

# Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy

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A Discussion Paper

BY  
Salih Booker and Diana Ohlbaum

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# Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy

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Published September 2021 by the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) Education Fund.

The FCNL Education Fund is a Quaker nonprofit that promotes civic engagement to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

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## ISBN

978-1-7373704-0-6

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The authors would like to thank the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Jubitz Family Foundation, and the individual donors whose generous support made these virtual gatherings and this discussion paper possible. The views and opinions expressed in this paper reflect those of the authors alone, with ideas and input from members of the Working Group.

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# Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy

## A DISCUSSION PAPER

*The Working Group on Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy met for 12 two-hour sessions between November 2020 and April 2021.*

*The working group included a cross-section of advocates, activists, organizers, faith community leaders, and scholars in the fields of U.S. foreign policy and national security; racial, economic and environmental justice; peacebuilding; migration; labor; human rights; feminism; and constitutional law.*

*Over the course of the six months, participants discussed the nature of the system by which U.S. foreign policy is developed and legitimized and an overall strategy for making that system more democratic and more just. The paper that follows reflects the contributions of the members of the group,\* who participated in their individual capacities and not as official representatives of their organizations. The authors, however, are solely responsible for the contents of the paper as presented.*

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\* The Working Group was co-chaired by Salih Booker, Center for International Policy, and Diana Ohlbaum, Friends Committee on National Legislation, and facilitated by Leila Hilal. The full list of participants is included at the end.

**SECTION 1**

**What Is the  
Problem?**

## I. What Is the Problem?

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To many living between its shores, the United States is a land of freedom and promise, a haven for unfettered practice of religion, a place where the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas can not only dream of a better future but rise to become president. To many outside U.S. borders, the torch of liberty offers a beacon of hope for equality and opportunity.

But to others—particularly people of color at home and abroad—the reality is very different. The United States is a country that has failed to publicly acknowledge, apologize for, or make amends for its long history of genocide and slavery—despite loudly proclaiming itself as a leader in combating these very evils in other countries.

It is a nation that explicitly seeks global military primacy and conducts aggressive military operations on multiple continents with seeming disregard for their impact on innocent civilians. It is a country whose political leaders are willing to spend trillions on senseless foreign wars and weapon systems but not on building racial, economic, and environmental justice.

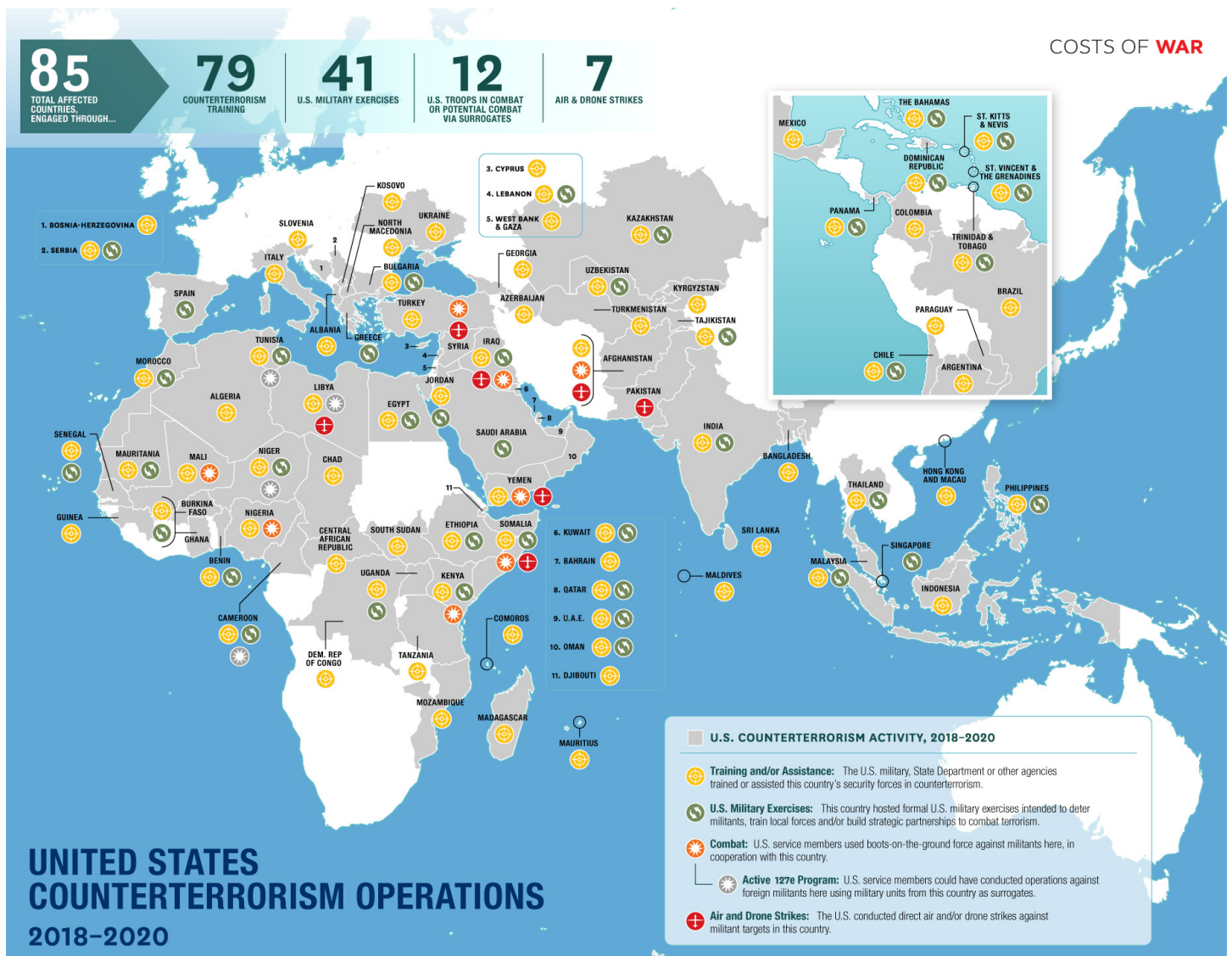
American political culture celebrates the nation’s virtues while demonstrating collective amnesia about its sins. Particularly, but certainly not exclusively, in the foreign policy and national security sphere, elites ignore, reject, and rationalize the enormous harms that the United States has caused through its long history of imperial expansion, structural racism, and economic and military domination. This is not accidental: it is a result of belief systems—manifested in policies and institutions—that we refer to collectively as the Racism-Militarism Paradigm.

American political culture celebrates the nation’s virtues while demonstrating collective amnesia about its sins.



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Keppler, Udo J., Artist.  
*From the Cape to Cairo*  
Keppler. N.Y.: J. Ottmann Lith. Co.,  
Puck Bldg. Photograph.  
Retrieved from Library of Congress.



The Racism-Militarism Paradigm is a way of looking at the world, widely shared among the U.S. policymaking community and much of the public, that arises from a largely unacknowledged doctrine of white supremacy and the necessity of using violence to uphold it. This paradigm establishes a rigid hierarchy, based on race, that values white lives above all others—at home and abroad. It embraces militarism as the most effective mechanism to guarantee this ordering of society and the world.

The Racism-Militarism Paradigm has a number of core theories/ myths and is manifested in a myriad of concrete and abstract ways. The principal belief is in the racial superiority of whites and their entitlement, exceptionalism, and indispensability. This is then used to justify global military domination and economic exploitation by the United States. The paradigm assumes that we live in a zero-sum world defined by scarcity and competition over resources and that humans are by nature selfish and greedy. In such a world, each man

**United States Counterterrorism Operations, 2018-2020.**

Savell, Stephanie. 2020. Costs of War Project, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University.



is therefore “out for himself”—but the needs and desires of white men are viewed as synonymous with those of the United States as a nation and are thus considered more important and more valuable than those of all others.

A key component of this paradigm is the belief that violence is effective. Domination through the use of military force is considered a necessity that offers the ultimate guarantee of protection of rights and physical safety to those who wield it. For example, since 2018 the United States has *engaged in combat in eight countries* and conducted military counterterrorism operations in 85 countries. The Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, and other wars have cost U.S. taxpayers at least \$6.4 trillion and resulted in the deaths of at least 800,000 mostly brown and Black people.

