

**STATE
OF BLACK
AMERICA®**

A National Urban League Publication
stateofblackamerica.org

2025



STATE OF DEMOCRACY, CIVIL RIGHTS & PROGRESS UNDER ATTACK EMERGENCY



ABOUT THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

The National Urban League is a historic civil rights and urban advocacy organization. Driven to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and justice for our nation's marginalized populations, the National Urban League works toward economic empowerment and the elevation of the standard of living in historically underserved urban communities.

Founded in 1910 and headquartered in New York City, the National Urban League has improved the lives of more than three million people each year nationwide through direct service programs run by 92 affiliates serving 300 communities in 37 states and the District of Columbia.

The National Urban League also conducts public policy research and advocacy work from its Washington, D.C., bureau. The National Urban League is a BBB-accredited organization and has earned a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, placing it in the top 10% of all U.S. charities for adhering to good governance, fiscal responsibility, and other best practices.

CONTENTS

- 03** **About *State of Black America*[®]**
- 04** **From the President's Desk**
- 06** **Delete. Defund. Deny.
The Erasure of Equity from the Inside Out**
- 07** **What We Stand to Lose**
- 08** **How the War on "Woke" is Fueling Systemic
Oppression and the Assault on Civil Rights**
- 10** **The Radicalization of the Civil Rights Division**
- 12** **Muted: How Digital Censorship & Misinformation
Undermine Democracy**
- 14** **A New Resistance**
- 16** **How the National Urban League is a Leader
in the Resistance**
- 18** **How Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Protects and Advances Democratic Ideals**
- 20** **Our Contributors**
- 23** **National Urban League Affiliates**

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SCAN TO READ THE
FULL REPORT.

ABOUT STATE OF BLACK AMERICA®

Since its first appearance in 1976 under the stewardship of the late Mr. Vernon E. Jordan Jr., the organization's fifth president, the *State of Black America*® remains one of the most highly anticipated benchmarks and sources for thought leadership around racial equality in America.

The report explores inequities across America's economics, employment, education, health, housing, criminal justice, and civic participation systems through research and the words of our contributors. Each edition contains penetrating commentary and insightful analysis from recognized authorities and leading figures in politics, the corporate and tech sectors, the nonprofit arena, academia, and popular culture.

In this 49th edition of the report, *State of Emergency: Democracy, Civil Rights, and Progress Under Attack*, we warn our readers and Americans that our country is on the brink of a dangerous tilt towards authoritarianism. This report was initially focused on the Voting Rights Act of 1965—a bedrock of American Democracy—and the profound challenges it faces today. But 2025 has seen the most volatility in modern

history, so we are unpacking the threats to our Democracy and the steps the civil rights community and the Urban League movement are taking to fight back.

As we witness escalating efforts to dismantle voting rights protections, block access to fair elections, and erode the civil liberties that have been fought for over generations, the 2025 *State of Black America* sounds the alarm: **Democracy, civil rights, and progress are under attack.**

Our contributors—elected officials, civil rights advocates, scholars, and thought leaders—offer critical insights on how we can fight back and fortify civil rights for the 21st century.

This is not the time to be silent. We cannot stand by while those who oppose progress weaken the pillars of Democracy. This fight is for our future, our legacy, and the soul of this nation. We urge you to join us.

Visit the *State of Black America* website to access author essays, data visualizations, expert analysis, and a downloadable version of this executive summary.

stateofblackamerica.org



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Marc H. Morial

PRESIDENT & CEO,
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

A democracy willing to destroy itself rather than deliver justice is a democracy in crisis.

This is the chilling reality we confront in 2025—a year that has revealed, in stark terms, the lengths to which some will go to halt the progress of Black America. The notion that we are living through a “state of emergency” is not rhetorical flourish. It is an honest reckoning with a government increasingly determined to sacrifice its founding principles—equality, liberty, and justice—rather than accept the truth of a diversifying nation and deliver equitable opportunity to all.

The story is as old as the Republic itself. Every inch of Black progress in America has been met with fierce resistance. The Reconstruction Amendments were followed by the rise of Jim Crow. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was born only after decades of filibusters, violence, and sabotage. And in the wake of George Floyd’s murder, as Americans of all races flooded the streets to

demand justice, we now see the same pattern repeating—only this time, the backlash is deeper, more calculated, and more dangerous.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965—the cornerstone of democratic participation—is once again under siege. Policies that once protected our access to the ballot box are being shredded, replaced with brazen new tactics of suppression. At the same time, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives—hard-fought measures designed to repair centuries of injustice—are being dismantled under the cynical guise of “fairness” and “colorblindness.” Entire federal departments once tasked with advancing civil rights have been hollowed out, their missions warped into tools of political retaliation.


