

Roadmap to an Equitable Response, Recovery & Resilience

A REPORT BY E PLURIBUS UNUM INSTITUTE

MAY 2020



E Pluribus Unum is an initiative created to fulfill America's promise of justice and opportunity for all by breaking down the barriers that divide us by race and class. In its first year, the E Pluribus Unum team traveled extensively across the American South to uncover and confront the challenges we face, to learn from people about what separates us and what can bring us together, and to find bold and effective solutions to tackle the modern legacy of Jim Crow so that an inclusive, new South may be born. Incubated at Emerson Collective and led by former New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, E Pluribus Unum is building a series of programs and initiatives to cultivate courageous leaders who are committed to realizing an inclusive vision for a new South, champion transformative policies to reverse the enduring harms of America's Jim Crow era past for those who continue to experience them today, and change narratives that perpetuate systemic and interpersonal racism in order to shift people's attitudes and behaviors. To learn more, visit www.unumfund.org.

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Overview

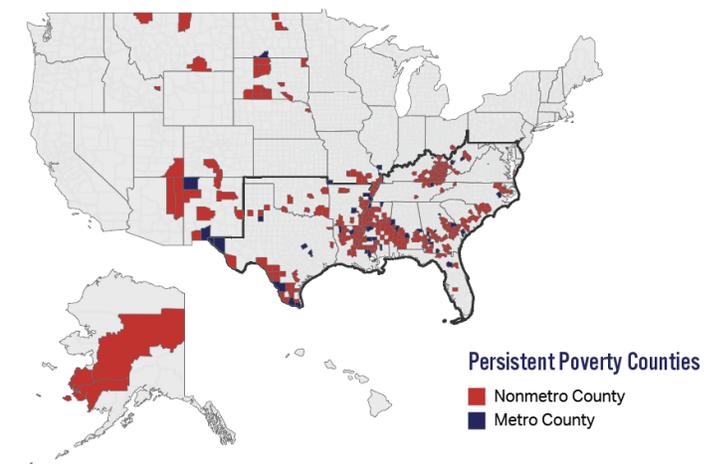
The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that it does not respect geographic borders, political ideologies, age or gender. Yet for the United States, the novel coronavirus has exposed a widespread and long-existing pandemic of poverty that is too readily ignored or accepted in our communities. We are made sick today because of the coronavirus, but the health and wellness of our communities have been declining for years as the result of deep, preexisting racial and socioeconomic inequities created by actions at the federal, state and local government levels.

The current global health crisis makes clear that the inequity we have ignored for too long has put us all at risk. In this crisis, we have the opportunity to acknowledge the danger of our past faults and chart a new course towards a stronger, more equitable future for all. Today, we recognize the millions of Americans going to work each day in essential roles as heroes who risk their health every day and still earn less than a living wage. Millions more Americans are out of work and facing an uncertain future. Yet our challenges persisted long before COVID-19. In February of this year, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, one in every three Americans lived with economic insecurity; more than half are people of color as the result of decades of structural racism.¹ Even worse, approximately 140 million Americans could not afford a \$400 emergency even before we faced a global pandemic.²

People living in the South appear to be at greater risk to this pandemic and to the economic damage that may result. When compared to other regions, the American South has higher rates of economic insecurity, elderly residents, residents with self-care and/or independent living difficulties, and lower rates of paid sick leave coverage when compared to the national average.³ Further, people of color bear the disproportionate impact of this public health and economic crisis, with

Most Persistently Poor Counties are in the South

Counties with Persistent Poverty



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Historical County Level Poverty Estimates Tool (1960-2010); U.S. Census Bureau/ American Fact Finder. Selected Economic Characteristics. 2012-2016 American Community Survey

