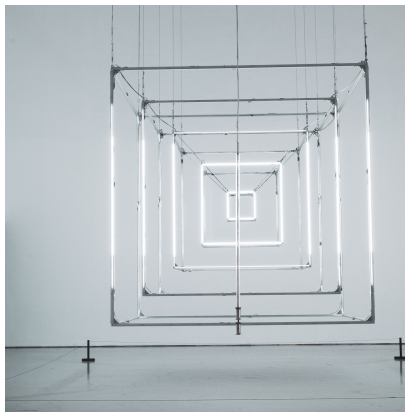
Ray Charles, Blind



Montel Williams, Multiple Sclerosis



Toni Braxton, Systemic Lupus, Erythematosus



Harry Belafonte, ADHD, Dyslexia



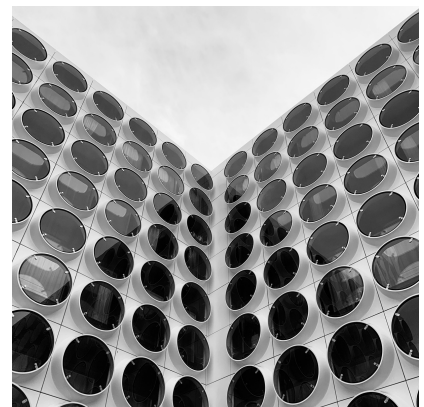
Missy Elliott, Graves Disease



Maya Angelou, Childhood Mutism, Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy



Danny Glover Epilepsy, Dyslexia



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<https://www.paraquad.org/blog/get-to-know-unsung-disability-champion/>
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