



# **Rooted in the South:** Expanding Disability Justice Through Community, Faith, Storytelling, and Rural Engagement

New Disabled South

# About Us



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Associate Director of Data  
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**New Disabled South (NDS):** Advancing disability rights & justice across 14 Southern states

**Black Disability Institute (BDI):** A Black-led research & advocacy think tank

**NDS Faith Coalition:** A faith-rooted movement affirming dignity, equity, and liberation for disabled people across the South



# Disclaimers

- In this presentation we will be using disability first and person first language interchangeably
  - “disabled people”
  - “people with disabilities”



“All that you touch, you Change. All that you  
Change, Changes you. The only lasting truth Is  
Change.”

— **Octavia E. Butler**



# Purpose & Outcomes of Our Session

- Centering the South in Disability Justice
- Building Black-led, faith-rooted power
- Tools, frameworks, and next steps



# The South is NOT the Margin

- **56%** of Black Americans live in the South
- **1 in 4** Black people has a disability
- **1 in 5** Black Americans lives in rural communities
- Disability rate in the South: **13.8% (highest nationally)**
- **14.7%** disability rate among rural residents

Sources: (Pew Research, 2022) (CDC Adults With Disabilities: Ethnicity and Race, 2025) (US Census Bureau, 2023)



# Historical & Structural Context

- Racial capitalism & wealth extraction
- Medical abuse & exclusion
- Disinvestment in care & infrastructure

# Rural Black Disability Realities

- Barriers to care, voting, broadband
- Environmental & economic inequity
- Rural communities left behind



# Reframing the Narrative

## Moving strength-based frameworks

- Survival
- Faith
- Resistance
- Collective care

**Disability Justice is a lived practice**



# Black Disability Institute: Research, Storytelling, and Power

- Black-led research & advocacy
- Centering Black disabled people
- Race, disability & systems
- Democracy • Criminalization • Technology



# Our Approach

- Research rooted in lived experience
- Policy change through narrative & data
- Disability Justice–grounded healing spaces
- Cross-movement collaboration



# Black Disability Institute Projects

- **Black Disability Policy Lab**

A collaborative pop-up series on race, disability & education (with National Education Association)

- **Black Disability Anthology Series**

Digital storytelling on mental health, healing & lived experience (Published & filmed | Ongoing)



# The Conditions We're Responding To

- **3.6 million** Black adults live with disabilities  
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)
- Black disabled adults are **more likely to live in poverty and housing insecurity**  
(National Disability Institute, 2019)
- Disability is deeply tied to **criminalization and state violence**  
(Cornell Chronicle, 2017)



# Faith Communities are Essential to Organizing

- Trusted messengers
- Mobilization
- Proximity
- Systems and strategies



# Who Should Be At The Table?

- Those most impacted and often excluded
- Disability justice, community and faith leaders
- Young people are also stakeholders and must be included
- We are **NOT** monolithic —  
our representation must reflect that



# Strategic Faith Outreach

Empowering communities to build their own power takes TIME!

## 1:1s and Power mapping

- History and connections
- How is the disabled community impacted
- Communication and Shared values
- Denominations, Groups and Alliances



# Strategies for Organizing in Rural Faith Communities

Don't recreate-integrate

- Food brings people together
- Social media, email, phonetree
- Disseminate information through networks
- Worship services resources and marquees
- Weekends of Action
- Radio, billboards, print media



# What We Take With Us

- Our communities hold knowledge
- Our survival is strategic
- Our care is collective

**Call to action:** Support Black disabled-led work. Share resources and platforms. Stay connected.





# Thank you for joining us!

## Let's Stay Connected

- **Black Disability Institute**  
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- **New Disabled South**  
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