The Pentagon budget, nearing \$750 billion, is higher now than at the peak of the Vietnam War or the Cold War and is larger than the defense budgets of the next ten highest-spending countries combined. It also constitutes more than half of the discretionary funding requested by U.S. presidents and approved by Congress—for decades.

A corollary to this paradigm is the old European justification for colonialism and imperialism known as the *white man’s burden*, which holds that African and Asian nations and peoples need European and white American tutelage and discipline and that the white race has a moral obligation to civilize such people. These racist and paternalistic attitudes permeate not only official U.S. diplomacy and development efforts, but also the *civilizing* mission of many churches and private voluntary aid organizations.

The evolution of this paradigm is not surprising, given that America’s economic and military might were built on land stolen from the Indigenous people of North America and the labor of enslaved Africans. From genocide and enslavement to westward expansionism, hemispheric domination, and global imperialism, the United States has consistently relied upon coercion, intimidation, and violence to enforce white supremacy while describing it throughout history as a mission of enlightenment.

With the conscious and unconscious establishment of the Racism-Militarism Paradigm in the minds of most Americans, those who are defined as *others*, both domestically and internationally, are routinely marginalized, dehumanized, and exploited. The narrow interests of wealthy and powerful white men are mythologized and legitimized as the *national security* interests of the United States.

From genocide and enslavement to westward expansionism, hemispheric domination, and global imperialism, the United States has consistently relied upon coercion, intimidation, and violence to enforce white supremacy while describing it throughout history as a mission of enlightenment.

In parallel, the national faith in violence is romanticized as patriotism, and as a result, Americans treat the U.S. armed forces and law enforcement personnel with cultish devotion, affording them unparalleled resources, trust, and respect.

This addiction to militaristic solutions heightens the fear of chaos, propels a lust for strength in all its forms, and engenders a culture of military reverence. The military capabilities of rival countries are interpreted as threats, and U.S. credibility is defined by the ability and willingness to carry out violence to destroy others. Superior capacity for violence is purported to keep Americans safe.

War crimes, police brutality, mass incarceration, border militarization, and capital punishment are excused as unfortunate but unavoidable means of deterring crime and aggression. Other types of coercion and intimidation—often economic, but with harmful physical impacts—are also used routinely and without question.

It is essential to note that acceptance of the Racism-Militarism Paradigm, while widespread, is largely unconscious. Few of those who have internalized its precepts recognize it as a mechanism for enforcing systemic white supremacy. Importantly, individuals need not be white, Christian, male, or avowed racists to believe that the United States has the right, the responsibility, and the power to control what other nations do.

The paradigm is so pervasive throughout U.S. society that it masquerades as objective truth, blinding most Americans and their leaders to its origins and purpose. Because it draws on a number of deeply held and/or widely promoted values—honor, discipline, order, loyalty, authority—it can seem like common sense rather than the ideological construct that it is.

### How Is the Racism-Militarism Paradigm Perpetuated?

If the Racism-Militarism Paradigm were merely a body of beliefs, narratives, myths, dogmas, or principles, it could be more easily countered or rejected. Its power lies not only in its ability to remain hidden, avoiding full scrutiny and interrogation, but in the manner in which it is propagated and reinforced by economic, political, and social-cultural institutions.

At the level of people and personnel, it operates through the twin strategies of exclusion and exploitation. Particularly in the national security space and at the highest levels, the influential voices are overwhelmingly white, male,

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It is essential to note that acceptance of the Racism-Militarism Paradigm, while widespread, is largely unconscious.



and upper class—educated at Ivy League institutions and removed from the daily challenges facing most Americans. Only a select group of elites who accept the paradigm’s basic precepts is admitted to the rooms where consequential decisions are made.

Adding to this exclusivity is the revolving door of lobbyists, policymakers, and government contractors who ensure that the narrow interests of the arms, extractive, and related industries are kept front and center. Among the professions that intersect meaningfully with foreign policy makers—academia, media, business, law—conformity with the basic precepts of the paradigm is equally ubiquitous.

In this environment, women and people of color rise in proportion to their willingness to accept the Racism-Militarism Paradigm. Their credibility as experts and the relevance of their experience is judged by their adherence to traditional ways of thinking. Diversity is accepted, and more recently even promoted, as long as the rules of the game are preserved.

Under a system of white supremacy, Black, brown, and Indigenous people are trapped at the bottom of the economic and social order. Without an adequate social safety net, worker protections, a living wage, universal health care, quality education, and affordable childcare, tens of millions of Americans (*nearly half of whom are white*) are mired in debt and chronic poverty. The Racism-Militarism Paradigm helps perpetuate these conditions by politicizing fear, directing it externally, and demanding ever-expanding resources for organized violence. The ruling class relies upon this atmosphere of fear to guarantee its continued control over the levers of government.

At the level of systems and institutions, a wide array of political and economic structures upholds the Racism-Militarism Paradigm. Political institutions that protect white supremacy include the Electoral College, unequal representation in the Senate (based historically upon slave ownership), the Senate filibuster, the two-party system, gerrymandering, the Supreme Court (institutionally and *through decisions such as Citizens United*), the campaign finance system, and the role of money in politics. People of color, especially African-Americans, are deprived of a meaningful voice in the decisions that affect them and America’s role in the world.

This is done through the outsized power of small and rural states, the lack of statehood for the District of Columbia and self-determination for Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories, voter suppression laws, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the biased legal system.

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Capitalism, at least as it is organized and practiced in the United States, is perhaps the deepest-rooted and widest-reaching system that perpetuates the Racism-Militarism Paradigm. In its prioritization of the interests of shareholders over workers, its socialization of costs and privatization of profits, its focus on short-term profits over long-term gains, and its failure to invest in human capital, the U.S. system of capitalism is inextricably intertwined with racism and exploitation.

It has resulted in a carbon-based economy that is exceptionally reliant on the arms and extractive and carceral industries; a government that has failed to address climate change or promote climate justice in any meaningful way; and a population that suffers from extreme gaps in health, wealth, and income. The constant search for new sources of cheap labor, the competition for access to natural resources, and the need for ever-expanding markets has led to human and environmental degradation, military expansionism, and the promotion of consumerism.

Closely associated with the capitalist system are the laws, policies, and regulations that enable its most detrimental impacts. A regressive tax system that tolerates massive tax evasion and avoidance by wealthy individuals and corporations has left federal coffers without resources to spend on the

The U.S. system of capitalism is inextricably intertwined with racism and exploitation.

THE ANNEXATION OF HAWAII.



Uncle Sam—"I think I will take a little hand in this game myself."

*Annexation of Hawaii*,  
Crawford Avalanche, Grayling, Mich.,  
July 15, 1897.  
Retrieved from Library of Congress.

common good. The excessive influence of the military-industrial-carceral-congressional complex has led to a massive network of prisons and detention centers, a huge global military footprint, and an unrestrained arms race and bloated Pentagon budgets.

War has become a permanent and largely unchallenged reality, with arms exports now determining many foreign policy priorities. The accelerated development of weapons whose use should be unthinkable is the new normal. The absence of responsible oversight and accountability mechanisms has given license to war profiteering, corruption, and waste—the burden of which falls upon U.S. taxpayers, disproportionately among the poor and middle class.

But it is not just the formal state structures and government policies that operate to maintain white supremacy and advance U.S. global military supremacy. Christian, white, male dominance and military solutions are also bolstered by nonprofit organizations, religious and cultural institutions, the media, the education system, and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund (where power and influence are based upon national wealth, privileging the ruling elites of the G7 countries, which combined represent *only 10% of the world's population*).

These institutions often unwittingly perpetuate the same exclusionary and exploitative practices as the U.S. government and U.S.-based corporations, and they encourage individual obedience to and compliance with those practices. They generally tell the stories that those with power and privilege want to be told. Many of them advocate, tolerate, or commit violence; replicate racialized hierarchies; and socialize narratives and myths that support the Racism-Militarism Paradigm.

