



Black Agenda 2020

B2F BLACK TO
THE FUTURE
ACTION FUND

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I Overview

For too long, people in power have conspired to rig the game, forcing Black people to work twice as hard to barely get half as far in America. We are falling further behind in health and wealth, safety and well-being.

Our future can and must be different. Black communities deserve and demand thoughtful, visionary policies and practices that make us powerful in every aspect of our lives.

Black Agenda 2020 urges elected officials and government to:

Make Black people powerful in The Economy

By **removing policies that lock us out of good jobs** and **investing in the health and wealth** of our communities.

Make Black people powerful in Our Society

By **rejecting the toxic culture of white nationalism** by calling it out at every opportunity and in front of every audience.

Make Black people powerful in Our Democracy

By **confronting those who conspire to steal our votes** and finally building the democracy that is promised to us all.

Make Black people powerful in Our Communities

By **acting on the climate crisis** as a national priority before more of our communities are hit first and worst by disasters.

Make Black people powerful in Our Families

By **challenging the policies and practices that leave us living sick and dying younger** and delivering the care we need to live long and live well.

Make Black people powerful in The Legal System

By **ending the use of incarceration** to solve the problems of migration, poverty, and disinvestment and **returning millions of us back to our families and communities.**



Introduction

In 2018, the Black Futures Lab launched the [Black Census Project](#), the largest survey of Black people conducted in the United States in 155 years. Over 30,000 Black people in all 50 states participated, providing insightful views and opinions about politics, society, and the opportunities and challenges facing Black communities and the nation. The information gathered through the Black Census amplifies the concerns and aspirations of the most politically and civically engaged Black adults in the U.S., and reveals issues critical to engaging, activating, and strengthening Black communities in the years ahead.

Black Agenda 2020 translates the Black Census results into a policy platform that educates elected officials, policymakers, and legislators, and challenges them to take positions that are beneficial to our communities.

This policy agenda is intended to be an advocacy roadmap for organizers, community members, policymakers, and thought leaders, and to inform and inspire candidates up and down the ballot to build platforms and campaigns that represent the real interests of Black voters.

The recommendations listed here reflect the breadth and depth of Black communities in America, including populations that are un- or under-represented in traditional policy-making frameworks (such as homeless people, incarcerated people, LGBTQ people, Black immigrants, Black people in

rural communities), but whose experiences are important to understanding the complexity of Black life and the solutions we seek. **This agenda reflects the most common concerns within Black communities across the political spectrum.**

Since Black communities are not monolithic, a one-size-fits-all approach to policy-making will not result in changing the lives of all Black people in America. Generic appeals and tepid policy proposals actually have the opposite effect, decreasing Black voters' trust in and engagement with politicians and democratic institutions.

For example, while 90 percent of Black people vote for Democratic candidates, our general support for the Democratic party is waning: only 62 percent of Black Census respondents have a favorable view of the Democratic Party, and a fifth of respondents have an outright unfavorable view towards the Democrats.¹ What's more, over half of Black Census respondents believe that politicians "do not care about Black people and their interests."

Fifty-two percent of Black Census respondents believe that politicians don't care about Black people.

Black people and Black communities deserve and demand thoughtful, visionary, and alternative policies that address the issues important to us. So, we've crafted our own. Black Agenda 2020 was developed in collaboration with a diverse range of grassroots organizations around the country who helped to identify concrete policy prescriptions that disrupt the status quo, dismantle policies and practices that stifle Black lives, and upend structural racism.

“Black people have always played a role in unlocking the promise of an America that has not yet been realized, and if there was ever a time to tap into that power—it's now.”

— Alicia Garza, Principal, Black Futures Lab



This agenda is based upon three core beliefs that shape our thinking about the solutions that are needed to lift up Black communities:

1. Race matters.

We must focus on the root causes of Black inequality in order to disrupt the cycle. American law and policy is built upon anti-Black racism and white supremacy, the residual effects of which continue to derail Black lives. Race-neutral policies will not resolve structural racism; race-forward policies will.

2. Government must be accountable.

Government, and the people who operate it, must be held accountable for laws, policies and practices that marginalize and perpetuate disparities for Black communities and Black people. Policymakers must take action to bridge racial gaps in health, wealth, and other social outcomes by eliminating laws, policies, and practices that do harm to Black people, as well as by outlawing private sector practices that exploit racial disparities in order to boost profits.

3. The Black agenda is a progressive agenda.

Fundamentally, we believe that progress for Black communities requires progressive thinking. Old ideas, play-it-safe strategies, and incremental movement will not secure Black futures. We need bold, innovative ideas that aggressively drive us forward.

Black Agenda 2020 is organized into six policy areas that Black Census respondents deemed most urgent. As such, we have concluded that to make Black people powerful in our lives, elected officials must:

- **Remove policies that lock us out of good jobs, and instead invest in the health and wealth of our communities;**
- **Confront those who conspire to steal our votes, and finally build the democracy that is promised to us all;**
- **Challenge the policies and practices that leave us living sick and dying younger, and deliver the care we need to live long and live well;**
- **Reject the toxic culture of white nationalism by calling it out at every opportunity and in front of every audience;**
- **Act on the climate crisis as a national priority before more of our communities are hit first and worst by disasters;**
- **End the use of incarceration to solve the problems of migration, poverty, and divestment, and return millions of us to our families and communities.**

Each policy section presents a brief overview of the issues, references the Black Census Project's findings where relevant, and outlines key policy solutions. Some of these proposals will ultimately require Congressional action, but many can be enacted through local and state measures that can create fairness, expand access, and inform best practices for jurisdictions around the country.

