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# No Going Back

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TOGETHER FOR  
AN EQUITABLE  
AND INCLUSIVE  
LOS ANGELES

*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

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# Executive Summary

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, families across Los Angeles County have endured multiple waves of sickness, insecurity, joblessness, learning loss, and challenges to mental health. These impacts have been felt across Angelenos of all spectrums including communities of color: Black Angelenos, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as well as women, LGBTQIA communities, the young, seniors, and people with disabilities. As of late August, the County was reporting over 225,000 cases and nearly 5,500 deaths, with the case and death rates sharply up in Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander communities as seen later in this report. These are even possibly more alarming as race/ethnicity data is still not identified for many cases. Economic costs have been uneven as well, with the state reporting that nearly half of Black workers have filed for unemployment since the crisis began through the end of July, well above the twenty-seven percent figure for white workers.

Meanwhile, undocumented Angelenos – 70 percent of whom have been in the United States for a decade or longer – have been largely frozen out of relief.

With them and their immediate family members comprising roughly 18 percent of the County, this has been a recipe for regional economic disaster. Add to that the stresses of making rent, the learning loss suffered by Black, Latino, and Native American kids on the wrong side of the digital divide, the physical and mental trauma visited on communities by the pandemic, and a lack of health care, and you have a recipe for deepening distress and inequality.

Yet this pattern of pain should have been expected: In many ways, COVID-19 is the disease that has revealed our social illnesses of anti-Black racism, precarious employment, sharp racial gaps in wealth and digital access, unaffordable housing, growing homelessness, unresponsive government, and so much more. Communities shattered, health battered, and businesses shuttered – these are the real costs of the crisis. But these outcomes are not the result of bad luck and misfortune; rather than a bug in the system, they are a feature in which structural racism has long set the fortunes and limited the potential of communities of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people.



The role of racism in our country has been driven home by the most recent rash of murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Elijah McClain, Rayshard Brooks, Anthony McClain, Dijon Kizzee, and so many others. But with that has come a deeper realization: Police brutality is just the tip of a racist iceberg that extends to systems of education, the economy, and health care. Public consciousness has shifted. Many Americans are coming to understand that confronting anti-Black racism is key *and* that the same forces that marginalize Black people also blame Asian Americans for COVID-19 and refuse to extend full support to immigrants.

As a result, we cannot think of the task ahead for Los Angeles as recovery from COVID-19. We cannot go back to an old “normal” that has failed so many. There is no return to a system that over-policed, over-incarcerated, and under-delivered. We should have no nostalgia for an economy that did not reward truly essential workers such as agricultural laborers, grocery store clerks, truck drivers, elder care specialists, and others. We should hold no affection for a system that has long stripped assets from communities through stolen land from Native Americans, discrimination, and redlining, rather than built them up through public and private investment.

This is not the first time Los Angeles has weathered an economic shock or been forced to face its own systemic racism. The Watts Rebellion of 1965 and the Uprisings in 1992 were both sparked by acts of police brutality and signaled the need to reckon with entrenched disparities and anti-Black racism. In both instances, reports were written and plans were

launched to deal with the under-investment that gave rise to unrest—but little fundamentally changed, particularly for Black Angelenos. So what might be different this time?

Three factors may make a difference. The first is simply the profundity of the moment: In the midst of a pandemic, protests against anti-Blackness were held in all 50 states and the national dialogue on race shifted, with some saying this has been the most widespread awareness of systemic racism since the Civil Rights movement. A second is the growing recognition – by the public, policy makers, and business leaders – that the current levels of inequality and racial disparity threaten public health in the short-run and prosperity in the long-run. A final factor is the depth and expertise of the community-based organizations that can propel a seismic change for the better in Los Angeles. Indeed, they have already helped make what was once unthinkable – restraining police spending, emptying our jails, delivering aid regardless of status – part of a new status quo.

To make a better Los Angeles, we must center racial equity, align systems and hold them accountable for more effective delivery, and stir a new civic conversation and commitment for change. In the accompanying policy report, we note how to do these three things across a wide variety of issues. Here, we emphasize ten important principles for a reinvention of Los Angeles:



# Ten Important Principles for a Reinvention of Los Angeles

1

## **Address anti-Black racism in all its forms.**

Statistic after statistic on homelessness, education, family wealth, health and well-being, and the criminal justice system show ample evidence of the systemic racism impacting Black Angelenos. Leaders must be committed to understanding the history that has produced these outcomes and devoted to making progress on an anti-racist agenda.

