



One Year of America's First White President

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It matters when the president of the United States says hateful and racist and bigoted things.

But it matters even more when the president takes hateful and racist and bigoted actions. He deserves even more condemnation – and more pushback – for those.

Some of these actions have been high profile, others less so. In some cases, the racism is overt or practically so; in others, racially motivated but facially colorblind policies disproportionately and harmfully impact communities of color. In some cases, the policies are just anti-poor. These anti-poor policies disproportionately hurt black and brown people, and are enabled, facilitated and rationalized by underlying racial animus.

President Trump proclaims, “I am not a racist.” But one year into the Trump administration, not only has the president repeatedly made racist and bigoted comments, Trump, his administration, and his collaborators have compiled a consistent and profoundly troubling record of unconstitutionally discriminating against immigrants, working to suppress the vote of people of color, rolling back civil rights and sabotaging social programs that disproportionately benefit people of color.

Ta-Nehisi Coates has brilliantly argued that Trump was elected to be [America's First White President](#), a man elected to the highest office in the land not just as the beneficiary of white privilege but as an advocate of white supremacy and as the negation of the black president who preceded him. As Trump campaigned, so too has he governed:

- **The Muslim Ban.** Days after his inauguration, Trump signed an [executive order](#) denying visas to people from seven overwhelmingly Muslim countries. Federal courts blocked the ban as unconstitutional, after which the Trump administration issued a second. When the courts blocked that, they [issued a third](#). The Supreme Court has permitted that ban to take effect while litigation continues. But while the litigation continues, the basic truth is obvious: the ban has zero to do with national security and is motivated exclusively by anti-Muslim animus.
- **Suppressing the Votes of People of Color.** Trump created the Pence-Kobach [Commission on Election Integrity](#) – now disbanded thanks to pressure and lawsuits – to intimidate voters of color and develop a national system of [voter suppression](#). The Justice Department has [reversed its prior position](#) in ongoing voting rights litigation, just days ago urging the Supreme Court to uphold an Ohio law that had the [plain intent of](#)

[knocking people of color off the voting rolls](#), part of an ongoing [series](#) of reversals that now put the Justice Department on the wrong side of voting rights.

- **Criminal Justice Anti-Reform.** Under Attorney General Jeff Sessions, the Justice Department is reversing modest measures to stop the criminalization of young people of color. Where the Obama administration aimed to ratchet down sentencing and prosecutions of low-level, nonviolent offenses – disproportionately affecting minority populations – [Sessions has decreed that low-level offenders should be hit with the most serious charges possible](#). The Sessions approach will throw thousands of people – especially Americans from communities of color or with low-incomes – into prison needlessly, sabotaging their life chances and increasing post-release criminality. Earlier this month, Sessions doubled down on this stupid and counterproductive approach, announcing that the government will [prosecute federal marijuana laws](#), even in states that have legalized the drug.
- **Crushing the Dream.** Last fall, [Sessions announced the administration would end DACA](#) – the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which curbed enforcement of immigration laws against immigrants without documentation who came to the United States as children. About 800,000 Dreamers are enrolled in DACA and facing deportation – in many cases to countries they do not know – unless the program is rescued by Congress in the next couple months. The Trump pretext for ending DACA was the administration’s profound respect for constitutional separation of powers, but a federal judge spoke more truthfully last week, finding “a plausible inference that racial animus towards Mexicans and Latinos was a motivating factor in the decision to end DACA.” Or in the simpler words of a Politico headline: [“Trump racism may have been key to ending DACA.”](#)
- **Medicaid Work Requirements.** Last week, the administration announced that it will permit states to [impose work requirements on Medicaid recipients](#). This move is stupid, cruel, illegal – and racist. It denies that health care is a right and will lead to needless death and suffering. It will worsen public health problems, including by complicating availability of opioid treatment. It violates the law, by contravening Medicaid’s purpose to expand health coverage. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Administrator Seema Verma has condescendingly talked about combating the [“soft bigotry”](#) of low expectations for Medicaid recipients. What she is in fact doing is promoting the hard bigotry of animus against poor people – the hard and shameful bigotry of health care denial based on wealth. This is a bigotry also against people of color, who comprise about [half](#) of adult [Medicaid recipients](#).
- **Tax Policy is Race Policy.** [The horrendous tax scam](#) legislation effectively constituted a trillion-and-a-half dollar gift to the superrich, with the largest tax cuts going to corporations, which one way or another will pass almost all of their savings on to shareholders. Shareholders are, by and large, white. [Whites are two times more likely](#) than African Americans or Latinos to own stocks. White financial assets are, on average, [twelve or more times greater](#) than African American or Latino financial assets (just among those who have such assets). But even that jaw-dropping figure understates the problem. [The top 5 percent](#) of households control about two thirds of financial assets – and they are virtually all white. Demos calculates that [90 percent of wealth is owned by whites](#). The tax cut, in short, was basically a tax cut for whites. Exacerbating the disparity, Republicans already are seeking to use the tax cut’s deficit worsening to justify

government spending cuts (excluding the military) that will disproportionately impact communities of color. So, yes, it is fair to say that people of color will be forced to pay for the tax cut for the white super rich.