We know that the challenges facing Black communities are complex and the solutions to those challenges require innovation, experimentation, and Black political power. We developed the Black Agenda 2020 to provide an actionable advocacy and policy agenda that will strengthen the capacity of Black communities across the United States to build independent, progressive, Black political power and get these policies passed at the local, state, and national levels.

Race Matters

Black Agenda 2020 is focused squarely on mitigating the impact of racism upon every aspect of our lives—from policy to governance to private sector practices—in order to achieve justice and equality for Black people in this country. We aim to drive policies and legislation that 1) dismantle structural barriers that systematically derail Black communities, and 2) create pathways for our futures.

America is a multicultural society, and we believe this rich

diversity strengthens our democracy. In order to accomplish our goal of making Black communities powerful in politics, we must fully embrace the complexity of who we are. Black people are not a monolith: we are immigrant, disabled, rural, LGB, trans and gender non-conforming, and deepening alliances within our diverse Black communities will go a long way towards achieving the changes we need, to the benefit of all of us. The Black to the Future Action Fund is committed to advancing an inclusive agenda that reflects the diversity of the Black community. For example, see [here](#) for the Black Census Project's reports on Black LGB and gender non-conforming communities.

Eighty-one percent of Black Census respondents strongly support Black Lives Matter.

But race has been enshrined into our laws and policies since the birth of the nation, and anti-Black racism in both policy and practice continues to be one of the greatest threats to our collective well-being. We must address the impact of racism on our social and economic structures in order to transform the policies that weaken our communities. Race-neutral policy prescriptions cannot and will not remedy the ill effects of four hundred years of government-sanctioned terror and discrimination that have systematically shut Black communities out of the bounty of the America that we helped to build.

Without the blood, sweat, and tears of Black people, whose bodies were beaten and broken for the sole purpose of building white wealth, America as we know it would not exist. Black communities quite literally built this country, seed by seed and brick by brick. Whether on antebellum southern cotton fields or behind modern-day prison walls, the un- and under-compensated labor of Black people was and still is vital to the founding and sustainability of this nation.

Despite these historical and present-day contributions, federal, state, and local policies have historically been levied against our communities, siphoning resources, thwarting our health and our ability to care for our families, disenfranchising us, and limiting our ability to build a future from the wealth generated by our labor. These well-documented policies span centuries, and include tactics from slave patrols (which, over time, developed into police forces), to Jim Crow segregation, to voter suppression and gerrymandering, to housing discrimination and redlining, to blatant wage theft and land seizures, to the “tough on crime” laws that led to the mass incarceration



plaguing us today.²

Even well-regarded federal policy measures that were enacted to aid in the growth of America's middle class—like the New Deal (which included Social Security), and the GI Bill for veterans—were racist by design, as they initially included “states’ rights” language intended to allow segregationist state officials to exclude Black people from federal benefits.³

Although many of these policies have been updated to scrub overtly racist language, and the Civil Rights Act of 1965 even explicitly banned discrimination, the residual effects of a legal and public policy system built on anti-Black racism and structured to deny Black people equal rights are still widely and deeply felt throughout our communities and society today.

It is because of this that Black people face the greatest disparities in health and well-being in America. For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Black people have disproportionately high death rates from almost all medical ailments, including heart disease, stroke, cancer, asthma, influenza, pneumonia, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS.⁴ Black families have few financial resources at their disposal when health challenges arise; the average Black household holds a net wealth of only \$3,400, compared to the average white household's net wealth of \$140,500.⁵

Because Black lives have been systematically diminished and dismissed, we must be intentional about amplifying the experiences and supporting the dreams of Black communities

in order to reverse course. Generic political proclamations and policy band-aids that fail to change outcomes for Black communities are no longer enough. The vast majority of Black Census respondents—81 percent—strongly support Black Lives Matter in principle and practice. That means it's time to advance policies that make Black lives truly matter in our society, in our democracy, and in our economy.

The Black Agenda 2020 centers race in order to radically change the written and unwritten rules of society that devalue Black people.

Government Must Be Held Accountable

Eighty-six percent of Black Census respondents believe it is the role of the government to solve economic problems and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor; seventy-nine percent favor expanding and increasing government aid for people who need it.

America has not reckoned with the systemic racism and oppression that continue to suppress Black communities.

What's worse, many politicians and lawmakers have little desire to understand how our history of racist politics and policies has resulted in poor outcomes for Black people today.

For example, the current Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell, recently shrugged off the need to atone for and address Black inequality because “none of us currently living are responsible for slavery.”⁶ This misguided thinking and evasion of accountability has pervaded our government and enabled elected officials to neglect their civic and moral duty to ensure that government works for everyone in our society, both in spite of and because of the endurance of racism at every level.

Government is, in fact, responsible for the well-being of all its people, and it must be held accountable to all the people. It was the government that enacted the discriminatory laws and policies that fostered the racial disparities that exist today, and government intervention is required to eliminate inequities and improve outcomes for Black communities.

Even though our political system, laws, and policies have continually erected barriers to Black prosperity, Black communities still believe deeply in the important role that government plays in our democracy, and we expect government to do its job. Eighty-six percent of Black Census respondents believe that it is the role of the government to solve economic problems and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, and 79 percent favor expanding and increasing government aid for people who need it.

Despite myths and stereotypes to the contrary, Black communities do not reap outsized benefits from government aid. In fact, government stimuli such as those noted above have done more to build white wealth and move white Americans into the middle class than to put Black people on the road to prosperity or even economic self-sufficiency.