Injustice of this magnitude will not be rectified by mere policy change. Even though transitions of administration and party control of Congress can result in meaningful policy shifts, the range of possible options is tightly constrained by this pre-existing set of beliefs and assumptions about the world and the U.S. role in it. What is needed is paradigm change. When we speak of dismantling racism and militarism in U.S. foreign policy, we are talking about the work of paradigm change.

A paradigm is a distinct set of concepts and rules that establish boundaries and dictate behavior. It is a theoretical framework that informs the processes of defining U.S. national interests, establishing foreign policy priorities, determining the distribution of resources, and conceptualizing *national security*. And this is what must be changed.

When we speak of dismantling racism and militarism in U.S. foreign policy, we are talking about the work of paradigm change.

**SECTION 2**

**A New Paradigm  
for the U.S. Role  
in the World**

## II. A New Paradigm for the U.S. Role in the World

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The current U.S. national security paradigm robs us of economic resources, corrupts our political system, endangers our lives, and offends our most fundamental moral values.

It perpetuates a system that discriminates against, disempowers, disrespects, dehumanizes, and brutalizes Black and brown people and other communities of color. It is an extension of systemic white supremacy at home that relies upon the threat and use of force abroad.

Continuing the U.S. quest for global military domination harms not only the people of other countries and the earth we share, but the vast majority of Americans. The Racism-Militarism Paradigm, moreover, harms all of our social, political, and economic institutions, including our democratic institutions, thus weakening our entire society.

To peacefully and democratically dismantle this paradigm, we must offer a compelling alternative vision of the U.S. role in the world. A paradigm designed to repudiate racism and militarism should be based on the following principles:

### Equality, Rights, and Dignity

#### **1. Humanity**

The United States recognizes that all people everywhere are created equal and are equally deserving of their rights and dignity. It acts to promote the full equality and dignity of all people domestically and internationally, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical or intellectual ability, migration status, or economic condition. No nation or people is superior to others.

#### **2. Protection**

For all those living within its borders, the United States protects not only civil, political, legal, and constitutional rights, but also economic, social, and cultural rights. These include the rights to adequate food, water, sanitation, housing, education, health care, and social security, as well as the rights of individuals to take part in cultural, spiritual, and religious life and to obtain safe work at a living wage.

Internationally, the United States advocates for, peacefully supports, and acts in solidarity with those seeking the same protections from their own governments. Both at home and abroad, the U.S. government works to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure full implementation of international human rights and humanitarian law.

#### **3. Self-determination**

The United States recognizes the right of a people to freely determine its own destiny, including to choose its own political status and its own form of economic, cultural, and social development.

#### **4. Democratic practice**

The United States ensures voting integrity, equal representation, and public campaign finance and promotes a national ethos of empathy, care, and repair. Campaign rules and regulations promote fact- and science-based political discourse and respect for political disagreements. U.S. democratic institutions

have been reformed to achieve equal representation and guarantee the promotion and protection of all human rights equally. Internationally, the United States provides appropriate technical, financial, and political support at the invitation of organizations, communities, and governments seeking peacefully to build strong democratic institutions of their own.

## **5. Migration**

The United States acknowledges that migration is an inherent part of human behavior and enables people to move in safety and dignity. It protects, respects, and upholds the human rights of all migrants and complies with its international refugee obligations. The U.S. government cooperates with other nations and with receiving communities domestically to ensure the safe, just, and dignified mobility of individuals and families across borders without discrimination. It protects refugees and migrants within its territory from forced servitude; economic exploitation; and arbitrary deportation, detention, and harassment.

## **Justice**

### **6. Accountability**

The United States has ratified all international human rights treaties and conventions and recognizes the jurisdiction of international courts, accepts their findings, and complies with their decisions. It acknowledges and apologizes for its role in perpetrating genocide, slavery, war crimes, and other crimes against humanity. The United States continuously monitors and measures its policies, foreign and domestic, to identify their racial and gender impacts. It takes action to prevent and eliminate harms and to repair damage.

### **7. Reparations**

The United States has made full reparations for its historic crimes, foreign and domestic, including compensation for survivors for the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the enslavement of Africans, mass incarceration of and state-perpetrated violence against Black and brown people, and the violent conquest of foreign lands.

## **Peace**

### **8. Human security**

The objective of U.S. foreign policy is to promote the social, political, economic, and physical well-being of all people.

### **9. Diplomacy**

The primary instrument of U.S. foreign policy is diplomacy, influencing the behavior and decisions of people, organizations, and governments through dialogue, negotiation, and compromise.

### **10. Multilateralism**

The United States works collaboratively and constructively to strengthen the effectiveness of multilateral institutions and works through them to build peace, resolve disputes, and find solutions to common problems. It respects, complies with, and seeks to strengthen international law and norms.

### **11. Solidarity**

The United States accepts that peace is only possible when there is justice. Therefore, through its international engagements, the United States acts in solidarity and partnership with those who have



been treated unjustly and works collaboratively to build avenues of dialogue, cooperation, reparation, equitable economic and social development, and climate adaptation that lead to peace and the safety and well-being of all people.

## **12. Nonviolence**

The United States rejects the use of threats, intimidation, and force to achieve its political aims. Through diplomacy and multilateral cooperation, it seeks to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict and mass atrocities and to protect vulnerable populations. The United States supports multilateral sanctions only to reduce violence and promote the peaceful resolution of disputes, in coordination with the demands of local civil society. And it treats sexual- and gender-based violence, police brutality, and abuses by security forces with the same seriousness as armed conflict and political violence.

## **13. Demilitarization**

To the extent that the United States maintains military forces, they are only sufficient to deter and defend against armed attack on U.S. territory. The United States has no permanent foreign bases and does not ordinarily station troops outside its borders. It has joined the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, dismantled its entire nuclear arsenal, and radically reduced its spending on conventional weapons. The United States promotes collective international security through multilateral institutions to achieve the parallel demilitarization of all nations and the end of the use of violence between nations for conquest or to resolve disputes.

## **Shared Wealth**

### **14. Social market economy**

The United States has created a social market economy through progressive taxation, careful regulation, legal protections for workers and

unions, fair trade, responsible budgeting, judicious industrial policy, and strong social safety nets. Companies practice stakeholder capitalism, optimizing throughout the supply chain the safety and well-being of workers, customers, communities, and the earth, rather than simply maximizing profits for shareholders.

### **15. Equity**

The U.S. economy is shaped and defined by the public, not corporations or wealthy elites. It ensures that workers are treated fairly at home and abroad and that fair value is paid for imported commodities, products, and resources. Laws and policies relating to taxes, benefits, and employment recognize the gendered reality of the economy and ensure that the work of caring for others is recognized and rewarded. All Americans, regardless of gender or color, have access to good jobs, social protections, and equitable power in their workplaces.

## **Sustainability**

### **16. Planetary imperative**

The United States has ended its dependency on and extraction of fossil fuels. It cooperates with other states and international mechanisms to end the fossil fuel industry worldwide and to counteract the effects of climate change. Significant investments in renewable energy and climate justice have resulted in an increase in fair jobs, food security, social equity, and community empowerment.

### **17. Responsible production and consumption**

The United States practices responsible patterns of consumption and production, using natural resources sustainably, reducing waste, and conserving the natural environment. It sees itself as a part of the shared stewardship of the earth and its bounty, working with the international community to protect the global commons and restore ecosystems.

**SECTION 3**

# **Theory of Change**

### III. Theory of Change

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Racism has always been closely intertwined with U.S. militarism. The American nation was born from the genocide of Indigenous peoples and conquest of their lands. Its brutal system of policing and mass incarceration, as well as its indulgence of private militias and widespread gun ownership, is rooted in the enslavement of Africans.

From imperial control of the Philippines and Cuba to the atomic bombing of Japan, from the arming of dictators in Africa and Latin America to the endless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a sizable proportion of Americans have been willing to impose unthinkable pain and suffering on those perceived to be non-white and therefore *less-than*. A new study confirms the [\*close linkage between anti-Black prejudice and support for bombing Iran\*](#).

