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Black People's Manifesto in the Response to COVID-19

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History is the finest teacher. Black lives in the United States have been devalued, disrupted, disregarded, commodified, and undermined since our entry into this land more than 400 years ago. As part of the global family dispersed throughout the Diaspora, we have known our unique share of suffering, defeat, and victory. Our triumphs were achieved due to the efforts of valiant men, women and children who

stood toe-to-toe against our oppressors in order to secure our collective freedom, liberty, democracy, dignity, and respect.

We honor our ancestors and our martyrs who understood that change comes when victims of oppression shake the foundations of the oppressor. Our progress has come at the expense of those who blazed trails of liberation and self-determination, many without thanks, recognition, or credit. Today, African Americans are free, but we are not equal. Our progress is purposeful. For we, who believe in freedom, it cannot come without a fight. This was true in yesteryear and it is true in 2020, when thousands of blacks in the United States are disproportionately impacted by what could have been an avoidable a health pandemic.

In 1857 the great activist, scholar and orator Frederick Douglass shared an eternal wisdom: “Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation ... want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” And so,

Whereas, in 1942 the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which stated “All human beings are born free and equal in the dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood. However, seventy-two years since its ratification, African Americans continue to endure the revolting brunt of racism, oppression, and exploitation.

Whereas, the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV or COVID-19), which according to world officials originated in the Wuhan province of China and began spreading globally in December 2019; and since the first infection in the United States was reported on January 20, 2020 from officials in Washington state.

Whereas, the World Health Organization (WHO), the US Government and the Atlanta-based Center for Disease Control (CDC) did not adequately inform the public of the growing pandemic until March 2020, thereby allowing for the rapid transmission of

COVID-19 on the unsuspecting public during a 90-day incubation period thus causing the US death toll to go from zero to 10,000 in six weeks.

Whereas, COVID-19 has infected more than 2.7 million individuals, killing about 200,000 people globally; and in the United States where 902,000 citizens have been infected with the virus causing about 51,000 deaths (to date and counting); and because WHO, the CDC, the US Government and other authoritative bodies alleged the pandemic is far from over and see a resurgence toward the end of the 2020 calendar year.

Whereas, 11.5% of African Americans lack healthcare insurance even though the CDC, WHO, US Government and local municipalities know and have known that due to socio-economic disparities blacks have more medical issues, less access to health care, yet are more likely to be income-impaired or deficient.

Whereas, blacks in the United States are at higher risk of death from 2019-nCoV and the majority of deaths attributed to the pandemic are African American; and African Americans in Chicago account for 30 percent of the city's 2.7 million residents, yet comprise more than 72% of coronavirus deaths in Cook County, Illinois; and, in states such as Michigan where blacks are 33% of those infected but 40 percent of fatalities and in Louisiana where blacks are 32% of the population they comprise 70% of coronavirus deaths.

Whereas, the US Government confirmed on several occasions that 2019-nCoV is not a natural disaster, or the result of an "act of God" a term promulgated and favored by insurance companies; and because US Government and other world leaders have attributed the creation and spread of the virus as a matter of intentional or unintentional human design or error; and because COVID-19 has been identified as developed, stored and subsequently released into the public therefore the public .

Whereas, the spread of COVID-19 caused states and US territories to "close borders," "shelter in place" and enforce a variety mandates of marital law; and, in Illinois where its 13 million residents were ordered by their governor to "shelter-in place" on March 20, 2020, and similar to other jurisdictions, halted and disrupted K-thru-12 schooling, shuttered businesses and put millions of people out of work and in financial ruin.

Whereas, on March 20, 2020 U.S. President Donald Trump declared himself a “wartime president” in direct response to growing 2019-nCoV crisis; and, because African Americans understand that the last time a US president declared a state of war to deal with a domestic issue resulted in the mass incarceration of blacks and the proliferation of the Prison Industrial Complex through its “War on Drugs” propaganda. We also understand that President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” has been underfunded and therefore a failure.

Whereas, the US Government’s response to the pandemic was to provide its citizens with a single, tax-free \$500-to-\$1,200 “stimulus check which was a mere portion of the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Stimulus Bill passed by the US Congress — the largest in the nation’s history; and because a minimum of \$500 billion fund was created to bail out corporations.