We seek to remedy the government-sanctioned policies and practices that suppress Black communities, limit our opportunities, and criminalize and marginalize Black people. We can level the economic playing field, restore dignity and safety to our communities, and strengthen our democracy so that Black people have the freedom to shape our own, and our nation's, destiny. But doing so will require the government to bridge the gaps.

Over the past century, elected officials have repeatedly ceded responsibility for supporting Black communities and boosting outcomes for Black people to the private sector. “Community empowerment” and “social justice” functions of government



have been outsourced through public-private partnerships, and major public problems have been framed as challenges for charitable capitalists to resolve through philanthropy.

But justice and equality are not achieved through trickle-down benevolence. It is both risky and ineffectual to shift the burden of responsibility from government to a private sector that far too often profits from the pain of Black communities.

For example, the private sector has notoriously exploited the racial wealth gap by levying exorbitant financial service fees on Black people, perpetuated racial health disparities by predatorily marketing junk foods, tobacco products, and alcohol in our communities, and used our neighborhoods as dumping grounds, turning them into polluted wastelands. So it is essential that the government hold private companies accountable for exploiting Black people and doing harm to the Black community.

Black Agenda 2020 challenges policymakers to consider the impact of racist policies and legislation on Black communities, own responsibility for those outcomes, and work to prevent private industries from earning profits through practices that further exacerbate the disparities we face. This agenda is *both* a resource to help policymakers rewrite the rules that marginalize Black people *and* a tool advocates can use to hold policymakers accountable for improving Black people's lives.

| Black Agenda 2020



The Economy

Make Black people powerful by removing policies that lock us out of good jobs. Invest in the health and wealth of our communities.

86% of Black Census respondents believe it is the role of the government to solve economic problems and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

The average white family has \$140,500 in wealth, while the average Black family has only \$3,400—and the gap is widening. In 1983, the share of Black families with zero or negative wealth was 31.4 percent; by 2016, this proportion had risen to 37 percent.⁷ This wealth gap is the direct result of a host of discriminatory federal and state policies that have limited Black people to low- or no-wage jobs, barred them from owning property, and excluded them from participating in government programs designed to boost the middle class.⁸

Further, many of the nearly twenty million Blacks in the labor force are working multiple jobs in order to make ends meet and

pursue a better quality of life for themselves and their families. Black employment remains concentrated in industries plagued by low-quality jobs with no benefits, irregular schedules, part-time employment, and wages too low to sustain a family.⁹

Everyone who works a full-time job should be able to afford basics like shelter, food, and clothes for themselves and their families. Everyone who works a full-time job should be able to take time off to care for loved ones when needed, whether that means providing and/or coordinating child care, healthcare, or long-term care due to aging, illness, or disability. But this is not the case for many Black families in America, where workers' wages have stagnated at a level simply too low to support rising costs of living, while corporate executives' incomes soar.

Wage theft—in which employers cheat workers by paying less than the minimum wage, stealing tips, forcing employees to work off the clock, or classifying them as independent contractors and rendering them ineligible for the benefits and

protections due full-time workers—also disproportionately harms Black families.¹⁰

According to the Black Census, the overwhelming majority of Black people (86 percent) believe it is the role of the government to solve these economic problems and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Black communities know that our economic challenges do not exist in a vacuum; we support redistributive solutions because we cannot simply invest in entrepreneurship as a way for Black people to lift themselves out of poverty.¹¹

For example, the funds saved by divesting from mass incarceration should be reinvested into economic stimuli that reduce racial inequality and provide Black Americans with opportunities to build wealth. Savings should also be used to strengthen the social safety net for low-wage earners.

79% of Black Census respondents favor expanding and increasing government aid for people who need it.

Additionally, because Black women carry a disproportionate share of the responsibility for the economic stability of Black communities, any policy or proposal seeking to tackle this issue must consider how the economy is organized by race and by gender. Eighty percent of Black women who are breadwinners are also heads of household, but it takes the average Black woman twenty months to earn what the average white man makes in just one year.¹² Ensuring that our policy solutions are reflective of the intersections of race, gender, and class is critical to ensuring the economic health and well-being of Black communities.

Most immediately, policymakers should take the following steps to close the Black wealth gap:

Examine the impact of slavery in the U.S. and develop reparation proposals to repair the harm to *all diasporic* descendants of enslaved people.

Black Census respondents think the government should “pay reparations to African Americans for its role in the Slave Trade and history of discrimination.”

- **Pass H.R. 40, which establishes the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans.**¹³ The commission would examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies.

Raise job standards.

Ninety percent of Black Census respondents view wages too low to support a family as a problem in the community, and 85 percent support raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

- **Pass legislation unilaterally raising the minimum wage** to at least \$15 nationally, with a requirement that jurisdictions apply a formula to adjust upward to meet or exceed the living wage in more expensive regions of the country.
- **Pass the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights**, which amends federal labor laws to include protections for domestic workers.
- **Pass the Wage Theft Prevention and Wage Recovery Act**,



which enables workers to recover the full value of back pay denied them; compensates victims of wage theft with triple back pay; substantially increases civil fines, particularly for companies that are repeat offenders; allows employers to be referred for criminal prosecution in certain egregious cases; strengthens whistleblower protections; and makes it easier for workers to take action to recover stolen wages.¹⁴

- **Enact universal family care social insurance policies** that assure paid leave and access to affordable care, including childcare and long-term care due to aging, illness, or disability.
- **Eliminate the sub-minimum wage loophole in the Fair Labor Standards Act** that allows employers to pay people with disabilities less than minimum wage. Eliminate asset limits in Social Security that cost people with disabilities thousands of dollars. These policies, which have been in place for decades, legally enforce the poverty of people with disabilities.¹⁵
- **Strengthen the capacity of public sector workers to unionize.**
 - Reduce the contracting out of federal government services.
 - Require businesses receiving federal contracts to adhere to certain labor standards, reduce the usage of independent contractors, and remain neutral in any attempts of their employees to organize.
 - Support public sector employees' right to organize (up to and including the right to strike) in states and

localities where workers do not have those rights.

