



Submission in Response to Call for Input

**Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent
32nd Session – Economic Empowerment of People of African Descent
1-5 May 2023**

For hundreds of years, white colonizers have amassed global power by forcefully exercising dominion over the properties, persons, and governance of Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples. Although colonial powers have in many instances been pressured into giving up their official sovereignty over other nations, they have continued to exert enormous influence over former colonies through neo-colonial exploitation.

More than 70 years ago, the Civil Rights Congress submitted “[*We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief From a Crime of the United States Against the Negro People.*](#)” Seventy years later, these words continue to ring true:

We shall prove that the object of this genocide, as of all genocide, is the perpetuation of economic and political power by the few through the destruction of political protest by the many.

We Charge Genocide, at 5. The United States, which was founded through the brutal colonization of lands formerly occupied by Indigenous peoples, and whose wealth and power were established on the backs of enslaved Africans, is among the Western states that continue to exercise undue influence around the world through a variety of neo-colonial practices. These practices have also been incorporated in *domestic* U.S. politics and governance, together with other, ever-evolving, forms of oppression, in order to suppress the ability of communities of color, especially Black communities, to maintain or exercise economic and political power and to keep their communities in a subjugated state.

In the wake of school desegregation, majority Black cities across the U.S. were created by white flight, which badly damaged those cities' economies, tax bases and educational systems. Ever since, the needs of majority Black cities have been routinely ignored by mostly white state legislatures, white Governors, and a mostly white federal bureaucracy. Conversely, these same governing bodies actively intervene to deprive Black city leadership and the Black voters who elected those leaders of their rightful authority. Although the white power base fled these cities to avoid suffering the imposition of some measure of racial equality, they still find new ways to seize control and to deprive the residents of majority Black communities of economic and political power and sustenance.

As the Civil Rights Congress charged decades ago, the white power structure continues to deliberately inflict conditions such as those addressed here "for the purpose of depressing wages, increasing profit, and retaining reactionary political and economic control through the divisions they effect in American life." *We Charge Genocide*, at 47. It starves Black communities to subjugate them and, ultimately, to destroy them.

A stark and current example of this domestication of neo-colonialist practices is found in Jackson, Mississippi. The population of the city of Jackson, the state capital, is more than 80% Black, while the overall state population of Mississippi is nearly 60% white. [White flight from Jackson](#), the state capital, began with court-ordered school desegregation in 1970. As the city's white population declined, so did its tax base and public investment. Thanks to an at-large election system, white politicians nevertheless maintained control of Jackson's city government until about 1985, when a more representative ward-based council system was adopted, and Black residents were better able to elect leaders of their choosing.

About 150,000 people currently live in Jackson, down from a peak population of more than 200,000 in 1980, when the population was more than 50% white. While the city of Jackson eventually became Black-led, every statewide elected official in Mississippi is white, as are the overwhelming majority of state legislators.

In August 2022, Jackson's water system suffered a catastrophic collapse that left residents, schools, businesses, hospitals, nursing homes, and fire stations without safe drinking water and in many cases with no water at all. By that time, a boil-water notice had already been

in place for more than a month. People in Jackson have for years had to boil their water after storms and have long since grown accustomed to adding bleach to their tap water when washing dishes. Many stopped drinking the tap water years ago.

The failure of Jackson's water system was not sudden. It was the logical result of decades of not just neglect, but of outright refusal of the state's nearly all-white legislature to respond to the many efforts made by Jackson officials to obtain the funding needed to pay for desperately needed infrastructure repairs. In the years leading up to the collapse, legislators had halted efforts by Jackson's mayor to raise sales taxes to provide funding, and refused to advance a bill that would have authorized the sale of bonds. It will cost billions of dollars to fully repair Jackson's water infrastructure, but white Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves, who presides over one of the poorest states in the US, said Jackson should instead adopt stricter collection efforts for late water bill payments. More than 26% of Jackson's population lives in poverty.

Last year, Republican lawmakers blocked \$47 million in funds earmarked for water and sewer repairs and continued to ignore repeated requests for funding from Jackson's mayor. While the state of Mississippi is expected to receive [\\$429 million for water and wastewater system work](#) under the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, two Mississippi state agencies will control its distribution and Jackson will have to fight for whatever portion it receives. All of it would not be nearly enough. Through direct negotiations with the Biden administration, Jackson's mayor recently secured the commitment of more than half a billion dollars from the federal government to assist with the repairs – still not nearly enough to correct a situation caused by decades of malign neglect.

The State of Mississippi also grossly underfunds the [schools in Jackson](#) and other majority Black areas of the state, resulting in the mostly Black schools, which are dilapidated and lack the most basic resources, receiving D and F ratings from state education authorities. Meanwhile, the nearby majority white schools have all the necessary resources and receive A ratings. Racial disparities in reading proficiency are stark. Ensuring a lack of quality education for Black students is an effective strategy for the long-term oppression of the city's residents.