2

## **Build an economy that prioritizes those who have been left or kept behind.**

Business can be a force for good in this arena, particularly by shifting hiring practices and opening up procurement systems to businesses owned by people of color. But there is also a need to protect workers, promote a “caring economy,” address long-standing racial disparities in labor markets, overcome discrimination against people with disabilities, and insure affordable digital access for all.

3

## **Support the health of communities and individuals living with the trauma of systemic neglect and oppression.**

This requires a combination of community-based care and attention to insuring sufficient reimbursement for providers serving the least advantaged. Everyone should be able to connect to health and mental health services, regardless of status. And mental health systems should promote healing and also empower communities to press for change in the systems that cause hurt.

4

## **Create housing for all and end unsheltered homelessness.**

Black people represent eight percent of the County population but a full third of those who are homeless, while the share of Native Americans who are experiencing homelessness is roughly five-fold their share of the County. The COVID-19 crisis has worsened already existing housing insecurity, with many an eviction away from the streets. Change will require that the scale of the response reflect the scale of the crisis, that we tackle the legacies and realities of structural racism, and that the region as a whole take action and hold these structures accountable.

5

## **Insure access, mobility, and voice for immigrants regardless of status.**

We need disaster relief that can get to all Angelenos, we need a right to work which does not depend on documentation, and we need small business promotion that includes firms owned by Black, Indigenous, and immigrant entrepreneurs. Political systems should open to include local voting by non-citizens and we need an aggressive campaign to naturalize all who are eligible.

6

**Support education access for all children and all communities.**

In the current situation, this means closing the digital divide, securing remote access for all families, and taking special steps to address the learning loss that has occurred in this period of disconnection. More broadly, we need an equity-oriented and anti-racist student performance framework that addresses community-based disparities.

7

**Celebrate and support youth leadership and empowerment.**

Youth who have intersectional identities of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity experience discriminatory disciplinary responses in education, child welfare, and juvenile justice. Changing this will require investments in youth leadership to challenge systems as well as training to insure employment and entrepreneurship.

8

**Strengthen the non-profit sector as a key part of civil society.**

Local philanthropy has stepped in to provide emergency support for non-profits who provide services and promote leadership but this cannot be a one-time infusion. Ensuring resources, harmonizing application and reporting requirements, providing multi-year funding, and supporting less visible sectors, like organizations supporting Native Americans, will all be critical.

9

**Build community power and develop accompanying metrics to hold systems accountable.**

Those who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution – but they are often furthest from the power needed to impact public policy. We need to support youth and community organizing, develop and deploy accurate and inclusive metrics that can measure progress on racial equity, and hold systems accountable to performance not promises.

10

**Align business, community, philanthropy, and government for equity.**

Justice is everyone’s business and we need more effective and integrated governance structures, data, and information sharing across systems. But we also need a new sense of public will that what was once deemed politically unfeasible – reducing police budgets, achieving digital equality, and investing fully in education – is now imperative.

COVID-19 continues to ravage the nation and the state, with pain and death ripping through communities with the fewest protections. Recovery will be slow, pain will be persistent, and, unless addressed, income inequality may grow. Yet there is also an extraordinary opening as residents and leaders recognize the pandemic's wake-up call: that our failure to act in solidarity with one another – to value Black lives, to treasure immigrant families, to declare homelessness unacceptable, to be willing to shoulder the burdens of mutual support – has left our whole region far more vulnerable than necessary.

This moment begs of us to create something better. We can prioritize Black wellbeing, we can support immigrant inclusion, and we can highlight the needs of groups like Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and people with disabilities – all of which are so often invisibilized. We can make work pay a living wage, we can help entrepreneurs build wealth, and we can find new solutions to housing. We can redefine community safety, make schools hubs of learning and connection, and support youth and community organizing.

To do all this, the region, the state, and the nation will need to have a frank discussion about how to raise revenues, drive dollars to more effectively address needs, and forge a new civic commitment to equity and accountability. The time is now. We cannot go back to a past that never really worked; we must move forward together for an equitable and inclusive Los Angeles.

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