- **Support the right of private sector workers to organize.**
 - Appoint pro-worker candidates to the National Labor Relations Board.
 - Increase penalties for businesses that violate labor laws.
 - Where it is difficult to organize unions through the NLRB, support efforts to develop sectoral (industry-wide) bargaining mechanisms.
 - Where workers are misclassified as independent contractors, support efforts to end such misclassifications.
- **Establish wage and standards boards** as a mechanism to facilitate worker organizing and raise labor standards.
- **End the Landrum-Griffin Act restrictions on the ability of unions to hire some formerly incarcerated people.**¹⁶ Since Black communities are disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration, these restrictions disproportionately limit the capacity of Black workers to engage in the democratic activity of running a union. Eliminating these provisions will expand the capacity of Black workers to deeply engage in the daily life of working-class organizations.

Make housing affordable.

86% of Black Census respondents say that the lack of affordable housing is a problem in the community and that the government should provide adequate housing.

Homeownership is a wealth-building engine for families, but for decades the federal government used a system of housing and mortgage discrimination called “redlining” to prevent Black people from securing loans and purchasing homes in America. Today, predatory lending practices and a dearth of affordable housing continue to erode Black wealth and perpetuate housing insecurity in Black communities.

- **Pass the American Housing and Economic Mobility Act,** which increases housing affordability by:
 - Controlling rents and home prices.
 - Incentivizing local governments to reduce land use restrictions that drive up the costs of new home construction.



- Strengthening anti-discrimination laws and improving the housing voucher program.¹⁷
- **Fully fund Housing and Urban Development budgets for public housing and Section 8/voucher housing.**
- **Invest in affordable rental homes.** No state has an adequate supply of affordable rental units for the lowest-income renters, and the lack of mid-level rental units is driving up living costs for middle-class earners.¹⁸ The federal government should invest in increasing housing supply across the board and ensure that the funds go towards the communities that need them most.

- **Support homeownership.** A home can be a sound investment, but many Black people face barriers to homeownership, including lack of access to capital for large down payments. In order to help Black families and communities circumvent this obstacle, the federal government should:

- Expand homebuyer programs to help more people

access homes in communities they can afford.

- Enact federal grant assistance programs for historically redlined communities that assist homebuyers in those areas with down payments and closing costs.
- **Ban predatory lending practices and protect consumers from mortgage discrimination** that makes it difficult for Black borrowers to secure loans at fair rates.

Invest in K-12 education.



U.S. school districts serving primarily white children receive \$23 billion more in funding than those serving primarily Black children.¹⁹ This funding gap directly contributes to disparities that Black communities experience in rates of matriculation, graduation, and educational attainment levels.

This investment gap is not simply a result of white schools having a larger tax base—wealthier districts certainly have access to more resources, but this is not the only factor. In reality, poor white districts also spend far more money on education than poor Black districts, and this is by design. Even when controlling for community wealth, there is still far less investment in the education of Black communities due to decades of institutional discrimination that undervalues and underinvests in Black school districts.²⁰

- **Mandate that education funding at the federal, state and local levels flow equitably** to school districts by enacting strict guidelines to ensure fairness in academic spending allocations across the board.
- **Dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by eliminating zero-tolerance policies and limiting the presence of**

police in schools. School discipline policies across the country have been found to have a disparate impact on Black students—especially boys and gender non-conforming girls—that leads to harsh punishments, suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement for even the most minor offenses. These zero-tolerance policies and the overreliance on police to intervene in school discipline issues disproportionately criminalize Black students, creating a school-to-confinement pathway that derails Black youth for years.²¹ We must disrupt this cycle. The Department of Education must also enforce the Equity in IDEA regulation requiring data collection on disproportionality of identification, placement, and discipline of students of color and students with disabilities.²²

- **Eliminate the growing number of policies that require registration and surveillance of students who have received mental health care as part of K-12 school enrollment, and require schools to stop using restraints and seclusion on students with disabilities.**²³

Make college affordable.

Eighty-five percent of Black Census respondents see rising college costs as a problem in the community and a similar percentage favor making college affordable for any person who wants to attend.

Having a college degree is a key predictor of economic mobility in America, but it is also a source of economic stress for the millions saddled with student loan debt. Seventy-two percent of Black students go into debt to pay for college, compared with 56 percent of their white counterparts, and carrying this debt for decades beyond graduation handicaps their ability to build wealth—even as their wages increase.²⁴ Alarming, while the majority of Black students who matriculate into college ultimately drop out before earning a degree, they are still responsible for repaying their student loans.²⁵ This means that attending college can be a double-edged sword for Black students, as student loan debt may ultimately offset their earning potential, making it difficult to build wealth regardless of whether or not they successfully complete a degree.



- **Establish debt-free public colleges and universities** by increasing access to need-based financial aid and guaranteeing that college tuition costs do not exceed what working families can reasonably afford to pay.²⁶
- **Forgive student loan debt** that continues to stifle families and the economy.
- **Invest in capacity-building and institutional development of historically Black colleges and universities** to strengthen Black academic institutions.

Make taxes fair and invest in economic mobility.

More than three-quarters of Black Census respondents support increasing taxes on individuals earning \$250,000 or more, and nearly 60 percent oppose reducing corporate taxes.

