



Radical Pragmatism

A FRAMEWORK TO GUIDE THE PATH TO ECONOMIC LIBERATION

We are at a major inflection point in our nation's history. The compounding pandemics of white supremacy and coronavirus force us to confront and tackle a formidable truth: racism is profitable. The great reckoning of our time calls us, of course, to respond to our immediate economic crisis, but also to seriously reimagine a new path forward and restructure the systems that perpetuate oppression in our economy.

Introduction

We are at an inflection point in our nation's history. The compounding pandemics of white supremacy and coronavirus force us to tackle a formidable truth: racism is profitable. This great reckoning of our time calls us not just to respond to our immediate economic crisis, but also to imagine a new path forward and restructure the systems that perpetuate oppression in our economy.

[Liberation in a Generation](#) and [Common Future](#) offer **radical pragmatism** as a framework to guide the path to economic liberation. This framework is both radical in its aspirations and practical in its strategic approach. Radical pragmatism aims to transform and upend systems of oppression and harm while acknowledging current realities and opportunities to shift power toward that vision.

The following position paper describes our current racial economic justice moment; what radical pragmatism looks like; and how we might deliver economic liberation for Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other marginalized people of color. You will find the following chapters:

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Throughout this paper we use a number of terms that require definition. **People of color** references people who have suffered directly from structural racism and white supremacy. **Elite institutions** are entities responsible for building and maintaining economic systems that perpetuate institutional racism and white supremacy to gain profit and hoard wealth. The use of **we** and **our** throughout the document at times refers to professionals who self-identify as part of the community development/revitalization, anti-poverty, social justice, racial justice, and economic justice movements. As each author has been part of these various movements, they are part of the shift in direction for which this paper calls. At other times, as the authors are people of color, *we* and *our* refer to people of color more broadly. See the glossary for more detailed definitions of key terms.

PART 1

The Fierce Urgency of Now



**We are
confronted with
the fierce
urgency of now.**

– DR. MARTIN LUTHER
KING JR.



When Dr. King spoke these words on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, the nation was on the verge of ground-shaking legislative change for civil rights. Built on a century of activism, the movement came to a crescendo with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Further, King's organizing led to the establishment of the Poor People's Campaign, a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious coalition to advance economic rights for poor people.

Despite these monumental achievements, civil liberties and economic rights remain largely out of reach for people of color, particularly access to and opportunity within the U.S. economy. The inability to build generational wealth is one of the most deep-rooted causes of contemporary racial inequities.

As we continue to combat COVID-19 and its devastating impacts, it is urgent that we also confront the epidemic of white supremacy in the U.S. economy. This nation has not only failed to deliver full economic rights for Black and Brown communities; it continues building its economy on our exploitation while excluding us from reaping the benefits of our participation. Each recession, public health crisis, and climate catastrophe is, by design, many times more devastating for Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other low-wealth people of color.

The data speak to this painful truth. All these figures reflect pre-pandemic reality. The devastating impacts of COVID-19 have already deepened these inequities:

- If our nation continues with business as usual, median Black and Latinx wealth will reach **ZERO** by the middle of this century.
- The median wealth of Black people today is less than it was in 1983, the year in which the federal government started collecting household data on wealth.
- We're less likely to have a job: Since 1973, unemployment rates for Black people have remained close to double that of whites, with Latinx unemployment consistently landing somewhere between Black and white unemployment.

- “Recovery” from economic crises is [always slower](#) for Black and Latinx workers.
- We don’t earn much when we do have a job: [Median](#) hourly wage of Black and Latinx workers has increased a mere \$2.00 since 1975.
- Those low-wage jobs – many deemed essential during the pandemic – are more likely to be dangerous, [putting people of color at a higher risk of harm](#) at work: 13% of all workers are Black, but Black workers [make up](#) 19% of low-wage essential work. Black workers are 50% more likely to work in healthcare & social service industries. Black workers are 40% more likely to work in hospitals.
- More than half of Black and Latinx (56% and 55% respectively) tenants are considered [rent-burdened](#), paying more than 30% of their income on rent.
- Black and Latinx people in the U.S. [suffer](#) higher rates of asthma, diabetes, obesity and pollution exposure than whites. [Further](#), they have contracted COVID-19 at three times the rate of whites and are twice as likely to die from the disease.

Since all of these figures describe the pre-pandemic reality, our future economic outlook is distressing.

It should not surprise us that the victories of the civil rights movement did not deliver economic justice to people of color. As prophesied by Dr. King himself, “it’s much easier to integrate a lunch counter than it is to guarantee a livable income and a good solid job.”

Winning racial economic justice is difficult work, largely because real change requires those in power to let go of some of their privilege and power. Still, an economic rearrangement and restructuring is imperative to improving the economic conditions of people of color. Dr. King and others in the movement pivoted in this direction following those monumental victories, through the Poor People’s Campaign. It is their unfinished work we continue today.

Unfortunately, racial and economic justice institutions have largely allowed our ethos of urgency to wane. Instead, we have embraced more restrained strategies that have led us to make fundamental mistakes and miss crucial opportunities, dampening our collective impact.

- Corporate and institutional philanthropy practices have relegated nonprofit efforts to charity work, preventing us from advancing and operationalizing the structural changes the civil rights era demanded.
- We’ve become content with half-solutions that deliver incremental progress which, even if fully implemented, would provide only marginal relief to a small fragment of people of color.

- We've become entangled in theoretical arguments that block us from taking decisive action and achieving large-scale impact.
- We've subordinated the leadership of people of color in the fight for our own liberation, thus reinforcing the worst forms of white supremacy in our own movement.
- We've divorced economic justice from racial justice.

The limitations of our current systems and structures continue to hold us hostage. Innovative ideas are dismissed as impossible in our current political climate. People and institutions in power do not cultivate emerging leaders, because their profiles do not fit the standards set by systems of white supremacy. Root problems, such as systemic racism, go unaddressed in service of protecting white comfort. We can no longer afford to tinker around the edges at a glacial pace of change. The stakes are too high, and the pain is too deep.

The only deficit that matters is a deficit of POWER.

Conventional economic debates frame statistics around economic inequality as resulting from individual choices and a lack of personal responsibility. In announcing his signature [Promise Zone](#) initiative, President Barack Obama commented that "a child's course in life should be determined not by the zip code she's born in, but by the strength of her work ethic and the scope of her dreams." This statement reflects a flawed perspective common in liberal and progressive circles, and the broader public debate.

We reject the notion that people of color can achieve racial and economic progress by individually overcoming a multitude of personal deficits, such as knowledge, skills, education, accessibility, morality, cultural purity, patriotism, religious piety, or opportunity.

A deficit of power in shaping and governing our economic systems creates these inequities. People of color have been systematically and intentionally denied economic and political power since the birth of this nation. By focusing on ameliorating the mythical plague of personal deficits, we have allowed both those who control capital (i.e., corporations, philanthropic institutions, and government), and the racial and economic justice movements that depend on the cast-off crumbs of that capital, to become complicit in denying us needed power. To achieve racial and economic justice, our movement strategies must first focus entirely on obtaining, possessing, and wielding economic and political power.

