

America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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Features

North Carolina's Moral Mondays Protest Austerity Agenda



Courtesy Lewis A. Brandon, III, Beloved Community Center
Rev. Nelson Johnson with others at Moral Monday action.

First by the dozens, then by the hundreds, now by the thousands, North Carolinians are protesting in the state capital every Monday – raising their voices against a conservative assault on economic and social equity, voting rights, and essential supports for poor and working families. Hundreds of demonstrators have been arrested for acts of civil disobedience since April.

The "Moral Monday" protests were triggered by sweeping new laws and proposals that will have devastating economic consequences for the most vulnerable people and threaten the state's growth and prosperity. More than 70,000 people lost unemployment benefits after the government imposed a 19-week limit, shorter than in any other state, and abandoned participation in a federal program that helps jobless residents when state benefits run out. About 100,000 more people will not get checks they would have received in the months ahead – this in a state with the nation's [fifth highest unemployment rate](#), 8.8 percent, and a black unemployment rate of 17.3

In Brief

Upcoming Webinar: An All-In Primer

America is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, but what does this mean for our economic future? Join Manuel Pastor and Nicole Smith along with PolicyLink and the Center for American Progress on August 27 for this first in a series of webinars on ideas and actions from *All-In Nation: An America That Works For All*. Learn more and register [here](#).

The Hidden Rise in Asian American Poverty

The number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) living in poverty has grown by more than a half million in the last five years, making this group one of the fastest-growing poor populations in the nation.

But the great diversity of skill and education level has largely masked this trend in studies that only look at AAPI communities in the aggregate. A [new report](#) by the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development breaks it down.

percent.

That's just one example. Legislators have also passed severely regressive tax reform, including a flat income tax, a lower corporate tax rate, a sales tax increase, and elimination of the earned income tax credit, which [benefits 900,000 low-wage workers](#). Together, these changes would increase the tax burden on all but the richest people and corporations while reducing the revenues available for critical services by \$2.4 billion over five years.

Galvanizing a broad alliance

The protest movement, which is gaining national attention, did not spring up overnight. It is the result of years of organizing and coalition building across issues, race, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, and generations, "to galvanize everyday people in North Carolina to move toward an agenda of equity," said longtime activist Joyce Johnson.

In 2006, the Reverend Doctor William Barber II, head of the state NAACP, brought together a diverse group of activists, academics, and community leaders to build a broad-based network for change. The effort soon gave rise to The Historic Thousands on Jones Street People's Assembly Coalition, an alliance of hundreds of organizations working on issues across the progressive spectrum – labor, immigration, anti-fracking, abortion, school funding, gay rights, prison reform, the war in Iraq, and more.

The genius of the strategy was in crafting a "fusion" platform. It united disparate, often single-focused groups, around a broad [14-point agenda](#) of civil rights, justice, education and economic opportunity, and dignity.

"We're a coalition that connects many streams, so these streams become a river," said the Reverend Nelson Johnson, who, with his wife, Joyce, leads the Beloved Community Center, a community empowerment organization in Greensboro. "Rivers tend to make their own pathways, and I think this has the capacity to reshape the landscape of North Carolina."

The coalition spearheaded local organizing campaigns, translated its agenda into several bills introduced in the state legislature, and held rallies every February in Raleigh, the state capital. This year's event drew 18,000 people.

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Is Income Mobility a Myth? Depends on Where You Live

Where you live may determine how likely you are to climb the income ladder, according to a [new study](#) by four economists from Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley.

A child who grows up in poverty in Atlanta, regardless of race, is far less likely to reach the middle class than a child from Seattle. Regions with less concentrated poverty, good schools, and more civic engagement seem to have higher income mobility.

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We're Still Marching...

Fifty years after the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the majority of economic goals for African Americans have yet to be realized as shown by [this report](#) and infographic from the Economic Policy Institute. Help bring attention to the unfinished promise. Join the [50th anniversary](#) of the march on August 28 in D.C.

A movement seizes a moment

The coalition adopted the slogan "a movement, not a moment." But a pivotal moment came this year. Largely because redistricting diminished the impact of voters of color, Republicans took supermajorities in both chambers of the legislature and captured the governor's office.