Black Census respondents strongly support a tax system that demands more from the wealthy to fund public goods. Our current tax policy is upside-down, with the wealthiest Americans receiving the most government assistance in building wealth and the poorest receiving the least.²⁷ This is not only unfair; it also results in the government having fewer funds available for critical spending needs like infrastructure investments, social safety net programs, and consumer

protection measures. And when federal and state spending decline, resources meant to support Black communities and neighborhoods are often first on the chopping block.

- **Roll back corporate tax cuts and close tax loopholes** to ensure that corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share.
- **Redistribute these funds** to boost funding for social safety net programs and investment in critical infrastructure projects.
- **Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit** that supplements wages and helps offset payroll and income taxes for low- and moderate-income workers.
- **Invest in programs that support Black entrepreneurs and business owners.**



Our Democracy

Make Black people powerful by confronting those who conspire to steal our votes and finally build the democracy that is promised to us all.

Black people have been systematically disenfranchised for as long as we have had the constitutional right to vote in America. The most recent state-sanctioned voter suppression efforts, such as voter ID laws, voter purges, and cuts to early voting and voting locations, deliberately undermine Black voter participation and also deter the elderly, students, and people with disabilities from voting.²⁸ States are increasingly criminalizing voting and voter registration by prosecuting even the most minor compliance errors, such as the inadvertent submission of blank forms.²⁹ The goal of all of these voter suppression measures is clear: to silence Black voters and diminish Black political power.

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act in 2013—the very section which had

protected the Black vote by enabling the federal government to block racially-driven voter suppression efforts. The current high court continues to enable unfair election practices, having recently upheld the constitutionality of racial gerrymandering, a practice which effectively allows politicians to select their voters rather than ensuring voters are able to freely choose their representatives.

Policymakers must ensure that every American can vote freely and fairly, and that Black voters in particular are fully enfranchised and able to flex collective political power without fear of prosecution or persecution.

We also must ensure that immigrants who seek a better life in America are afforded a clear path to citizenship and an opportunity to fully participate in our democracy.

Restore voting rights and fight voter suppression.

More than 4 in 5 Black Census respondents (84 percent) favor restoring the voting rights of formerly incarcerated people.

- **Pass the Voting Rights Amendment Act** to restore voter protections for Black communities.³⁰
- **Fight voter suppression with state policies that ban unilateral voter purges and voter ID laws, and make voting as convenient as possible** through early voting, online voting, and online and same-day voter registration.
- **Restore voting rights for all convicted felons.**
- **Stop using the Americans with Disabilities Act as a tool of voter suppression in low-income and nonwhite communities.**³¹ Thirty years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, over 60 percent of polling



places in the country remain inaccessible.³² Funding must be provided to increase access to the polls for seniors and people with disabilities.

Fix our broken immigration system.

- **Clear the path to citizenship** so that immigrants who have made America their home can fully participate in our democracy.
- Stop criminalizing immigrants:
 - **Repeal the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act**, commonly known as the “1996 immigration laws.”
 - **End police and ICE collaboration** and protect immigrants from being hunted, incarcerated, and deported.³³
 - **Expand legal channels for people to migrate to the United States**, including work-based programs for workers of all economic classes.
- **Establish a permanent independent commission on immigration** to make humane immigration policy recommendations to Congress and the President.³⁴





Our Families

Make Black people powerful by challenging the policies and practices that leave us living sick and dying younger. Deliver the care we need to live long and live well.

Eighty-six percent of Black Census respondents agree that the lack of affordable health care is a problem in the community, and consider it the government's role to provide health care for all Americans.

Black communities face significant disparities in overall health and wellness, and often fare worse than their white counterparts when given the same diagnosis. For example, Black people hold the highest mortality rate of any group for all cancers.³⁵ Black women experience the highest pregnancy-related mortality rate of all American mothers—42.8 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births – over 3 times the rate than white

women at just 13 maternal deaths per 100,000 births.³⁶ What's more, corporations exacerbate these health disparities by predatorily marketing junk food, tobacco products, and alcohol to Black communities.

Despite gains made through the Affordable Care Act, health insurance is still unaffordable and out of reach for many Black people, who remain less likely than white people to have adequate health coverage. Nearly 1 in 3 Black Census respondents (32 percent) has put off seeing a doctor for financial reasons in the last 12 months, and another 14 percent live with someone who has.

Even for those with health insurance, uncovered procedures or providers, high deductibles, and out-of-pocket cost sharing contribute to unaffordable health care costs and medical deb

In fact, older Black adults are nearly three times as likely as older white adults to have medical debt.³⁷

The healthcare crisis in the Black community is also an economic crisis. Many of the nearly 20 million Black workers in the labor force are working multiple jobs to make ends meet and pursue a higher quality of life for themselves and their families. Black workers remain concentrated in industries that offer no benefits, meaning they often lack paid leave to manage care for oneself or one's relatives.

Black people, and Black women in particular, bear the burden of being the primary caretakers for ailing family members; low wages, job instability, and lack of worker protections mean that the majority of working individuals with low incomes cannot afford to take leave without pay when care needs inevitably arise.