Notes

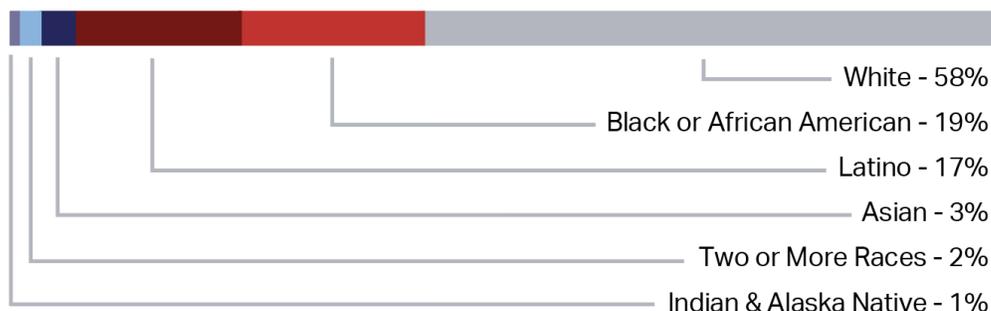
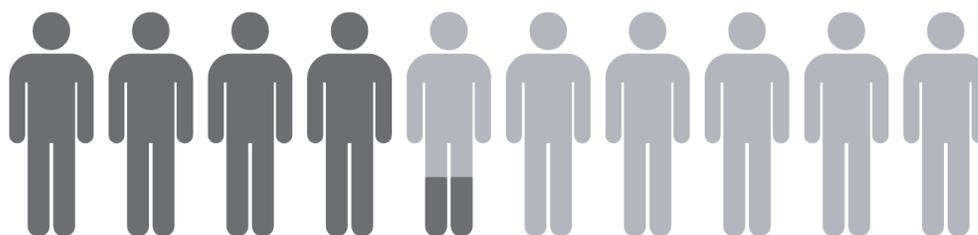
1 https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/pcsr_racial_equity_final.pdf

2 <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PPC-Audit-Full-410835a.pdf>

3 <http://www.theseap.org/wp-content/uploads/SEAP-Southern-State-Responses-to-COVID-19-1.pdf>

Black Americans facing the largest burden in the South. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COVID-19 is affecting the Black population at exceptionally high rates. While Black people make up just around 13 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 30 percent of COVID-19 patients⁴ and constitute a third of COVID-19 fatalities.⁵ Majority-Black counties have had infection rates three times the rate of majority-white counties.⁶ Those statistics beg us to ask, why is this disease preying upon this segment of our population so dramatically?

More than 4 in 10 Southerners are People of Color



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Population); 2015 ERS County Typology Codes. USDA Economic Research Service using data from Bureau of Economic Analysis and U.S. Census Bureau (Metro/Nonmetro).

We cannot and must not be surprised by the answer. Centuries of discriminatory policy are coming home to roost. We now face life and death decisions at an unimaginable scale after decades of dismantling our social safety net. Like Hurricane Katrina and all crises that have come before and will after it, this pandemic has magnified the deep structural inequities that have existed in our society for generations, if not since its founding.

Our current circumstances must prompt a greater examination of how we treat each other. Our country has long been divided by design and those divisions create significant disparities in outcomes around COVID-19. We have to ask ourselves, is this really who we are? Is this what we really value? Or can we finally acknowledge what we see in the mirror and demand change from the previously accepted status quo?

Notes

4 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

5 <https://apnews.com/8a3430dd37e7c44290c7621f5af96d6b>

6 https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/04/07/coronavirus-is-infecting-killing-black-americans-an-alarmingly-high-rate-post-analysis-shows/?arc404=true&itid=lk_inline_manual_3

Centering our response on policies that directly address racial and economic disparities will ultimately benefit us all. These are not left or right issues, but fundamental questions of our identity, our national security and our collective future. When we understand the power of equity and view it as an economic and social growth strategy, we can weather any storm. We are stronger together.

The roadmap to greater resilience and better outcomes requires an equitable response and recovery. We believe that all government action must be guided by the following four principles:

- Data and science must lead the way.
- Our federal, state and local governments must address this pandemic in a way that strengthens racial equity and economic equality. Disparities thrown into sharper relief by this crisis require long-term solutions, not short-term patches.
- Local governments are on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis and must be treated as partners in delivering services and policy, not as special interest groups.
- This is a time to act with courage and conviction, and to make bold and lasting systemic change.