Mississippi's white legislators take a much more active approach when it comes to usurping the power of Jackson's Black voters and elected officials to govern their city.

Republicans [introduced bills](#) during the 2023 legislative session that would seize control of the water system, as well as the city's judicial and law enforcement systems and its allocation of sales taxes. The proposed plan to create a regional board to control the water system [has been shelved](#) for now, but on April 4 the Mississippi State Legislature passed [H.B.1020](#) and [S.B. 2343](#) to expand the jurisdiction and authority of the Capitol Police, authorize the white Chief Justice of the nearly all white Mississippi Supreme Court to appoint four special judges to the Hinds County Circuit Court, and to establish an inferior court, similar to a municipal court, within the Capitol Complex Improvement District. Mississippi Capitol Police will take control of a larger area of Jackson with authority to imprison Mississippians for misdemeanors.

These bills take authority away from the Black-led Jackson city [police department](#), the elected [city government](#) led by a Black mayor and majority-Black city council, and the majority Black voters of Jackson. The bills set up a system with an astonishing similarity to apartheid. The new judges in the expanded Capitol district, an area surrounding the Capitol that is home to the majority of Jackson's white residents, will be appointed by white state officials instead of being elected by voters. The expansion will also put the white led Capitol Police, an arm of the comparatively well-funded state Department of Public Safety, in charge of the expanded district.

In addition, the new law also restricts free speech throughout Mississippi by forcing Mississippians to get written permission before holding an event on or near property owned by the state or any state official.

While Jackson, which has the highest percentage Black population of any major U.S. city, stands as a prime example of the lengths to which white lawmakers and politicians will go to prevent Black leaders and voters from maintaining and exercising power, it is hardly the only one. Current examples include:

- In Tennessee, the state legislature voted to expel two Black legislators over their participation in a protest against gun violence. The protest, which took place inside the legislative chamber, was prompted by a mass shooting at a Tennessee school that killed six people, three of them children, in late March 2023. A white woman legislator who also took

part in the protest was not expelled. Justin Pearson, one of the Black men expelled by the majority white legislature, represents a district that is [more than 60% Black](#).

- In late March, the Georgia legislature passed [S.B. 92](#), which will allow it to appoint an oversight commission for locally elected prosecutors, with the power to remove prosecutors and district attorneys from office. The move comes amid a grand jury investigation of former President Trump and some white Georgia officials that is being conducted by Black Fulton County district attorney Fani Willis.
- In St. Louis, Missouri, the white-led police themselves are [seeking a state takeover](#) in response to efforts by the recently elected Black mayor to bring about reforms. The Missouri House of Representatives has passed a [bill](#) to allow the state's Governor to [selectively strip prosecutors of jurisdiction](#) over certain crimes, after an earlier bill expressly aimed solely at the Black St. Louis Circuit Attorney failed to advance. Meanwhile, the state's Attorney General is making [his own efforts to remove her](#).
- In Alabama, whose currently extant state constitution was explicitly written in 1901 "to establish white supremacy," the mostly white state legislature appears to delight in preventing Black city leaders from making progress toward protecting the interests of their residents. The state legislature's undoing of Birmingham's adoption of a [minimum wage ordinance](#), meant to address the city's high poverty rate, is just one example of many.

These tactics are unfortunately not limited to state legislatures. Congress, and now the White House, are adopting the same approach to the nation's capital. The Washington D.C. population is about 50% Black, 38% white, and 11% Hispanic or Latino. Earlier this year, Congress passed a measure to [overturn the revised criminal code](#) adopted by a vote of Washington, D.C.'s elected, majority Black city council, and President Biden has promised to sign the measure into law. Emboldened by this successful usurpation of Black political authority, Congress is now considering a bill to [reverse policing reforms](#) passed by the D.C. city council last year.

As the U.S. continues to grapple with challenges to voting rights, these circumstances show that even when Black people in the U.S. are able to amass sufficient voting power to elect

their choice of leadership, the systemically racist white political power structure will continue to find other ways to undermine their choices and seize control for itself.

The proportion of the U.S. population that is white has been in decline since the 1950s. Much of the political and societal upheaval currently happening in the U.S. is driven by fear and paranoia, amplified by hard-right extremists, over the implications of the eventual disappearance of a solid white majority. White supremacy has always evolved to create new ways to maintain its grip on power.

“History has shown that the racist theory of government of the U.S.A is not the private affair of Americans, but the concern of mankind everywhere.”

We Charge Genocide, at xii.

Since African peoples formerly enslaved by white colonial powers were freed from the bonds of chattel slavery, those same powers have sought in ever-evolving ways to ensure that Black people and communities do not amass wealth, and thereby political power. These practices are most starkly seen in the U.S., where majority Black cities amidst a (for now) majority white country have been created as a direct result of white refusal to accept the notion of equality. As the Black and other minority populations of Western countries dominated by whites of European descent grows, the U.S. likely represents the leading edge of the next wave of strategies to prevent them from exercising broad-based political power.