Whereas, due to consistent racist, tone-deaf policies that have led to significant disparities in health care, insurance coverage, income, wealth, housing, education, and upward mobility throughout the United States, and at the local level; and, because both current and historical data demonstrate that black people are disproportionately targeted for incarceration, segregation, social experimentation, victimization and political exploitation

Whereas, according to Columbia University, nearly 4.5% of COVID-19 deaths in the US could be attributed to poverty and therefore could have been prevented; and, because 11.8% or 38.11 million people in the United States fall below the poverty line; and because although blacks are 13% of the US population but make up 20.8% (10.5 million people) of the US poverty rate.

Therefore, as a descendant of people whose human rights were violated through more than 246 years of forced labor, 100 years of domestic terrorism; as a descendent of an enslaved people whose systemic denial of basic civil rights by descendants of the slave-holding class and their benefactors continue 155 years after the signing of the 13th amendment, which abolished slavery, the 1868 ratification of the 14th amendment which granted citizenship to all persons born in the United States and therefore equal protection under the law; and, the 15th amendment, ratified 1870 which allowed

African American men the right to vote; it is my duty, right and responsibility as a Black woman to make the following demands on behalf of my ancestors:

1. WE DEMAND A COMPREHENSIVE RELIEF BILL: We want a \$500 billion COVID-19 relief package to specifically benefit African American descendants of enslaved people in the United States. Central to this stimulus package is a \$150,000 to each black household (or \$36.9 million) regardless of size. We believe this tax-free relief will go far in restoring our families and offering stability. Other stimulus dollars will be distributed immediately to black-owned enterprises, media, entrepreneurs, funeral homes, property owners/landlords, social service agencies, arts and cultural institutions and groups, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and other institutions. Non-black owned businesses, such as grocery stores, drug treatment clinics and social services agencies, with a predominant African American clientele must receive a subsidy. Monies must also be directed to medical and research facilities housed on HBCU campuses to research COVID-19 in order to reduce the loss of black life now and into the future. A minimum of \$150 million must be set aside, directed to, and managed by, an African American controlled legal defense fund. We also believe all essential workers in the United States should receive an additional tax-free, combat pay bonus in no less than \$1,200 per pay period.

2. WE DEMAND DEBT FORGIVENESS: We are calling for an immediate halt to all debt acquired by black households and individuals between December 2019 until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic period; and, we also demand an erasure of student debt by undergraduate and graduate students of African American descent. We also demand all credit reporting agencies restore the credit of Black Americans to a pristine score in order to prevent lending institutions from the continued practice of redlining and loan bias.

3. WE DEMAND EDUCATION: We call on the US Government to distribute the \$13,847 allotted to each public-school student to be given directly to all black households with school-age children whose education has been disrupted due to COVID-19. We also demand that each state distribute its per pupil spending to each black household where a child was denied access to full, comprehensive public education because the schools were suspended, closed. We demand that public education remain free, inclusive, and accessible. We believe these local dollars should be distributed as an “education credit”

so parents and caregivers to purchase education materials, adequate food and other pedagogy supplies so that none of our children are deprived of their schooling. We demand all pre-school and K-thru 12 educators, receive full salary and benefits during forced school closures and that no teacher is laid off for a period of two years after the “end of the pandemic.” We made the same demand for college professors at both two- and four-year institutions.

4. WE DEMAND ACCESS TO OUR LOVED ONES: We call on the US Government and all local jurisdictions to order hospitals and off-site COVID-19 treating centers to allow a designated family member, care giver or power of attorney to have in-person visits with a patient hospitalized by COVID-19. All medical facilities and treatment centers will provide a family member with the exact same Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) that hospital workers use to protect themselves while caring for patients. We believe it is inhumane and a violation of human rights to deny people access to loved ones who are hospitalized. Given the US government and medical establishment’s history’s well-documented history of engaging in medical apartheid, we assert our human right to be present when our relatives are treated for COVID-19. We also demand that designated faith leaders be allowed to serve as surrogates to families who are out-of-state in cases where people must be hospitalized and/or become incapacitated.