Black workers are also 6 percent less likely than white workers to have access to paid parental leave.³⁸ Families lose an average of \$20.6 billion each year because workers are unable

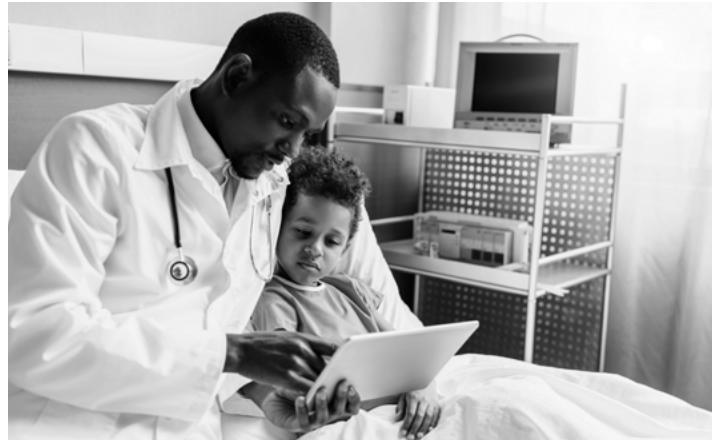
to take paid family and/or medical leave to care for a sick infant, a disabled child or spouse, or an aging parent. These issues all converge as the Black caring majority ages.³⁹

A national paid leave program that ensures paid leave to all workers, regardless of their employers, means increased earnings. Further, paid leave could help close the persistent gender gap in earnings by creating income stability and work attachment for women workers, who bear the economic brunt of caregiving, and could alleviate life stressors that perpetuate poor health outcomes.⁴⁰

Insurers, pharmaceutical companies, and employers continue to profit off of pain while Black people struggle to fund the care we receive. And that care is often delivered with bias and bigotry that puts Black lives at risk. From the high mortality rates among Black mothers, to the alarming rates of Black patients reporting inadequate diagnosis and treatment, to the stark disparities in health outcomes for Black communities across the board, one thing is for sure: our current healthcare system fails Black people.

Establish universal care for all.

- **Increase enforcement of anti-discrimination protections for people with pre-existing conditions** within the Affordable Care Act.
- Establish universal health care to **eliminate financial barriers to health and wellness and reduce the cost of prescription drugs.**
- **Enact Universal Family Care social insurance policies like the Family Act** that assure access to affordable childcare, paid leave, and eldercare in a sustainable, accessible, affordable, and streamlined way. This should be in addition to existing safety net programs and not require borrowing against Social Security or other retirement benefits, which would punitively force people to work longer.
- **Ensure reproductive health care access.** A woman's economic security is directly tied to her ability to make decisions about when and whether to have a family. This is particularly true for Black women, which is why equal access to affordable, accessible reproductive healthcare services, including abortion, is critical.⁴¹



- **Ensure funding for robust, high quality, long term services and support systems** that allow people to live in their homes and not be forced into nursing homes or institutions by insurance companies.⁴²
- **Increase funding and availability of community-based, high quality, culturally competent mental health services.**⁴³

Incentivize health and wellness over “sick care” and tackle health disparities.



- **Incentivize doctors and hospitals to increase health outcomes.** The current healthcare system is incentivized to boost profits for corporations rather than to improve the

health and wellness of patients. Black Americans are among those most likely to be caught in this “sick care” cycle. The federal government should establish funding and guidelines to reward health care providers who save lives and penalize those who perpetuate poor health outcomes.

- **Include doula care in government-funded health care programs.** Black women are at the highest risk of poor birth outcomes in the United States. Doula care is among the most promising approaches to combating disparities in pregnancy-related health. Those receiving doula care have been found to have improved health outcomes for both themselves and their infants.⁴⁴ Doulas have also been found to help reduce the impact of racism and racial bias in health care on pregnant people of color by providing individually-tailored, culturally appropriate, and patient-centered care and advocacy.⁴⁵ Despite these findings, there are only 3 states that provide doula coverage to pregnant people who receive Medicaid.⁴⁶ Even in states with limited Medicaid coverage of doula services, many Medicaid beneficiaries are unaware of doula coverage or doula care.⁴⁷

Ban discriminatory pricing and predatory marketing, and expand access to healthy foods.



- **Pass the Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act to stabilize the cost of prescription drugs and reel in price gouging of life-saving medications.**⁴⁸ Black communities

disproportionately rely on costly prescriptions like HIV/AIDS prevention medications (PrEP)—forcing Black people to sacrifice economic stability for life-saving medical treatment.⁴⁹ The federal government should ban this corporate profiteering and exploitation by passing legislation to negotiate lower prices and hold drug corporations accountable for overcharging patients.

- **Enact penalties for corporations that predatorily market tobacco and alcohol to youth.**
- **Tighten FDA nutrition and labeling standards and ban the marketing of junk food to children.**
- **Allocate federal grants to supply fresh produce** to retailers in communities deemed “food deserts” that lack grocery stores and access to fresh foods, and **boost federal nutrition program funding to incentivize** consumption of fresh versus processed foods.



Our Society

Make Black people powerful by rejecting the toxic culture of white nationalism, addressing it at every opportunity and in front of every audience.

White nationalist violence has been used to subjugate, terrorize, malign and murder Black people since the founding of America. Much of this violence—chattel slavery, lynchings, riots that destroyed entire Black communities, the police brutality prevalent today—has been state-sanctioned. In the twenty-first century, white nationalist violence is often facilitated by race-neutral policies and practices.

Alarming, white nationalist violence is on the rise and its growth in recent years has been well documented by the Department of Justice. Hate crimes in the country increased by 17 percent from 2016 to 2017, marking the third straight year of a spike in hate crimes, according to the FBI, and more than half of the hate crimes reported in 2017 were motivated by racial or ethnic bias.⁵⁰ Mass shootings and other acts of violence against Black people, Jewish communities, and other non-white people perpetrated by white supremacists continue to plague our society, with few interventions in place to effectively stem the tide.

