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### **“Agenda Setting”**

A very important political economy concept is “agenda setting.” This concept is at the root of democracy. For example, it is one thing to have the right to vote. It is another thing to have enough votes to force adoption of an agenda item. However, the most important thing is to have the power to set and control the agenda on which votes are taken.

One of the starkest cases of Black America’s powerlessness over agenda setting is the case of H.R. 40 and S. 40—these two pieces of legislation request a measly \$12 million to study the need for reparations for Black Americans as a result of our treatment in America for over 400 years. The legislation has been hanging around the U.S. Congress for over 40 years, but it has never reached the floor of either House for a vote because we have no power to set the agenda.

Similarly, the vote for D.C. Statehood, which is now receiving renewed attention is another case of Black America’s inability to set the agenda. The decades-old legislation labeled H.R. 51 and S. 51 was granted only one floor vote in the House in 1993; it has never been brought to the floor of the Senate for a vote. Yes, it is receiving renewed attention now because Democrats have control of the Congress. However, it is also “coincidental” that the Black majority in D.C. has been reduced significantly over the years through gentrification. In other words, even if D.C. achieves statehood now, White politicians have an excellent chance of representing the new state because the White population has grown by leaps and bounds over the years. In this case, the agenda setters have delayed a vote until it is favorable for them to do so. Who could ever argue that there should be taxation without representation?

But the most important agenda setting failure that faces us today is the case of the murderer of the late George Floyd. Unarguably, when a man places his knee and the full force of his weight on your throat, you wheeze out “I can’t breathe,” and the man just continues applying his weight in a relaxed manner with his hand casually in his pocket, then that man is saying with his actions: “I intend to kill you.” Yet, the State of Minnesota says that the most severe charge that can be lodged against this murderer is Second-, not First-, Degree Murder. So, America, Black America in particular, is now locked into whether the murderer will receive a sentence for Second- or Third-Degree Murder. In our view, this is a moot issue. The charge should be First-Degree Murder. Period. But we do not set the agenda.

From the outset of this country, Black life has been devalued. Remember the old “Three-Fifths Compromise.” Consequently, there is an unwritten rule in America: A White man cannot be killed for killing a Black man. This unwritten rule is enforced because of White’s ability to set the agenda. There is always some reason to reduce the charge from First- to Second- or Third-Degree Murder.

So, what is to be done? As we have proposed in [\*Exodus: A Book for Black Americans Suggesting a Way Out and Up\*](#), Black Americans should make every effort to establish control of, and dominate, our areas of influence (initially in the form of a state) so that we can begin to set the agenda. If we can set the agenda, then we can determine outcomes. Until then, we will continue to experience outcomes, such as H.R. and S. 40, H.R. and S. 51, and a slap on the wrist for George Floyd’s murderer—not a life for a life.

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