

## LEFT FORUM 2016 PANEL PROPOSAL

Submitted by Joel Cabrera and Diane R. Pagen

### **The Universal Basic Income as a Method to End Oppression**

The present U.S. economy affords certain opportunities for those participants who have not become caught up in certain of its oppressive systems. Certain members of the economy have become trapped in one of two mechanisms of oppression within the economy that prevent them from harnessing any of the opportunity. The two systems we are talking about are the low wage labor market, which is a tool of oppression of many Black and Latino workers, and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (“welfare”) system; which has evolved from its original purpose of supporting mothers and children to its current structure, which by design oppresses low income mothers and by extension their children. Both of these systems by design exclude participants from accessing better labor opportunities and better quality of life, and in doing so, these systems by design preserve the truly worthwhile opportunities and resources for the higher earning and better resourced people in society. Universal Basic Income (UBI) has a long list of respected members of society advocating for its implementation in more than one nation.

Income inequality cannot be understood without consideration of how current systems preserve opportunity for a small segment of the community, and we will discuss this. Central to our presentation is a conversation on how Universal Basic Income in theory and in practice shows itself to be a do-able solution to this conundrum of income inequality and barriers to resources that currently hold society back.

Our panelists Joel and Diane present related arguments for replacing the current economy. Joel’s focus is how a UBI would reduce the wealth inequality of Black and Latino households; Diane’s focus is how a UBI would give society an unprecedented opportunity to discard the welfare system that has ruined the lives of so many mothers and children by a design developed to create an economically distressed class of mostly women, unable to refuse to participate lest their children be harmed in retaliation.

#### **Topic One: Ending Oppression of Blacks, Latinos, and the Poor via UBI**

In 2015, Demos and the Institute of Assets and Social Policy did a study that found Black households have only 6 percent of the wealth of the typical White household, while Latinos have 8 percent of the typical wealth of White households. According to the U.S. Census

Bureau, the median White household has around \$111,000 in wealth holdings, compared to around \$7,000 for the median Black household and around \$8,000 for the median Latino household. Many argue that there are both historical and systemic reasons. What we need is a move in the right direction that would increase the economic viability of Black and Latino communities to be both safe and sustainable. A Universal Basic Income (UBI) is the step we need to take. UBI is a regular income transfer to households, without work requirement and without conditions, given to all in a community, to assure that each person has an income sufficient to meet its basic survival needs regardless of labor market conditions.

A UBI will serve the Black and Latino communities in an array of ways. Not only will a UBI increase available start up capital to start businesses from within the Black and Latino community but it will also eliminate the desperation that grips many within the community when income or wages are not available, resulting in drug trade, incarceration, and more. Ultimately members of the community may be labeled felons, thus unable to produce effectively in society once again. A UBI will enable low income and poverty stricken Black and Latino single mothers to pursue their education, pursue a new business ventures, or simply to have the time and resources to attend to themselves and their children, who in the Black and Latino communities most of the time need additional resources in order to compete in the marketplace when they get older. A UBI will uplift millions of Black and Latinos in need of the resources to compete effectively, especially in this day and age where technology is disrupting every industry we can think of and will be displacing millions of jobs in the very near future.

### **Topic Two: Ending Oppression of Mothers (and Fathers) via UBI**

The national welfare system of the U.S. has been a tool for the oppression of women, especially mothers, even since its creation in the 1930s. But while imperfect at that time, in modern times, all its just and adequate elements have been shrunk and new oppressive aspects have become the main structure of the policy; meanwhile its primary purpose of income distribution to meet the basic survival needs of families has been eviscerated. No state provides more than 50% of a poverty line income to a single parent on welfare. Some states provide no more than 10% of a poverty line income, all while obligating mothers to “work” for these insufficient amounts of money, and in the process forcing them to relinquish care of their children to other oppressed and exploited program participants. As if this weren’t exploitation enough, this welfare system allows states to shirk any common sense of decency in that it

allows states to put all of its resources into social engineering of women, funding “two parent family formation” classes, and forcing women to conform to others’ reproductive standards. Perhaps the most revolting aspect of this is the program’s tendency to refer its participants to abortions, for this has created a U.S. where a disproportionate number of black, latino and poor women are pressured to end their pregnancies.

All this is done while cutting destitute families off the rolls with impunity and using the funds for non-poverty purposes: in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida, fewer than 4% of mothers poor enough to qualify for welfare get any help at all. And nationwide, states have cut children from the rolls: in 1969, 97% of poor children were welfare recipients. Today, barely 28% are. The implications for their futures are clear: children cannot remain alive without income. The children unserved may not make it to adulthood in the United States.

A UBI would make our Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program obsolete. No mother would choose to participate in such an oppressive, inadequate, and inequitable program. A poor mother with a UBI would be able to work in the paid market to supplement her UBI or live simply and use her UBI to meet her family’s basic needs. She could forge her own path, without the stigma imposed by current “means-tested” and exploitative welfare aid. A UBI would promote her freedom by giving her income, and would end stigma because a UBI is *universal*, distributed to everyone.

Note to Left Forum organizers:

We have not yet chosen the moderator for the panel. We have a choice between 3 or 4 people who are familiar with UBI but not necessarily supporters of it yet. Two of our possible moderators are professors at New School for Social Research; one is a professor at the University of Maryland; and one is not a professor but is an African American mother with extensive life experience living in poverty. It is possible that we may integrate two moderators into the panel, the mother and a professor, so as to generate questions from people with two very different, but equally valid life experiences. We expect to leave ample time for the question and answer section with the public.

Biographies:

**Diane R. Pagen** has been a social worker for New York City and a social policy analyst and writer for ten years. She has worked with low income families in hospitals, shelters, and schools;

she lived in Puerto Rico for five years while attending college there; and has an MSW degree from Fordham University. She is fluent in Spanish and English. She co-wrote *The Adventures of Carrie Giver: The Cost of Caring* with the brilliant welfare rights activist Theresa Funciello in 2007. She is currently writing about the diversion of welfare block grants away from the U.S. poor and organizing and fundraising to examine diversion of welfare funds in Wyoming, the state that distributes welfare benefits and services to fewer than one percent of its poor and keeps half of its \$42 million grant every year.

**Joel Cabrera** is a Bronx native who has worked in both the New York State Senate and New York State Assembly. He has a Bachelors of Science in Public Affairs from the City University of New York Baruch College. Joel is fluent in Spanish and English. He is currently building an organization with the help of others aimed at exposing young Blacks and Latinos to the philosophies and skills needed to achieve financial independence.

Please contact us with any questions at 347-726-1908 (Diane Pagen) or 347-595-6953 (Joel Cabrera).