Homegrown white nationalists are one of the greatest domestic threats to the safety and security of Black communities and the nation at large. We must take action to mitigate the spread of racism and bigotry and hold perpetrators accountable for race-based attacks. Doing so requires politicians and corporations

to face, head-on, the fact that white nationalism is real and on the rise by calling it out for what it is at every opportunity and in front of every audience.

White nationalism is domestic terrorism and must be treated as such.

The federal government should aggressively enforce civil rights and anti-terrorism laws to protect Black people from attacks and be more vigilant in dismantling the networks that allow hate to spread. This can be done using the current laws on the books; however, the federal government has yet to fully demonstrate the moral and political will to combat race-based domestic terrorism.

To be sure, several states and some federal lawmakers have enacted or proposed new domestic terrorism laws to track white nationalist violence and hold perpetrators accountable. But we should tread carefully and ensure that new laws do not embolden law enforcement to increase surveillance against marginalized communities or incentivize overreach that otherwise violates their civil liberties.

Black communities have historically been targeted and trapped in the dragnet of anti-domestic terrorist programs, with the

federal government unjustly attacking civil rights organizers, immigrants, religious communities, and organizations from the Black Panthers to Black Lives Matter. Any new laws or enforcement measures must therefore be crafted in such a way

as to limit misuse and ensure they are not leveraged to unfairly surveil and silence Black communities and social justice activists.

Combat white nationalist terrorism.

The reality is that the FBI already has all the authority it needs to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of white nationalist violence. Congress has enacted 51 federal crimes of terrorism that apply to entirely domestic acts, five federal hate crime laws that target bias-motivated violence, as well as organized crime and conspiracy statutes that are often used to prosecute violent white supremacist groups.⁵¹ Yet the FBI lacks the will to identify these crimes as race-based terrorism, which masks the problem, deprives the investigations of resources, and endangers the ability of law enforcement to thwart subsequent acts of extremist violence.⁵²

Congress should require data collection and regular reporting by the FBI on:

- The true breadth of white nationalist domestic terrorism in America, so that adequate resources can be dedicated to addressing the problem



- Its efforts to curb white nationalist violence, including data on monitoring and policing tactics
- Its efforts to disrupt the systems and networks that foster white nationalist terrorism

Enforce all civil rights statutes consistently and comprehensively.

The enforcement of civil rights law is currently left up to the discretion of the President via directive to various federal agencies; most robustly, the Department of Justice's Office of Civil Rights. Yet the hyper-political nature of the White House leaves the rights of Black communities and other marginalized groups vulnerable to the whims of those in power, who may or may not prioritize equal protections for all Americans. The current Administration, for example, has proven that a president, if left unchecked, can redefine whose lives matter in America and actively work to roll back civil rights based on their own ideological biases rather than the law.⁵³

The rights of Black people should never be subjected to the personal attitudes of one Administration and should be protected at all times under the law. To limit bias Congress should:

- **Strengthen the Office of Civil Rights by requiring greater transparency, data collection, and reporting** on their work of protecting the civil rights of marginalized communities



and holding accountable those who violate them.

- **Provide stricter guidelines around surveillance funding** and ensure that budgets approved to protect civil rights cannot be reallocated in ways that ultimately thwart them.



Our Communities

Make Black people powerful by acting on the climate crisis as a national priority before more of our communities are hit first and worst by disasters.

Ninety percent of Black Census respondents think the government should protect the environment.

Black people suffer most from the erosion and toxification of our natural resources, and we are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.⁵⁴ We are most likely to live in communities that are experiencing volatile weather patterns like flooding and heat waves, but that lack the resources to bounce back after disasters, as we saw with Hurricane Katrina. We are also most likely to live in neighborhoods with power plants and pollution, which lead to high rates of asthma, cancer and other illnesses.⁵⁵ The federal government too often

protects and enables corporate polluters, but then is slow to respond and help Black communities recover from climate disasters and contamination (as in the Flint water crisis).

We must shift to a clean energy economy to preserve our planet and protect our communities, and in doing so we have an opportunity to shift the profits from the polluters to the people. Black communities currently pay significantly for energy consumption, but we are boxed out of the economic benefits of investments in clean energy. We must ensure racial equity in access to jobs, renewable energy resources, consumption policies, and other aspects of the transition to a green economy.

Mitigate the climate crisis and reduce pollution.

- **The U.S. must recommit to our global leadership in driving sustainable climate policy** and take responsibility for mitigating the harmful impact of the U.S. around the world.
- **Strengthen waste and emission regulations and penalties to hold corporations accountable** for pollution and contamination crises.
- **Adopt the Green New Deal**, which will decarbonize our environment and transform our economy through massive infrastructure investments and a federal jobs guarantee.⁵⁶
- **Fund and support community-led climate action plans** that allow communities to develop their own infrastructure projects to address place-based climate needs like affordable and sustainable housing developments, bike lanes, and urban greening projects.⁵⁷
- **Promote “Energy Democracy”**—community ownership of renewable energy generation that would boost low-income communities and help close racial wealth gaps.⁵⁸
- **Increase federal emergency management funding** and develop guidelines to deploy federal funds to help states rapidly respond to climate and contamination crises. Additionally, Congress should pass the Real Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion for Disasters Act (REAADI) and The Disaster Relief Medicaid Act (DRMA) to help communities meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities disproportionately impacted by natural and manmade disasters, and those who acquire disabilities as a result of them.⁵⁹



The Legal System

Make Black people powerful by ending the use of incarceration to solve the problems of migration, poverty, and disinvestment and returning millions of us back to our families and communities.