- **Deporting People of Color.** Trump is ending Temporary Protective Status for [Haitians](#), [Nicaraguans](#), [Salvadorans](#) and [Sudanese](#). This means hundreds of thousands of immigrants who have effectively permanently relocated to the United States in the wake of natural disasters and other emergencies in their home countries will be forced to return to nations that [do not have the capacity to absorb them and where they may face violence](#). The Trump administration line is that it is doing nothing more than ending haven for people who were supposed to be in the United States for a limited period only, long expired. That pretense hardly seems worth rebutting after the “shithole” remark.
- **Budgetary Cruelty.** Happily, the Trump administration has not managed to have much influence over the budget. But its budgetary proposal called for the eradication or massive scaling back of an array of [programs](#) to benefit poor people – food stamps, Medicaid, home heating assistance, legal services for the poor, low-income housing programs and much more. Many more white people would be hurt by these cuts than, say, African-Americans, but the cuts would disproportionately affect people of color.
- **Undermining Fair Housing.** The Trump administration is pursuing a full-fledged assault on fair housing rules. Ben Carson’s Department of Housing and Urban Development has sought to delay Obama-era fair housing rules that would enable lower-income persons with vouchers (through the program formerly known as Section 8) to access a broader range of housing opportunity (a [lawsuit](#) blocked the delay) and just announced plans to [delay another key fair housing rule](#). Appallingly, it is seeking to [gut the landmark Community Reinvestment Act](#), which requires mortgage lenders to make loans available in low-income communities.
- **Fraudulent Count.** The preparatory work for the 2020 U.S. Census is going on now, and the Trump team is doing all the wrong things – by design. To head the census, Trump is expected to nominate a political science professor who authored a book with the subtitle: “[Why Competitive Elections are Bad for America](#).” And the administration is pushing for a [question about citizenship](#) on the census questionnaire – guaranteed to massively diminish response rates from Latinos and other recent immigrants. This is no archaic issue. An accurate count of America’s population is important to enforce an array of civil rights, social justice and democracy protections. As the [Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights notes](#), “The collection of accurate, comprehensive race and ethnicity data in the census is central to implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a vast range of civil rights laws and policies, from fair political representation and voting reforms, to equal opportunity and access across all economic and social sectors of society, including housing, education, health care and the job market.”

The list goes on and on. The Justice Department, the federal defender of civil rights in modern times, is now aggressively working to advance policies injurious to communities of color. These range from aiming to [end consent decrees with police departments](#) aiming to alleviate police brutality and mistreatment of people of color, to directing the department’s civil rights division to [attack affirmative action programs](#) at colleges and universities. And the nominee to run the department’s storied civil rights division has [a record of working against](#) the very rights the division is supposed to uphold.

And, again, the underlying hostility to communities of color is not just expressed through civil rights policy. Policies disproportionately and adversely affecting communities of color run the gamut from the [rollback of Net Neutrality](#), to [forced arbitration provisions](#), supported by the administration, that prevent class action employment discrimination claims; from [clean air rollbacks and anti-environment policies](#) that will poison communities of color, to an array of anti-union and anti-worker rules – including one [undermining workers' leverage over fast-food and hotel chains](#).

Tallying the devastation wreaked by the Trump administration is a depressing enterprise. Recognizing the contempt for core constitutional values and the reversal of the historic racial justice gains of the last half century is even more depressing.

Yet the resistance has been inspiring and, in many key instances, successful. Litigation and popular opposition defeated the first two Muslim bans. The voter suppression commission disbanded amidst widespread defiance. A lawsuit stopped Ben Carson's effort to undo a key fair housing rule. Trump's budget never got off the ground, in significant part because of its unmitigated cruelty. And, with researchers finding that anti-Muslim ban protests may have [reduced anti-Muslim sentiment](#), the mobilization against Trump's racism may be improving overall attitudes in America.