Dismantling entrenched racism and militarism, and the political and economic structures that reflect and reinforce them, will require new ways of working together. Systemic change will come not from a small group of elites or political insiders who revise policies, but from a broad grassroots movement that fundamentally shifts the dynamics of power. It will mean centering the views of those who have been marginalized and oppressed and bringing people together across racial lines.

As [\*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. explained in 1965\*](#), “The segregation of the races was really a political stratagem employed by the emerging Bourbon interests in the South to keep the southern masses divided and southern labor the cheapest in the land.”

By taking an anti-racist and anti-militarist lens to U.S. foreign policy and bridging the divide between organizations working on *domestic* and *foreign policy* issues, we can reject the corrosive and poisonous myth of American innocence and support the growth of a broad democratic movement to reshape America’s role in the world.

We believe that supporting the movement that is already in motion will require the following:

- 1. A concerted effort to unmask the lies, myths, and false narratives about national security and the U.S. role in the world.** For people who have experienced marginalization, criminalization, colonization, and dehumanization, these untruths are already

We must expose, describe, and confront the moral, economic, and physical harms caused by the Racism-Militarism Paradigm.

obvious. But those who draw social, political, economic, emotional, professional, and reputational benefits from the current order are either willfully ignorant of or unconcerned about the harms it causes—or else they have been blinded to these harms by the system's internal mechanisms to normalize white supremacy and militarism.

We must expose, describe, and confront the moral, economic, and physical harms caused by the Racism-Militarism Paradigm; identify those who benefit from it; and reject the underlying notions of national and racial superiority (i.e., the lie that there is a hierarchy of human value in which some lives are worth more than others). However, we cannot expect those who currently draw power from these myths to recognize and repudiate them. Most of the power shift will come from supporting those who are mobilizing communities that already reject these false narratives to demand and achieve changes in representation and the exercise of political power.

2. **A positive, alternative vision that appeals to shared values.** The current U.S. national security narrative projects a sense of power, importance, and control, portraying *us* as a force for good. In addition to calling out the wrongs and evils of the current paradigm, we must offer a positive and inspiring alternative that will give people the courage and confidence to overcome the dominant myths. Building unity around a new vision of America's global role is just as important as building opposition to the current paradigm.
3. **A direct linkage of the paradigm to people's daily lives, values, and concerns.** The sheer volume and scope of violence perpetrated in and by our government and society has numbed people and shrunk their capacity for moral outrage. Even the epidemic of mass shootings and gun deaths has failed to stir Congress to act. What's more, the number and scope of existential threats—from climate change to pandemic disease to nuclear holocaust—can be overwhelming and disheartening. People must care about dismantling racism and militarism because their own rights and security depend on it—and so do everyone else's. A successful appeal must strengthen the spirit of global solidarity and connectedness, expanding the *us*, rather than centering the *me*.
4. **Connections among campaigns and movements across the artificial domestic-international divide and across borders.** All of the issues that social movements seek to address are inherently connected, and our success in achieving durable change is dependent

In addition to calling out the wrongs and evils of the current paradigm, we must offer a positive and inspiring alternative that will give people the courage and confidence to overcome the dominant myths.

on our ability to work together using shared narratives and combined power to address common obstacles. Each of our organizations and campaigns needs to look beyond its own immediate legislative and political goals to a larger vision of the world we wish to create.

This will require building networks of sustained relationships and mobilizing new constituencies. And it will require listening to and learning from our counterparts around the globe who are engaged in parallel struggles for freedom, justice, and equality. Only through strategic partnerships with allies in other movements and other countries can we develop and advance goals and strategies that put people and planet first.

- 5. *The breaking down of long-term goals into shorter-term, achievable but meaningful steps.*** Building a multiracial, multinational democracy in which all people have equal opportunity to fulfill their own potential *will require a Third Reconstruction*, involving truth-telling, reconciliation, and recompense. But people can become easily discouraged by the enormity of the task and feel helpless to bring about change. They need to know that there are concrete things they can do, as individuals and as participants in movements, to make a difference.

To build momentum, we must identify and take advantage of opportunities for quick wins. Stories of social justice champions can provide hope, inspiration, and encouragement; artists and musicians can make participation socially attractive and culturally enjoyable; faith leaders can provide a moral compass. But the real energy will come from ordinary people who feel compelled to act and supported in doing so.

Building a multiracial, multinational democracy in which all people have equal opportunity to fulfill their own potential will require a Third Reconstruction, involving truth-telling, reconciliation, and recompense.

**SECTION 4**

**Obstacles  
and  
Strategies**



## IV. Obstacles and Strategies

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Changes of this magnitude will not be made quickly or easily. They will face massive resistance, not only from reactionary elements who pursue an openly racist and militarist agenda, but also from self-proclaimed liberals and policy elites who see themselves as humanitarians and internationalists. A majority of today's Democratic officeholders rejects the notion that U.S. global military supremacy is fundamentally racist and that the security of the American people can be better protected without regular recourse to coercion, intimidation, and violence.

Establishment politicians speak of “restoring democracy to America”—as if the pre-Trump status quo were true democracy—and “reclaiming America's seat at the head of the table”—as if we are entitled to it. Paradigm change will mean changing not just the politicians, but the electorate and the systems within which they operate.

The specific obstacles that stand in the way of dismantling racism and militarism in U.S. foreign policy fall into three major categories:

- 1. Belief Systems:** the assumptions, narratives, ideologies, values, and myths that pervade American thinking.
- 2. Economic Structures:** the distribution of wealth, jobs, industries, and taxes; the flows and relationships of capital and labor; and the practices by which these are determined.
- 3. Political Institutions:** the laws, regulations, procedures, constitutional provisions, legal interpretations, and bureaucratic entities that shape governance at the federal, state, and local levels.

### Belief Systems

An array of foundational myths undergirds America's addiction to war and anti-Black racism. These narratives and falsehoods are usually unstated and often unacknowledged, yet they are understood and internalized at a subconscious level.

Even though they are most prevalent among whites, their pervasiveness throughout American culture and society means that most Americans accept them to some degree or at some level. These beliefs may be perpetuated and reinforced most intentionally by political leaders and policymakers, but they find resonance among a broad swath of the U.S. public.

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## 1. *White supremacy*

Most white Americans believe at some level that the lives of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color matter less than their own. More importantly, structural racism—systemic white supremacy—entrenches patterns and practices to consistently disadvantage people of color and privilege whites. It is not merely the individual delusion of being superior to Black people; institutionalized white supremacy does not need individual bigotry in order to function. It is a system that consistently marginalizes Black, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous, and female voices and agency.

Overseas, white supremacy has guided the selection, dehumanization, and demonization of America's enemies and has allowed the conduct of brutal and endless U.S. wars against populations that are perceived as non-white and non-Christian. The myth of scarcity—that there are not enough resources to go around and, therefore, gains for some must come at the expense of others—was created to justify domination and rationalize greed.

This zero-sum worldview posits a perpetual and existential competition for power, casting the other as a threat—undeserving, malevolent, and dangerous. Ironically, by using fear to justify the maintenance of white privilege at home and American exceptionalism abroad, political leaders create the very competitions, grievances, and hatreds that threaten that privilege.

Revealing the structures of white supremacy by stripping the blinders from those who prefer not to see it is important. Schools, workplaces, the media, faith communities, and organized labor can all play an important role through storytelling and relationship-building. But overcoming institutionalized white supremacy will require much more than education and de-mythification.

It must channel simmering anger and frustration into a strategy of mobilization. To delegitimize the current paradigm, campaigners must center the direct experiences of the people who have been most negatively impacted and appeal to shared moral and religious values. They must force all Americans to choose between racism and anti-racism, narrowing the space for disengagement, apathy, and inertia. And they should seek to build the political, economic, and social power of Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous activists.

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## **2. U.S. exceptionalism and national superiority**

The uncritical embrace of U.S. power depends upon a belief in the good intentions behind American military action around the world and in the innate reason and rightness of putting our own well-being above that of all others.