The vast majority of Black Census respondents see the excessive use of force by police officers (83 percent) and police officers killing Black people (87 percent) as problems in the community

Today there are more Black people under correctional control—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began.⁶⁰ The number of people incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails has increased 500 percent over the past 40 years, not as the result of an increase in actual crime rates but as a consequence of policymakers' decisions to raise penalties, create mandatory minimum sentences, and establish truth-in-sentencing and three-strike laws.⁶¹

Black people have borne the brunt of this failed “tough on crime” approach, which was propelled by the 1994 crime bill that provided huge federal incentives to states to enact these measures.⁶² The result is a mass incarceration crisis wherein Black people are incarcerated at almost 6 times the rate of white people.⁶³ One in every 10 Black men aged 30 to 40 is in prison or jail on any given day, while 1 in 3 Black men will likely come in contact with the system at some point in his lifetime.⁶⁴

Criminal justice policy in America is steeped in racial bias and stereotypes of Black communities as lawless and Black people as predisposed to engage in nefarious behavior. Since the birth of the nation, Black people have been subjugated and controlled through brutality and terror sanctioned as law enforcement, and the residual impact of this culture continues to influence policing tactics today.

Racial profiling, police use of excessive force, and police killings

of unarmed Black people have been incentivized and justified by laws, policies, and practices that criminalize Black bodies and devalue Black lives in the name of public safety.

Yet none of these measures have actually made our communities safer. Instead, they have destabilized families, removed caretakers from their homes for years on end, and robbed families of both quality time and the wages that their loved ones would have contributed had they not been shuttled into prison. Even after serving their time, formerly incarcerated

people are often branded as criminals and felons for life and relegated to second-class citizenship, unable to vote, serve on juries, or be free from legal discrimination in employment.⁶⁵

Everyone wants to feel safe in their communities, but safety must not come at the expense of Black bodies and Black lives. Policymakers must enact comprehensive public safety reforms that are preventative rather than punitive, reduce reliance on incarceration, and treat all people who come in contact with the system with dignity and respect.

Invest in community safety, prevention, and justice rather than the penal system.⁶⁶



- Redirect \$20 billion from military and war spending into **prevention programs that improve community well-being and address the root causes of crime**, including behavioral, mental, and physical health services, as well as educational, job, and housing opportunities for Black communities.⁶⁷
- **Fund violence reduction programs that reduce police contact** to the minimum necessary to secure safe communities.
- **Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences** for low-level offenses.

- **Increase funding and oversight of reentry programs.** The recently-enacted First Step Act provides for early release and allocates funding for reentry programs, but implementation and accountability are key.⁶⁸ Congress should monitor the process and mandate increased funding for education, employment opportunities, mental healthcare, affordable housing, and other services to aid in program implementation.
- **Increase enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act throughout the legal system**, ensuring that people have access to reasonable accommodations as witnesses, victims, and perpetrators.⁶⁹

Eighty-seven percent of Black Census respondents think gun violence is a problem in their communities and seventy-six percent say it's a major problem.

- **Pass gun violence prevention measures** aimed at drastically reducing the number of guns in the hands of civilians, including (but not limited to) comprehensive background checks.⁷⁰
- **Stop using government funding, incentives, and other public resources to build and open new jails and prisons.**⁷¹
- **Ban private prisons and detention centers** and forbid companies and the government from profiting off of mass incarceration.⁷²

Hold police officers accountable for misconduct and use of force.

Seventy-three percent of Black Census respondents think that holding police officers accountable improves police-community relations, and fifty-one percent think community oversight boards would go a long way towards holding officers accountable.

- **Create an independent federal agency** charged with investigating police shootings and setting national best practices for policing. Though we often think of police involved shootings in terms of individual officers' decisions, the truth is that police involved shootings—as well as other failures of law enforcement to meet community standards—are often systemic failures.⁷³ A national body would create incentives for policy innovation, opportunities for system-wide accountability, and the necessary infrastructure for national-level data capture.
- **Eliminate law enforcement officers' "Bill of Rights" legislation** that protects police from the transparency and oversight that is necessary to ensure accountability.⁷⁴
- **Establish local community boards** that partner with law



enforcement on community safety initiatives and have disciplinary authority to supervise the police.

- **Fund state and national data collection systems** that track police stops, use of force data, crimes, sentences imposed, diversions, etc., disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and disability.⁷⁵

Stop criminalizing poverty.

- **End money bail, immigration bonds, and exorbitant fees and fines** that 1) criminalize poverty by incarcerating low-income people who cannot afford to buy their freedom, and 2) punish people who cannot afford to pay the often exorbitant charges they incur for their own basic needs (such as room and board and feminine hygiene products) while incarcerated.⁷⁶
- **Pass federal legislation like the Pretrial Integrity & Safety Act**, which requires the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs to make grants that would enable jurisdictions to 1) replace bail systems that use payment of money as a condition of pretrial release in criminal cases, and 2) implement a National Pretrial Reporting Program to collect data on the processing of defendants by state and local courts.



Decriminalize marijuana.



- Follow the lead of many states that have legalized and/or decriminalized marijuana possession and distribution.
- Retroactively **expunge misdemeanor marijuana charges**.

Forbid employers from asking job applicants to disclose criminal records.⁷⁷



- **Ban the Box** through state legislation that forbids employers from asking job applicants to disclose criminal records.
- **Pass the REDEEM Act**, which automatically seals juvenile records, enables adults convicted of nonviolent crimes to petition to have their criminal records sealed, and improves the accuracy of the FBI background check system.
- **Pass the Fair Chance Act**, which prohibits the federal government and federal contractors from requesting a job applicant's arrest or conviction record until after a conditional offer of employment has been made.



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