

United States - Major new document: "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice."

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On August 1, a coalition of some sixty Black Lives Matter groups from around the United States issued "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice."

The document is long and detailed. It is the most important Black independent political action program since the National Black Independent Political Party and Black Power conventions of the early 1970s. It also is a reflection of the leading role of Black young people in an as yet nascent radicalization of youth in general.

It's preamble states, "Despite constant exploitation and perpetual oppression, Black people have bravely and brilliantly been the driving force pushing the U.S. towards the ideals it articulates but has never achieved.

"In recent years we have taken to the streets, launched massive campaigns, and impacted elections, but our elected officials have failed to address the legitimate demands of our movement. We can no longer wait...

"We are a collective that centers and is rooted in Black communities, but we recognize we have a shared struggle with all oppressed people; collective liberation will be a product of all our work." This is expressed in many of the document's demands concerning Latinos, women, Native Americans, all workers, LGBT people, and others.

It is a radical document, that poses fundamental change as well as immediate demands. For example, it states, "America is an empire that uses war to expand territory and power. American wars are unjust, destructive to Black communities globally and do not keep Black people safe locally."

It opposes the "war on terror," including in the Middle east. Zionist organizations have denounced the document because it opposes U.S. military aid to Israel, "a state that practices systematic discrimination and has maintained a military occupation of Palestine for decades." It characterizes Israel as as an "apartheid state" responsible for "genocide" against the Palestinians. It details the role of the U.S. globally, including its military actions in Africa, the long suppression of the Haitian people, and so on.

"The interlinked systems of white supremacy, imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy shape the violence we face. As oppressed people living in the belly of global empire, we are in a critical position to build the necessary connections for a global liberation movement," the policy statement says.

“Until we are able to overturn U.S. imperialism, capitalism and white supremacy, our brothers and sisters around the world will continue to live in chains....our liberation is intrinsically tied to the liberation of Black and Brown people around the world.”

This is in a section of the document that lists things that should be “Divested” from to fund people’s needs.

Another example of its vision for Blacks and society as a whole: “Until we achieve a world where cages are no longer used against our people ... we demand an end to all jails, detention centers, youth facilities and prisons as we know them.” This is part of the longest section of the document, “End the War on Black People.”

What has galvanized the Black Lives Matter movement is not only the police murders of Blacks, but the whole system of institutionalized racist oppression. The uprising in Ferguson exposed not only systematic police violence and repression, but the entire legal system’s criminal use of frivolous arrests, high bail, fines, court surcharges, and interest on these to exact what amounts to illegal taxes on the Black community, which this part of the document demands an end to.

It calls for an end to the “war on Black immigrants,” including deportations, Immigration and Customs (ICE) raids, and immigrant detentions, which obviously also embraces Latinos and other immigrants.

By calling for an end to the war on “Black trans, queer and gender nonconforming people” - which does impact Blacks especially - it also embraces all LGBT people.

It calls for an end to the criminalization and dehumanization of Black youth; the use of past criminal history to discriminate; capital punishment; mass surveillance of Black communities; the privatization of police, prisons etc.; and for the demilitarization of police.

In making these and other demands throughout the document, “Vision” offers concise but thorough explanations of the problems addressed and what its demands would accomplish.

There are four other sections. One is about “Political Power,” and calls for “independent Black Political Power and Black self-determination.” This recalls demands raised in the Black radicalization of the 1960s and early 1970s, as do Vision’s call for “Community Control” which is in another section.

This connection is also clear when the document calls for an end to the criminalization of “Black Political Activity” and for the release of all political prisoners. It directly refers to the FBI’s COINTELPRO directed against Black organizations and leaders (and many others including socialists) in that earlier radicalization, and to the political prisoners from that time still in jail or on international “terrorist” lists.

It is noteworthy that it calls for the removal of Assata Shakur from such lists, and for the bounty on her head to be rescinded. Shakur was the victim of a police frame-up, imprisoned, escaped and fled to Cuba where she was granted political asylum. Democratic and Republican administrations and politicians, including Clinton and Trump, have demanded she be brought back to the U.S. and sent to jail for the rest of her life.

Another section is on “Reparations.” This concept has been known for demanding reparations for the harm done by slavery. But the Vision takes this further, to include reparations for all the economic harm and exploitation of Blacks not only under slavery, but through Jim Crow up to the present day.

This exploitation is addressed in a separate section also, "Economic Justice." Among other things, this section calls for the restructuring of current Federal, state and local taxes to eliminate regressive taxation where workers pay a higher tax rate than the rich, in favor of progressive taxes where the rich pay a much higher rate, and the lowest income bracket pays nothing.

It also calls for worker protections for those not included under current regulations, including domestic workers, farm workers, restaurant and other workers who rely on tips. Many are Black and Latino, but this demand is in the interest of all workers, as is the demand for the right of all workers to organize unions.

The whole document covers much more than what I have indicated. It is a work in progress. As it is read, discussed and changed by the wider Black Lives Matter activists, their political awareness will be greatly deepened. It will also have an international aspect, as groups in other countries — including in Canada, Britain, and Australia — have taken up the name of Black Lives Matter in their own struggles.

It should also be read, discussed and debated among socialists and others on the left. I learned a lot from reading it, as will others.

Black Lives Matter has increased the confidence of Black youth that what they do matters. They are taking the lead away from the Black political establishment which is mired in the Democratic Party. The "Vision for Black Lives" will increase that confidence.

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