8 Radical Ideas for a More Equal America

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Below, some of the biggest, most innovative and, in some cases, controversial ideas for making the U.S. a more perfect union.
1. Baby bonds

Studies show that earning a good living is not enough to help people of color move up the socioeconomic ladder. So researchers William Darity Jr. and Darrick Hamilton have proposed “baby bonds,” which would give every baby born in the U.S. money up to about $50,000, depending on their family’s wealth. The money would belong to the children, becoming available when they turn 18. Supporters say giving every child a trust fund could help level the economic playing field and close the racial wealth gap.

2. No cash bail

Nearly half a million Americans are in jail without a conviction—and many are there because they can’t afford bail. As people wait for trial behind bars, they often lose jobs, can’t care for families and are likelier to take plea deals. People of color are disproportionately affected. Reformers have debated ways to eliminate cash bail for certain defendants, like those who are unlikely to skip trial and who don’t pose a public danger. It’s still controversial, but California is considering outlawing the practice, New Jersey and New York have curtailed it, and some progressive DAs are considering similar steps.

3. Universal basic income

What if the government gave all citizens a set amount of free money, with no strings? That’s the idea behind universal basic income (UBI), which proponents say would help families cover their basic needs, alleviate poverty and lift up society at large. Thomas Paine proposed a version of it in 1797, and figures from Martin Luther King Jr. to Richard Nixon have supported it. But in recent years, UBI has been gaining currency. Andrew Yang championed it during his presidential campaign, and Stockton, Calif., Mayor Michael Tubbs is already in the midst of his own pilot program to see whether cash infusions can help struggling residents.

4. Bring back the draft
The idea of conscription has never been very popular, and yet some argue that America’s all-volunteer force has created more problems than anyone anticipated. The U.S. military draws heavily on working-class and nonwhite residents—and with fewer than 1.3 million active service members, most Americans are not involved. Some advocates, like retired Army major general Dennis Laich, argue that reinstating a draft would close the divide, reduce recruiting costs and increase foreign-policy engagement. A judge ruled in 2019 that a draft for men only is unconstitutional, and a commission is examining potential changes to the future of the draft, with a report due in March.

5. Free public college

College costs have soared in recent years, saddling millennials with huge student debt—just as the pay gap between college grads and everyone else hits record levels. To solve some of these issues, Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have both proposed plans to make tuition free at all public two-year and four-year colleges in the U.S., while canceling substantial amounts of student debt. Their plans differ, but both argue that making public college free would give more Americans access to higher education, help them get better jobs and boost the economy.

6. Web accessibility

In 1990, the Americans With Disabilities Act ostensibly outlawed discrimination against disabled people in all areas of public life. But 30 years later, huge portions of the Internet are unusable for people with disabilities. This is partially because the ADA does not specifically mention web accessibility. Over time, a consortium of web experts created the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, but the DOJ has never offered official guidance about what is legally required. Now disability advocates, and lawyers filing a growing number of ADA lawsuits, are arguing that companies must make their websites accessible—because, they say, the Internet is fundamental to public life.

7. No electoral college
The distribution of electors in the **Electoral College** gives less populous states more power per person than more populous states. That leads to situations, like in 2000 and 2016, in which the presidential candidate who won the Electoral College lost the national popular vote. In an effort to align those two metrics, John Koza co-founded the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact in 2006. The idea is simple: participating states agree to award electors to the candidate who wins the national popular vote. The deal kicks in only after enough states have joined to reach the 270-electoral-vote threshold. So far, 15 states and Washington, D.C.—196 electoral votes—are on board.

### 8. Universal paid leave

The U.S. is the only developed country that doesn’t guarantee paid family leave. That’s bad for workers who need to take time off to have babies, care for a child or sick relative, or attend to their own health, but it also has a serious impact on the economy. After decades of progress, women’s workforce participation has declined about 3% since 2000. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D., N.Y.) says she’s got the fix: her bill, the FAMILY Act, which she’s introduced every Congress since 2013, would federally mandate 12 weeks of paid leave. Passing it is a long shot, but some Republicans have embraced the need for a solution.

*This article is part of a special project about equality in America today. Read more about The March, *TIME*’s virtual reality re-creation of the 1963 March on Washington and sign up for *TIME*’s history newsletter for updates.*