



Reclaiming Populism

"We are the Ones We've Been Waiting for"



Organizing for Inclusion, Sustainability, and Opportunity

"We are indeed a house divided. But the division between race and race, class and class, will not be dissolved by massive infusions of brotherly sentiment. ...the division and the bad sentiments are both reflections of vast and growing inequalities in our socioeconomic system—inequalities of wealth, of status, of education, of access to political power." — Bayard Rustin

THE SUMMIT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS 2025

Beyond the Politics of Division and Dread...

....and toward a New Populism of Unity and Opportunity.

Dear Civil Rights / Faith / Labor Leader,

Please mark your calendar for the next [Summit for Civil Rights](#) to be held in New Jersey on May 8 and 9, 2025.

We will kick off the Summit on Thursday evening, May 8th, with a powerful labor and civil rights *Unity Gathering* at Fountain Baptist Church in Summit, NJ. The conference portion of the Summit will take place Friday, May 9th, from 9 AM to 4 PM at Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ.

We are especially proud to announce that Claude Cummings Jr., president of the Communications Workers of America, will join this year's Summit as an honored guest and keynote speaker. President Cummings was elected in 2023 as the first African American leader of North America's largest communications, media, and public sector workers union. Other prominent faith, labor, and civil rights leaders

Since 2017, the *Summit for Civil Rights* has held a series of gatherings with prominent clergy, labor leaders, civil rights leaders, elected officials, and scholars to warn against ignoring the economic and social underpinnings of the populist upheaval of the past decade.

We will again gather on May 8th and 9th of 2025 to assess the current political and economic landscape and to review, renew, and put forward a nonpartisan agenda for fully inclusive middle-class opportunity in work, schools, and housing.

You can go here to [register](#) and [sponsor](#) or for [more information](#) about sponsorship levels and packages.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Willie D. Francois, Summit Co-Chair and Social Justice Chair, Progressive National Baptist Convention and Pastor of Fountain Baptist Church, Summit, NJ.

Anthony Abrantes, Summit Co-Chair and Assistant Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters.

LaRae Smith, Summit Co-Chair and Civil Rights Chair at Shiloh Baptist Church, One Family Two Locations (Port Norris and Vineland, NJ), Dr. James Dunkins, Senior Pastor.

Myron Orfield, Summit Founding Director and Professor of Law and Director, Institute for Metropolitan Opportunity, University of Minnesota Law School

summitforcivilrights.org

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Beyond the Politics of Division and Dread...

....and toward a New Populism of Unity and Opportunity.

As we again pass another deeply contentious election season, the contradictions around class and race among the constituencies, institutions, and interests (in both parties) remain fundamentally unresolved and unreconciled. The compelling attraction to a crude and incoherent populist agenda and an insurgent political movement that feeds off these contradictions will not go away anytime soon.

The Summit for Civil Rights is a national coalition of constituency leaders from the uniquely American *Tripartite Alliance* of labor, civil rights, and the faith community who have sharply challenged (and offered an alternative path to) the dominant liberal (and conservative) establishment narratives and policies that have given rise to an enduring and powerful right-wing populism.



The *Summit for Civil Rights* will make a case not for a resistance to or denial of populism but a restoration of

a powerful American movement that reconciles class and race and is adapted to (and with an analysis of) the very significant changes in our geography, demographics, economy, and technology over the past four decades.



At the heart of this proposal is a return to the historic and truly populist alliance between the American civil rights and labor movement but with a thoughtful and informed response to a) the

gargantuan changes in the nature of work; b) the massive suburbanization and demographic diversification of metropolitan regions; c) the hypersegregation and criminalization of a deeply isolated urban underclass; d) the dislocations from globalization and foreign interventions; and e) the tremendous growth and exploitation of an undocumented and vulnerable laboring immigrant class in the workforce.

These dynamics have not only divided, weakened, and atomized working people; they drive and have been driven by an unprecedented surge in economic inequality and some of the most obscene concentrations of wealth and political power in our nation's history.



These are not overcomplicated or unfamiliar concepts of rule by divide and conquer, but the current alignment in our establishment politics, whether on the liberal left or conservative right, both dominated by greedy corporate interests and narcissistic oligarchs, has been (and will continue to be) unwilling or incapable of advancing an agenda or strategy that will challenge the status quo and unite working and middle-class families of all races and backgrounds around a truly progressive agenda for inclusive opportunity and equality.



Because of the utter failure of establishment institutions and coalitions (including the corporate media, major donors, think tanks, liberal foundations, and “expert” political professionals), it must fall to those people-based associations and organizations (and the leaders who represent and are accountable only to working men and women) to lead America out of its deepening political quagmire. Building One America believes that the vanguard of such a movement must come

from: 1) the leadership of predominately and historically Black-led organizations, including the Black church and chapter-based civil rights organizations; 2) the leadership of a *unified* labor movement, including the building trades, service and public sectors, transportation, and manufacturing unions; and 3) local elected leaders who represent and are accountable to a diverse working- to middle-class constituency.