To impose our power, we need new movement infrastructure helmed by leaders of color with expertise in advancing antiracist economic justice efforts. This new infrastructure will consist of organizations that develop the next generation of antiracist policy solutions; design new economic narratives and stories to inform our collective understanding of the economy; organize a base of people primed to advance policy change; organize capital to finance this new movement infrastructure; and position the next generation of political leaders accountable to our liberation. We are not starting from scratch. Vast networks of these leaders currently exist.

We are at a critical moment for addressing the inequities laid bare by COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement. People are interrogating the data and the systems that uphold them. We can harness this moment and chart a new direction that reflects the fierce urgency, audacious vision, and tactical precision necessary to win economic liberation for the next generation of people of color. That new direction is **Radical Pragmatism**.

PART 2

A Framework to Win Economic Liberation

Principles of Radical Pragmatism

Radical Pragmatism is a framework to guide our work to win economic liberation. It balances the incredible urgency needed to respond to this moment with the necessity to advance bold, transformative, and long-term solutions for systems change. It envisions a new economic order that provides, for the first time in our history, full economic citizenship to people of color. Full economic citizenship with the right to be fully compensated and valued, have our fundamental needs met and find safety and security. Radical Pragmatism seeks to materially improve the economic condition of people of color today, while winning economic liberation for the next generation of people of color. It is both radical in its aspirations and practical in its strategic approach.

Radical Pragmatism has ten core principles that differentiate it from other economic justice frameworks:

1. Economic liberation requires always telling the truth about the centrality of racism in our economy.
2. Racial and economic justice are one in the same.
3. We need to fix systems, not people.
4. People of color must lead throughout the movement ecosystem.
5. Efforts must be grounded in the material realities of people's lived experiences.
6. Private actors—and private capital—must be utilized as allies of racial and economic justice.
7. Bold antiracist government policy will win economic liberation.
8. Liberation can be actualized in one generation.
9. To succeed, we must build, consolidate, and impose our political power.
10. All people of color belong.

PRINCIPLE #1

Economic liberation requires telling the truth about racism, always.

The economic justice movement has largely ignored the role that racism has played in economic inequality. There are three fundamental truths that we must accept if we are going to walk the path toward economic liberation. In our current economic system:

1. **Racism is profitable;**
2. **Racism enhances the individual and institutional wealth of elite white people and groups; and**
3. **Racism is the cause of economic disparities for communities of color.**

Our current economic narratives of deservedness, 'pulling yourself up by your bootstraps,' letting the free market reign, government waste and inefficiency, are all ideas that are fundamentally detrimental to the well being of Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other low-wealth people. They convey a false notion that markets are race-neutral, that the government cannot deliver prosperity to all (and insinuates that corporations can), and that we all self-determine our ability to thrive in this free market based on our own effort.

To be clear: racism, not race, causes the economic pain that people of color experience. This pain is not accidental or a natural consequence of racial identity, but an intentional outcome of an economic system designed to produce white supremacy. Furthermore, these economic systems have been skillfully refined over centuries by elite institutions, in partnership with federal, state, and local governments, to perpetuate racialized economic outcomes.

PRINCIPLE #2

Racial and economic justice are one in the same.

Racial and economic justice are inseparably entwined. All systemic racial injustices are rooted in economic motivations, either in the intentions of the oppressor or the impact on the oppressed. For example, the mass incarceration of Black and Brown people in the U.S. fuels the profits of a multi-billion-dollar prison-industrial complex, while also severely curtailing the earnings of formerly incarcerated people of color. The interconnectedness of racial and economic justice extends to issues like health care, voter suppression, policing, immigration, and climate change, to name just a few.

Moreover, our economy rests on the foundation of stolen labor (from enslaved Black people) and land (from Indigenous people) and is sustained through uncompensated household labor provided primarily by women. These connections extend to other economic issues like labor, wages, housing, corporate power and monopoly, taxation, and financial services. Acceptance of this truth allows us to accurately diagnose the root cause of our challenges, develop solutions that can meet those challenges, build coalitions across a progressive movement, and build the power (and the infrastructure to wield that power) to force systemic economic change.

PRINCIPLE #3

We need to fix systems, not people.

Neoliberal narratives that blame individuals, especially people of color, for systemic injustice exist to justify our economic oppression. The personal behavior or choices of people of color do not explain racial disparities. The economic systems are designed to break us and must be replaced.

Too many institutions in our movement have spent millions of dollars and countless hours of person-power on misguided people-fixing strategies. These include financial literacy, job skill building, remedial education, and

housing counseling. These same institutions have designed racialized systems to divert government resources to the “deserving poor” while creating policies and programs to regulate the behavior of the “undeserving,” including fatherhood initiatives, parenting classes and reentry initiatives.

Only programmatic and policy solutions that seek to fix systems, not people, can deliver economic liberation to people of color. This should be the work of the economic justice movement.

PRINCIPLE #4

People of color must lead throughout the movement ecosystem.

The professional leadership of the economic justice movement is predominantly white, which both results from and exacerbates white supremacy. Leaders and organizers of color have been and largely are still relegated to supporting roles. This deprives the people most affected of the power to determine movement political tactics, policy development and alignment, advocacy strategy or resource allocation. At most, we are empowered to fill roles that white power brokers deem appropriate. For example, white professional movement leaders may

grant positional authority to leaders of color to advance local grassroots efforts, but they rarely grant us the autonomy to lead national policy development and advocacy strategies (unless it is in a supporting role to white leaders).

To root out white supremacy and its impact in the movement itself, people of color with a deliberate anti-racist disposition must lead it, throughout all segments and all levels of intervention, with white allies supporting that leadership.

PRINCIPLE #5

Efforts must be grounded in the material realities of people's lived experiences.

Acknowledging the racialized systems that oppress people of color and result in material harm provides a basis from which we can generate solutions. Our solutions and interventions must remain connected to the real disenfranchisement, exploitation, theft, and exclusion faced by people of color. We cannot afford to continue advancing efforts to improve systems of

democracy, corporate governance, stewarding of our natural resources or any progressive issues that do not make plain their economic benefit to people of color. These systems should be transformed for the express purpose of materially benefitting people of color. We should hold this value as an outcome at the heart of all our efforts.

PRINCIPLE #6

Private actors—and private capital—must be utilized as allies of racial and economic justice.

All social movements need funding. Historically, the wealthy elite have used investment and philanthropic channels to support their preferred social causes and strategies, exerting the power of the pocketbook to shape the work they fund. They do this overtly and with conscious awareness, by imposing clear constraints and directives, as well as without express intent, following institutionally adopted and culturally maintained policies, practices, and norms to the same effect.

To be true allies of the racial justice movement, **investors, philanthropists, and the professionals that act on their behalf must cede power racial and economic justice movement leaders** and shift away from the policies, practices, and norms in which they have found comfort.

Without this concession of power—in decision-making, strategy determination and the structure of funding relationships—leaders of color will never be able enact the campaigns and programs necessary to achieve true change within the racial justice movement.