As we outlined in “Divided by Design,” our policy focus is rooted in dismantling unequal access to opportunity, democracy, safety and protection under the law. We do not claim to be the first to take an interest in breaking these barriers; rather, we are committed to supplementing the deep knowledge in this field with insights shared with us by communities across the South.

Delivering A More Equitable Response

The next phase of our country's response requires governments at all levels to place public health and safety above all else. COVID-19 is an invisible threat to us all, but it is targeting communities of color at a disproportionate level. To deliver a more equitable response, we must unleash data-driven insights at a nationwide scale so we can better track coronavirus infections and deaths at the neighborhood level, fight it at street-level and save more lives.

The much-anticipated, "phase four" coronavirus relief package must be passed quickly and keep the safety and protection of frontline and essential workers at the forefront. They include doctors, nurses, home care workers and other healthcare workers, grocery store and drug store employees, domestic workers, food service workers, federal, state and municipal employees, janitorial staff, farm workers, delivery drivers, warehouse workers, transportation workers and child care workers. Public safety personnel, including police officers, firefighters, emergency medical services and other first responders that serve our communities also need better protections. The current crisis shines a spotlight on undeniable racial and economic disparities, when we examine who is working on the front lines compared to who is able to work from the safety of their homes.⁷

We must use data to recognize the racial implications of our current circumstances. In the South, these frontline sectors are made up of large percentages of people of color. Fewer than 20 percent of Black Americans have jobs that allow them to work at home.⁸ Many Black workers are concentrated in public-facing jobs,⁹ working in mass transit,¹⁰ home healthcare, retail and service, where social distancing is virtually impossible. Black Americans make up the majority of those incarcerated and in the homeless population as a result of decades of structural racism. Social distancing is near impossible in our prisons, jails and homeless shelters, and extra support is required to ensure the safety of those populations.

Beyond a lack of essential worker protections, the economic situation is stark. Over 30 million Americans have filed for unemployment aid since a national emergency was declared due to the COVID-19 pandemic, representing approximately 20 percent of the labor force.¹¹ These layoffs will continue as diverse business sectors respond to the impact of the crisis. It has been predicted that over 47 million jobs could be lost next quarter, resulting in an unemployment rate worse than during the Great Depression.¹² The high rate of unemployment has overwhelmed state systems, making it difficult for Americans to access the help they need.

Notes

7 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/04/23/483846/frontlines-work-home/>

8 <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/flex2.t01.htm>

9 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2019/12/05/478150/african-americans-face-systematic-obstacles-getting-good-jobs/>

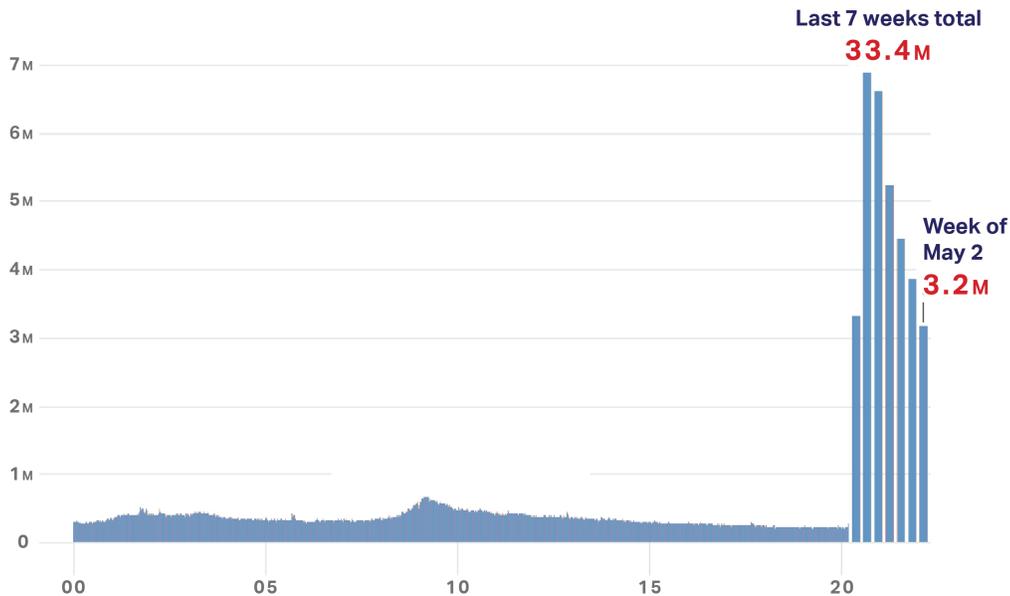
10 <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/bus-drivers#demographics>