There are many who think these associations and networks (including labor and civil rights organizations) are not powerful, sophisticated, or unified enough today to go up against the enormous power of the reactionary right. Perhaps they are not. But neither is the corporate liberal establishment that has shown itself (twice now) to be far more feckless, incompetent, and completely disconnected from ordinary Americans than many of us wanted to believe. And the larger bipartisan structures of institutional power that Donald Trump broke through in 2016 and 2024 have revealed themselves to be a fragile house of cards. He was not stopped by a determined Republican establishment in 2016 or the powerful Clinton wing of the Democratic Party. He was not stopped by Congress, the Justice Department, the “intelligence community,” or the bulk of the mainstream media and culture. And he was outspent three to one in the most expensive political campaign in the history of the world. After Obama’s shocking 2008 insurgency in defiance of his own party and Senator Sanders startling near-breakthroughs in 2016 and 2020, perhaps Trump is not as much the phenomenon as is the staggering hollowness, ineptitude, and unpopularity of our two-party political establishment.



So long as we continue to rely on the experts, elites, and oligarchs who are out of touch with working people and their values, we can expect to see populist anger coopted and exploited by the right with an anemic pro-establishment response from the liberal left.

The Black church, the American Labor Movement, and the modern Civil Rights movement, however flawed or diminished in size or reputation, are still with us, still organized, and still self-governed. And the institutional and relational linkages within and between them are still extensive and deep and manifestly American.



“...We are (still) the ones we’ve been waiting for”.

SUMMIT OVERVIEW

DAY ONE

Summit for Civil Rights Unity Gathering

7 PM – 9 PM, Thursday, May 8, 2025 - Fountain Baptist Church, Summit, NJ

Labor / Civil Rights Unity Gathering

New Jersey will be the number one flashpoint for national politics in 2025. It is one of only two (Virginia is the other) gubernatorial races in the nation and will be hotly contested in both the primary and general.

The Summit will begin with a powerful gathering at Fountain Baptist Church where many (possibly all) of the candidates (of both parties) will help open with the conference with the Summit for Civil Rights leadership team. The Summit for Civil Rights leadership will present the goals of the Summit and put forth a broad - but actionable - set of policy objectives and principles that will be basis of the Summit deliberations the next day. Elected leaders and candidates present will be asked to say a few words in support of these goals and principles. Some will join us for the Summit conference the next day.

A draft of the Summit for civil rights goals and principles will be circulated among our member congregations, unions and civil rights organizations over the coming weeks to solicit input and secure a consensus.

DAY TWO

Summit for Civil Rights Conference

9 AM – 4 PM, Friday, May 9, 2025 – Bethany Hall at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ

Part I - Welcome, Background, Goals of the day and overview of program

Each Section will have a presentation and brief panel discussion with 3 to 5 practitioners, constituency leaders and/or experts.

There will be 3 main sections and a working lunch break for people to interaction and build consensus on issues and final session on next steps.

Part III. What Happened? – Spatial, Class and Racial analysis of the 2024 Election Race.

How the failure to build a multi-racial working class constituency informed a conflicted policy agenda across a fragmented geography with a divided political strategy.

- **The Pivotal Black Vote** – The Black vote is still the most unified and progressive but can longer be taken for granted. Urban and Suburban Registration and Turnout by Place Class and Institutional relationships.
- **The Pivotal Union Vote** – Labor is weakened, divided and some of its members are defecting. Analyzing the racial, cultural, class, industrial and geographical divides.
- **The Pivotal Suburban Vote** – Everyone agrees suburbs are important but which ones? What kind of suburbanite? Pursuing the multi racial working to middle class Obama, Bernie, Trump voter or Liz Cheney, Niki Haley Wine Moms.

Part III - Where we are today - What is Dividing Us? (this might be a keynote with a reaction panel)

- Segregation by Race and Poverty
- Suburban Sprawl, and Urban Abonnement and Deterioration
- Industrial Decline, Globalization, War and Economic Dislocation
- Immigration and Labor Exploitation
- Wealth Inequality and Opportunity Hoarding

Part IV – What do we do? What unites us?

Creating a unifying agenda for a unified working-class constituency

Renewing a national initiative for a metropolitan agenda for environmental sustainability, racial justice and expanded and inclusive middle-class opportunity and security.

- Inclusive Jobs, Infrastructure investment, Union protections, Inclusive Housing Opportunity and Integrated Schools and neighborhoods.