5. WE DEMAND INFORMATION & EVIDENCE: Since Americans have been denied access to nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, long-term living facilities, jails, detention centers and prisons in an effort to reduce the infection rate, we demand all of these institutions develop and implement a live, feed and video monitoring system for relatives and advocates to communicate with or observe their loved ones. We have no way of verifying if our loved ones are alive or have perished. Therefore, we want the ability to “face-time” or “video chat” or “video observe” our loved ones to ensure that what is being reported about their health and safety is accurate. We also demand that all US government and WHO officials include black-owned media and influencers in all press briefings, conference calls and summits related to 2019-nCoV; and, that specific briefings about African Americans and COVID-19 be implemented. Black media, influencers and leaders are the most trusted sources of news and information in our community. It has been that way since the founding of the Black Press on March 16, 1827. We are tired of the gross distortions, misinformation, political propaganda, information and lies perpetuated during this global crisis.

6. WE DEMAND A HALT ON FORECLOSURES & EVICTIONS: We call on the US Government to instruct all banks, financial institutions, and private equity firms to stop all foreclosures and evictions slated between December 2019 until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. This measure extends not only to personal property (such as homes, condos, and timeshares) but also to churches and other institutions central to black life. We believe no black family should be evicted from a rental unit due to lack of payment caused by the 2019-nCoV crisis. We also believe at the end of the pandemic, all banks, financial institutions, and private equity firms cannot re-file foreclosure cases until the end of a six-month waiting period.

7. WE DEMAND THE RELEASE OF OUR INCARCERATED PEOPLE: We understand that jails and prisons throughout the United States have become petri dishes full of 2019-nCoV outbreaks, leading to many unnecessary deaths. We also believe the number of infections and deaths have been underreported. We demand the immediate release of all non-violent detainees who have tested negative for COVID-19; we want all prison inmates over the age of 65 who are susceptible to the virus to be released into controlled environments; we want an immediate release all pregnant detainees and inmates regardless of status. We believe violent female offenders can be removed from massive facilities and placed in off-site specialized, units for the duration of their pregnancies as they pay their debt to society. We also demand that all black workers in jails, holding centers and prisons to receive combat pay bonuses.

8. WE DEMAND NO EXPERIMENTATION ON BLACK BODIES: We do not want any African American subjected to 2019-nCoV vaccine experiments, placebo exercises and unresearched, unverified treatments. We do not want any African American who is disabled, housed in a nursing home, rehabilitation center, mental institution, jail or prison, juvenile detention center, foster homes, or any other state-sponsored institution to be used as COVID-19 guinea pigs. Any participation in such programs must be voluntary, compensated and monitored by a coalition African American doctors, scientists, social workers, biologists, researchers, elected officials, and clergy. Any black person who is asked to participate in such a program must be compensated with a cash payment (direct deposit) of \$50,000 to cover expenses resulting from adverse side effects and/or death.

9. WE DEMAND EXPATRIATION & IMMIGRATION ACCESS: We call on the US Government to open its borders to allow black US citizens living abroad to return to the United States if they so wish — and without penalty. We also demand the US government provide expatriation supports any black household wishing to flee the United States for fear of death due to the 2019-nCoV. We believe the US Government must decided on a case-by-case basis on how to ease travel one-way restrictions and restore citizens ability to obtain passports. Because we believe we are part of a global African family, we request a specific pandemic relief bill for Africa and the Caribbean be secured to aide nations adversely impacted by COVID-19.

10. WE DEMAND PROTECTTIONS FOR BLACK TROOPS: Any person serving in the US military who is adversely impacted by 2019-nCoV and requests emergency leave or discharge must be afforded such, including those in boot camp and basic training programs. Any U.S. service man or woman must be given an honorable discharge from military service if requested during the COVID-19 pandemic, and all rights afforded them under the GI Bill and subsequent legislation must apply. Likewise, no soldier seeking to return to active duty will be penalized for requesting leave to care for a household impacted by the virus and will be restored to the rank they had when they left. We also request the same or similar concessions for African Americans who are serving in local police departments across the country, along with other frontline workers such as firefighters, EMT specialists and others in similar fields.

These are the demands of this African American woman who has lost loved ones to COVID-19; one who now bears a living witness to the devastation and economic disaster now ensnaring the black communities at a frightening rate. We understand that the affirmation of the value of black lives is not the devaluation of other people. All human beings have the right to self-determination.

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. PhD, instructed, “Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

Therefore, it is in the spirit of solidarity I stand united with all members of the human family who are impacted by this global pandemic. It is upon this platform of human rights and that we intend to ensure that the gains we have achieved are not