

BAMN Pledge to Become a Leader of the New, Independent, Integrated, Youth-Led, Civil Rights/Immigrant Rights Movement

1. I pledge to lead mass actions and build the new integrated, independent youth-led Civil Rights/Immigrant Rights Movement. I will fight to save Dr. King's Dream for America because it is my dream as well. The new student and youth-led movements in California and elsewhere are in the forefront of leading the struggles to win immigrant rights, to stop the attacks on public education from Pre-K-college and to restore affirmative action programs so that Latina/o, black, Native American and other underrepresented minority students have an equal opportunity to attend this state's and this nation's best public universities. To win, our new movements need a core of determined, optimistic young leaders who are prepared to lead in action and to learn from both their own experiences in struggle and from America's two greatest and most successful leaders of militant mass movements of the oppressed, Frederick Douglass and Dr. Martin Luther King.

2. I pledge to accept the challenge of becoming my generation's voice of freedom. I know this requires always speaking for and to the oppressed, telling the truth about racism and inequality and expressing both the anger and the aspirations of our communities. I reject the popular, wrong, and dominant ideology of most of those who claim to support progressive reforms, that the only people who have the power to make and change history are the rich and powerful. Accepting this false assumption places the oppressed in the dead-end position of having no alternatives other than making moral appeals to the rich and powerful or trying to find clever arguments to convince them that granting our demands will make it easier for them to exploit us. Those who are in power and currently decide the social, economic and political policies of our nation are completely aware that their determination to prioritize profits over people causes the vast majority of the world's people to live in squalor and in despair. Changing the actions/attitudes of the rich and powerful and their political representatives requires asserting through mass action the superior power and will of the masses. This is the only road to victory.

3. I pledge to be a youth leader of mass actions led by the youth themselves. I do not fear the anger, boldness or power of youth in struggle. To those who criticize the legitimacy of our walkouts or other youth-led mass actions by saying "most of the students/youth cannot even say what they are fighting for", I say rest assured we are always fighting for our dignity, equality, respect and justice. We understand that actions speak louder than words. We judge leaders by what they do and not their ability to make great speeches which they never deliver on. Some of our greatest leaders are those who lead in action and fight to win.

4. I pledge to be a great leader by always being proud of who I am and by just being myself. I am a role model for others when I am not ashamed to be myself. I cannot stand on the truth if I am trying to act like the people in power who oppress us and assign us to second-class status.

In American history, the only way we have ever secured progress, new rights and greater prosperity for the great majority of people of all races living here and some of the oppressed living in other nations, is by standing up and fighting against racism, including the ideology of black and brown inferiority. Our movement must consciously counter the false promises and racist theories put forward by those in power that an alliance between the white "haves and have-nots" to defend white privilege offers a way out of poverty and despair for the white masses. We cannot counter this wrong theory and our movement will achieve nothing if we accept the premise of both left and right populists that by silencing any discussion on race or racism and simply fighting for more jobs or lower tuition we can win gains for everyone. In the nineteen thirties the programs created by the New Deal Populists actually widened the gap in wealth and social opportunities between the white and black, Latina/o and other poor, working class, and middle class communities. This in turn reinforced racist stereotypes. It took the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. King fighting for black equality and initially, despite its integrationist stance, consisting almost exclusively of only black people to remove the badge of inferiority from all those who were not

white and to substantially close the income and opportunity gap between rich and poor.

Young Latina/o, black, Asian, Arab, Native American, undocumented immigrant, LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender) and other oppressed youth standing up and demanding equality and justice must follow Dr. King's example and adopt his attitude towards racism. If we fight intransigently for our equality and dignity, even if our struggles are initially only supported by a tiny minority of white people and are vehemently decried by the establishment leaders from our own communities, we will win.

As Dr. King repeatedly remarked that it was only when black college students, many from more privileged backgrounds, came out of their Brooks Brother suits (expensive, designer "dressed-for-success" attire), stopped acting like exaggerated white people, embraced their communities, put principles before career and built mass militant struggles that they became leaders of the whole nation. Masses of white youth became radicalized and inspired to fight because of the determination and success of the old civil rights movement. Dr. King's fight to defeat the old Jim Crow gave birth to the student led anti-war movement and the women's, the Latina/Chicana/o, LGBT and environmental movements. Our struggle to defeat the new Jim Crow can greatly strengthen and revitalize those movements.

If we lead others will follow. If we hesitate because we lack the support of the majority of white people or because we follow the worthless advice of the burned out, scared, cynical or demoralized establishment leaders of the civil rights, immigrant rights and/or union movements, we will not only fail our own communities but we will also fail the majority of poor, working class and middle class white communities whose fight for dignity, equality, justice and prosperity we unabashedly champion.

5. I pledge to work collectively with the other young leaders of the new movements, struggling to overcome the ignorance, prejudice, and bigotry that living in a society so divided by race and distorted by the racism, sexism and anti-LGBT bigotry imbues in everyone. I understand that being a leader requires sacrifice, dedication, strength

and the courage to grow and change. I know that I must learn to think critically and question the views of anyone no matter how well meaning they might seem, that urge me to put off fighting until a later time in my life (until I graduate from High School, College, Graduate School, etc...). I cannot win a bright, happy or hope filled future for myself by fighting only for my own prosperity or immediate self-interest. I know my future is bound up with our shared future.

6. I pledge to the millions of oppressed people around the world, most of whom I will never know but all of whom I regard as my brothers and sisters that I will fight for freedom, equality and the right of all of us to democratically decide the future of each of our own nations.

Winning freedom and justice for all in America is not possible so long as hundreds of millions of other people throughout the world live in desperate poverty, battle small and large man-made disasters on a continuous and regular basis and are forced to accept the dictates of wealthier foreign powers. To win, our movement must be an international movement of the oppressed. The issues of racism, immigration, the right of all to real direct democratic control of our governments and of what social forces and power will determine the policies of our nations are the questions of the day everywhere. And so to all those who are oppressed, I say as a proud young leader of the growing new, integrated, independent, youth-led civil rights/immigrant rights movement: Your blood is my blood. Your enemy is my enemy.

Your struggle for freedom is my struggle for freedom. Your dreams and hopes echo in my heart and mind. The borders that separate us will not divide us. We will win as one. We have the power to make this world into the world we want to live in. We can, if we act, create a new society in which the needs of humanity come before the enrichment of a few and for the first time in human history, human beings can finally think, love and socialize as equals while protecting and realizing the great potential of both human beings and all that inhabit this earth.

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