

Lessons Learned with NBEC

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Daija Yisrael newcomb@tulane.edu

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This summer I have the empowering opportunity to work with the National Black Equity Collaborative (NBEC) as an intern for their president's office. NBEC president, Dr. Joia Crear-Perry, founded the collaborative in 2015 with the goal of improving Black maternal and infant health care in America and beyond. Starting off with a staff of less than 10 members, NBEC is now a team of over 30 women, primarily women of color, who work in a linear accountability specialized team model to target the many aspects of improving equity in health care and medicine. As an NBEC intern I am introduced to three first experiences:

One, this is my first opportunity to be a part of a predominantly Black women team. NBEC welcomed me and the other four interns with open arms. We quickly learned that these women were not only co-workers, but family. Being that NBEC is a completely virtual organization, meetings and projects move quickly. However, meetings consistently launch with a warm greeting and group check-in. The space is filled with love, respect, accountability, and grace. Before being a part of this team, I had not experienced a work environment that upholds these values.

Second, NBEC is the first professional organization I am part of that applies a Black feminist approach to all levels of work (policy, finance, research, marketing, etc). This looks like naming anti-black institutions and practices regardless of who is in the room, which Dr. Joia models beautifully in the meetings I attend with her as a scribe. As a student of Black feminist theory and a Community Engagement Advocate, I was shocked that the calling out of a racist institution to a representative of that institution in a meeting sparked in me discomfort. It felt inappropriate and unprofessional to talk about racism at work. However, what followed was a rush of relief and liberation! I was successfully unlearning my own internalized racism! Since then, I've pushed myself to reimagine what safety in health care can look like, just as my co-workers are asked to do every day.

Finally, I am able to personally contribute to reproductive justice strategies to reduce Black maternal and infant mortality rates and to build a safe health care system. NBEC builds connections with as many parts of the health field as possible, from nurses of the National Black Nurses Foundation looking to expand doula programs to scholars writing literature to educate the public on trauma-responsive care for Black birthing people. The most important strategy of them all is maintaining personal peace and health. To do so, NBEC stays in communication with reproductive justice organizations around the country to sustain a system of support and healing in this difficult line of work.

I am grateful for what I've learned in my first three weeks with NBEC and look forward to all that is to come in the rest of our time together.