

# THE COMPACT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

## PREAMBLE

Residents of the United States are experiencing an unprecedented, inspiring and transformational moment in our nation's history. Shouted by some in blazing daylight and whispered by others in dark corners, the lived reality of race and racism is at the center of the American conversation in ways we haven't seen in nearly half a century. Our ancestors could hardly have foreseen the swift and powerful move of a Black man to the very top rank of government. The rush of unfolding events at times obscures the deep currents that have moved us to this place. But this we know: this political moment is the fruit of centuries of struggle to create from the radical vision of democracy a liberating reality of government of, by, and for ALL the people. Far from being a post-racial moment, however, this is a time that calls for unique clarity about the possibilities and dangers we face, and for bold action that is based on our best thinking and highest hopes.

Our opponents have become masterful shape-shifters, promulgating racist policies while insisting that race is the furthest thing from their minds, aided and abetted by mass media that allow them to frame and control the national dialogue. Racist expression has taken new, coded and perverse forms:

- Dog-whistle racism, in which messages are conveyed on a separate frequency through racially coded words and phrases, reaching ears that have been primed and are highly attuned.
- Colorblind racism, in which the status quo is sustained by those who pledge allegiance to purportedly race-neutral policies that leave them free to focus on intent and ignore outcomes.
- Double-bind racism, in which those who make reference to the racial regime or advocate on behalf of anti-racist practices and policies are themselves accused of being racist by “playing the race card.”
- Image-borne racism, in which a picture that is purposefully deployed to trigger deeply ingrained stereotypes is worth a thousand color-coded words.

We could not ask for a sociopolitical context more in need of our ability to name our full vision. We deserve and demand a society that rejects the pessimism of unending racial conflict and embraces the optimism of a human community firmly anchored in justice and mutuality. Nothing could be more affirming of our individual and collective worth than our work to create a country where:

- The needs of our children are fully met so that they can thrive and develop their unique gifts to contribute to the common good.
- A commitment to internationally recognized human rights, at home and abroad, that structures our partnerships in the community of nations.
- The unwavering practice of justice and equity overcomes the centuries-old divisions of dominance and privilege along the color line.
- The global migration of humans is understood as a fundamental feature of our age, and all workers are compensated and routinely protected, whatever their place of birth.
- People choose partners, create families, and build households free from arbitrary, discriminatory limitations based on gender, sexual identity, or birth relations.

- The structural barriers to political participation are removed, creating electoral processes uncorrupted by the power of private wealth and ensuring access to government decision-making at all levels for all people.
- The social safety net is rewoven, its strongest cords a generosity of spirit toward the vicissitudes of the human condition and a recognition that no one deserves to live in desperation.
- The outlandish apportionment of public funds to militarism is diverted to address the climate and energy crises, rebuild neglected infrastructure and meet human needs.
- We respect and celebrate the rich diversity of belief, language and cultural practice that constitutes the national fabric.

It is up to us to rally our considerable resources and place them at the service of the struggle to build a society based on inclusion, justice, equity, dignity and respect for diversity and difference. We need the sustained, dedicated action of grassroots organizers, policy advocates, social analysts, artists, elected officials, union members, religious congregants of every faith, community leaders, technologists and new media makers. We need organizations, networks and alliances that carry our vision and values, sustain collective struggle, promote messages that inform and inspire, expand our capacity to be powerful and establish new policies and practices that institutionalize racial justice.

The seismic shift from institutionalized racial inequity to institutionalized racial equity requires a radical reorientation in policies and practices, a fundamental reordering of economic priorities, and, underlying these two things, a shift in culture and values. A movement of that magnitude comes about only when millions of people have begun to believe that change is possible and have been set in motion to bring it about. It has long been a political truism that the power of wealth can only be overcome by the power of the people, such as:

- Those who can strategically lead us in so thoroughly undermining the structures that degrade people of color that we can begin to build new ones that do not depend on hierarchies.
- Those who are committed to finding creative ways to bridge cultural differences in experience and perspective among different communities so we can build winning coalitions of conscience.
- Those who are willing to lead by example and teach us to become attuned to the compounding dynamics of race, class, gender, religion, sexual identity, citizenship status, and level of physical/mental ability, and whose work at these intersections empowers the multiply marginalized.
- And those spiritually committed seekers who show us the way to hope and courage as we take up the hard work of inspiring, mobilizing, educating, organizing, recruiting, and communicating.

At this, OUR moment of destiny, let us acknowledge with great gratitude that we build on the legacy of those who, down through the centuries, made our progress possible. May what they dreamed be ours to do. We are rich in resources, in the very first place the deep creativity, intelligence, and perseverance of communities who hunger for freedom. And so we, steadfast travelers on the long roadway to racial justice, are secure in the knowledge that our destination will be reached. We've come this far not just by faith, not just by leaning on what we hold sacred, but by the daily decision of each and every one of us not to turn around. We will never give up, we will never give in; we will find a way or make one, together.

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCING RACIAL JUSTICE

- 1. Focus on *structural racism* and *systemic inequality* rather than simply *personal prejudice*.** Structural racism—the overarching system of racial hierarchy and inequality that routinely privileges whites and disadvantages people of color—profoundly affects most issues and institutions in the U.S. In addition to addressing historic underpinnings and root causes, speak to the cultural norms and popular ideas that contribute to current racial inequities.
- 2. Focus on impacts rather than intentions.** Racially disparate impacts and outcomes, regardless of intent, are sufficient evidence that racism exists. Impacts can be documented, while intentions are debatable and difficult to prove. Rather than dwell on who is a racist, it's far more useful to focus on the causes and effects of racism.
- 3. Address racial inequality explicitly but not necessarily exclusively.** Racism must be illuminated in order to be eliminated. Challenge so-called “colorblindness,” which seeks to deny the realities of racism and render people of color invisible. Often other significant factors are involved that must also be made visible, such as gender, class, ethnicity and immigrant status.
- 4. Propose solutions that emphasize equity and inclusion rather than diversity.** Racism is pervasive, but it need not be permanent. Offer proactive solutions that are equitable, inclusive, and viable. It is important to distinguish the principle of equity, which is fairness, from that of diversity, which is about variety.
- 5. Develop strategies to empower stakeholders and target institutional powerholders.** Build inclusive and cohesive cross-racial alliances that prioritize the full engagement of people of color as leaders. Make the powerholders who have decision-making authority to enact needed changes accountable for institutional racism.
- 6. Make racial justice a high priority in all social justice efforts.** A successful progressive movement must recognize racial justice as a central component of social justice. The struggle for racial justice is not a zero sum game. Instead of allowing racism to drive social division and disparities, we must make racial equity the driving force for uniting and benefiting all people.