The leadership immediately set in motion plans to roll back years of racial progress and democratic inclusion. The legislature recently passed a strict voter ID law and restricted same-day registration and early voting – practices that increased voting by African Americans and helped President Obama win the state in 2008. Civil rights groups have now filed lawsuits challenging the law in federal court. Governor Pat McCrory signed a repeal of the Racial Justice Act, which had allowed prisoners on death row to use statistical evidence to argue that race played a significant part in their trial or sentence. African Americans make up about 20 percent of the state's population but [53 percent of people facing the death penalty](#).

About 60 people joined the first Moral Monday protest on April 29 this past spring, and 17 were arrested – among them the Reverend Johnson. The demonstrations have grown each week along with arrests. The idea is to sustain the momentum by growing an informed, committed, intergenerational corps of leaders who can help North Carolina move toward greater equity and inclusion, and by anchoring the work in the places where people live.

"Big crowds are not unusual," the Reverend Johnson said. "What is unusual is sustaining it and translating it into policies that speak to the needs for which people are protesting. We need to think creatively and we need to think long term. If we change everything [the state government] put in place we will be back where we were 10 months ago. That's not sufficient."

North Carolina is not the only state under right-wing siege. Moral Mondays offer not only inspiration but also guidance for activists around the country as reflected in the words of the Reverend Johnson: "Take a stand, that's number one. Work in creative and compassionate ways to unite the broadest possible population. Build a movement that reflects the interests of the whole. Expose and educate in real time so that people can be part of it as it's happening."

Learn more about Moral Mondays and how you can get involved: www.naacpnc.org.

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Rhode Island Governor Orders Inclusion in the State's Hiring and Contracting



Governor Chafee signs Executive Order on Diversity

Responding to dramatic demographic changes in Rhode Island, the governor has issued an executive order aimed at increasing government job and contracting opportunities for people of color.

Governor Lincoln D. Chafee [said](#) he wants the state workforce and contracts to better reflect the population and to provide opportunities for the communities that need them most. "Throughout Rhode Island's history, diversity has made this a better, more vibrant place to work," said Chafee, a Democrat.

People of color represent 24 percent of the population but 15 percent of the state government employees and only 8.5 percent of senior staff. The state government is Rhode Island's largest employer, with nearly 15,000 employees in 2011.

The press release for the order cites a [new equity profile](#) by PolicyLink and the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) at the University of Southern California, showing that all of the state's population growth since 1990 has come from communities of color. The equity profile was prepared to support the State of Rhode Island's comprehensive planning initiative to ensure that future investments are equitable, sustainable, and economically

resilient – a project catalyzed by HUD's Sustainable Communities Initiative.

As in many regions, Rhode Island's fastest-growing communities also rank among its poorest. The Latino population grew fastest, by 44 percent. Latinos are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage service jobs and in the state's declining manufacturing sector, and the state has the [highest Latino unemployment rate](#) in the nation. The state's Asian and African American populations grew by 28 percent and 23 percent, respectively. Thirty percent of Latinos and African Americans in the state live in poverty, two and a half times the rate for the state overall.

The governor's order recognizes that greater economic inclusion is essential to the state's prosperity. The order sets no targets but directs government agencies and departments to develop recommendations and strategies to increase hiring of people of color and contracting with minority business enterprises. The order also calls for data tracking and reporting, to strengthen accountability, and for diversity training of staff.

"It's not just achieving a number," said Kelly Mahoney, the governor's director of policy. "It's improving the overall atmosphere in state government."

The governor's office worked with representatives of about 65 Latino, Asian, African American, and women's groups and with members of the legislature. Many grassroots and business leaders of color identified state workforce inclusion as a priority issue.

"It's a great first start," said Jorge Elorza, law professor and co-chair of the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University. "It is encouraging that this is not only on the governor's radar but appears to be a priority. We'll have to see what comes of it – the proof is in the pudding."

Edward Santos, vice president of the Latino Contractors Association, said the state must move quickly to translate the executive order into jobs and contracts for people who are struggling.

"We are looking to better our community and ourselves, and we need help from government to give us an opportunity to make a living," he said.

The executive order, signed in May, is modeled on measures issued by Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick in 2007 and 2010. Since their implementation, Massachusetts has exceeded its hiring goals for people of color and women.

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America's Tomorrow highlights campaigns, leaders, policies, reports, and local models that are advancing equity as an economic imperative. It is produced by Chris Schildt, Sarah Treuhaft, Fran Smith, and Ana Louie. To learn more, visit the *America's Tomorrow* [webpage](#).

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