11 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-economy/millions-of-americans-join-unemployment-line-as-coronavirus-savages-economy-idUSKCN2250CS>

12 <https://www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2020/march/back-envelopes-estimates-next-quarters-unemployment-rate>

Weekly U.S. jobless claims

JAN 1, 2000 TO MAY 2, 2020



Source: Axios; "Another 3.2 million Americans filed for unemployment last week"

Coupled with the extended waiting periods to receive federal stimulus assistance, many Americans are having to face decisions that were unthinkable just two months ago. Food security has become a concern. With a loss of jobs, it has been predicted that over 18 million Americans may lose employer-sponsored healthcare.¹³

Specific populations, including young adults, Black Americans and Latinos are at higher risk of losing their employment due to the types of industries they work in.¹⁴ And in the South, workers are also predicted to be more disproportionately impacted by job loss, because the retail, service and hospitality sectors, which are those tied to the lowest wages, dominate private sector employment in the region.¹⁵ Now more than ever, people need to get the care they need, whether they've recently lost coverage or whether they're chronically uninsured or under-insured.

Notes

13 <https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/covid-19-impact-many-184-million-americans-face-disruptions-and-potential-loss-health>

14 <https://www.usnews.com/news/economy/articles/2020-04-03/young-and-minority-workers-feeling-first-effects-of-coronavirus-unemployment>

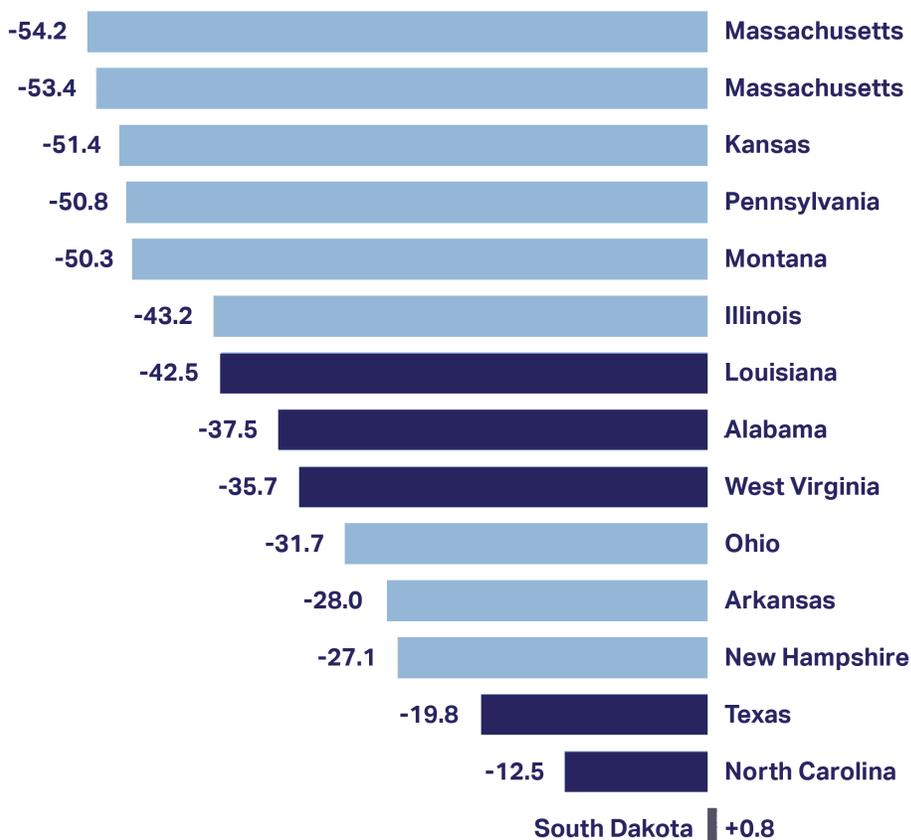
15 <http://hopepolicy.org/blog/sobering-estimates-of-job-losses-from-covid-19-in-the-deep-south-point-to-the-critical-need-for-targeted-economic-relief/>

