

Establishing an Antiracist Los Angeles County Policy Agenda

To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of [B]lack people but with the flaws of American society – flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes. How we set up the terms for discussing racial issues shapes our perception and response to these issues. Professor Cornel West, Race Matters (1993)

The United States has never fully addressed one of the original sins of its colonizers – the institution and practice of 250 years of chattel slavery. The ideology that established and maintained the institution of slavery has left an indelible stain on the fabric of this nation and is embedded in virtually every facet of American culture and civil society.

Sadly, when slavery ended, a new era of repression emerged and became the common thread in the lives of African Americans. The legacy of the intentional structuring of opportunity, implementation of policies and practices, and assignment of value based solely on skin color and other physical characteristics, has created and continues to mete out unfair disadvantages to African Americans. These circumstances have prevented entire communities from achieving their full potential due to the implementation of Black codes and Jim Crow laws, the widespread and condoned practices of lynching and

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sexually assaulting African American men and women, voter suppression of African Americans, the myth of separate-but-equal schools, state-sanctioned housing discrimination in the form of red-lining and enforcement of racially restrictive covenants, disparate access to and substandard treatment within the health care system, police brutality in Black communities, and mass incarceration.

As a result of these conditions, African Americans have systematically experienced unequal access to the foundational aspects of this nation that are universally envisioned as essential to building strong individuals, families, and communities. These disparities in access are quite evident in Los Angeles County (County) where African Americans consistently lag behind other racial and ethnic groups across several indices of social and economic well-being. While comprising only 9 percent of a regional population of 10.7 million (U.S. Census estimate 2019), the disproportionately high representation of Black people on the low end of these indices is well documented. Black people represent:

- 11 percent of COVID-19 related fatalities; (County Department of Public Health, July 2020)
- 27 percent of the people shot or seriously injured by law enforcement in the County in 2017; (California Department of Justice, 2018)
- Nearly 30 percent of the overall population in County jails; (Measure of America: Portrait of LA County, 2018) and
- 34 percent of the population experiencing homelessness. (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority Homeless Count, 2019)

Further, an analysis of unemployment in California during the COVID-19 crisis found that as many as 22% of Black workers were jobless (University of California, Los Angeles Center for Neighborhood Knowledge, May 2020).

The killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, by a white police officer sparked global protests and has inspired a multitude of interventions and advocacy to address not only the issue of racialized violence at the hands of law enforcement, but systemic inequities and racist structures that have plagued this nation for centuries. In this collective awakening, universities have changed the names of campus buildings in

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acknowledgment of the namesake's ignorance and racism. Corporations have donated funds, created diversity pipeline initiatives, and phased out offensive product images and advertising. Additionally, federal, state, and local budgets are being reimagined for greater investments in community-based solutions.

While the current groundswell of recognition and support is inspiring, the County's agenda for racial equity must go further to address generational inequality and systemic anti-Black racism. This agenda must focus on the actions and outcomes that will produce real systemic change: improved educational outcomes, better physical and mental health care and outcomes, increased housing and housing stability, meaningful employment opportunities, and an equitable and fair criminal justice system consistent with the "Care First, Jail Last" policy platform developed by the Alternatives to Incarceration Workgroup and adopted by the Board on March 10, 2020.

No child is born with racist worldviews. These are learned attitudes that lead to behaviors that have been woven into every aspect of the culture of this nation, its society, and the foundations of its institutions. Just as racism can be learned, it can be unlearned and replaced with antiracism, the adoption of beliefs, actions, movements, and policies to oppose racism. An antiracist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups (How to Be an Antiracist, Ibram X. Kendi, 2019).

The United States has reached an inflection point and it is time for every jurisdiction in the nation to collectively and publicly confront this country's history, beginning with the acknowledgement of its actions and inactions toward African Americans over the last four hundred years. The County has the third largest African American population (906,300) in the U.S. and the largest in California (U.S Census, 2010) and can do its part by building antiracism into its structures, processes, operations, and services. To do so, the County will need partnering institutions to embrace transformation in sectors ranging from education to health care to employment, housing and beyond.