We are witnessing something more than policy shifts. We are watching an attempt to turn back the clock to an era when the full humanity of all Americans was not recognized—when the idea of true equality was treated as a threat to the social order. What we face today is a deliberate, coordinated effort to deny the future of a more

just and inclusive America. And the architects of this effort have made their intentions plain: they would rather see our democracy crumble than cede power to a multiracial, equitable society.

Yet if history teaches us anything, it is that Black America has never accepted injustice as destiny. Time and again, we have organized, resisted, and overcome. The National Urban League was born for moments like this—when the stakes are high, and the path forward demands clarity, courage, and conviction.

In this 49th edition of the *State of Black America*, we do more than document the threats we face. We illuminate the power of resistance. Across courtrooms and classrooms, from statehouses to boardrooms, a new generation of leaders is rising to defend the gains we’ve made and push for the progress still to come. The work is difficult. The road is long. But we know from experience that the arc of history does not bend toward justice on its own—it must be bent by those with the strength and will to see it through.

This is our charge. This is our moment. And together, we will not yield.

A portrait of a middle-aged Black man with short hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. A small circular pin with the National Urban League logo is visible on his left lapel.

*The work is difficult.
The road is long. But we
know from experience that
the arc of history does not
bend toward justice on its
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those with the strength and
will to see it through.*



DELETE.

DEFUND.

DENY.

THE ERASURE OF EQUITY FROM THE INSIDE OUT

- I. What We Stand to Lose**
- II. How the War on “Woke” is Fueling Systemic Oppression and the Assault on Civil Rights**
- III. The Radicalization of the Civil Rights Division**
- IV. Muted: How Digital Censorship & Misinformation Undermine Democracy**
- V. A New Resistance**
- VI. How the National Urban League is a Leader in the Resistance**
- VII. How Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Protects and Advances Democratic Ideals**

Credits:

Poll tax receipt: National Museum of African American History and Culture

Louisiana Voter Literacy Test, circa 1964 via [Civil Rights Movement Veterans](#)

Ben Shapiro: Tomas Cuesta via Getty Images

Tucker Carlson: Chip Somodevilla via Getty Images

Edward Blum: Bloomberg via Getty Images

President Johnson & MLK, Jr.: Bettmann via Getty Images

Demonstrators: Drew Angerer via Getty Images

Pro-Palestinian rally: Babak Bordbar via Getty Images

Andrew Tate: Daniel Mihailescu via Getty Images

Marjorie Taylor Greene: Gage Skidmore via Flickr

Kanye West: Jeff Kravitz via Getty Images

Mark Zuckerberg: Alex Wong via Getty Images

Elon Musk: Brendan Smialowski via Getty Images

A. Philip Randolph: John Bottega, NYWTS via Library of Congress

HOW THE WAR ON “WOKE” IS FUELING SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION AND THE ASSAULT ON CIVIL RIGHTS

Following the murder of George Floyd, far-right extremists seized an opportunity to stop the calls for racial equity by reframing the policies as “woke” and anti-American.

The narrative took off on right-wing forums and was echoed by conservative television and podcast hosts around the clock, fueling fear and anger among vulnerable Americans who were isolated and frightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. As it gained traction, conservative organizers began drafting a strategy to challenge the legality of diversity programs, erase the contributions of people of color from American history, and dismantle the federal government to be remade in their image.

This movement led to a flurry of lawsuits that have resulted in two cases: *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina*, which led to the erosion of affirmative action.⁴

But they didn’t stop there.

The American Alliance for Equal Rights (AAER) continued⁵ its assault on organizations with “unfair,” “race-based” diversity and equity programs. The AAER successfully sued the philanthropic arm of an Atlanta-based venture fund, the Fearless Fund, and forced it to shutter its Fearless Strivers Grant contest, which awarded \$20,000 to small businesses led by at least one woman of color. The suit claimed anti-white bias.

And today, organizations dedicated to leveling American institutions with deep histories of unequitable lending practices such as home appraisals, and that have historically had significantly lower levels of enrollment for people of color, are under attack.