Part V – How do we do it? Action and Organizing

Advancing a unified and unifying agenda through:

- Recruiting Institutions and Leaders
- Regional Analysis
- Leadership Training
- Regional Gatherings

Part VI – Closing Commitments and Next Steps

SUMMIT DATES

May 8 and 9 2025

- 7PM – 9 PM, Thursday, May 8, 2025
Labor / Civil Rights Unity Gathering – Sanctuary of Fountain Baptist Church in Summit, NJ
- 9 AM – 4 PM, Friday, May 2, 2025
Civil Rights Conference – Bethany Hall at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ

SUMMIT ATTENDANCE

200 to 500 leaders, speakers and participants.

SUMMIT LOCATION OPTIONS

Fountain Baptist Church, Summit, NJ

Seton Hall, (in Bethany Hall) South Orange, NJ

INVITED SUMMIT SPEAKERS AND KEY CONSTITUENCY LEADERS **Indicates past Summit speaker* (this is a partial list of leaders and speakers)

- Claude Cummings - President CWA - Keynote and 2025 honoree
- Sean McGarvey - North America's Building Trades Unions*
- Khalil Gibran Muhammad - Professor of History, Harvard University *
- Rev. Dr. Freddy Haynes III*
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor – Professor of African American Studies, Princeton University. *
- NEA President Becky Pringle*
- John a. Powell - Professor of Law, UC Berkeley*
- April Verrett, President, SEIU
- Shawn Fain, President of United Automobile Workers, UAW
- John C. Brittain - Professor of Law *

- Sheryll Cashin - Professor of Law *
- Barbara Ransby - Professor of History *
- Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott - Ranking House Committee on Education and Labor*
- Naomi R Williams, Professor of Labor Studies, Rutgers New Brunswick
- Congressman James E. Clyburn*
- AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer Fred Redmond*
- Rev. Dr, Otis Moss III
- Todd Vachon, Ph.D., Director of LEARN, Rutgers New Brunswick
- Sherrilyn Ifill, NAACP Legal Defense Fund Former President*
- Anthony Abrantes - United Brotherhood of Carpenters
- Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman*
- Rev. Dr. Willie Francois*
- Former Congresswoman Barbara Lee*
- Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison*
- Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III
- AME Bishop Samuel Green 1st Episcopal District
- NAACP President Derrick Johnson*
- AME Bishop Reginald T. Jackson*
- James T. Callahan – General President, International Union of Operating Engineers
- Everett Kelley – president, American Federation of Government Employees
- Mark McManus – General President, United Association – Union of Plumbers, Fitters, Welders & Service Tech
- Lee Saunders - president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
- Timothy Driscoll – President International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers
- Paul Jargowsky, Professor of Sociology, Rutgers Camden *
- Jimmy Williams, Jr. – General President, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades
- Sean O'Brien – General President, International Brotherhood of Teamsters
- Kenneth Cooper – International President, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
- Brent Booker, General President, Laborers' International Union of North America
- Michael Coleman – General President, International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail & Transportation Workers (SMART)
- Congressman Donald Norcross*
- Beverly D. Tatum – Former President of Spellman University*
- Julian Vasquez Heilig - Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Western Michigan University*
- Theodore M. Shaw - Professor of Law, UNC, Chapel Hill *
- Erika K. Wilson, Professor of Law, UNC School of Law
- Loïc Wacquant | Research UC Berkeley
- Stella Flores, Professor of Higher Education and Public Policy, University of Texas at Austin *
- Richard Rothstein, Author*
- Eric Foner - Professor of History, Columbia University *
- Michelle Burris, The Century Foundation*
- Forrest Pritchett at Seton Hall University
- Bruce D. Haynes - professor of sociology at UC Davis *
- Elizabeth Powell – Secretary Treasurer, American Postal Workers Union *
- Mark Dimondstein – president, American Postal Workers Union*
- Gary Orfield - professor and co-director of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA *
- Genevieve Siegel-Hawley - professor of educational leadership, VCU School of Education *
- Myron Orfield - Professor of Law, University of Minnesota School of Law *

- William P. Jones - Professor of History, University of Minnesota *
- Douglas Massey - professor of Sociology, Princeton University *
- Rucker Johnson - Professor of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley *
- Marc Bayard - associate fellow, Institute for Policy Studies, director of its Black Worker Initiative *
- Amy Wells – Professor of Education, Columbia University*
- CBTU President Rev. Terrance Melvin*
- Lisa Rice – President of National Fair Housing Alliance *
- Algernon Austin - Center for Economic and Policy Research*
- Stefan Lallinger, Century Foundation*
- Nikole Hannah Jones, New York Times*
- Leah Wright Rigueur, Professor of History, John Hopkins
- Leslie Wilson, Professor of History, Montclair State University”
- Michael Honey, Professor of History, University of Washington, Tacoma
- Hakeem Jeffries, Minority Leader US House of Representatives.