It requires the creation of a sanitized version of U.S. history and official amnesia about the death and destruction our government has wrought at home and abroad. It conflates threats to U.S. global primacy with threats to U.S. security. And it results in a jarring double-standard by which the United States asserts the right, the responsibility, and the power to set the rules for everyone else, judge their compliance, and punish their transgressions—while holding ourselves accountable to no one.

Although the historical record of failed and crumbling empires ought to be instructive, the inability or unwillingness of Americans to see themselves in this context adds to the difficulty of countering U.S. exceptionalism. Tapping into the real or imagined American capacity for reinvention, progressives must create space for the articulation of a new, post-imperial conception of the United States—a reimagining that should have occurred (at the very latest) at the end of the Cold War, but never did.

Creating a new story about why America is unique and what Americans can be proud of—one that is inclusive, value-based, and true; that recognizes the necessity of global solidarity; and that resonates with the American public—is an important strategy for overcoming the obstacles of U.S. exceptionalism and national superiority.

## **3. Patriarchy**

The United States is not unique in its gendered value system that sees violence, intransigence, and clinical detachment as strong—and diplomacy, compromise, and caring as weak. Our culture is not the only one to privilege logic and theory over emotion and lived experience—even recognizing the exceptional irrationality and demonstrable falseness of major tenets of U.S. foreign policy. Authoritarian, homophobic family structures, often promoted and exalted by religious sects, are no more deeply ensconced in American society than most others.

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However, the lack of empathy and inability to see common humanity are pronounced in U.S. foreign policy, and the fear of looking weak is unusually pervasive among U.S. politicians. The imbalance between how our society values and compensates the protective roles of women and those of men is extreme in comparison to other industrialized nations. And by world standards, our political institutions have been markedly slow in moving towards gender parity.

As with white supremacy, patriarchy will not be vanquished by education and consciousness-raising, although both are necessary. Women, gender-nonconforming, and LGBTQI individuals and their allies will need to use their power to demand change, not only in U.S. domestic law and policy but also in conceptualizations of national security, which almost completely ignore the most serious threats to their survival: sexual- and gender-based violence, maternal mortality, stigma, and poverty. This erasure results in a foreign policy that sees military threats as the only ones worthy of concern and domination as the only strategy for overcoming them.

#### ***4. Necessity and effectiveness of violence.***

Closely related to all these themes is the myth that well-armed police and overwhelming military might are the only things that can be counted on to protect Americans at home and their *interests* around their world. In the prevailing view, holding the world hostage to the threat of nuclear annihilation may be distasteful, but it is needed and effective in preventing others from attacking us.

Most policymakers claim, at least, to see the use of force as a “last resort” —but this only reinforces the idea that if all else fails, violence will work to keep Americans safe. Yet the last time this was even arguably true was in World War II, which has thus become the defining case to which every threat and every conflict is compared. Every enemy is a potential Hitler; every concession is another Munich Agreement.

The glorification of violence and those who wage it is an important tool for legitimizing aggression and marginalizing qualities deemed *feminine*. Video games, action heroes, violent movies, and military recruitment ads all serve to normalize war and dehumanize its victims. Air shows and overflights, the singing of the national anthem at sporting events, and the commemoration of holidays honoring veterans (but not others who gave their lives for a peaceful cause) all tend to conflate patriotism with jingoism, nationalism, and militarism.

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Overcoming these deeply ingrained beliefs and practices is complicated by the fact that so many Americans have a personal, professional, or economic interest in maintaining high levels of Pentagon spending. The military-industrial-congressional-carceral complex is enormous, and those who have served in law enforcement or the armed forces, who work in the weapons or prison industries, or who live in communities dependent upon military spending may be offended by arguments that militarism is a bad thing.

The narrative that tells them their work is honorable—and the jobs and salaries they can't find elsewhere—make it particularly hard to convince even some of those who would benefit most from a new paradigm to embrace it. The strategy for dismantling militarism thus requires not only demonstrating the existential threat posed by the current approach and the urgency of change, but also a stigmatization of those who derive hefty profits from war and violence—as opposed to ordinary workers—and significant investment in alternative jobs and peaceful industries.

Overall, the process of paradigm change begins with a sustained and concerted effort to delegitimize and denormalize a set of beliefs about who we are, how the world works, what is right, and what we know. It must be accompanied by the construction of a practical and ethical alternative that connects with people's values, gives them a sense of purpose, and validates their essential goodness.

Finally, it requires the mobilization of these new thinkers and believers to institutionalize these changes through laws, policies, rules, and structures that reflect and perpetuate the new paradigm. This process is neither rapid nor linear; as we witnessed from the movements to abolish slavery and end colonial rule, these massive changes involved multiple factions pursuing different strategies over an extended period.

## Economic Structures

It is an open question as to whether advanced capitalism can accommodate the changes necessary to end white supremacy and the stranglehold of the military-industrial-carceral complex. The number, type, and quality of jobs tied to this complex, the corporate profits extracted from it, and

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the dependence on it of so many other sectors—oil, gas, and extractives industries; media, think tanks, and universities; lobbyists and Congress—all make the disentanglement extremely difficult.

However, a number of other economies have managed to combine social protections with markets; to advance the rights of workers over shareholders; and to invest in cleaner, greener, and more constructive industries. The corporate-driven U.S. model must be significantly altered in order to support a more just and peaceful foreign policy.

### ***1. Jobs and unions tied to the military-industrial complex***

Jobs related to the military tend to be among the best paying, with robust recruitment and training pipelines and generous, reliable benefits. This is a reality that extends beyond the U.S. armed forces to the vast empire of military and quasi-military support industries: arms manufacturers, logistics contractors, prison construction and administration, law enforcement, private security, and the border patrol. The gas, oil, and extractives industries must be included in this group because so much of the U.S. global military footprint is specifically oriented towards protecting their supply chains.

After decades of neoliberal policy—slashing wages and benefits, weakening unions, and draining pension plans while enriching billionaires, large corporations, and their shareholders—the middle class has been hollowed out and disempowered. Under such conditions, it is unfair and ineffective to ask people to leave good jobs without having a realistic and equally beneficial alternative—in the same locations and for the same employees—ready and available.

Too many times, the promise of transition assistance and retraining has been oversold or abandoned entirely, while direct conversion or retooling of factories has generally proved unworkable. And the absence of a real social safety net that provides for economic security as well as human dignity makes such dislocations even harder.

To overcome these obstacles, a Just Transition model is required that invests in industries and areas that are good for the economy, good for workers, and good for the environment. It must create well-paying, secure jobs with generous benefits and workplace democracy. And it must be accompanied by the erection of significant guardrails around the economy, including labor protections, health and safety regulations, and trade policies that don't ask American workers to compete with low-wage and slave laborers.

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In place of the current overspending on the military and arms industry, police, and prisons—and instead of all the tax benefits, diplomatic and military support, and drilling rights granted to extractives—government should invest in green energy and infrastructure, education, health, and job training.

The Pentagon budget can be tapped to fund civilian apprenticeship and retraining programs, developed in cooperation with unions and impacted populations and communities, as a first step towards transitioning away from military-related employment and reducing the Pentagon budget. As the injuries, traumas, and indignities heaped upon veterans returning from foreign wars accumulate, this population might be especially open to mobilizing for this kind of economic transformation.