Not only are these efforts growing, but they are also becoming more

aggressive as the new administration has made it federal doctrine—attacking colleges, universities and corporate—for simply having the words diversity and inclusion as part of their mission. The administration successfully forced the University of Michigan and Columbia University to drop their programs.

These efforts mark a dangerous slide toward authoritarianism—threatening to impose a uniform education system and a homogenous workforce that sidelines anyone who doesn’t fit a narrow, exclusionary mold. If left unchecked, they risk reversing decades of progress that have made America more dynamic, competitive, and just.

⁴ <https://www.scotusblog.com/2023/06/supreme-court-strikes-down-affirmative-action-programs-in-college-admissions/#:~:text=In%20a%20historic%20decision%2C%20the%20Supreme%20Court,which%20bars%20racial%20discrimination%20by%20government%20entities>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/08/us/edward-blum-affirmative-action-race.html>

The Backlash Pipeline: From Fringe Narrative to National Policy

1

Alt-Right Echo Chambers

Extremist forums and anonymous message boards circulate conspiracy theories that reframe racial justice as "anti-white discrimination."



On platforms like 4chan and Telegram, far-right users linked diversity efforts to a so-called "Great Replacement" plot, turning equity initiatives into a threat narrative.



Figures like Ben Shapiro and Jordan Peterson on The Daily Wire echoed these white nationalist narratives, fueling backlash against schools, corporations, and civil rights protections.



2

Far-Right Media Amplification

Narratives migrate into mainstream conservative media.



Between 2020 and 2021, Fox News aired nearly 2,000 segments attacking Critical Race Theory.



3

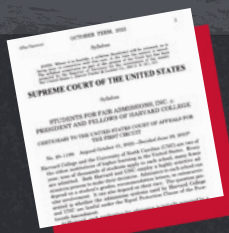
Legal Weaponization

Once this fear is normalized, conservative legal organizations mobilize.

In one high-profile case, AAER sued the Fearless Fund, forcing it to suspend its \$20,000 grant program for women of color entrepreneurs, claiming "anti-white" bias.



Led by strategist Edward Blum, the American Alliance for Equal Rights (AAER) began suing companies and nonprofits with targeted race-conscious programs.



4

Judicial Endorsement

These legal challenges reach the highest courts.

In 2023, the Supreme Court ruled against affirmative action in the case of *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* and *UNC*, finding that race-conscious college admissions violated the Equal Protection Clause—redefining decades of precedent on educational equity.

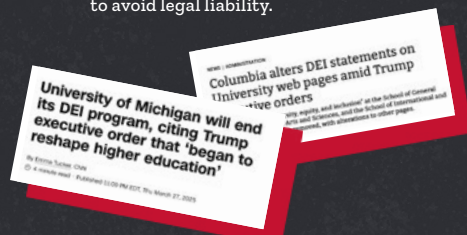
5

Policy Rollbacks

Following these court decisions, federal and state governments begin dismantling diversity policies.

The new administration issued directives prompting universities and agencies to retract their DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) commitments.

Columbia University and the University of Michigan dropped or restructured programs to avoid legal liability.



6

Systemic Erosion of Rights

What began as anonymous online rhetoric is now codified into law and policy.

If left unchecked, this movement risks reshaping American institutions to reflect the interests of the few rather than the equity of all.

Civil rights initiatives are being reversed, racial equity programs dismantled, and the inclusion of diverse voices increasingly labeled as partisan or illegal—all under the banner of "neutrality," which masks a return to exclusion.



THE **RADICALIZATION** OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION

For decades, the civil rights division of the Department of Justice acted as an enforcer of the rule of law. It protected Americans from discriminatory practices committed by the government and private corporations.

Under its new leadership, the Civil Rights Division has been hollowed out and repurposed—transforming from a guardian of justice into a tool for political retribution.

Within weeks of the new administration taking power, cases against election deniers who've tampered with the election equipment were dismissed and January 6th rioters were pardoned. At the same time, the civil rights division has withdrawn its arguments from key cases that play a role in the future of our Democracy including the Louisiana redistricting case before Supreme Court.⁶

The attorney general has also issued guidance instructing the DOJ to investigate and sue corporations and universities with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.⁷ The civil rights community has collectively rebuked the nomination of Harmeet Dhillon, a leading voice in the election denier movement, to lead the DOJ's civil rights division.

Dhillon penned an op-ed for Fox News that opposed the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act Amendment which would have restored full power to the legacy law.⁸

The radicalization of the DOJ is more than bureaucratic rot—it is an existential threat to civil rights enforcement, allowing discrimination to flourish unchecked under the false guise of “reverse racism.”

