FROM THE GROUND UP
“Our advocacy is a powerful example of how we can advance social and racial justice from the ground up in our communities, despite the racist, xenophobic, and dangerous policies being promoted by national leaders, including President Donald Trump.

Join us as we fight to position New Jersey as a national standard-bearer for economic justice, reimagining policing and transforming youth justice, and building an inclusive democracy.”

– Ryan Haygood, Institute President and CEO
THE NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
advocates fiercely from the ground up
to ensure that urban residents live in a society
that respects their humanity,
provides equality of economic opportunity,
empowers them to use their voice in the political process,
and protects equal justice.
The Institute’s economic justice advocacy works to address the great unfinished business of the Civil Rights Movement: ensuring equality of economic opportunity for people of color through full-time, meaningful employment that pays a living wage; affordable, quality housing; and access to credit.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., described “two Americas” sharply divided by race. In one America, “children grow up in the sunlight of opportunity,” but in the other America, people of color “find themselves perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.”

Fifty years later, the two Americas persist in states across America, including in New Jersey, one of the wealthiest states in the nation. The median net worth for New Jersey’s white families is $271,402—the highest in America.

By contrast, the median net worth for New Jersey’s Latino and Black families is just $7,020 and $5,900, respectively, together totaling less than 5 percent of the net worth of white families in the state.
As detailed in the Institute’s report *Bridging the Two Americas: Employment & Economic Opportunity in Newark & Beyond*, Newark exemplifies the two Americas. A majority of the people who work in New Jersey’s largest city earn more than $40,000 a year.

But Newark residents hold just 10 percent of these jobs paying more than $40,000 annually.

This is part of a broader, troubling picture: Newark residents hold just 18 percent of all jobs in the city, despite the fact that residents of color have a higher labor force participation rate—meaning that they are either working or actively looking for employment—than all residents. Because Black residents are more than twice as likely to be unemployed, their poverty rate in Newark is a striking 33 percent.
These racial disparities are systemic failures that require systemic solutions. The Institute is committed to creating these solutions.

Newark 2020

*Bridging the Two Americas* is the blueprint for Newark 2020, an unprecedented systems-change initiative to combat poverty by connecting 2,020 Newark residents to full-time employment that pays a living wage by 2020. The ultimate aim is to build a self-sustaining public and private workforce system that provides career opportunities for local residents.

Through Newark 2020, the Institute is working to help create a system that identifies various career pathways to meaningful employment for a range of residents, from people with limited work experience to those with college degrees.
From reimagining policing to transforming New Jersey’s youth justice system, the Institute’s advocacy seeks to end criminal justice policies that criminalize communities of color, perpetuate racial injustice, and fuel mass incarceration.

**Reimagining Policing**

More than fifty years ago, violent encounters with the police catalyzed the Newark Rebellion, just as they did the protests in hundreds of other cities across America.

The protests came after decades of frustration and justifiable anger about the enduring effects of poverty, racism, police abuses, and a lack of opportunity.

As such, what happened in Newark was a rebellion, an act of empowerment meant to resist the oppressive conditions under which Newark residents had been forced to live.

Since the Newark Rebellion, local residents have fought for a transformed Newark Police Division (NPD).

Fifty years later, Newark is under a federal consent decree with the Department of Justice to address its findings of pervasive police abuse, including that 75 percent of Newark’s police stops were unconstitutional and that more than 20 percent of stops involved unreasonable use of force.
As part of the Federal Monitoring Team appointed to oversee the Consent Decree reforms, the Institute is working to ensure that the NPD works to create a brand new police-community relationship—based on trust, policies, trainings, transparency, and accountability—that residents have urged and deserved for more than fifty years.

150 Years Is Enough

The Institute’s 150 Years Is Enough campaign engages thousands of people from across New Jersey and beyond to demand a system that supports the possibility of each child.

Just six months after the Institute launched the 150 Years Is Enough campaign, in direct response to its advocacy, former Governor Chris Christie announced the closure of two of New Jersey’s failed youth prisons—Jamesburg, the state’s prison for boys, and Hayes, the state’s prison for girls.

“YOUTH PRISONS HAVE FAILED OUR COMMUNITIES. ISN’T 150 YEARS OF THIS FAILED SYSTEM ENOUGH? LET’S #CLOSEJAMESBURG AND #CLOSEHAYES.”

- JOHN LEGEND

Below: Institute Associate Counsel Andrea McChristian and Institute Youth Justice Campaign Manager Retha Onitiri speak at the rally outside the New Jersey Training School for Boys (Jamesburg).
This announcement is one of the most significant youth justice developments in a generation. And this is just the beginning.

As the Institute detailed in its report *Bring Our Children Home: A Prison-to-School Pipeline for New Jersey’s Youth*, New Jersey’s system of youth incarceration is racially discriminatory, immoral, and neither serves the most vulnerable young people nor reduces recidivism.

New Jersey has the worst disparities in Black/white youth incarceration rates in the country. A Black child in New Jersey is over 30 times more likely to be incarcerated than a white child, even though Black and white kids commit most offenses at similar rates. And New Jersey spends more than $280,000 each year per child in incarceration. Imagine how an annual investment of $280,000 could change a child’s life.