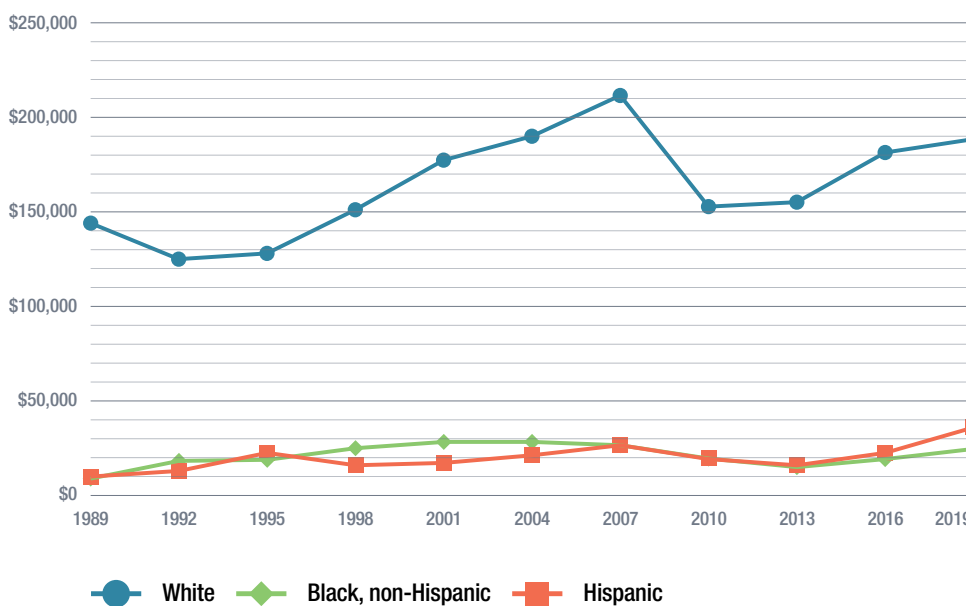
## 2. Racial income gaps

The vast differential in wealth and income among various racial and ethnic groups in the United States poses an enormous barrier to the reallocation of power, especially given the role of money in politics. The racial wealth and income gap is not just a natural consequence of free markets and competition; it was engineered through a very specific history of slavery and exploitation, which only now are large parts of the American population coming to acknowledge and understand.

Given the different ways that people accumulate wealth and how these ways are treated for tax purposes—inheritance, labor, property ownership, investments—every policy has a racial impact even if that is not its explicit purpose.

The racial wealth and income gap is not just a natural consequence of free markets and competition; it was engineered through a very specific history of slavery and exploitation.

Net worth by race or ethnicity, adjusted to 2019 dollars



Source: Survey of Consumer Finances, FederalReserve.gov

The redistribution of wealth can be accomplished through tax and spending policies and by restructuring of the capitalist economy. But closing the gap, particularly for Black and Indigenous Americans, will be a lengthy and difficult process without the payment of reparations. A Third Reconstruction will be needed in which Black and other communities of color mobilize to demand—as a matter of basic human rights, ethics, and decency—their fair share of the land and economy built on the unpaid labor and unpunished suffering and death of generations of people who have been enslaved, held in debt bondage, underpaid, cheated, and discriminated against.

### 3. Regressive tax system

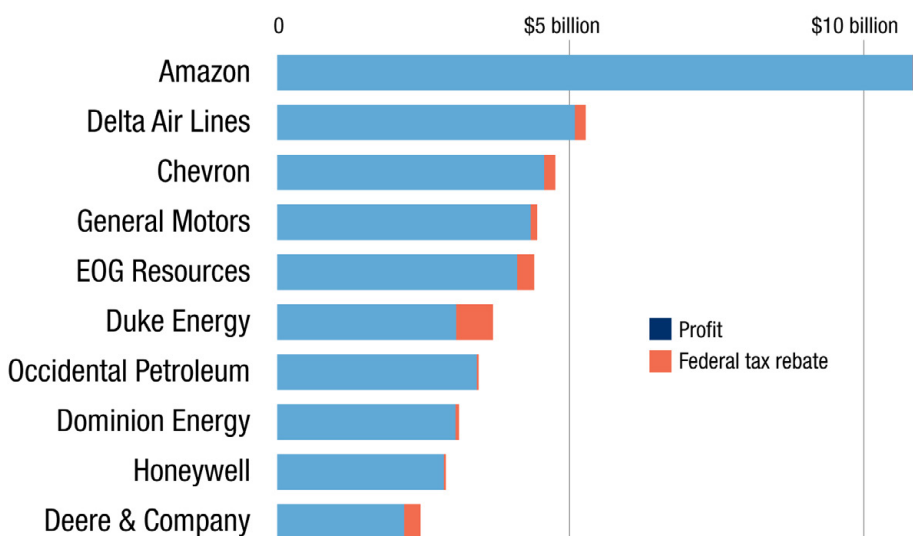
Americans' resistance to paying taxes has been exacerbated by the perception, and to some extent the reality, that they receive very little in return. Government has been portrayed—often unfairly and usually for political purposes—as wasteful and corrupt, but the truth is that corporations and the wealthy do not pay their fair share. Meanwhile, ordinary Americans fail to receive the same benefits as the rich, or even the benefits taken for granted by residents of most other industrialized democracies.

Given the skyrocketing costs of health care and education; the lack of a minimum wage, paid leave, and other worker benefits; and the crumbling infrastructure of roads, water and sewer systems, cyber networks, and power grids, it is difficult for Americans to see what their government is doing for them. And all too often, *as Heather McGhee has noted*, white Americans are willing to give up the good things in life simply to prevent people of color from gaining access to them.

While the government finds it easy to collect taxes from ordinary laborers, it is unable or unwilling to unravel the opaque and elaborate schemes concocted by wealthy individuals and corporations to avoid paying theirs.

## Top 10 Companies That Paid No Federal Taxes in 2018

Some companies received rebates to reduce future tax burdens



Source: Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy

Some taxes are obvious—such as sales taxes, which are printed on every receipt, and income taxes, which require a laborious and often expensive filing process each year. Others are invisible, hidden in our budget and paid through government borrowing, *such as the war tax*.

And while the government finds it easy to collect taxes from ordinary laborers, it is unable or unwilling to unravel the opaque and elaborate schemes concocted by wealthy individuals and corporations *to avoid paying theirs*. Add to this the regressive nature of the tax system itself, which privileges capital gains over labor and home ownership over renting, in addition to protecting the highest earners from high tax rates, and you've got a toxic brew.

In order to make palatable to the American public the case for higher taxes, it will be important to place the overwhelming bulk of the burden on the wealthy and large corporations—many of whom pay no income taxes at all now—and to pair these increases with tangible benefits for the majority. These could include elimination of student debt, creation of Medicare for All, and the building of clean infrastructure, among other ideas. Such a package should also include the simplification and automation of personal income taxes for most people so that the pain of paying taxes is not compounded by the pain of filing taxes.

#### **4. Campaign finance and the role of money in politics.**

Campaign finance is only one symptom of a larger problem of our democracy, which is the overwhelming influence of money in politics, policymaking, and access to justice. Wealth is so deeply connected to power that it is nearly impossible to build one without the other. If members of Congress cannot get elected without pandering to rich donors and corporations and cannot retain office without spending more than half their time raising money, then Congress will never truly reflect the voice of the people. And if corporations and people of wealth are able to avoid legal and political accountability for their actions, then all the economic obstacles to change will be even harder to address.

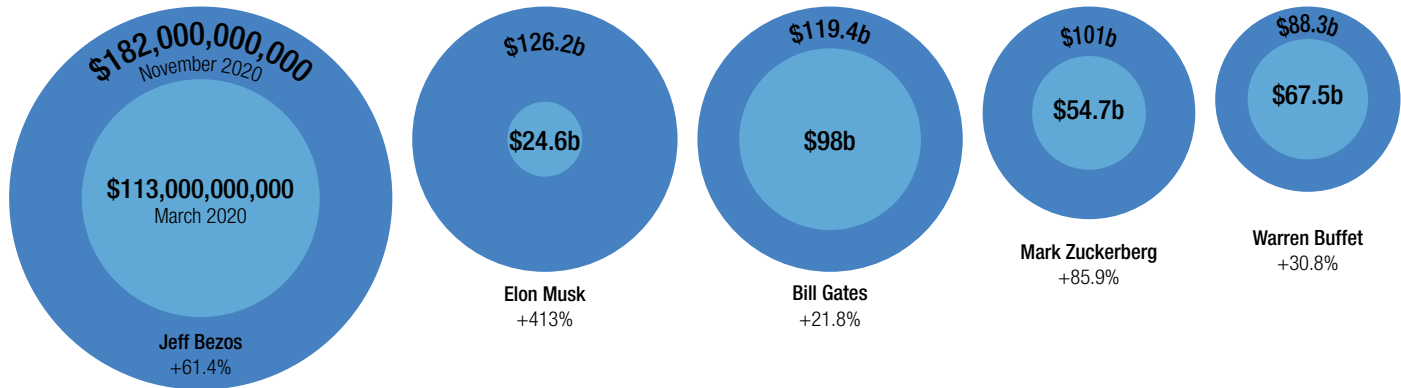
There are lobbying efforts under way, such as for S. 1 / H.R. 1, the For the People Act, that would begin to roll back some of the worst excesses of our current campaign finance system. But greater limits will be needed on the amount that can be contributed and spent, and the framing of the debate will need to be changed to capture the imagination of a broader segment of the population.

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(Data Source: Niall McCarthy, statista.com)

# U.S. Billionaires Gained \$1 Trillion in the First Nine Months of the Pandemic

## TOP FIVE U.S. BILLIONAIRES



Mobilizing low-income communities and larger social movements will help to overcome the number of the dollars with the number of voters. Stigmatizing politicians who accept large corporate contributions can help to balance out the influence such contributions buy.

While the obstacles listed above are characterized as economic, it is important to recognize that they are not accidental results of a natural or unchangeable system. They occur due to policy decisions, and they can be overcome by different policy decisions. Given the number of people who would be better off under a more fair and equitable organization of the economy, a democratic political system should logically trend in that direction.

However, American shareholder capitalism is structured to preserve the status quo, in which a small minority of the population—mostly white, and mostly male—controls not only the majority of the wealth, but also the laws and institutions that protect it.

## Political Institutions

Despite the war to end slavery and the movements over the centuries to secure equal political rights for women and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, the American political system retains many antidemocratic features aimed at limiting the participation and power of America's diverse majority.

These features include structural impediments, baked right into the very essence of institutions such as the Senate and the Electoral College, as well as legal, procedural, and policy obstacles that have evolved over time. The legislature has largely abdicated its constitutional responsibility to act as a check and balance on the executive branch, as has the Supreme Court by refusing to adjudicate matters relating to the separation of powers. And there are no adequate mechanisms for holding the executive branch or the Supreme Court accountable for their conduct or decisions.

To fully dismantle the Racism-Militarism Paradigm, it will be necessary to democratize the systems that determine and manage U.S. foreign policy, beginning with the institutions that wield political power. Until now, foreign policy has been largely treated as divorced from American democracy, remaining the preserve of a small and insular elite.

### **1. Representation in the U.S. Congress**

America does not extend the right to political representation to all Americans equally. Those excluded are primarily people of color: residents of the District of Columbia (until recently a majority-Black city, now 46 percent Black, with a population of 712,816—larger than Vermont and Wyoming and nearly as large as Alaska and North Dakota); Puerto Rico (population 3.2 million—larger than 20 states); and the four other U.S. territories (Guam, population 168,485; U.S. Virgin Islands, population 106,235; Northern Mariana Islands, population 51,433; and American Samoa, population 46,366). None have representation in the U.S. Senate or voting representation in the House of Representatives.

Providing full and effective representation to all Americans will require the passage of legislation to admit the District of Columbia as a state and to enable self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico and U.S. territories—whether in the form of statehood, independence, or other territorial arrangements.

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## 2. Voter suppression

At its creation, the United States granted the right to vote only to white, male, Christian landowners (as defined by state legislatures). By the 1850s, all white men over 21 had gained the right to vote. Over the many subsequent decades of struggle, the voting franchise was expanded to include Black men, women, Indigenous people, the disabled, and language minorities. The age limit was also lowered from 21 to 18. But even as the legal right to vote became more inclusive, there were always concurrent and largely successful efforts to suppress the votes of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people by means of violence, intimidation, and exclusion, such as through poll taxes and literacy tests.

The landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965 included significant provisions to curtail voter suppression. In 2013, however, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Supreme Court gutted those provisions, leading 23 states to create new obstacles to voting by the time of the 2018 election. In the aftermath of the 2020 elections, [\*389 bills were introduced in 48 state legislatures to restrict voting rights\*](#). The Republican-dominated state legislatures in Georgia and Florida have passed sweeping legislation to roll back access to the ballot box. Only lawsuits and federal action can reverse the numerous provisions that seek to make it harder to vote in these states, especially for people of color.

Federal legislation will also be required to restore the preclearance formula to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and expand access to the polls.

## 3. Gerrymandering

Both political parties have used the U.S. Census and the subsequent congressional redistricting process to create districts where they can win. For Republicans, this has meant diluting the power of voters of color by dividing them into multiple districts or by reducing the number of districts in which minority voters are a majority.

Another tactic Republicans have used to entrench their power has been to apportion prison populations (who can't vote) and military base populations (who often don't vote at that location) to increase the population count for Republican districts. The 2010 election was a watershed because Republicans, after taking a majority of key state legislatures across the country, re-drew district maps to lock Democrats out of power for the foreseeable future.

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Much of the work to rectify race-based and partisan gerrymandering will need to take place at the state level through court litigation and ballot initiatives.





Thousands of people from all over America gathered in Washington, DC, on June 23, 2018 for a march led by Rev. Dr. William Barber II and the Poor People's Campaign.

Photo by [Susan Melkisetian](#), licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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As a result, in a place like Wisconsin, Democrats can win a majority of votes and still have no chance of winning the state legislature. Given the results of the 2020 election, Republican-dominated legislatures will again be in a position to strengthen those gerrymanders. Even if in 2022 no votes change from the 2020 election, Republicans could take back the House of Representatives based on redistricting alone.

Much of the work to rectify race-based and partisan gerrymandering will need to take place at the state level through court litigation and ballot initiatives. Federal legislation, such as H.R. 1 / S. 1, the [For the People Act](#), would also help to lessen the influence of gerrymandering by requiring states to establish bipartisan independent commissions to redraw their congressional districts every 10 years.

Another option would be to expand the size of the U.S. House of Representatives. When Congress was established under the Constitution in 1789, each member represented approximately 33,000 people; currently, that number is over 720,000, and the membership cap of 435 has remained unchanged for nearly a century.

#### **4. The Supreme Court**

Five of the current members of the Supreme Court were nominated by presidents who entered into office having lost the popular vote. All five justices were confirmed by a Republican-majority Senate whose members

Five of the current members of the Supreme Court were nominated by presidents who entered into office having lost the popular vote.

did not represent a majority of American people, and all five went on to reinforce these antidemocratic realities by undermining voter rights, upholding gerrymandering, and protecting corporate interests.

Most notably, the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United* dramatically increased the political influence of wealthy donors, corporations, and special interest groups and ensured an election system that sustains racial bias and reinforces the racial wealth gap.

On foreign policy specifically, the Supreme Court is partially responsible for the never-ending expansion of executive powers exercised with impunity. This is because the court refuses to intervene on behalf of plaintiffs or victims when the case involves congressional-executive powers or "state secrets." Nearly all foreign policy-related matters that reach the court fall into one or both categories.

Making the Supreme Court more democratic and less of an instrument of white supremacy will be difficult, but several steps could help. Congress and the president could expand the size of the court and introduce term limits for justices. They could roll back the impact of *Citizens United* by providing public funding for elections, increasing transparency in campaign spending, and legislating stricter regulations on campaign contributions. Progressives should also build a strong counterweight to the highly influential Federalist Society, such as the American Constitution Society.

### **5. The Electoral College**

The Electoral College has been called "the nation's oldest structural racial entitlement program" because it was designed to increase the weight of southern slave-holding states in determining presidential elections. Twice in the last five elections, the system has resulted in the election of a president who lost the popular vote. Most Americans now say it should be eliminated.

There are two possible ways to overcome the fundamental injustice and racist outcomes of the Electoral College. One is simply to abolish it, but this would require a constitutional amendment. Another is to ensure that electors are apportioned in accordance with the number of votes won by each candidate, rather than a "winner take all" system.

The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact would guarantee the presidency to the candidate who receives the most popular votes across all 50 states and the District of Columbia by giving every voter a direct vote

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for a group of at least 270 electors (a majority of the 538 electoral votes). The Compact has been enacted by 15 states and the District of Columbia, accounting for 196 electoral votes, and will take effect when enacted by states possessing an additional 74 votes.