Our systems only work when there are checks and balances and accountability from its citizens. As civil rights organizations continue to push for advancements in critical civil rights protections at every level of government, staying vigilant in rapidly changed voting laws at the local level and electing representation who support progress, are steps every American can take to defend democracy and fight hate.

⁶ <https://www.opb.org/article/2025/03/30/some-voting-rights-act-cases-dropped-by-trump-administration/>

⁷ <https://www.justice.gov/ag/media/1388501/dl?inline>

⁸ <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/hr4-election-democrats-power-grab-harmeet-dhillon>

Laws Enforced by the Civil Rights Division



Prohibits racial discrimination in voting. One of the most significant civil rights laws in U.S. history.

The Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, and 1968

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended through 2006

The Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974

The Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act of 1980

The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986

Section 102 of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA)

Authorizes the Attorney General to seek relief for persons confined in public institutions where conditions exist that deprive residents of their constitutional rights.

Prohibits discrimination on the basis of national origin and citizenship status as well as document abuse and retaliation under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952.

Protects the right to access reproductive health services by prohibiting threats, intimidation, or physical obstruction at clinics.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993

The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act of 1994

The Police Misconduct Provision of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000

The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009

Gives the DOJ authority to investigate law enforcement agencies suspected of engaging in patterns or practices of unconstitutional conduct, including excessive force, unlawful stops, or discriminatory policing.

MUTED: HOW DIGITAL CENSORSHIP & MISINFORMATION UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY

The evolution of digital platforms and social media has changed the way we do everything—including organize. Leaders have galvanized support and raised awareness on injustices that may have otherwise gone unnoticed by sharing videos and connecting with supporters online. Activists are also able to pressure brands and organizations easily by posting on social media. These efforts have led to products being removed from shelves, elected officials passing laws to address unjust practices, and changes in public opinion on racial equity.

However, during the pandemic, we saw a shift. The same platforms that protected the speech of marginalized communities were taken over by billionaires with their own political goals, many of which are anti-progress and extremist.

Within a day of Twitter's takeover in 2022, accounts championing right-wing views including anti-diversity rhetoric, hate speech, and conspiracy theories saw explosive growth on the platform as more progressive accounts saw their follower counts abruptly drop.⁹ During the 2024 election cycle, accounts supporting progressive candidates also saw their accounts blocked and shadow banned without explanation.¹⁰

The hateful rhetoric once confined to the darkest corners of the web has now breached classrooms, grocery stores, houses of worship, and public squares—fueling acts of violence and radicalizing a new generation of extremists.¹¹

And as social media continues to become a more hostile place for marginalized communities, platforms like Meta and YouTube have all but removed their content moderation and safety teams, and restored the accounts of far-right activists under the guise of promoting “free speech.” While free speech is a core value shared by the civil rights community, it is the work of all of us to ensure that there is equity on the internet, safe spaces for all communities to connect, and that we continue to hold bad actors accountable for radicalizing our citizens and jeopardizing the lives of children and families.

We are witnessing a digital rollback of rights mirroring what's happening in courts and legislatures. The rise of far-right narratives online—combined with the silencing of progressive voices and the collapse of digital safeguards—isn't just a tech issue. It's a democracy issue.

This is a call to action: to rebuild digital public squares where free speech doesn't mean unchecked hate—and where progress isn't shadow banned out of existence.

shadow ban:

to cause (a user or their content) to be hidden from some or all other users usually without the user's knowledge.

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/28/technology/twitter-far-right-followers.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/nadler-urges-investigation-x-restriction-kamala-harris-account-rcna163236>

¹¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/investigations/online-extremism-political-polarization-us-attacks-threat-rcna186017>

WARNING

A SURGE IN RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST LANGUAGE

Following Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter (now X) in 2022, researchers documented a spike in hate speech and far-right rhetoric. Anti-Black, anti-LGBTQ+, and anti-immigrant posts surged, as verified by groups like the Center for Countering Digital Hate.

During this time, right-wing influencers' and conspiracy theorists' accounts previously banned were restored, and hate speech rose by 50%, some words increasing by over 200% across categories like racial and transphobic slurs and antisemitism.

WARNING

THE SILENCING OF PROGRESSIVE ACCOUNTS

Progressive users and civil rights organizations have reported unexplained account suspensions, shadow banning, and follower purges.

During the 2024 primary season, NBC News reported that Democratic organizers and Black-led campaigns were throttled or blocked from boosting content.

WARNING

ALGORITHMIC BIAS AND INFORMATION MANIPULATION

Search and recommendation engines on platforms like YouTube, X, and Instagram increasingly prioritize sensationalism and ideological bias—often pushing users toward conspiratorial or racist content. Civil rights groups have flagged this as algorithmic redlining.

WARNING

GROWING SURVEILLANCE AND POLICE COOPERATION

Even as they fail to moderate hate, platforms continue to cooperate with law enforcement, often disproportionately targeting communities of color. In many cases, police departments request user data with little oversight.

A 2022 Mozilla study showed that YouTube's algorithm pushed white nationalist content even to users who had never expressed interest in politics.

WARNING

SAFETY TEAM ROLLBACKS

Companies like Meta, Twitter/X and YouTube slashed or eliminated their Trust & Safety teams under the guise of cost-cutting or "free speech." The result has been a dramatic drop in moderation of harmful content.

In 2022, Facebook handed over private messages from a teen facing abortion charges in Nebraska, raising serious concerns about digital privacy and surveillance abuse.

Only a few platforms—like LinkedIn and TikTok—still retain centralized moderation teams with clear policies against extremism and hate.

Elon Musk fires Twitter's human rights team as part of sweeping layoffs at platform

Massive cuts came a week after world's richest person completed \$44bn purchase of company
Guillermo Mazoni Los Angeles • Friday 06 November 2022 16:08 EDT • Comments

A NEW RESISTANCE

Americans, led by the civil rights community, are not going silently into the dark.

In the wake of a flurry of executive orders that crossed legal boundaries, state attorney generals, governors, and civil rights groups launched lawsuits from coast to coast challenging blatant and dangerous overreaches of the executive branch.

In March of this year, the National Urban League, the NAACP Legal Defense Funds, and Lambda Legal sued the Trump

administration,¹² challenging three anti-equity executive orders from President Trump related to diversity, equity, inclusion accessibility. Along with co-plaintiffs, the National Fair Housing Alliance and the AIDS Foundation of Chicago claim these orders will severely limit the organizations' ability to provide critical social and health services such as HIV treatment, fair housing,

"For more than two centuries, it has been established that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision. The normal appellate review process exists for that purpose."

—Chief Justice John Roberts

Source:

<https://www.scotusblog.com/2025/03/chief-justice-rebukes-trumps-call-for-judicial-impeachment/>

Calling out executive defiance

Abrego Garcia v. Noem

In April 2025, U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis criticized the Trump administration for failing to comply with court orders regarding the wrongful deportation of Kilmar Abrego Garcia:

"Defendants have sought refuge behind vague and unsubstantiated assertions of privilege, using them as a shield to obstruct discovery and evade compliance with this Court's orders."

Fighting violations of the First Amendment & due process

Mahdawi v. Trump

United States green card holder and Pro-Palestine supporter Mohsen Mahdawi was detained by DHS on April 14, 2025. Justice Crawford ordered his release on April 30, stating:

"Legal residents—not charged with crimes or misconduct—are being arrested and threatened with deportation for stating their views on the political issues of the day."