MONEY TALKS

In the early 20th century, the Garland Fund acted as a primary funder to the NAACP. Founded in 1922 by Charles Garland and funded through his (initially rejected inheritance), the Garland Fund was a progressive and radical funder at the time; the institution claimed to follow the lead of activists and changemakers in the determination of funding decisions. However, the Garland Fund pushed its grantees to prioritize education and organized labor in their work, as the Fund believed these two systems were most crucial to the betterment of society. The Garland Fund discouraged the NAACP's work on racial violence in favor of a focus on Black education.

According to Dr. Megan Ming Francis at the University of Washington, this shift did not reflect the priorities of NAACP leadership. "[W.E.B.] Du Bois" — one of the founders of the NAACP — "was moving away from education to a 'racial program for economic salvation,'" says Francis, "and had become deeply skeptical that black students would ever receive decent treatment in white schools." The shift still guides the NAACP today.

Early civil rights leaders deeply understood the relationship between racial and economic justice. Still, groups like the NAACP have been systemically discouraged from addressing racial inequities from an economic justice lens, due to the biases and narrow outlook of private funders. This continues today, especially in philanthropy's approach to funding contemporary movement leaders, such as the Movement for Black Lives and other Black-led justice organizations.

Immense opportunity exists for transformative partnership between change leaders and private actors. **In order to avoid "movement capture," as Dr. Francis puts it, funders must take a backseat to the aims and priorities of Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian leadership.**

PRINCIPLE #7

Bold government policy will win economic liberation.

Small-scale, incremental policy will not undo centuries of economic oppression; only bold, transformative systemic policy change will dismantle systems of racial oppression and simultaneously build systems of economic liberation. The government (primarily federal and state and, to a lesser extent, local) has the power, capacity, resources, and accountability to deliver liberation; movement leaders of color are positioned to build the power necessary to ensure government delivers.

The government created our current systems of oppression and thus has the responsibility of taking them apart. As exemplified by the three pieces of legislation referenced in the beginning of this publication, our movement has won every civil rights victory in its history by leveraging the power of government intervention). The federal government has

the most power to deliver economic liberation at a national scale. Through its mandate, responsibility, authority of taxation and regulation of our national currency, the federal government's power is unparalleled.

The scale of policy change necessary is substantial. It must be bold and, in many ways, reimagine how the government meets the economic needs of people of color. The design of these policies must respond to the condition of people of color, while ensuring that our many intersectional dimensions are accounted for (e.g., women of color, people of color with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people of color, etc.). These policies must envision a rearrangement of the economic system, built on a rights framework that guarantees fundamental economic rights and citizenship to all people of color as a condition of living within the borders of the United States.

PRINCIPLE #8

Liberation can be actualized in one generation.

We must reignite our urgency to deliver economic liberation, and nothing inspires urgency more than a deadline. We believe that the deadline is one generation, or 25 years. Ours is not an arbitrary deadline. In 25 years, we will find ourselves in the year 2046, a few years ahead of when—on our current trajectory—the average net worth for people of color will be zero wealth, and people of color will comprise more than half the US

population. Counter-productive activities (such as relying on small incremental solutions, theoretical debates and academic study that does not support action) have sapped the urgency needed to win liberation in a generation. We, people of color, do not have time, nor can we afford, to continue to endure the consequences of an oppressive economy, or the flawed-and-failed attempts so far to change it.

PRINCIPLE #9

To succeed, we must build, consolidate, and impose our political power.

Political power is the base for economic vitality and prosperity in a democracy. It determines the distribution of money and capital throughout our economic system, including who stewards that distribution. Economic power requires political power. Winning liberation requires that we engage in all segments of the democratic process: electoral, legislative, and administrative.

Despite this reality, the funders of economic and racial justice movements find the words “partisan,” “political” and “politics” distasteful and have withdrawn from partisan politics. In doing so, they have ceded this space to the same elite institutions

responsible for the oppression of people of color. For example, mainstream philanthropic organizations restrict the political activities of their grantees to protect the tax benefits enjoyed by their wealthy donors.

We envision a new political and advocacy infrastructure, led by people of color, to ignite the political debates that determine our political representatives and hold them accountable. For this infrastructure to succeed, we must aggregate the currently dispersed power of organized people of color around a transformative policy agenda that centers and benefits people of color.

PRINCIPLE #10

All people of color belong.

We have never seen a United States where truly every person belongs. While the notion of who deserves full citizenship has expanded over the last two centuries, elite institutions and their leaders continue to maintain their dominance over the Oppression Economy (see page 26 for a definition) by othering people of color.

It is not enough to design systems that are responsive to people of color generally. We must be explicit in our intent to ensure all people of color belong in the economy. We must be diligent so that no segment of our population is left behind. This will require a laser focus on making sure the most vulnerable people of color (especially Black women) are protected, including immigrants of color, formerly incarcerated people of color, LGBTQ+ people of color and people of color with disabilities.

PART 3

How Radical Pragmatism Goes Beyond Other Economic Transformation Frameworks

Some progressive economic frameworks envision an economic change that can be best described as wholesale replacement. In this vision, the pathway to liberation is achieved by replacing racialized capitalism centered on individual ownership with an economy built on collective ownership, solidarity with other people and conservation of natural resources. Some of these frameworks include Just Transition, Living Economy, Solidarity Economy or Sharing Economy.

Our time horizon is more immediate.

Radical Pragmatism strives for a more intermediate time horizon. Long enough for us to achieve bold transformative change, but short enough to ensure that people of color living today will enjoy the fruits of that change. It also seeks to make transformative change within our current economic and political systems. We believe that this can be accomplished while still advancing many of the policy solutions envisioned by other progressive frameworks, such as land trusts, social housing, and worker cooperatives.

While Radical Pragmatism agrees with the ideals of many of these frameworks, we surmise that the comprehensive transitions they require could take over 100 years. We must instead take bold and decisive action that will change the systems under which people of color live today. Further, we worry that such a dramatic disruption could create problematic unintended consequences for people of color if we are not intentionally centered as the beneficiaries of this economic change.

We embrace aspects of various economic ideologies and practices.

Economic change is a spectrum, with the complete replacement of our economic systems at one end and reformism, tinkering at the edges of our current systems, at the other. This tension most dramatically presents itself in progressive circles in the debate around the virtues of capitalism versus socialism. Many progressives on the side of capitalism believe the system simply needs to be reformed to deliver opportunities to people of color. They see racial disparities as externalities that can be eliminated through adjustments that will eventually benefit disadvantaged people of color. Many progressives on the side of socialism believe instead that our economic system is fundamentally flawed and cannot be redeemed to deliver liberation to people of color. They believe that the best course of action is to replace our

capitalist economy with one where key economic products and services are collectively or publicly owned and democratically governed.

We find these debates counterproductive. The US economy already operates as a hybrid between socialism and capitalism, providing socialism to the wealthy and powerful and rugged capitalism to everyone else. Rather than engaging in ideological arguments about the merits of two, we should accept that both capitalism and socialism are part of our current economic system and ensure that they facilitate the economic prosperity of low-wealth people of color, rather than the white elite they currently serve.

