



ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY, INC.

301 RHODE ISLAND AVE., NW SUITE 2204, WASHINGTON, DC 20001

P 202.238.5910 | W www.asalh.org

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Dear ASALH Members and Friends,

At this spiritual time of Easter, and Passover, and soon Ramadan, when many of our people are reflecting upon the life-giving source and power of our faith, we witness and mourn the death of so many due to the novel (new) corona virus pandemic. In the last two weeks, medical experts in newspapers and on television have called attention to the disproportionate loss of life to COVID-19 among African Americans. On April 7, 2020, the *New York Times* reported that African Americans accounted for 70 percent of all deaths from COVID-19 in Louisiana. In Chicago, blacks accounted for 72 percent of such deaths. These are but two examples of the racial disparity in regard to COVID-19 found in many places across the nation. The virus has impacted black people of all economic classes, from the rich and famous to the ordinary. Yet the hardest hit by COVID-19 are those in low-income communities—those in places with high densities of poverty, meaning, the conflation of racial and class segregation. It is in those communities, where blacks are most susceptible to ill-health from lead paint in their homes and from environmental toxins that cause asthma and other respiratory illnesses that exacerbate the effects of the coronavirus. It is in those communities where the lack of adequate medical care is most glaring. And it is in those communities where many African Americans do not have the option to stay sheltered at home, but must support themselves and families by working in service occupations that place them at greater risk for exposure to COVID-19.

ASALH conveys its heartfelt sympathy and condolences to all those who have lost loved ones, and in many cases multiple family members. We pray for the restoration of health to those infected with this dread disease. Plans are being made to create more online opportunities led by ASALH scholars to discuss, within our branches and in other settings, the socio-economic, environmental, and medical factors at the root of black health problems. African American history tells of the struggle for quality healthcare from the past to the present, and it also reveals that our people have faced epidemics before. During the Civil War and the early years of freedom from slavery, contagious diseases such as cholera, yellow fever, and smallpox ravaged southern black communities. During the flu pandemics of 1885 and 1918, there was tremendous loss of life among African Americans. There are lessons to be learned as to how our foreparents faced and overcame such tragedies—through their spiritual faith, through their unceasing demand for equal rights and justice in America, and through various individual and collective acts of selfless service to those in need. We hope that many of you will join us in our new virtual history programs to come.

May this time of our faith traditions bring us greater peace and strength in the days and months ahead.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham
ASALH National President

ASALH MISSION

To promote, research, preserve, interpret, and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community