## **6. The Senate**

The U.S. Senate is undemocratic by design. Data for Progress refers to the Senate as “the most antidemocratic institution in America” because it disproportionately benefits small states, which have a higher proportion of white people, fewer immigrants, and more culturally conservative voters than the nation as a whole. Today, a voter in Wyoming (with about half a million people) has 70 times more influence in the Senate than a voter in California (with a population of 40 million). Created to prevent the “tyranny” of the majority of free states over the minority of slaveholding states, the Senate gives small, rural, less-diverse states a stranglehold on our democracy.

Senate Republicans have not represented a majority of voters since the late 1990s, and yet they have controlled the Senate about half the time since then. Currently, Democrats represent 41 million more people in the Senate, and yet they control the same number of seats as Republicans. When the Senate was first created, the largest state had 13 times as many voters as the smallest state. Today, the gap is 68 times, and if current demographic trends continue, that imbalance will only increase.

Abolition of the Senate and creation of a unicameral legislature would require major constitutional reform. However, statehood for the District of Columbia and reform of key Senate rules and practices, such as the filibuster, would diminish the antidemocratic influence of the Senate.

## **7. The Filibuster**

If the disproportionate power of senators representing a minority of primarily white voters is not enough to ensure their dominance over legislation and policy, they can always turn to the filibuster to obstruct majority rule. Whereas the filibuster used to require a feat of human endurance—continuous speaking on the Senate floor for hours or days—it now requires only a phone call from a senator to the Majority or Minority Leader.

The cloture rule, requiring 60 votes to cut off extended debate on most measures, has become the largest single obstacle to the passage of progressive reforms. A minority of senators, representing an even smaller minority of

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Americans, is able to prevent the consideration of measures with mass public support from people of both parties.

The filibuster can be reformed or eliminated in several ways. The Senate can choose to require talking filibusters; they can restrict the types of measures that can be filibustered; they can reduce the number of votes required to overcome a filibuster. Or they could abolish the filibuster entirely with a simple majority vote.

However, given the antidemocratic nature of the Senate itself, the filibuster has also been used in the past to prevent Republican majorities from passing legislation that would harm communities of color, and many Democrats are nervous that its elimination could come back to haunt them. In the short term, ending the filibuster is likely to be met with significant breakdowns in the comity that is required to run an institution that depends on receiving unanimous consent for most of its daily operations.

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There are a variety of other political impediments to progressive change. To maintain its slim majorities in the legislature, the Democratic party is disproportionately tied to defending the interests of so-called *moderates* and making those interests the lowest common denominator for many policy matters. This has the effect of alienating many progressives and promoting apathy or a loss of hope among many voters.

As if all of the above were not enough, well-organized adversaries, such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) have immense political power that they use to deprive Black, Indigenous, and other people of color of their voting rights and free speech rights in a massive way. ALEC's methodology of developing model legislation (*inside-out* strategies that focus on state and local legislators) has frequently shaped public policy debates and constrained legislative options by reinforcing systemic white supremacy through the adoption of new laws.

And the explosion of violent fascist groups in America, paying fealty to Donald Trump and fed by a right-wing media unconstrained by a commitment to truth in reporting, has called into question the stability of even the flawed democracy that now exists. The armed insurrection of January 6, 2021, and the failure of the Republican Party to acknowledge this assault on constitutional democracy, have pushed the nation to a breaking point.

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**SECTION 5**

# **Conclusion**



## V. Conclusion

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The Racism-Militarism Paradigm that defines U.S. national security and has guided U.S. foreign policy since the country's founding makes most Americans and the world less secure. At a moment when the largest mass movement in U.S. history is demanding a reconstruction of the country to become a truly multiracial democracy and an international force for human rights and human security, there is an opportunity to change this paradigm and establish a new national consensus on the role the United States should play in the world.

The current U.S. national security paradigm arises from a largely unacknowledged doctrine of white supremacy and the necessity of using violence to uphold it. This Racism-Militarism Paradigm establishes a rigid hierarchy, based on race, that values white lives more than any other—at home and abroad. It embraces militarism as the most effective mechanism to guarantee this ordering of society and the world. Both racism and militarism are ideologies that justify and enforce inequality.

The policies that emanate from this paradigm rob us of economic resources, corrupt our political system, endanger our lives, and offend our most fundamental moral values. They perpetuate a system that discriminates against, disempowers, disrespects, dehumanizes, and brutalizes Black and brown people and other communities of color at home and abroad. Continuing the U.S. quest for global military domination not only harms the people of other countries and the earth we share, but makes the vast majority of Americans less secure.

To peacefully and democratically dismantle this paradigm, we must establish a compelling alternative vision of the U.S. role in the world. We must build a paradigm designed to repudiate racism and militarism that is based on principles of justice, peace, equality, rights, dignity, shared wealth, and sustainability. The objectives of U.S. foreign policy must be to promote the social, political, economic, and physical well-being of all people.

Success in changing the national security paradigm will depend foremost on changing the foundational myths and widely shared assumptions that underlie U.S. domestic and foreign policy. White supremacy, U.S. exceptionalism and national superiority, and patriarchy are all closely tied to the belief in the necessity and effectiveness of violence. To justify global military domination, Americans have been taught a highly sanitized version of history that erases the genocide, slavery, brutality, and destruction our government has wrought inside U.S. borders and around the world.

Both racism and militarism are ideologies that justify and enforce inequality.

The objectives of U.S. foreign policy must be to promote the social, political, economic, and physical well-being of all people.



But education and changing hearts and minds will not be sufficient. There are also deep economic and political structures that keep the current paradigm entrenched. The number and quality of jobs tied to the military-industrial-carceral complex, the corporate profits extracted from it, and the dependence on it of so many other sectors—oil, gas, and extractive industries; media, think tanks, and universities; lobbyists and Congress—all make the disentanglement extremely difficult. Racialized wealth and income gaps, regressive tax systems, and the deleterious effect of money in politics all perpetuate the status quo.

At the same time, unequal representation of Americans in Congress and exclusion from political decision making—through the lack of voting representation for the District of Columbia, the denial of self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico and U.S. territories, and the expanding avenues of voter suppression and gerrymandering, among other measures—keep Black, Indigenous, and other people of color from exercising their rights and power.

Antidemocratic institutions such as the Senate—which disproportionately benefits small, rural, less-diverse states—and the Electoral College—which has twice in the last five elections resulted in a president who lost the popular vote—must be significantly reformed or abolished. The arcane Senate rule known as the filibuster only amplifies the power of a small minority to prevent all Americans from exercising their legal and constitutional rights. And the Supreme Court now has a majority of justices appointed by presidents who lost the majority of the electorate, confirmed by a Senate whose members represented a minority of the American people.

Changes of this magnitude will not be made quickly or easily. They will face massive resistance not only from reactionary elements who pursue an openly racist and militarist agenda, but also from self-proclaimed liberals and policy elites who see themselves as humanitarians and internationalists. A majority of today's national officeholders rejects the notions that U.S. global military supremacy is fundamentally racist and that the security of the American people can be better protected without regular recourse to coercion, intimidation, and violence.

Changes of this magnitude will not be made quickly or easily. They will face massive resistance not only from reactionary elements who pursue an openly racist and militarist agenda, but also from self-proclaimed liberals and policy elites who see themselves as humanitarians and internationalists.

Dismantling entrenched racism and militarism—and the political and economic structures that reflect and reinforce them—will therefore require new ways of working together. Systemic change will come not from a small group of elites or political insiders who revise policies, but from broad grassroots movements that fundamentally shift the dynamics of power.

It is these movements that provide the truth-telling necessary to educate a country willfully ignorant of its past, and it is these movements that can force the political and economic changes necessary to create space for an urgently needed alternative role for the United States in the world.

Paradigm change will mean changing not just the ideas and the politicians, but the electorate, and the systems within which they operate. It will require a reorientation of U.S. foreign policy to become anti-racist and a bridging of the artificial divide between organizations working on *domestic* and *foreign policy* issues.

We believe that a growing majority of people in the United States are supportive of the movements that are already engaged in this work, and we hope that many more will stand up and join this struggle.

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# WORKING GROUP ON DISMANTLING RACISM AND MILITARISM IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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