This also requires accepting the reality that private capital must play a role in plans to dismantle oppression and transition to economic liberation. Accepting this reality means ensuring that the policies and strategies we follow do not reinforce racial capitalism. To that end, we embrace replacing the extractive, foundational elements of racial capitalism with the following:

Profit maximization as the only or first motive	Value creation that accounts for people and planet and centers equity, distributed ownership, and shared prosperity
Shareholder primacy	Stakeholder capitalism that prioritizes community members as central constituents
Ecological and economic extraction	Circular, regenerative economic principles
Exploitation of human and financial capital	Fair wages and working conditions with strong worker protections
Market fundamentalism	An understanding that markets are governed by policy, and healthy competition is fostered by strong regulation
Corporate power and supremacy	Anti-monopoly activism

PART 4

Ending Oppression and Delivering Liberation

If we win, what will liberation look like? In the face of extreme economic oppression, it is difficult to visualize what feels far out of reach. We must muster the courage to have what Angela Glover Blackwell calls Radical Imagination. We must have the audacity to envision an economy that does not yet exist. The economic liberation of people of color is our nation's most critical project, and it must begin with a new architectural blueprint. Such a bold, transformative, and comprehensive policy platform will deliver economic liberation to people of color in a single generation.



**It is going
to take radical
imagination to
get where we
want to go.**



– ANGELA GLOVER
BLACKWELL

Here we present a curated look at what progressive advocates of color are already doing that is working. We do not identify specific policies in this paper, as we believe that design work should happen in community with others. Rather, the Liberation Policy Platform we outline in this paper identifies a radical policy vision, a set of radical long-term goals and a group of bold policy pathways that we believe can deliver economic liberation.

Our Radical Vision, Long-Term Goals, and Bold Policy Pathways

The vision for this Liberation Policy Platform has two parts that must be simultaneously designed and pursued. First, we must dismantle our current **Oppression Economy**, where elite institutions use the racist tools of theft, exclusion, and exploitation to expand their wealth, and subsequently systematically suppress the economic vitality of people of color. Second, we must build a **Liberation Economy**, where people of color have their basic needs met, have safety and security, are valued and compensated for that value, and belong in the economy in our entirety and full intersectional diversity.

Dismantling the Oppression Economy

Government action has enabled centuries of economic oppression. However, government action can also dismantle the same economic oppression it has created. The Oppression Economy we are charged with dismantling rests on four pillars, which we must destroy. Our long-term goals are to:

- End the political suppression of people of color.
- End the criminalization of people of color.
- End the dual financial system.
- End corporate domination and concentration.

End the political suppression of people of color.

In the Oppression Economy, wealth and political power go hand in hand. Elite institutions, from powerful monopolies like Amazon to coordinated lobbying groups like Koch Industries, use their wealth to purchase political power, then manipulate U.S. democracy to enlarge their wealth. Central to their quest for power is the political disenfranchisement of people of color. For example, they have used their control of our government to politically disenfranchise 6.1 million formerly incarcerated people and four million people, largely people of color, living in US territories. Further, they collude with U.S. policymakers to manipulate elections by actively suppressing the votes of people of color through policies like voter identification requirements, limiting polling places, last-minute polling place changes and voter roll purges.

End the criminalization of people of color.

Former President Donald Trump's consistent references to people of color as "criminal," "illegal," "rapists" and "thugs" give voice to a long history of elite institutions systematically criminalizing people of color to make us vulnerable to theft, exclusion, and exploitation. In the Oppression Economy, it is profitable to incarcerate Black and Brown people, which has fueled the police occupation of our communities and the mass incarceration of our people. Our criminalization is the primary purpose of the U.S. justice and immigration systems. In 2019, Black and Latinx people comprised [60% of the 2.3 million adults and children confined to US prisons, jails, and immigration detention facilities](#). This Prison Industrial Complex, at a cost of [\\$182 billion a year](#) to the government and families, consists of an array of elite public and private institutions, from funders like Wells Fargo to informatics companies like Palantir. There are dozens of organizations that build wealth through operating private prisons, assessing court fines and fees, financing cash bail, operating debtors' prisons and selling basic necessities like food and phone calls to incarcerated people. Over [\\$50 million](#) in debt is carried by about 10 million people due to their involvement in the US justice system in the form of fines and fees.

End the dual financial system.

Financial institutions (e.g., banks, investment firms, insurance companies and credit reporting agencies) are designed to profit from the exclusion and exploitation of people of color. In the Oppression Economy, the government has anointed these institutions to serve as unchecked gatekeepers with the power to determine who can and cannot access the financial products, services, and capital (e.g., checking and savings accounts, affordable credit, and insurance) necessary to navigate the economy. This has led to nearly half of Black and Latinx households being either [unbanked or underbanked](#) and over a [fifth owning zero wealth](#). Without access to basic mainstream financial products, services, and capital, we are relegated to the fringes of the economy. It is in these fringes that predators lurk to exploit and steal our hard-earned income and wealth through predatory products like payday loans, subprime mortgages, overdraft fees and [prepaid debit cards](#).

End corporate domination and concentration.

U.S. policymakers have empowered elite corporations, and the people who control them, to act as the architects and overseers of the Oppression Economy. These plutocrats run an array of industries: financial services, technology, healthcare, farming, education, hospitality, entertainment, retail and more. They have amassed obscene amounts of wealth from building an economy =upon the theft and exploitation of Black, Latinx, immigrant and Indigenous land and labor. The primacy of shareholder return over worker pay and benefits, the manipulation of tax codes, runaway monopolies and our pay-to-play democracy are just a few hallmarks of this imbalance of concentrated corporate power and corrupted public power.

Building a Liberation Economy

The United States of America has never had a Liberation Economy. In order to create one, all people of color must envision a world that does not currently exist. The policies we will enact through Radical Pragmatism will provide for our basic economic rights and elevate our collective humanity. By building a Liberation Economy we will embark together on the final steps along the long road towards freedom that we have traveled for centuries. Below are the radical goals and bold policy pathways we must create.

- All people of color have their fundamental needs met.
- All people of color have safety and security.
- All people of color are valued, are compensated for that value, and can thrive.

All people of color have their fundamental needs met.

Imagine a world where none of us are worried about where our next meal will come from, whether the water we drink or the air we breathe are contaminated or whether we can get medical care for a sudden illness or injury. Poverty has ravaged the lives of people of color in the United States. Every single community of color suffers a [higher rate of poverty](#) than white households, including Asian-American and Pacific Islanders, who suffered some of the [fastest rates of growth in poverty](#) following the 2008 recession. Access to life's basic needs should be a right of all occupants of this country, not a commodity purchased to enrich the wealth of elite institutions. Further, charity has proven to be an insufficient strategy for winning the proverbial war on poverty. Charity alone cannot meet the scale of need. Only radical policy can realistically eradicate poverty and ensure that all people of color have their basic needs met.

All people of color have safety and security.

For many people of color, financial freedom is a dream. In 2017, nearly [25% of Black households and 17% of Latinx households](#) reported falling behind on their bills, and nearly [60% of Black and Latinx renters and nearly 40% of Black and Latinx homeowners](#) spent more than 30% of their income on housing. This financial insecurity is costly and drives many people of color into debt and deep emotional crises, including a loss of hope for the next generation. After the bills

are paid, we have little left over to improve quality of life, let alone to pass down to our children.