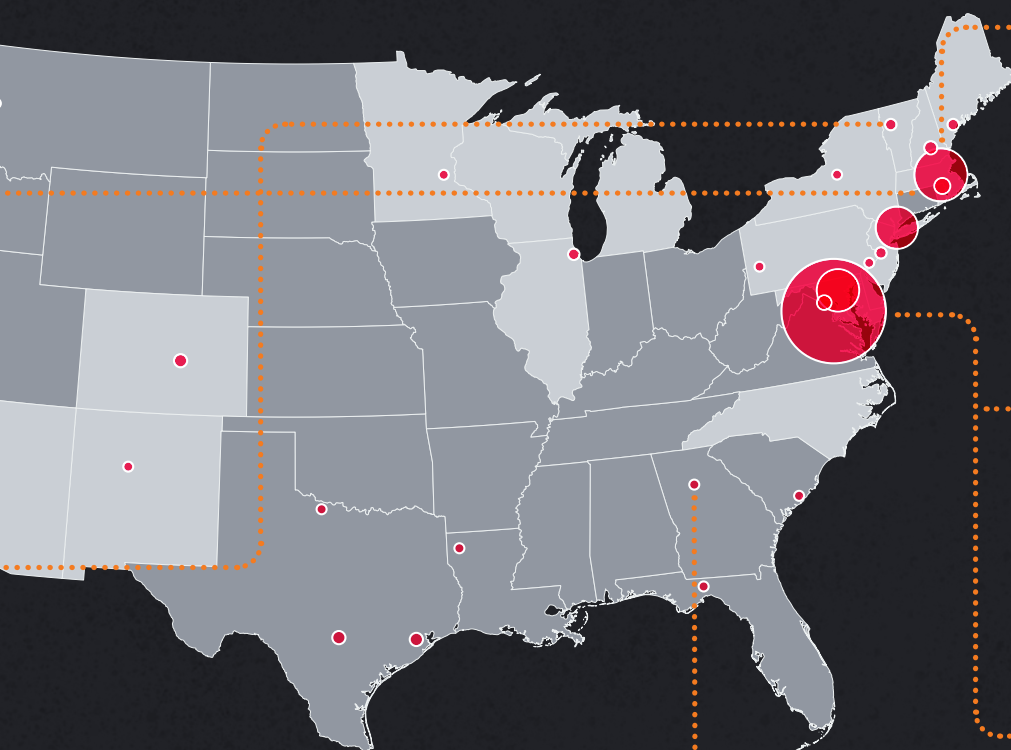
¹² <https://lambdalegal.org/case/national-urban-league-v-trump/>

equal employment opportunities, affordable credit, civil rights protections, and many others. This would harm countless people across the United States, including people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and people living with HIV.

State Attorney Generals have also sued the administration for attempting to overhaul election rules, defunding the National Institute of Health,¹³ and federal agency closures that threaten funding for public education, housing, and civil rights.¹⁴

In a rare signal of judiciary resistance, Chief Justice John Roberts also rebuked¹⁵ the President for calling for the impeachment of the judge who ruled against his deportation plans. Roberts also sided with liberal justices against the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives cutting hundreds of millions of dollars in teacher-training funds.

As the resistance continues to grow, the National Urban League is tracking it in real time here.



MAP OF RESISTANCE

- Cases filed in U.S. District Courts (number represented by size of red dot)
247 total cases as of May 23, 2025
- States involved in cases as plaintiffs

Source: Just Security
<https://www.justsecurity.org/107087/tracker-litigation-legal-challenges-trump-administration/>

¹³ <https://www.science.org/content/article/states-sue-trump-administration-over-nih-cuts>

¹⁴ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/voting-rights-groups-challenge-trumps-recent-executive-order>

¹⁵ <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/10/roberts-trump-impeachment-judges-00131452>

Resisting assaults on science & medicine

Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. Kennedy
Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. National Institutes of Health

Coalitions of state attorneys general as well as multiple academic institutions have filed several lawsuits to challenge new NIH policies that threaten medical research by terminating existing research grants and severely capping reimbursements for future grants.

Defending civil rights & education

NAACP v. U.S.A.
NAACP v. U.S. Department of Education

The NAACP has challenged attempts by the Trump administration to dismantle or subvert the Department of Education and defund schools with diversity, equity, and inclusion programs or programs that teach about systemic racism.

Challenging attacks on equity

National Urban League v. Trump

The National Urban League sued the Trump administration to challenge executive orders to terminate diversity, equity, and inclusion programs as well as "equity-related" grants and contracts.

Protecting students' rights

Jane Doe 1 v. Bondi (N.D. Georgia)

Student visa holders assert that ICE terminated their system records, thereby ending their visa status. This case is one of over 100 lawsuits of its kind against the administration.



HOW THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE IS A LEADER IN THE RESISTANCE

Since 1910, the National Urban League has worked toward creating an America where Black Americans and other people of color can have economic power, self-reliance, and civil rights. In the early 20th century, the Urban League movement emerged as a critical force during the Great Migration, helping Black families transition from the rural South to urban centers in the North.

Under the visionary leadership of Eugene Kinkle Jones, one of its founding executive secretaries, the League forged groundbreaking partnerships with businesses to open doors for Black workers in industrial sectors and pioneered vocational training programs to build economic resilience. Jones also positioned the League

as a trusted advisor to the federal government, meeting with presidents from Woodrow Wilson through Franklin D. Roosevelt to advocate for fair employment and anti-discrimination policies. His lobbying helped secure Black workers' inclusion in New Deal programs during the Great Depression.