Although Congress has established some emergency leave policies, increased funding to state unemployment systems and provided more funding for childcare services and food assistance, these measures are temporary, do not include all workers and do not address long-term needs. Unemployment insurance, in particular, can both provide immediate support to families and help stabilize our economy, but only if lawmakers act immediately to strengthen protections for unemployed workers. We must push Congress to pass additional legislation focused on saving our economy that prioritizes worker protections by making policies and investments that protect people first. We must, together as a nation, work to ensure that the economic fallout from this crisis does not land on the shoulders of workers and their families.

State and local governments stand to lose billions of dollars in revenue as a result of the shutdown of businesses and organizations caused by COVID-19. Several have begun revising their budgets and made spending cuts, which will negatively impact critical public services. As the consequences of this public health emergency come more into perspective, it is essential that local elected leaders ensure that city and county budgets address COVID-19 related economic impacts through a racial equity lens to reduce potential harm to under-served and marginalized individuals and communities. State and local governments will need more direct aid to continue providing core services in the short-term.

Year-over-year change in state tax revenues

APRIL 2020 VS. APRIL 2019, SELECT STATES



Source: Axios; "States face economic death spiral from coronavirus"

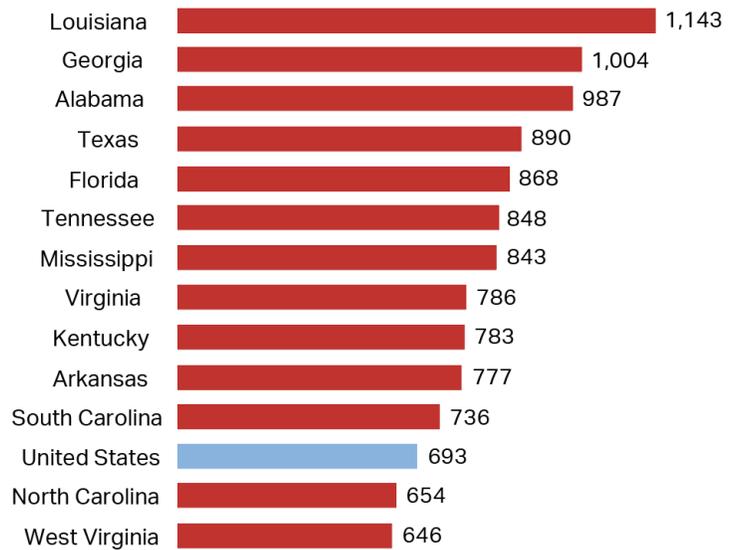
Finally, this crisis has exposed severe risks to the prison population. Additional reforms to the criminal justice system are now being made in some instances in response to COVID-19.

To ensure the response is more equitable, E Pluribus Unum is recommending expanded:

- Protections for workers;
- Direct financial assistance and safety net supports for all Americans;
- Access to healthcare;
- Direct financial support for state and local governments of all size; and,
- Guidelines for reducing risk in the prison population.

Southern States Lead the Nation in Incarceration Rates

Incarceration rates per 100,000 people



Source: Prison Policy Initiative, States of Incarceration: The Global Context. 2016.