In one word, we want **WEALTH**. And safety and security are about having both financial security and intergenerational wealth. Technically, wealth is what you own minus what you owe, or net worth. But wealth is so much more than a number. Wealth provides protection from sudden financial hardship. It provides a family the freedom to choose how and where to live. It allows parents to contribute to their children's futures, from the day a child is born to when they start their own family. Wealth ultimately shifts power into the hands of communities of color. With wealth, we can build our own institutions, systems and structures that allow us to determine our future on our own terms. The ideas exist to make this possible, but we must fight the corporate and political elite that threaten our freedom to make this future a reality.

All people of color are valued, are compensated for that value, and can thrive.

In the Oppression Economy, elite institutions continue to undervalue and steal the labor of people of color. Whether at an antebellum plantation, a California fruit field, a meat packing plant, a McDonald's drive-through, a Walmart register or an Amazon distribution center, the bodies of people of color have always been treated as disposable by elite institutions. Our economic policy has normalized [Black, Latinx and Indigenous unemployment](#) rates well above that of whites.

Job scarcity, artificially created by elite institutions, forces workers of color to accept illegal working conditions (such as [racial discrimination](#) in hiring, [racialized wage theft](#) and more), undercutting the quality of employment for people of color. In the largest economy in the world, full employment should mean exactly that: a job for every single person with the desire to work. Further, those jobs should come with a livable wage, health and retirement benefits, paid time off, and protections for workers' safety and health.

PART 5

Reclaiming Power

Breaking Political and Capital Flow Barriers

So far, we've explored the new model of Radical Pragmatism and identified the principles that should guide this new direction. We've also explored the vision of economic liberation that we hope to achieve by imagining a Liberation Policy Platform. The next question we must explore is: How do we actualize these principles and realize this vision?



**For the
master's tools
will never
dismantle the
master's house.**

– AUDRE LORDE



We do it by building collective, strategic power. Though we often forget we have it, the elite are keenly aware of our power, as evidenced by the aggressive tactics they use to suppress it. This section explores how to build, deploy, and finance a new advocacy infrastructure to win economic liberation.

This includes:

- building a new, more expansive advocacy infrastructure;
- acknowledging the advantages of a radically pragmatic infrastructure; and
- financing the movement's new infrastructure.

Building a New, More Expansive Advocacy Infrastructure

The political power of the elite is concentrated in Washington (government), New York (financial) and San Francisco (technology) through a formidable network of institutions designed to ruthlessly wield their political power. The political infrastructure they have designed includes multi-billion-dollar networks of lobbyists, political action committees, donor networks, political consultants, research institutions, policy think tanks, advocacy associations, communications firms, and trade associations. These networks serve a single purpose: to enhance elite wealth and power by electing, pressuring, and colluding with government officials both elected and unelected. This infrastructure controls both major political parties and reaches into every level of our government. Returning to Audre Lorde's iconic words, this

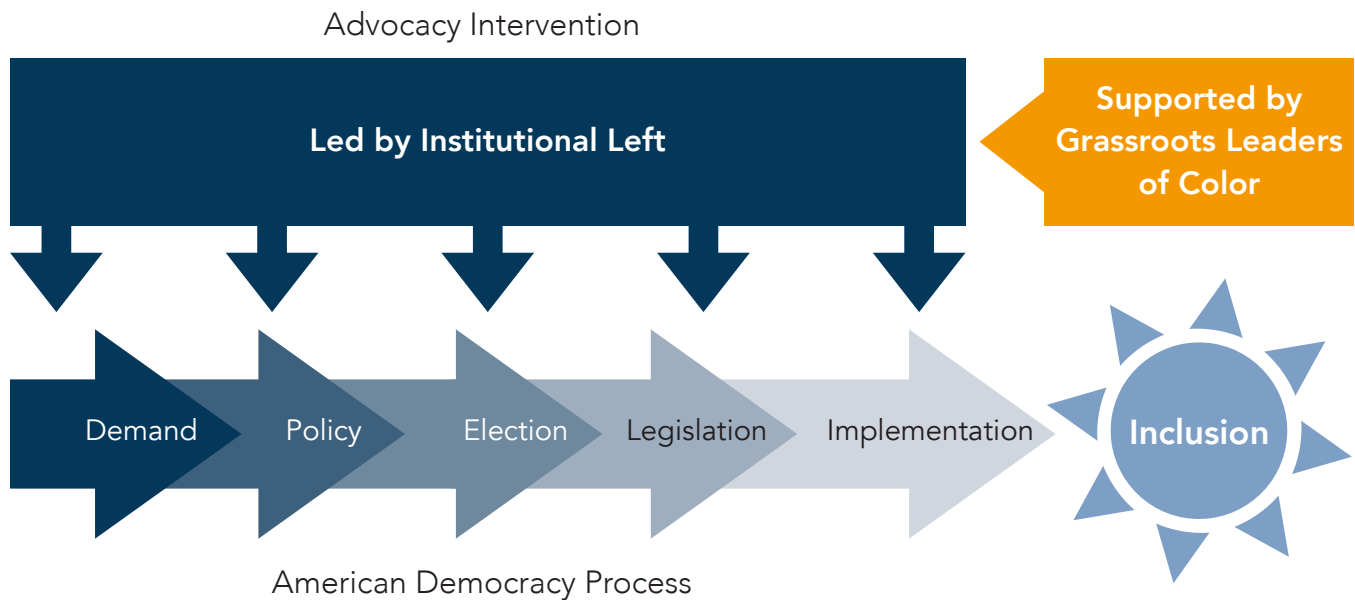
infrastructure is the tool that built and maintains the master's house—the Oppression Economy.

We, people of color, do not have a competing advocacy infrastructure with the purpose of winning economic liberation. Rather, we've entrusted our economic well-being to the **Institutional Left**, composed of organizations largely controlled by white progressives. To date, the Institutional Left has done little to dismantle the systems responsible for our political and economic oppression. In fact, they've poured hundreds of millions of dollars into similarly oppressive systems. For example, when the Right builds think tanks like Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation, the Left builds think tanks like the Brookings Institution and the Center for American Progress.

