



A VISION FOR BLACK LIVES: POLICY DEMANDS FOR BLACK POWER, FREEDOM, & JUSTICE

A Right to Restored Land, Clean Air, Clean Water and Housing

The Movement for Black Lives respects, supports, and stands in full solidarity with the rights of Indigenous peoples to the lands currently known as the United States. We make the following demands within a broader context of respect for Indigenous sovereignty.

What is the problem?

Nearly three decades ago, a [United Church of Christ \(UCC\) study](#) on environmental inequities found that Black people were more likely to live near hazardous waste than white people. Today, we still see the effects and continuation of environmental racism, which is largely a result of our dispossession and lack of control over land, resources, and decision making abilities in our communities. As a result, our communities are exposed to lead arsenic, dioxins, mercury and other carcinogenic and morphogenetic toxins causing harm to current and future generations (including disproportionately high asthma rates). Additionally, our lack of control and the poisoning of land has resulted in drastic decrease of and lack of security around farmable land (both urban and rural) to feed, house and sustain our communities.

The following details more issues relating to environmental racism:

- Environmental harms heavily impact Black communities. Historically, Black people have been most vulnerable to predatory corporate practices that lead to siting of landfills, incinerators, and a variety of industries that pollute the land, air and water, leading to high rates of cancers, chronic diseases and breathing conditions.
- Inconsistent application of environmental regulations, laws, and policies, expose communities of color to greater risks¹. This is especially visible in response to environmental and climate disasters (numerous examples in the Gulf South after hurricanes, chemical explosions in Texas, chemical spills that pollute water and land, etc). In Warren County, North Carolina, birthplace of the environmental justice movement, it took 25 years after the dumping (1978) before the PCB poisoned soil was remediated (2003).
- This vulnerability to pollution is reflected in the ways in which Black people, working class, low income people and communities of color are disproportionately vulnerable to cancer alleys, brownfields, polluted air, toxic soils and poisoned waters.
- We see examples in communities such as the Bronx in New York where they experience heavy flow of trucks to distribute food to more affluent communities, leaving Bronx

¹ See Robert Bullard, "Dumping in Dixie"



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residents with higher asthma rates, increased pollution, toxic soil and lack of access to good food options.

Following are more problems related to water, healthy food and farming:

- Inferior and insufficient access to quality, nutrient-dense foods including fresh produce and whole grains (the intention behind these inequities is called “food apartheid” for the racialized separate and unequal access to quality, healthy food).
- Displacement from farmland through violent removal and foreclosure, [discriminate access to farmer assistance programs](#), predatory lending, and housing foreclosures.
- Lack of access to clean water and increasing privatization of water.
- Black farmers have been and continue to be blatantly discriminated against. According to Black Farmers Agriculturalist Association, “In a 15 year period, 1982-1997, 42 percent of Black family farmers were put out of business in this country.” Discrimination and land theft has not ceased, unfortunately.
- According to statistics of the Census of Agriculture, Black farmers owned more land in 1920 than they do today.
- Consider [Pigford vs. Glickman](#) — a class action lawsuit in which years of racial discrimination and targeted disenfranchisement of Black farmers by the USDA was cited. Black farmers and producers were intentionally denied loans and access to benefits through various USDA programs resulting in the loss of significant Black-owned land and wealth — 300,000 acres in North Carolina alone resulting in \$1.2 billion in assets from 1981 to 1996, according to Gary Grant, the president of the Black Farmers and Agriculturalist Association. The settlement for the most part awarded \$50,000 to Black farmers, mainly those who managed to navigate a highly problematic claims process. Many Black farmers died before a settlement was ever reached and the generations of discrimination and anti-blackness that farmers endured at the hands of the state via the USDA has created severe economic consequences and emotional traumas that have never been undone.

What are the solutions?

- End the dumping of toxic wastes in poor and Black communities, poor, working class and communities of color.
- Close down waste burners.
- Clean up poisoned waters and stop corporations from pouring toxic waste into waterways which find their way into rivers and drinking water.