SPECIFIC POLICY PROPOSALS

- Provide full funding for health and safety protections including universal access to coronavirus testing (antigen & antibody), treatment and personal protective equipment (PPE) for all frontline workers (federal, state and local);
- Establish national minimum standards for safety guidelines to prioritize worker safety and health (federal);
- Expand access to emergency paid sick days and paid family leave, to include employers of all types (federal);
- Extend federal supplemental unemployment insurance benefits (for up to 26 weeks) and expand access to unemployment insurance for gig-economy and self-employed individuals (federal and state);
- Provide additional direct cash stimulus to low-income households (federal);
- Protect families most in need by prioritizing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program by directing cash assistance to low-income households (state);
- Utilize Direct Express™ federal prepaid debit cards to ensure everyone has access to COVID-19 stimulus funds quickly, including those without bank access (federal);
- Increase food assistance for low-income families through expanded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and suspended time limits (federal and state);

- Create special enrollment periods for the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in states with exchanges and expand Medicaid coverage in those without (state);
- Increase direct aid and expand eligibility for state and local governments (federal); Require the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) work in coordination with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to collect and distribute data on racial and ethnic health disparities related to the coronavirus pandemic by passing the Equitable Data Collection and Disclosure on COVID-19 Act (federal);
- Ensure COVID-19 economic impacts on state and local budgets are viewed through a racial equity lens by issuing a formal executive order or resolution affirming a commitment to equity (state and local);
- Establish guidelines for reducing risk in prisons, detention facilities and throughout the carceral system, including evaluating options to release non-violent and elderly offenders to promote safety and prevent mass exposure to the coronavirus (federal, state and local);
- Protect tenants and homeowners by instituting moratoriums on evictions, foreclosures and late fees, reinstitute Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing standards and offer emergency rental assistance, rent freezes and grace periods (federal, state and local);
- Extend support for the expansion of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) (federal);
- Support small business and community revitalization by providing \$1 billion to Community Development Financial Institutions to make Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans to economically disadvantaged communities and provide low-documentation Small Business Administration grants (federal);
- Expand access to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)'s Lifeline program and reduce barriers to broadband access (federal and state);
- Implement emergency bail reform procedures, divert low-level offenses from formal prosecution, release non-violent offenders, elderly populations with underlying medical conditions and inmates approaching release, provide short-term housing to returning citizens and phase out state private prisons (federal, state and local);
- Enact federal baseline rules to ensure every eligible American can vote safely (federal, state and local); and,
- Expand 2020 Census promotion budgets for online and digital communications to maintain social distancing (federal, state and local).

Shifting to an Equitable Recovery

As cities, counties and states begin to reopen in a phased approach, new challenges will emerge. Do residents feel safe enough to jumpstart economic activity? How has COVID-19 changed our spending patterns? How do we rebuild the economy? There are certainly more questions than answers. Undoubtedly, more businesses will fall into bankruptcy and millions more Americans will lose employment.

An equitable recovery will not be possible without big thinking. Moving towards recovery will require stimulating the national economy in new ways and including everyone in the path forward.

Federal, state and local governments are likely to advocate for more infrastructure spending to create jobs and improve our roads, highways and water systems. There also seems to be broad consensus on spending to expand broadband and 5G capabilities, particularly in rural and low-income communities that personify the digital divide.

But how do we create more employment and link those out of work with new opportunities? As President Franklin D. Roosevelt did with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) after the Great Depression, the federal government must create systems that create economic security for all Americans by putting Americans back to work.

Beyond economic stimulus, a healthy recovery requires a healthy democracy. This fall, with Presidential and Congressional seats on the ballot, voters should not have to choose between protecting their health and exercising their right to vote. Before the coronavirus outbreak, the United States already struggled with voter participation through a tortuous system of state laws and procedures designed to suppress the vote. We have to make it easy for people to vote from home and safe to vote in person. In order to ensure that all Americans have the ability to safely vote and have their vote be counted, we have to expand voting options to include vote by mail and improve the safety and accessibility of polling places across the nation. These measures include: ensuring that vote by mail is available, reliable and all ballots are counted; reforming policies and practices which have the impact of disenfranchising minority voters; and expanding measures in states that will make it safe and convenient to vote.