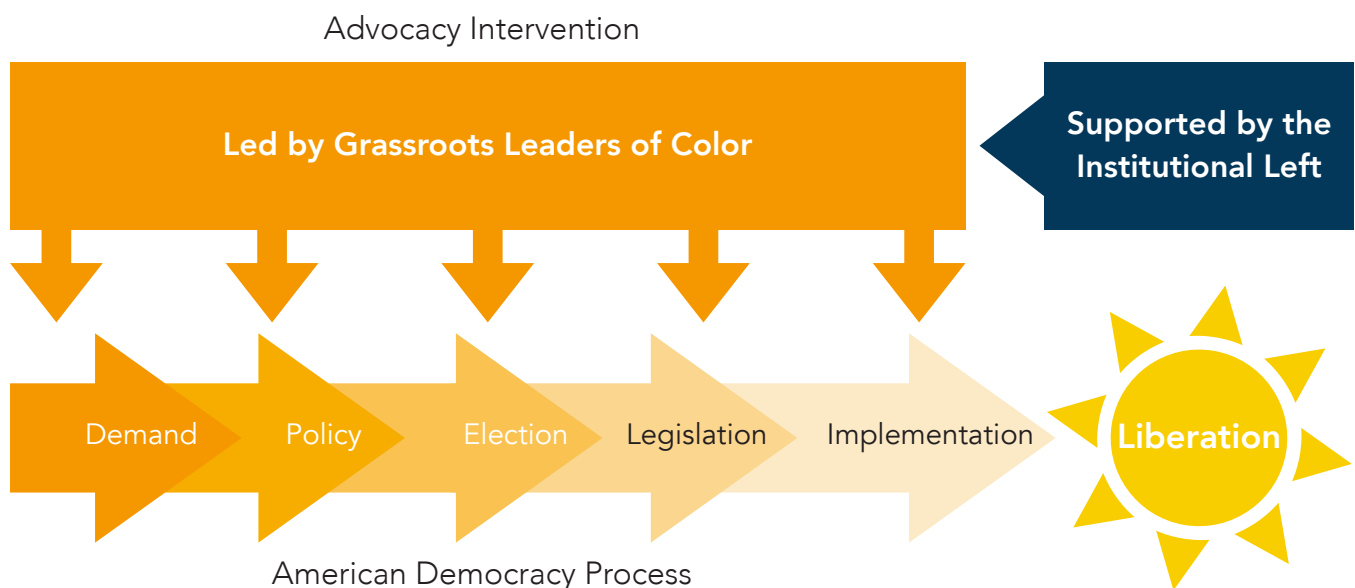
We, people of color, must accept the uncomfortable truth that the Institutional Left has neither successfully countered the Right's effectiveness nor delivered transformation. After decades of driving the progressive movement, they have barely gotten us anywhere. People of color can no longer wait on economic liberation and thus must act with urgency to build our own political infrastructure that leverages our source of power to win liberation. Our power is not consolidated in the pay-to-play environment of Washington, D.C. Our power resides in a different place than these elite institutions. Our power resides in the 90 million voting-age people of color in this nation.

Our new infrastructure should not be led by national think tanks, advocacy organizations and political institutions. Rather, **Grassroots Organizers of Color** must lead our efforts to intervene at every point in our nation's democratic policy-making process. Professionals trained in the Institutional Left who wish to align themselves with these leaders must do so in a supporting role, where their expertise can be used by grassroots leaders of color to advance those leaders' policy ideas and bolster their advocacy strategies. This model shifts the power and decision-making leadership from the Institutional Left to grassroots leaders of color.

Current National Advocacy Framework



Radical Pragmatism



The Advantages of a Radically Pragmatic Infrastructure

Radical Pragmatism replaces concentrated power with dispersed power.

The elite are a small population of voters that must create and maintain exclusive systems and institutions to purchase their political power. The 400 richest people in the U.S. are worth a combined [\\$2.96 trillion](#), and own more wealth than the [entire Black population and one-third of the Latinx population combined](#). They cannot depend on the power of their vote alone to keep and wield their power. Instead, they use their money to influence the media, buy political favor and set the parameters of the political debate, all in service of managing the electorate through voter suppression and alienation.

We, people of color, are many, and our votes have the power to sway government action. In fact, people of color comprise 30% of the population in 246 congressional districts across the country. Our challenge is to organize and to force the necessary reforms in our democracy and governance; to wield the political power necessary to transform the economy. This challenge requires building a robust infrastructure of dispersed local power across a vast movement of local institutions. This dispersed power will allow us to influence lawmakers at the level where they are most accountable: the communities they represent.

Leaders of color are the architects of the vision, strategies and policies needed to achieve economic liberation.

So long as the Institutional Left designs policies and political strategy to improve the economic condition of people of color, the results will be painfully incremental, actively reinforce white supremacy and fail to reflect the desires and needs of people of color. Leaders of color must take the lead as architects of a governing agenda, policy ideas and political strategy that will win our economic liberation.

This shift is possible and has already begun. A vast network of organizers, researchers, policy wonks, political strategists and communication professionals of color exists throughout the progressive ecosystem. It includes many who have built our expertise both within and as checks on the Institutional Left. It also includes organizers of color who are building, consolidating, and wielding political power in fellowship with people of color in communities

across the country. This base of professionals should work in fellowship to lead the organizing, agenda setting, and governing institutions that make up this new infrastructure.

We celebrate and leverage our differences while combining power to fight a common enemy.

The term “people of color” refers to a large population with both commonalities and a beautiful array of differences. As stated earlier, we do not use the term to erase our diversity, as some have, but rather to celebrate and honor it. People of color make up the full mosaic of intersectionality that exists across humanity, as we are:

- Descendants of the six continents occupied by humanity;
- Practitioners of nearly all of the world's religions;
- Creators and stewards of a wide array of sophisticated cultures;
- Lesbian, gay, queer, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and heterosexual as well as cisgender, transgender, intersex, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming
- People with disabilities;
- Southerners, Midwesterners, East Coasters, West Coasters, Southwesterners, and those that live on the Great Plains and in the Rocky Mountains; and
- And so much more.

We all share the disastrous effects of white supremacy and economic oppression. Through this common experience, we have the opportunity to unite our power and align those 90 million voters around a common vision to dismantle the Oppression Economy and build a Liberation Economy.

Our narrative reflects reality and sets a vision.

The current racist beliefs about Black, Latinx, Indigenous and marginalized people of color shape our economic policy decisions. Data about the persistent racial wealth gap clearly show that Black and Brown people are not reaping the economic benefits of educational attainment, pursuit of entrepreneurship and other individualized paths to financial prosperity. These data

fly in the face of the notion that our virtuous hard work will get us ahead, yet that notion persists in and permeates our policymaking. For example, both state and federal public benefits pile on work requirements to ensure recipients “have skin in the game,” but limit the amount of savings recipients can accumulate while receiving those benefits.

We are calling for a new economic story that centers the well-being of people of color and positions people of color as essential to the economy—both what it is and whom it benefits.

We have a proven, trusted tool: organizing.

Organizing is the tool that we must use to confront the wealth and power of elite institutions. Organizing has proven time and time again to be our path to racial and economic justice. Organizing can aggregate and fortify our power, clarify our vision, and provide the flexibility necessary to remain nimble across many fights.

Abolishing slavery was an organizing victory. Beating back encroachment on Indigenous land was an organizing victory. The civil and economic rights of farm and industrial workers are major organizing victories. Soon, organizing will defeat a major weapon of economic oppression: the police state. Existing networks of experienced organizers of color across the country are already primed to lead us into this critical work. The rest of us in the movement must honor that leadership by following and supporting them as they lead us to economic liberation.

Financing the Movement’s New Infrastructure

As we acknowledge the need to develop a new infrastructure, the obvious next question is: how do we pay for it? Traditionally, as [Echoing Green](#) and [others](#) have found, organizations led by people of color are under-resourced as compared to their white counterparts. This is a direct reflection of this country’s persistent racial wealth disparities, and the white supremacist assumption that people of color are not credible leaders or good stewards of resources. Historically and currently, people of color do not possess the capital to build the institutions crucial to confronting the power of the elite. In many ways, we are reliant on the elite for the small amount of capital we are able to access via elite institutions.

Still, there is immense opportunity for wealth holders to become allies in this work. According to [the Foundation Center](#), there are nearly 86,000 charitable foundations with more than \$890 billion in assets, a number that is rapidly increasing. These institutions have a mission to support the common good, with [many explicitly naming racial equity](#) as a priority.