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- Halt all foreclosures on Black farmland, eliminate all Black farmer debt and make healthy foods and lands for growing food available.
- Ensure public access to safe, clean water for housing, drinking and food production
- Use public resources — funds and land — to implement fair development, prioritizing community-based cooperative entities governed by traditionally excluded communities and community members.

Federal Action:

- Reauthorization of funds to build affordable housing for all.
- Strict enforcement of environmental protection standards.
- Eliminate all debt for Black farmers.
- Halt all foreclosures on Black farm land.
- Enforce policies and regulations consistently.
- Increase funding for renewable energy infrastructure (wind, solar, etc.).
- Commit to the comprehensive goal of fair development and require states meet standards of fair development to receive pass-through funding.
- In a coordinated way, review all tax credits, insurance systems and budgets concerning various elements of development (e.g., housing, schools, community, highways, etc.) and align around the goal of fair development with an emphasis on community land trusts, cooperatives and community control.

State Action:

- Stop transporting and placement of toxic waste dumps in poor and black communities.
- Clean water available for all, without restriction based on inability to pay, with strict penalties for corporations which ignore the law.
- End discriminatory credit policies by financial institutions in order to enable access to housing and farmable land.

Local Action:

- Facilitating access and funding for community land trusts, food co-ops and food hubs (regional aggregation, marketing and distribution) for Black farmers
- Community led research studies to obtain accurate information on the impacts of land-air-water contamination on their health and quality of life.
- Local governance — Community involvement in decisions that impact all aspects of life, including housing, transportation, food, development, etc.
- (Translocal action) organizing across geography and issue area, sharing strategies, building a stronger movement for change.



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How does this solution address the specific needs of some of the most marginalized Black people?

- Black, poor, and trans people of color are disproportionately affected by lack of access to affordable housing, clean water, air and access to (and control over) healthy food.

Model Legislation

- [Baltimore Fair Development Standards](#) (pending)
- [H.R. 4727, National Comprehensive Housing Act](#), introduced by Congressman Ronald Dellums (D-CA) in the 100th and 101st U.S. Congress (1988 and 1989).
- [Cooperation Jackson Just Transition Plan](#)

Resources:

- [We Are Mother Earth's Red Line](#)
- [The Vermont Declaration of Human Rights](#) (2012) is a comprehensive human rights charter that articulates goals of fair development..
- [Community + Land + Trust: Tools for Development without Displacement](#) (2016), focuses on jobs and housing, while uplifting many of the basic ingredients at the local level of fair development.
- For initial information on a human rights budget to support fair development, visit <http://www.nesri.org/programs/the-peoples-budget-campaign-in-vermont>; also see [this animated short video](#) on human rights budgeting.
- [The Vancouver Action Plan: 64 Recommendations for National Action](#),
- Both Cleveland, OH, and Springfield, MA, have initiatives that focus on supporting cooperative business development through a so-called anchor institutions strategy. In Cleveland, [Evergreen Cooperatives](#) was launched in 2008 by a working group of Cleveland-based institutions (including the Cleveland Foundation, the Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, Case Western Reserve University, and the municipal government). The focus is on creating living wage jobs in six low-income neighborhoods known as Greater University Circle. An initiative in [Springfield](#) has pulled in a model grant for worker cooperatives that are being developed with guidance from local anchors.
- [Gulf South Rising 2015 Strategy Document](#)

Organizations Currently Working on Policy or These Issues:

- We understand this section is by no means exhaustive, but it is important to give some examples of the work:
 - [We The People of Detroit's](#) Wage Love Campaign



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- Wage Love campaign for water access in Detroit
- [National Black Food and Justice Alliance](#)
- Federation of Southern Cooperatives
- [Land Loss Prevention Project](#)
- National Economic and Social Rights Initiative
- [Cooperation Jackson](#)
- BYP100

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