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Eugene Kinkle Jones

In the 1940s, the League alongside A. Philip Randolph, who, though more widely known for leading the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, pushed for the establishment of the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) and President Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802—the first major federal action to prohibit discrimination in defense industries and government employment.¹⁶

A. Philip Randolph



Our work has and continues to reach the lives of millions and influence policies that change the face of America. Resistance to racism and tyranny is part of our DNA, today is no different.

In the 2020s, we have risen to meet the moment.

Immediately following the murder of George Floyd, the League established the Equitable Justice and Strategic Initiatives (EJSI) division, a bold step to formalize its commitment to systemic reform. Through EJSI, the League launched its groundbreaking **21 Pillars for Redefining Public Safety and Restoring Community Trust**¹⁷ framework, which has shaped policy advocacy from Capitol Hill to city

halls nationwide. These efforts include convening affiliates and grassroots partners to advance local policing reforms, drafting legislation, and training thousands of community members in advocacy and voter mobilization.

Recognizing that justice extends beyond policing, the League has also been a fierce advocate for economic equity. Under the **Empowerment 2.0** strategy and its “D3” framework—Defend Democracy, Demand Diversity, and Defeat Poverty—the League has amplified national campaigns, such as the **Urban Expungement Program**,¹⁸ which has already helped more than 1,500 justice-impacted individuals in Ohio alone, breaking barriers to employment, housing, and education.

In the face of this new administration and the rollout of Project 2025, we are mobilizing again.

To ensure that the Fiscal Year 2026 budget centers fairness, opportunity, and economic security for all Americans, the Urban League launched the Fair Budget Coalition,¹⁹ a new alliance of civil rights leaders, economic justice advocates, and policy experts. The coalition sent a letter to Congressional leadership²⁰ outlining its vision for a just and inclusive federal budget, requested meetings with key lawmakers, and initiated a grassroots campaign²¹ to mobilize local leaders and community voices to support a fair budget that reflects the nation’s core values.

In the courtroom, the League has led high-profile legal challenges against the federal government’s anti-equity executive orders, standing alongside partners like Lambda Legal and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to protect critical services and civil rights protections

under assault. Through the **Demand Diversity Roundtable**,²² the League has also convened cross-sector civil rights leaders to fortify the national defense of DEI and ensure long-term strategies are in place to withstand political headwinds.

In this new era of retrenchment and backlash, the National Urban League is more than a participant in the resistance—it is a leader, architecting a path forward where justice, equity, and opportunity are not just aspirations but guaranteed rights for all Americans.

Organizations United in Resistance



¹⁶ <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-8802>

¹⁷ <https://nul.org/index.php/21-pillars>

¹⁸ <https://nul.org/basic-page/urban-expungement-program>

¹⁹ <https://nul.org/news/national-urban-league-convenes-leading-civil-rights-economic-justice-and-policy-organizations>

²⁰ https://nul.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/2025_04_09_APP_Fair_Budget_Coalition-Letter-to-Congressional-Leadership_FINAL.pdf

²¹ <https://nul.quorum.us/campaign/FairBudget/>

²² <https://nul.org/event/demand-diversity-roundtable>

HOW DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PROTECTS AND ADVANCES DEMOCRATIC IDEALS

The Constitution, the line “Liberty and Justice for All,” and America’s core values all have one thing in common: the promise of equality for all Americans.

Yet, since the founding of our nation, that promise has been consistently broken for Black Americans. After centuries of inhumane bondage, the legacies of slavery continue to haunt every corner of American life—embedding themselves in our economy, justice system, education, and workplaces through institutionalized racism.²³

Across generations, civil rights leaders have fought to close these gaps, but progress has rarely been linear. With each victory—such as the Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1875—there came setbacks, like the Supreme Court’s 1883 dismantling of civil rights protections and the rise of Jim Crow. This cyclical struggle continued until the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964,²⁴ which President Lyndon B. Johnson signed to outlaw discrimination in employment, education, and public accommodations, fundamentally reshaping American life.

Importantly, this legislation did more than expand rights in theory—it laid the groundwork for what we now recognize as

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act formalized anti-discrimination policies in the workplace, catalyzing affirmative action and DEI frameworks designed to actively dismantle systemic barriers.²⁵

While often framed as tools for fairness in workplaces and schools, DEI policies play an essential role in strengthening democracy itself. As explored in research from Brown University’s *Democratic Erosion* blog, DEI is not only about representation—it also deepens civic participation by ensuring historically excluded groups have pathways to engage fully in democratic processes.²⁶ This includes creating safe, equitable spaces where individuals can develop the knowledge and confidence to participate in public life—from voting to advocacy and leadership.