“There are no throwaway kids. All kids can be saved.”

Ryan Haygood, President and CEO
Following the closure announcement, the Institute is building a system that invests in young people by addressing these striking racial disparities, interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline, advocating for sentencing and parole reform, closing New Jersey’s youth prisons, and reinvesting in the creation of a community-based system of care for young people.
Reopening a Modern “Tuskegee of the North”

New Jersey is the home of a literal school-to-prison pipeline.

For more than half a century, New Jersey operated the Bordentown School, also referred to as the “Tuskegee of the North,” an elite public boarding school for New Jersey’s Black youth.

Today, however, Hayes, the state’s only girls’ youth prison, occupies the land on which this school once stood. And, across the street sits New Jersey’s medium-security prison for boys (JMSF).

As the Institute argues in its report Bring Our Children Home: A Prison-to-School Pipeline for New Jersey’s Youth, Hayes is the school-to-prison pipeline realized.

To reverse the school-to-prison pipeline that Bordentown has become, the report issues a call to action for New Jersey: close Hayes and recreate a modern Bordentown School for all of New Jersey’s youth to once again develop and thrive.
Expanding the Right to Vote

The Institute’s voter empowerment advocacy seeks to make the promise of democracy real in New Jersey by expanding the right to vote, reducing barriers to participation, and ensuring that communities of color are fully counted in the 2020 Census and afforded equal representation in the districting process.

Restoring voting rights for people with criminal convictions is the next frontier of the voting rights movement.

New Jersey first broadly denied the right to vote to people with criminal convictions in 1844, at a time when slavery was legal and practiced in the state and the franchise was limited to white men.

But we are 1844 no more.

The Institute launched 1844 No More, a campaign to restore the right to vote to nearly 100,000 people denied access to this fundamental right because they are on probation, on parole, or in prison for a felony conviction.
As described in the Institute’s report *We Are 1844 No More: Let Us Vote*, today’s law accomplishes the very racial exclusion that was commonplace in 1844 and that was meant to be eradicated by the Fifteenth Amendment—which guarantees the right to vote, regardless of race.

Today, about half of the people denied access to this fundamental right are Black, even though Black people make up just 15 percent of New Jersey’s overall population—a result of systemic racial discrimination throughout the criminal justice system.

Because the law imports racial inequality from the criminal justice system into the political process, more Black people in New Jersey are denied the right to vote because of a criminal conviction than were prohibited from voting before the Fifteenth Amendment was passed in 1870.

More than 100 organizations across New Jersey have joined this campaign, united around the belief that voting is a fundamental right that should not be lost because of a criminal conviction. The Institute’s campaign seeks to turn the page on this pernicious practice in New Jersey and to finally proclaim that we are 1844 no more.
Institute President and CEO Ryan Haygood and Associate Counsel Scott Novakowski were joined by legislators, community leaders, and dozens of supporters to announce the introduction of historic legislation that will restore voting rights to nearly 100,000 people with convictions in New Jersey.

Ronald Pierce, Institute intern, United States veteran, and Rutgers University-Newark graduate, speaks at a press conference introducing legislation to restore his voting rights and the rights of nearly 100,000 other people currently denied the right to vote in New Jersey.
Reducing Barriers to Democratic Participation

The Institute helped secure the successful passage of automatic voter registration in New Jersey, which will help to register hundreds of thousands of new voters and help ensure the electorate reflects the diversity of the state.

To safeguard the rights of New Jersey’s voters, the Institute also leads on-the-ground efforts to ensure voters have access to the polls on Election Day. Through this non-partisan effort, Institute staff and trained volunteers seek to ensure maximum participation on Election Day by observing the voting process, assisting voters who have trouble at the polls, and distributing voter empowerment materials.

Ensuring a Full Census Count and Equal Representation

The decennial Census count determines how political power is apportioned and how district lines are drawn. The Institute will help ensure an accurate Census count in 2020 by working with a coalition of community groups and other stakeholders to engage and raise awareness in historically undercounted communities.

The Institute and its partners will develop outreach materials about the importance of an accurate count and activate its networks to identify key community leaders to help distribute those materials.
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THE INSTITUTE’S MISSION

The Institute’s mission is to empower urban residents to realize and achieve their full potential.

Established in 1999 by Alan V. and Amy Lowenstein, the Institute’s dynamic and independent advocacy is aimed at toppling load-bearing walls of structural inequality to create just, vibrant, and healthy urban communities. We employ a broad range of advocacy tools to advance our ambitious urban agenda, including research, analysis and writing, public education, grassroots organizing, communications, the development of pilot programs, legislative strategies, and litigation.

Using a holistic approach to addressing the unique and critical issues facing New Jersey’s urban communities, the Institute advocates for systemic reform that is at once transformative, achievable in the state, and replicable in communities across the nation.
Social justice should be the underlying goal of all humanity.

Alan V. Lowenstein, Founder, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice