OVERVIEW

This is a critical moment for our society. The murder of George Floyd struck the match. The gasoline is decades of government violence against communities of color, and more recently, the clear message from those at the top that the rest of us are on our own as we face a global pandemic, crushing unemployment, and low-wage jobs that require us to put our lives on the line. Protests are erupting nationwide, while the president seeks political advantage by calling for more violence.

Among progressives, the most prevalent frame right now involves speaking out against white racism. Yet this is a "yes, and" moment for progressives: Yes, racism is the problem, and people from every racial group must pull together to confront racism and to build a larger sense of "we." Firm condemnations of racism are important; support for Black organizations and leaders is critical. And, these are most effective in forms that stress multi-racial cooperation.

Trump exploits tactics used by Richard Nixon when he calls himself the "president of law and order" and denounces demonstrators as an "angry mob" threatening "peace-loving citizens." He is repeating the core Republican story: the nation is locked into a conflict between innocent white people and threatening people of color. In effect, the Party of Big Business mainly campaigns by promoting racial panic.

Why? Because people want to know who threatens them and who are their allies, never more so than when they're experiencing high levels of stress. The Right answers these questions by pointing the finger at people of color. The Left cannot simply denounce the finger-pointing. Progressives must clearly answer who threatens us and who helps us.

That's why opposition to racism is everyone's fight, no matter their race. This is a moral requirement for every person of good will. It is also the only way to defeat the Right. Our fight is not between racial groups. It's between the large majority of us, and politicians beholden to the wealthy who seek to galvanize their voters by stoking conflict and division.

As advocates, the current times call for us to strike a balance between acknowledging pain and offering hope. Many people are experiencing rage, anguish, and sorrow. Messages that emphasize what's wrong risk overwhelming people who already feel beset on many sides. Instead, our tone should recognize suffering while summoning hope from shared aspirations and the power of joining together.

More than a matter of tone, progressive should build hope through our vision for the future. The Right warns people that conflict between racial groups is inevitable and violent; the future is grim; and the best they can do is circle the wagons with their racial group. The Left should offer a vision in which racial groups come together to take care of each other, including by fighting racism and repairing harms to communities of color; people can lean on and enjoy others who are different; and our best future depends on building cross-racial solidarity.

The left conveys its vision not simply through words but through the visuals of our actions. The Right's preferred visuals include: angry people of color; injured white people; white police officers under assault; turmoil and flames; Trump looking strong. The Left’s strongest visuals are: peaceful protesters confronting a militarized police; images and videos of police brutality; and multi-racial groups joining forces to (a) protest, (b) stop violence, (c) repair damage, and (d) take care of each other, for instance by providing masks and meals.
MESSAGES

Race-class messages follow a **basic form** that can be widely adapted:

- Start with values shared across racial groups, affirming every group’s humanity
- Name as the real enemy those trying to divide us for their own purposes
- Call for coming together across racial lines to take care of each other

The following messages contain language that can be combined in different forms. **The most important point is to emphasize building a bigger “we” as a necessary response to strategic efforts to divide us.** This is different from simply calling for a bigger “we.” On its own, this strikes many as a fine ideal, but unlikely. Combined with warnings that politicians like Trump purposefully stoke division, “joining together” becomes a necessary, pragmatic response for all racial groups.

**We all oppose racism—and all of us must join the fight.**

[Goal: avoid condemning racism in a manner that reinforces the Right’s story of a basic conflict between whites and people of color]

Most of us recognize that racism continues to plague our society. It’s killing Black people and many others too. That’s why people from every racial group—white people included—are pulling together. We know that some politicians stoke divisions so they can amp up their fearful base. We vow to build connections, no matter our color or where we come from. When we come together, we can defeat the racists and those who encourage them. Together, and only together, we can elevate leaders from our communities who will help us heal and move forward toward a society that cares for all of us.

**We need new leaders because politicians helped create police violence.**

[Goal: identify politicians, rather than white racism, as the root cause of police brutality, creating a clearer path to fundamental reform]
In a democracy, the police are supposed to come from and to protect the communities they serve, no matter their color or wealth. But too many police departments have become bastions of racism. The officers and their leaders must be held accountable. Ultimately, however, the fault rests with some politicians. For years, to rile up their base, some politicians have campaigned by scaring voters with lies about supposedly dangerous people of color. We must reject their messages of fear and division. When we believe in each other, we can take care of each other, reforming the police so they truly serve every community.

**Protestors want justice, not chaos.**

*Goal: push back against the Right’s framing of people of color as violent*

Sometimes the best way to honor our deepest values is to march. Those with the courage to raise their voices for a better tomorrow help all of us. But some people stoke division and hate. We see it in some politicians. And we see it in racists. They prefer conflict and turmoil. The future we want is visible right now, in people from all racial groups marching together for a better tomorrow—and, when necessary, joining to stop those infiltrating our movements to disrupt and destroy. We won’t let the racist agitators define us. When we come together, we can build a world of peace and justice in which people from every racial group thrive.

**COVID-19 makes this fight more necessary.**

*Goal: connect the protests to the hardships so many communities face because of the mismanaged pandemic response*

No matter where we come from or what we look like, we all want to keep our families healthy and safe. Police brutality threatens us. So does the bungled response to the pandemic. Most communities are not getting the healthcare or economic support they deserve. Too many politicians answer to the wealthy CEOs who fund their campaigns. So while we suffer, Wall Street is right back to boomtimes. Then these politicians tell us to blame China, or the protesters calling for justice. We know the real threat we face comes from politicians who promote conflict while they help out the wealthy few. Together, and only together, we can make sure government protects the safety and security of all working families.
Reforming the police means more public services for every community.

[Goal: connect police brutality to skewed public priorities that hurt every community]

It doesn’t matter what race, ethnicity, or nationality you are, we all know that growing up in a healthy community helps our children thrive. But too often, politicians bow to the campaign contributions that get them elected. They prioritize their wealthy donors, while creating hard times for the rest of us. Then they try to win votes by scaring their base, pushing them to fear certain communities as mainly a bunch of criminals. Our state needs need more books, not more barbwire. More jobs, not more jails. By reforming our criminal justice system, we free up resources for the things every community needs. Let’s reject messages of fear and division to elect new leaders who will ensure this is a place where all our families and all our communities thrive.

We need whites in large numbers to join the fight because it’s their fight too.

[Goal: to win support from the greatest possible number of whites, they need to see that fighting racism is something they do to also take care of their own families]

The fight against racism requires all of us, including white people. For white people, joining the fight means processing guilt and wrestling with privilege. But there’s also room for hope and community. The society we’re building celebrates our differences and provides a welcome place for all to be part of the multi-racial majority. By joining together with others across racial lines, we can reject those trying to divide us, reduce racism, and nurture a society that equally values each and every family, whatever our color, race, or nationality.