However, it's the follow-through that matters, and the vast majority of these dollars are locked up in foundations' endowments. Federal law stipulates that foundations give away just five percent of their endowments each year—a number which can include staff and consultant expenses, making the amount actually donated even less). While foundations work to better society with grantmaking dollars, the bulk of their wealth is typically invested in Wall Street via their endowment, under the pretense of “investing for perpetuity.”

To truly shift power to people of color, foundations must change these practices. Rather than prioritize investment returns for perpetuity, what if foundations invested their assets in ways that deliberately addressed inequality? How can we, collectively, justify perpetuity if our communities of color are suffering? Why should we accept and protect perpetuity to urgently advance incremental change? If funders could shift their endowments to support organizations working in line with the movement (e.g., community development financial institutions with a track record of lending to businesses owned by people of color), those endowments could instead support direct mechanisms for creating good jobs, wealth, and institutional power in communities of color.

Restorative investing offers one such alternative.

Pioneered by brilliant Black women like Nwamaka Agbo and Alfa Demmellash, restorative investing acknowledges the urgent moral, economic, and ecological imperative to share and redirect power and promote collective well-being and social equity. This is an approach that is [“rooted in relationships with social movements](#) in a way that democratizes the ownership of wealth, land and resources and where communities are making decisions around who has access to those resources.”

Still, this isn't to say that there isn't room for improvement in grantmaking as well. Philanthropy still does not typically provide the type of grant capital necessary to further the movement.

Philanthropic capital is restrictive, sparse, and undependable. Leaders in the field, from Nonprofit Finance Fund to [GEO funders](#), continue to prove that nonprofits build better and more transformative solutions when they're able to access general operating funding, allowing institutions the leeway to experiment and invest in what's necessary. Complementary [research](#) from Echoing Green found that the unrestricted assets of nonprofits led by people of color were 76 percent smaller than white-led institutions. In short, the vast majority of philanthropic resources are going to white-led institutions.

When leaders of color do receive funding for their economic and racial justice work, it often comes with prohibitions that limit their effectiveness. For example, federal law restricts or outright bans them from participating in partisan electoral politics. We need new and radical forms of ownership, governance, entrepreneurship and financialization to fight pervasive economic inequality. Philanthropy must prioritize funding organizations that are building solutions that further this work.

PART 6

Recommendations for the Path Forward

Changing hearts and minds is not enough to end the cycles of oppression facing people of color. Radical Pragmatism is about ending the profitability that fuels systemic racism and redistributing resources, including power and capital. Profitability is governed by our laws and policies, which are shaped by the lawmakers we elect and the economic beliefs we uphold.

The urgency of our now is to create political and narrative environments that usher in transformative policies. Organizers who are mobilizing and activating the power of people of color are the ones who must design and create these environments. They are the ones who must usher in local, state, and federal changes. We need to ensure that those that are building power are:

- Building a liberation policy platform;
- Generating a transformative story of the economy;
- Developing political strategies that fix systems, not people;
- Building political infrastructure; and
- Wielding the power of private capital.

Building a Liberation Policy Platform

We are generating the bones of a platform that is multi-issue and implicates many sectors. Our oppression is a tangled knot, and pulling just one side will not undo it. We must instead tackle it simultaneously from the private, public, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors. A liberation policy platform addresses the problems that people of color face and aims at materially improving our lives today. Federal policies govern the bulk of regulations and spending that can improve the lives of people of color. These are not new policies, there is no need to start from scratch. Some of these ideas, like a job guarantee, have been circulating for [nearly a century](#).

The liberation policy platform serves as a reference library for organizers seeking to address particular issues. We want every organizing group to have a federal policy agenda supported by the best thinking and research on those policies, with specifics determined by organizers to meet the needs of their base. This approach differs from our current model of ideating, developing, and detailing federal policy in national think tanks and hoping that advocates and

activists support the final product. This library is meant to be a curated, iterative space that organizers can shape and own, ensuring that their base of people of color will support, take action on, and mobilize to win these policies when it comes time for advocacy.

Generating a Transformative Story of the Economy

Our current economic narrative—specifically who “wins,” who “loses” and who should have a say—is grounded in notions of individualism and deservedness. The “rags to riches” stories written by Horatio Alger, despite being over a century old, still reign supreme.

We might instead be moved by stories that reflect community power, choice, and ownership in the economy, stepping away from a “winners and losers” dichotomy and toward inclusion and access for all. Stories of marginalized communities creating alternative banking structures that are not extractive but additive; employee-owned businesses that restore community wealth; and financial investments driven by stakeholder, instead of shareholder, needs.

These stories are based on existing initiatives, programs, policies, and institutions from across the country and can lead the way to a new economic future. These stories matter, because stories create narratives, assumptions and beliefs that make up a worldview. We are aiming for a new worldview that generates new economic policy, as well as bold, radical economic policy that reinforces that worldview.

Developing Political Strategies That Fix Systems, Not People

As the pandemic has illustrated, programs can address immediate needs like food, healthcare, and financial support, but people of color are still at the whim of national policy decisions that determine both short-term and long-term economic relief. Programs, and the organizations that run them, do not address the systems in which their clients operate. Nor do they have the political power to influence the elite decision makers responsible for those systems.

We should shift our focus from programs that focus on individual incentives or behavior toward organizational efforts to change systems and structures. We are concerned particularly with building and protecting our right to democratic influence. We must focus on efforts that strengthen our right to vote; uplift our voices above lobbyists’ in statehouses and on the Hill;

and pave the way for people of color to hold elected and administrative offices. These efforts must also articulate policy positions on restructuring our current, white supremacist systems. Ultimately, we must focus resources on efforts that build power among people of color, as policy, justice and freedom all follow power.

Building Political Infrastructure

The success of racial capitalism has almost entirely eroded the ability of people of color to wield significant political power. For example, Black voters are often responsible for the election victories of Democratic presidential candidates, but as a base have little power to hold those same leaders accountable in the White House.

We need a constellation of institutions that can nimbly coordinate and collaborate across races, issues, and strategies. These institutions should have cultural power to rewrite our stories of what is possible, especially regarding the economy. These institutions should be able to carry a robust, comprehensive agenda that centers people of color. To support these institutions, we need a deep bench of elected and administrative leaders who, with the support, guidance, and partnership of aligned communities, will usher in the economic liberation necessary for people of color to fully participate in our economy and democracy.

Wielding the Power of Private Capital

To build systems and structures that work for Black and Brown communities, people of color-led organizations need access to flexible, unrestricted capital. Though the Movement for Black Lives and other efforts led by people of color inspired many philanthropists in 2020 to increase giving to Black and Brown communities, little is known about whether those funds ever materialized, let alone where they have actually gone. Relatedly, [while \\$12 billion was pledged globally](#) within the first half of 2020 to fight COVID-19, the lion's share of funding was restricted to project-based support. Only 5% of the funding disclosed was earmarked for Black and Brown communities.