To ensure the recovery is more equitable, E Pluribus Unum supports:

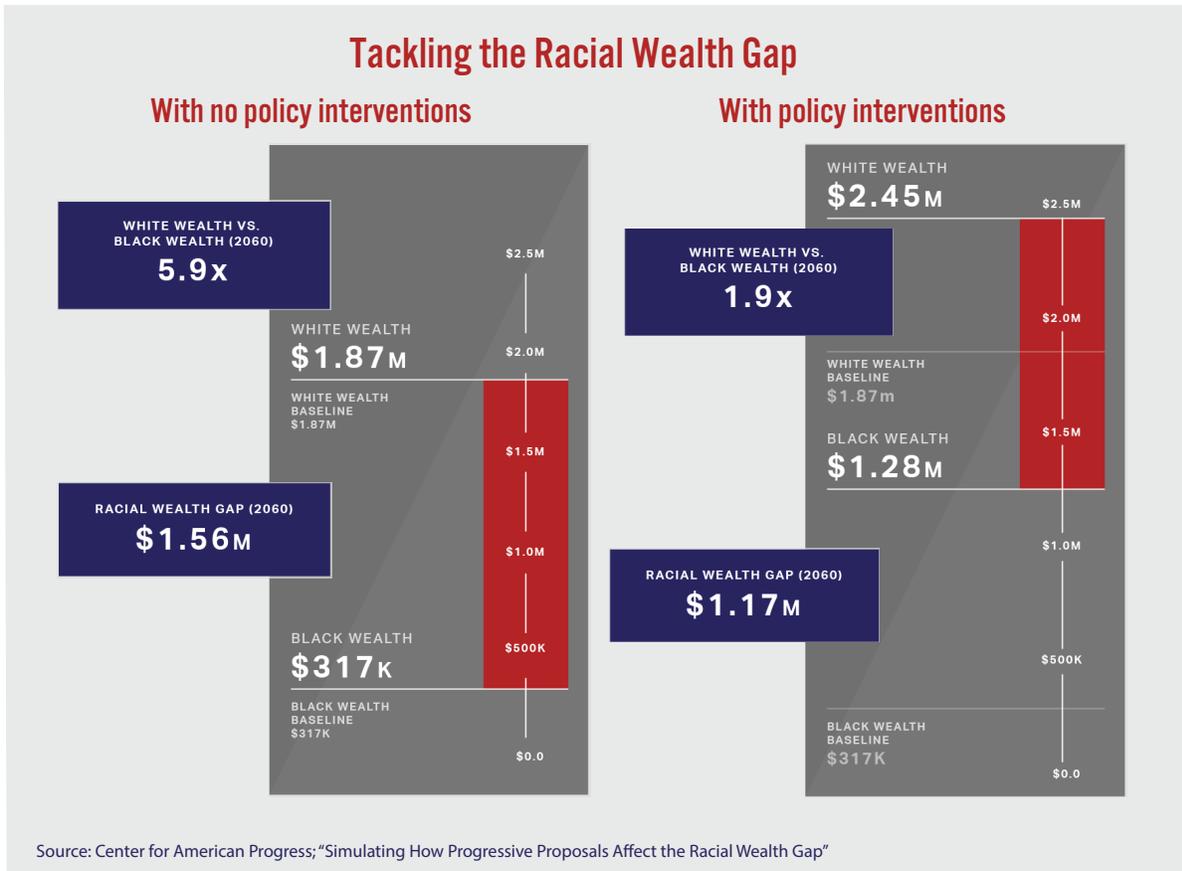
- Creating jobs through new infrastructure spending and a universal jobs guarantee;
- Ensuring public transportation remains viable;
- Stabilizing housing and increasing supports for housing affordability; and,
- Implementing national voting reforms to ensure the foundation of our democracy remains strong.