The County's departmental leaders have already taken the initiative to commit to this work by pledging to stand against racism in any form and use their positions to advance racial and social equity, diversity, and fairness. The County has made great

strides toward addressing and eliminating implicit bias but it is time to advance to the next level. It is no longer sufficient to support diversity and inclusion initiatives. The County must not only move to identify and confront explicit institutional racism to set the national standard and become a leader of antiracist policy making and program implementation – it must lead to dismantle it.

The killing of George Floyd demonstrates where initial efforts should be focused. In the area of justice reform, this Board embarked upon antiracist program implementation when it established the Office of Diversion and Re-entry in 2015, in 2017 when it established the Office of Youth Development and Diversion, in 2019 when it voted to adopt a Probation Oversight Commission, and most recently in 2020 when it adopted the “Care First, Jail Last” policy platform. But more work remains to be done. This moment which confronts the County today requires the formalization of an antiracist policy agenda platform, continuation of ongoing efforts, and expansion of these efforts to other areas negatively impacting the lives of, and opportunities for, Black Angelenos and others who have been historically harmed.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

- 1) Recognize, affirm, and declare that racism is a matter of public health in Los Angeles County (County) and that racism against Black people has reached crisis proportions that result in large disparities in family stability, health and mental wellness, education, employment, economic development, public safety, criminal justice and housing.
- 2) Direct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to establish an eighth Board-directed priority to address the elimination of racism and bias in the County and:
 - (a) develop a strategic plan and underlying policy platform articulating the goals, actions, and deliverables;
 - (b) establish an organizational unit within the CEO that is dedicated to implementing the plan; and
 - (c) report back to the Board on the strategic plan and policy platform, in writing, within 60 days.

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- 3) Direct the CEO and other departments to evaluate existing County policies, practices, operations, and programs through a lens of racial equity in order to more effectively promote and support policies that prioritize physical and mental health, housing, employment, public safety, and justice in an equitable way for African Americans.
- 4) Direct the CEO, in collaboration with the Director of Personnel and department directors, to assess existing policies, processes, and practices that may prevent African Americans from advancing within County departmental career ladders and develop procedures that best advance and sustain Countywide and departmental equity commitments.
- 5) Support the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority in its work to execute a workplan, in collaboration with the County and the City of Los Angeles, to prioritize and advance the overarching strategies and 67 recommendations put forward by the Ad Hoc Committee for Black People Experiencing Homelessness. The workplan would establish baseline data to track and evaluate implementation of the recommendations.
- 6) Direct the Executive Director of the Human Relations Commission (HRC) and the CEO to:
 - (a) Commission an annual report (Report) by an academic institution and/or research institute that outlines and provides a regular update on the State of Black Los Angeles County with a focus on outcomes for African Americans in the areas of physical and mental health, education, employment, law enforcement, justice, housing, and homelessness including updates from the implementation of recommendations made by the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness;
 - (b) Include within the Report an annual assessment of outcomes and progress with defined benchmarks and objectives; and
 - (c) Present the findings of the Report to the Board of Supervisors (Board) each year during a Board meeting in the month of June.

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- 7) Direct the CEO to work with the Executive Director of the HRC to execute data usage agreements for relevant County departments as necessary and develop a funding plan in consultation with philanthropy and academia to identify the requisite funding to produce the Report each year.
- 8) Direct the CEO to ensure that all County department directors identify at least one Management Appraisal and Performance Plan (MAPP) goal each year that strengthens organizational capacity for cultural competency and vigilance to reduce racial stigma, inequality, and implicit bias within their respective departments.
- 9) Direct the CEO to recommend and advocate for relevant legislative policies that improve outcomes and reduce racial disparities and support local, regional, state, and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism.

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