Moreover, restructuring the policies that govern our economy will be largely dependent on philanthropic support. But philanthropic support is problematic in both its power to dictate

which charitable work gets funded and its implication in the perpetuation of systems of economic oppression. Several challenges must be met head on in order to fund a new focus on power building. We need to restructure the tax code to require philanthropy to release more funds and close tax loopholes for charitable giving. Private foundations are only required to donate 5% of their endowment annually. With \$873 billion collectively in assets, private philanthropy must do their part in redirecting and building the necessary political infrastructure. There are several groups within the philanthropic sector who are advocating for reform, such as the [Solidaire Network](#). Similarly, groups like [Patriotic Millionaires](#) have been advocating in recent years for higher taxes on the rich, and against unjust tax breaks, to keep private-sector philanthropy from growing at such an alarming rate.

Several scholars have also scrutinized donor advised funds (DAFs), which collectively account for an additional \$121 billion in assets, because they potentially restrict the flow of philanthropic capital typically going to non-profits.

Similarly, the so-called “impact” investing sector must do better in evaluating which investments are truly impactful in serving communities of color. All too often, impact investors deprioritize investment in the real economy, neglecting businesses in communities of color due to false or misguided interpretations of risk. Impact investors must instead deploy principles of restorative investing, rooting investment decisions in relationships with social movements to democratize the ownership of wealth, land, and resources. If we’re going to build better models of ownership, governance, entrepreneurship and financialization to fight pervasive economic inequality, wealth holders across the capital spectrum must prioritize funding organizations building solutions that create opportunities for communities of color.

Conclusion

Radical Pragmatism is a framework to confront racism and white supremacy and to achieve economic liberation for people of color. It is a bold agenda to uproot the status quo that, in its aims of equity and justice, will accept nothing less than structural transformation. Radical in aspiration and practical in strategic approach, a Liberation Economy envisions—and demands—a new economic order centering and built by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander folks. This, among other principles, is central to radical pragmatism.

As we push back against the many crises we face, including COVID-19, inequality, and climate change, we must challenge and reimagine the systems and institutions that exploit and exclude people of color. As we confront our current crises, it is crucial that we also confront and undo the epidemic of white supremacy in the US economy. America's racism and structural inequities are deeply rooted. Radical Pragmatism is capable of eradicating this oppression and winning liberation, so that generations of Black and Brown people can not only live but thrive.



Radical simply means grasping things at the root.

– ANGELA DAVIS



Glossary

Elite institutions have been ordained by national, state, and local policymakers as the architects and overseers responsible for building and maintaining the economic systems that use institutional racism and white supremacy to facilitate their plunder of the nation's wealth. Elite institutions are controlled by real-life, almost entirely white people who benefit directly from the wealth and power these institutions capture. For example, the richest 400 people in America [own more wealth](#) than the entire Black population and one-third of the Latinx population combined. Elite institutions include corporations representing nearly all for-profit industries (e.g., Wall Street firms, health care, retail, agricultural, media/entertainment, and energy), educational institutions (i.e., colleges and universities), non-profit organizations (e.g., arts and culture, recreation, human services, and policy advocacy), and government institutions (e.g., Congress, state legislatures, administration agencies and the judiciary).

Institutional Left and Right are the institutional infrastructure of the ideologically liberal and progressive movements and the ideologically conservative movements in the United States. The organizations that make up the Institutional Left and Right include academic institutions, public policy think tanks, policy advocacy organizations, political parties, political action committees, lobbyists, communications firms, and philanthropic institutions.

People of color as a term represents groups of people that have suffered directly from institutional racism and white supremacy. The term is not used to erase important cultural, experiential, or economic differences among people of color, but rather to identify the solidarity among racial groups who are racially oppressed in the United States. The racial groups represented in this collective definition include:

The descendants of American slavery: widely referred to as Black or African American (for the purposes of this paper, we refer to them as Black). Black people's brutal experience with white supremacy in the U.S. began with their legal enslavement and provision of unpaid labor to white elite landowners. After slavery was outlawed, systemic oppression followed Black people through the post-Civil War Reconstruction era and the Jim Crow era, to northern states in the Great Migration, and continues to this day. This legacy feeds pernicious anti-Black narratives in today's economic and political systems, which facilitates Black people's exclusion from full economic citizenship in the United States.

People affected by American colonialism: This group includes Native American people, people of Mexican heritage in the American Southwest, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian and Indigenous peoples. It also includes residents of U.S. territories in Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Specific experiences with white supremacy vary widely between these groups. For

Native Americans, Native Alaskans, and Native Hawaiians, who occupied these lands centuries before the first European settlers arrived, violent land theft forced removal from their homelands and resulted in genocide. Today, many live on a shrinking number of reservations isolated from mainstream economic systems. People living in U.S. territories, taken as the spoils of war, have limited democratic control over their economies and are largely reliant on the mainstream U.S. economy. Despite serving in the military and paying U.S. taxes, they do not have equal democratic representation in the U.S. government. While different, these impacts of colonization and American infringement on sovereign rights unite stories across geopolitical boundaries.

People affected by global white supremacy and imperialism: Discussions about the impacts of institutional racism and white supremacy often overlook American imperialism. In conjunction with European governments, the U.S. has used its financial and military power to violently spread its brand of white supremacy across the globe, particularly in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Central and East Asia, and Africa. The widespread poverty and war caused by decades of U.S. neocolonialism, specifically the exploitation of resources and destabilization of governments, continues to force millions of people of color to flee from what the World Bank calls the Global South. These immigrants enter a country that profits from racism—and anti-Blackness, in particular. Immigrants of color are thus sorted into the racist strata upon which the U.S. economy depends. This depresses their ability to earn livable income and build wealth while recreating systemic racism, specifically anti-Blackness, within immigrant communities.

Grassroots organizers of color: When we refer to grassroots or community organizations, we mean those organizations that are led by and serve the people of color most marginalized from institutions of economic and political power. These are organizations that are aggregating power among people of color (see earlier definition of “people of color”) to make change at the local, state, and national levels.

Oppression Economy: This is the current economy, built by elite institutions and the individuals who control them that use the racist tools of theft, exclusion, and exploitation to expand their wealth and power.

Liberation Economy: This is the economy we're building toward, where people of color have their basic needs met, have safety and security, are valued and compensated for that value, and belong in the economy in our entirety and full intersectional diversity.



About Liberation in a Generation

Liberation in a Generation is a national movement-support organization, working to dismantle economic oppression, secure power for people of color, and build liberation. Founded in 2018, we unite communities and campaigns to totally transform how the economy works and who it benefits. Through [our work](#), we're tearing down systems of structural exclusion and building toward fully realized inclusion, so that Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander people can prosper — within one generation.

Led by Jeremie Greer and Solana Rice, LibGen is incubated at PolicyLink. Learn more at www.liberationinageneration.org.

COMMON FUTURE.

About Common Future

For two decades, Common Future has been identifying, resourcing, and co-creating economic solutions alongside a network of 200+ community leaders who are building wealth and economic power in marginalized, POC-majority communities. As a think and do tank, Common Future is a platform for thought leaders and community leaders who believe in the power of racial equity and asset ownership to close wealth gaps and transform our economy.

Work on radical pragmatism was led by Rodney Foxworth, Lauren Paul, and Allison Jones. Learn more at www.commonfuture.co.