SPECIFIC POLICY PROPOSALS

- Create new jobs through infrastructure spending, focused heavily on broadband, 5G and water systems in low-income census tracts (federal and state);
- Expand social safety net programs by expanding Earned Income Tax Credit & Child Tax Credit;
- Establish a National Investment Employment Corps (NIEC) to provide universal job coverage for all adult Americans and eliminate involuntary unemployment (federal);
- Enact the Health Empowerment Zone Act to designate a community that experiences disproportionate disparities in health status and healthcare as a health empowerment zone and give them priority in awarding competitive grants (federal);
- Fund public transit agencies to maintain pre-COVID-19 service levels and improve safety and accessibility of public transit (federal, state and local);
- Expand Housing Choice Vouchers and other short-term financial assistance to provide housing stabilization and support for more low- and middle-income families (federal and state);
- Expand housing protections by extending the moratorium on evictions and foreclosures to include all housing, including renters, and suspend work requirements for federal housing programs (federal, state and local);
- Ensure that the distribution of federal economic recovery funds is documented by the collection and public release of disaggregated data (e.g., race, gender, age, income level and zip code/census tract) to address structural inequity at the local, county and state level (federal, state and local); and,
- Implement national voting reforms to ensure the foundation of our democracy remains strong (federal, state and local).

Building Longer-Term Community Resilience Through Equity

Disparities exposed by this crisis deserve long-term solutions, not short-term patches. Because the face of America is changing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, white people will become a minority in the United States by 2045. But if we focus just on children, we're in the midst of this shift as less than half of all children are non-Hispanic white.¹⁶ If we are to meet this moment in our country's history with courage and conviction, we must begin making bold, innovative and systemic change for the generation we are educating now and those that come behind them.



The enduring legacy of American slavery and de jure segregation is today's enormous racial wealth gap. On average, a typical white family has 10 times the wealth of a typical Black family. Black households headed by an individual with a bachelor's degree have just two-thirds of the wealth, on average, of white households headed by an individual who lacks a high school degree. Further, Black median household net worth is a fraction (8 percent) of white median household net worth.¹⁷ As a result, many low-asset people are more vulnerable and less likely to be able to afford days or weeks without income.¹⁸

Notes

16 <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/children-of-color-projected-to-be-majority-of-u-s-youth-this-year>

17 <https://tcf.org/content/report/attacking-black-white-opportunity-gap-comes-residential-segregation/>

18 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2018/02/21/447051/systematic-inequality/>

Workers of color, for example, consistently earn lower wages and are more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts. Nationally, full-time workers of color earn 23 percent less than their white counterparts.¹⁹ With this unjust and nagging economic disparity in mind, almost 30 percent of Black college-educated households are not able to afford to pay all their bills after a \$400 emergency expense.²⁰

The racial wealth gap has exacerbated other inequities, related to health, environment and housing. The suddenness of this pandemic has accentuated that, despite education level, many in these communities possess fewer financial resources to endure the undeniable economic hardships created and the federal, state and local governments must mitigate COVID-19 related expansion of the existing racial wealth gap.

To move communities in the South toward longer-term resilience, E Pluribus Unum supports bold policy to:

- Close racial wealth and income gaps;
- Expand healthcare access and affordability;
- Expand economic supports for low-income working families;
- Fight disparate environmental impacts in low-income communities; and,
- Permanently reduce jail populations.

SPECIFIC POLICY PROPOSALS

- Close the racial wealth gap by establishing “Baby Bonds”, canceling federal student debt and making college debt free (federal);
- Address inequitable treatment within the financial services industry through strengthening the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (federal);
- Raise the minimum wage to a living wage (federal, state and local);
- Mandate inclusionary zoning laws and ban exclusionary zoning to begin to undo the negative impacts of redlining (federal, state and local);
- Address the epidemic of maternal mortality among Black mothers (federal, state and local);
- Address the regulatory impediments to making telehealth/telemedicine services widely available and covered by insurance (federal and state);
- Fight disparate environmental impacts in low-income communities by committing to worldwide emissions reductions through planning, incentivizing and investing in zero-emissions infrastructure and manufacturing (federal, state and local);
- Advance “community-centered policing” to include independent review boards, implicit bias training, community engagement and diverse hiring (local); and
- End cash bail and phase out out-of-state, private prisons (federal, state and local).

Notes

19 https://nationalequityatlas.org/sites/default/files/Equity_Solution_Brief.pdf

20 <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/2019-economic-well-being-of-us-households-in-2018-dealing-with-unexpected-expenses.htm>



Visit our website at www.unumfund.org.