

# America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model

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*By Alexis Stephens*

Today, racial inequities are once again at the center of the national political conversation — along with bold, visionary proposals for policies to resolve them. Grassroots responses to police violence have given rise to a movement of leaders, coalitions, and organizations seeking not only social justice for Black communities, but economic justice as well.

The [Movement for Black Lives](#), a collective of 50 organizations around the country, is creating a common vision and agenda for Black communities. Last August, the group released a nine-point economic policy platform that calls for progressive restructuring of the tax code to ensure an equitable and sustainable redistribution of wealth, federal and state job programs targeting the most economically marginalized Black people, protection for workers' rights to organize, tax incentives for cooperative economy networks, and more (read the full platform [here](#)). By centering economic equity for Black people and creating and amplifying a shared agenda, the Movement for Black Lives hopes to “move towards a world in which the full humanity and dignity of all people is recognized.”

So far, the collective has been most visible in its event-based organizing. For the past two years, [Reclaim MLK Day](#)

has been connecting the national holiday to the radical actions of contemporary movements. Launched to coincide with Mother's Day 2017, "Mama's Bail Out Day" [kicked off a summer](#) of bailing out more than 200 incarcerated people as a step toward ending pre-trial incarceration for those who cannot afford bail. On June 19 (Juneteenth), the collective held a day of action in 40 cities to reclaim abandoned buildings, vacant lots, and other local spaces.

*America's Tomorrow* spoke with DeAngelo Bester, contributor to the Movement for Black Lives economic justice platform and co-executive director and senior strategist at the [Workers Center for Racial Justice](#), to discuss the platform's labor organizing recommendations and talk about what it will take to move the agenda's policy points forward.

**Organizing workers outside of traditional employment models is a priority for the Workers Center for Racial Justice. What are some of the strategies Black workers have begun using to organize in response to the growth of the "on demand" economy?**

The Workers Center for Racial Justice and some more progressive unions and worker centers have been trying to organize workers in industries where they are either considered contract or temporary workers. The idea is to organize them as we would in a union, and to change the laws and policies in their localities to give them collective bargaining rights. The National Labor Relations Board ruled last year that you can organize temp workers and people working in temp agencies into collective bargaining units.

Short of guaranteeing collective bargaining agreements, we won't be able to get on-demand workers the same type of rights as far as fair wages. But there have been some victories in Chicago and other places around increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and getting domestic workers paid sick leave and fair scheduling.

With the politics being the way they are in DC, a national right-to-work policy could be coming down at the federal level. The Supreme Court will also probably be ruling in favor of getting rid of public sector unions. Therefore, we are trying to do our work at the local level in terms of making policy changes to ensure worker protections.

**In your local level efforts, where have you seen fair development work in action, in the sense of people creating affordable housing, fighting displacement, and creating good jobs in a single effort?**

There hasn't been a ton of what you are calling fair development. When I did housing work a few years ago, getting the right number of affordable housing units included in development projects was a big issue. As far as jobs going to workers from marginalized communities in community benefits agreements or private labor agreements, it has been really hit-or-miss. It hasn't been what it needs to be to get Black workers real jobs.

In the construction industry, a lot of cities have minority set-asides. The way it usually works is that two rules are in place: employers have to use union labor, and a certain percentage of the jobs are supposed to go to people from local communities. But there are always ways for folks to get around the stipulation to provide jobs. Sometimes developers only have to pay a \$25,000 fine, so they might still choose not to hire people from the community. Or they could say that no new jobs are being created. In the construction industry, a lot of contractors have their own staff in place already and so developers say that they didn't hire any new people because they just used existing employees. In private labor agreements, that's been a drawback — and there hasn't been real enforcement. What we [at the Workers Center for Racial Justice] have been trying to do when we work on private agreements is to say that a certain percentage of jobs and hours worked must go to people from the community; that way we can get around the language of "new jobs created."

**The Movement for Black Lives economic justice platform — like the rest of its policy agenda — has brought together a diverse range of voices and organizations in a bold and ambitious vision for racial economic justice. What has your experience been working with this group?**

The process has been great. The executive team did a great job of bringing people together, keeping people engaged, and answering phones and questions. It's been as good of an experience as I've had as far as getting

together and meeting with people and continuing to build relationships.

The only drawback or critique that I have is that there hasn't been a discussion of building the power needed to get some of the platform implemented. With politics being the way they are in DC right now, none of us really have the power to do that right now. We need to have a discussion about what it would take to build that power, and after we have that power, what we would do to get some of these things implemented.

**Speaking of the changing political climate, as the current presidential administration has evolved, which of the Movement for Black Lives platform points do you see as having the most promise in getting implemented?**

There could be some potential around tax reform. There was language in the platform around tax breaks for marginalized workers, and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit. Republicans have been talking about tax reform, too – cutting taxes for the rich. There could be a chance, if we build up enough support, to move some of the tax reform ideas forward. Other than that, the platform's points around justice reform and police reform – I don't think we have a real chance of getting that stuff moving with the person we have in the White House and the person we have heading up the Department of Justice. Even the points around housing and environmental justice and land rights are going to be tough in the current political environment. That's why it is necessary to build enough power to implement the platform.