For instance, equitable education and literacy—core components of DEI—are fundamental to an informed electorate. As the National Urban League’s 2024 *State of Black America* report underscores, although progress has been made

²³ <https://nul.org/state-of-black-america>

²⁴ <https://nul.org/state-of-black-america>

²⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/juliekatz/2024/12/29/history-of-dei-why-it-matters-for-the-future/>

²⁶ <https://democratic-erosion.org/2025/02/14/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-how-does-this-affect-democracy/>

↑ **5%**

increase in voter participation

on average, in states that implement same day voter registration.

Center for American Progress

↑ **9%**

increase in young voter participation

as a result of Colorado’s vote-at-home plus vote centers policy.

Center for American Progress

71%

of those who registered online turned out to vote

compared with 48 percent and 52 percent of those registering by mail or through a state agency, respectively.

Center for American Progress

914,000
additional voters

could have participated in the 2016 US elections, based on Virginia’s experience restoring the rights of 25,000 formerly incarcerated people.

Center for American Progress

since the desegregation of schools (via Title IV of the Civil Rights Act), disparities remain. Research consistently shows²⁷ that equitable education and literacy not only produce informed voters but also cultivate resilience against authoritarianism by empowering citizens to challenge disinformation and participate meaningfully in governance. Still, access to quality education ensures that citizens have the tools to understand and shape policy, resist disinformation, and hold leaders accountable.²⁸

Pipeline programs, another critical feature of DEI, are equally transformative. By intentionally developing pathways from underserved communities into politics, civil service, and leadership roles across industries, these initiatives broaden the range of voices influencing decisions that impact all Americans. For example, civic internship initiatives, mentoring programs, and early-career fellowships ensure that a new generation of leaders reflects the diversity of America's population. As the Forbes article highlights, this approach "cultivates long-term inclusion by not just diversifying who is present but also who holds power."²⁹

Moreover, the expansion of DEI in government agencies and educational institutions also builds trust in democratic institutions. When people see themselves represented in the decision-making bodies that govern their lives—and when they feel their voices matter—they are more likely to participate in elections, public hearings, and civic activism. This reinforces a core tenet of democracy: government by and for the people.

In short, DEI policies don't just level the playing field in education and employment; they fortify democracy itself. By expanding opportunities, ensuring equitable access to information, and creating leadership pipelines, DEI helps guarantee that every American—not just the privileged few—can contribute to the nation's future.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a monumental leap forward, but its true promise is realized when we continue to expand equity and inclusion—not only as moral imperatives but as pillars of a thriving, resilient democracy.

²⁷ <https://democratic-erosion.org/2025/02/14/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-how-does-this-affect-democracy/>

²⁸ <https://democratic-erosion.org/2025/02/14/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-how-does-this-affect-democracy/>

²⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/juliekraatz/2024/12/29/history-of-dei-why-it-matters-for-the-future/>

22 million
registered voters

could be added to state voter rolls in just the first year if every state implemented automatic voter registration.

Center for American Progress

↑ 4.7%
increase in youth
voting participation

when preregistration laws were implemented in Florida.

Center for American Progress

↑ 17.2%
increase in
participation
among Muslim
American voters

from 2012 to 2016, after invested in by integrated voter engagement and outreach group Emgage.

Center for American Progress

81%
of people surveyed
in 2023

support using ranked choice voting in their area. More than half of those surveyed were people of color.

Fair Vote

Diverse Voter Engagement Strategies and Increases in Outreach

- Automatic voter registration
- Same-day voter registration
- Preregistration
- Online registration
- Early voting
- No-excuse absentee voting
- Vote-at-home with vote centers
- Restore rights for formerly incarcerated people
- Strengthen civics education in schools
- Invest in integrated voter engagement and outreach
- Ranked choice voting

Source: Center for American Progress

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/increasing-voter-participation-america/>



OUR CONTRIBUTORS

"The future has a past—and we must honor that past by constructing a future worthy of those who struggled before us. Their dreams of full democracy remain our blueprint, but our hands must now lay brick upon brick. We are the founders of this next chapter in American democracy. The question is not whether we can win, but whether we have the courage, creativity, and commitment to realize the representative democracy we desire and deserve—one that embodies the ideals of inclusion, equity, and justice for all."



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

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