

2021

RACIAL EQUITY TOOLKIT



Introduction



*“You have to act as if it were possible to **radically transform the world.** And you have to do it **all the time.**”*

— Angela Davis

Welcome!

to [True Colors United's Racial Equity Toolkit](#). We are a nonprofit organization that implements solutions to youth homelessness by focusing on the unique experiences of LGBTQ youth, youth of color, and other groups harmed by historical inequities. We developed this toolkit through the specific lens of youth homelessness in America, which has a long history of racism that has led to wide-ranging consequences for young people. However, we believe that the topics and concepts covered in this toolkit can apply to all individuals from all sectors, because no American system or institution is exempt from its history of racial inequity.

[True Colors United takes an intersectional approach](#) to racial equity and believes that racial equity is directly tied to undoing anti-Blackness and dismantling white supremacy. We

know that race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and documentation status, in addition to other forms of oppression, are inextricably linked. We believe that rectifying inequities faced by the most marginalized will make the world a better place for everyone.

This toolkit was developed in the second half of 2020, when the nation was reeling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the widespread uprisings sparked by [the murder of George Floyd](#) in Minneapolis, Minnesota.² Job losses from COVID-19 sparked national conversation around housing, leading to the passing of progressive housing policies to ensure people were not evicted from their homes. The [#cancelrent](#) movement advocates for expanding eviction moratoriums and mortgage suspension to include the cancellation of rent collection in these times.

These movements have inspired new conversations around housing as a human right.

At the same time, the youth homelessness movement at large has been moving towards a reckoning. Stakeholders demanded that movement leaders take stock of their role in perpetuating system-wide inequities and be held accountable for the degree to which they centered anti-racism. [Anti-racism](#) is a process, a systematic method of analysis, and a proactive course of action rooted in the recognition of the existence of systemic racism.



¹ Crenshaw, Kimberly
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039?mag=kimberle-crenshaws-intersectional-feminism&se.q=1>

² You can read our statement in response to the uprisings here:
<https://truecolorsunited.org/2020/06/02/true-colors-united-for-black-lives/>

Anti-racism actively seeks to identify, remove, prevent, and mitigate racially inequitable outcomes and power imbalances between groups and change the structures that sustain inequities. This toolkit is our contribution to these conversations, and we hope that users will gain the baseline understanding and vocabulary needed to effectively advance racial equity within their own organizations.

True Colors United as an organization had also been moving towards broadening the scope of our work to include not just LGBTQ young people, but all marginalized youth. This required an intersectional understanding of anti-racism and recommitting ourselves to centering the voices, experiences, and expertise of Black queer, specifically trans, people. But before providing organizations with racial equity technical assistance, we felt there was work to be done internally.

Our organizational racial equity journey began with a series of all-day, all-staff trainings and grew to encompass a Racial Equity Workgroup and caucuses for Black and POC staff, white staff, and non-Black staff.

Racial Equity workgroup vision statement:

True Colors United envisions a world where all young people have complete economic and social freedom, and no longer experience homelessness, poverty, racism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, or any other form of systemic oppression.”

Our work was guided and facilitated by outside consultants who had extensive experience leading racial equity training for organizations within the youth homelessness movement. This toolkit is the result of a concerted, years-long internal effort to meaningfully live the values we champion to others. This is our first external-facing resource on the subject. Above all, we hope that this toolkit is a starting point for you and your organization, rather than a signal that you have crossed the finish line.



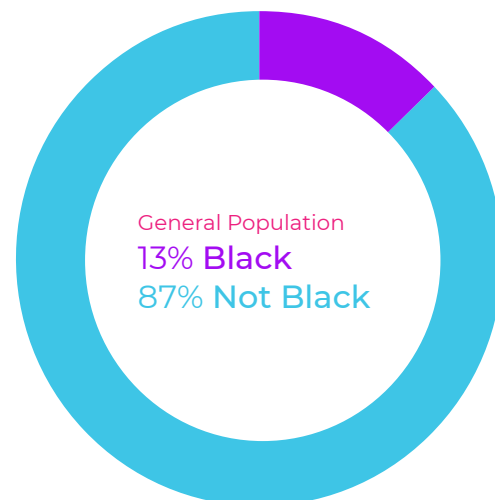
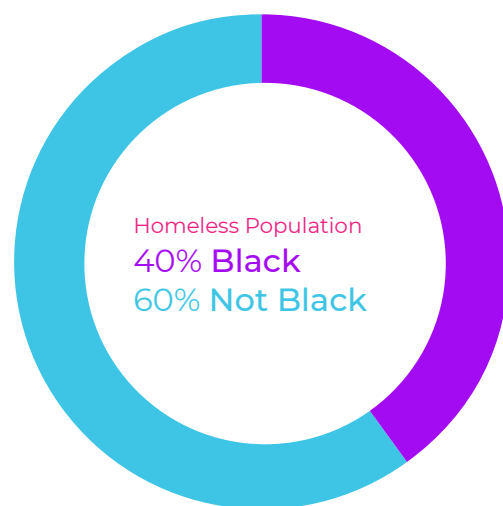
Issue Overview

While people of color are overrepresented in the homelessness system, the most striking disparity can be found among African Americans, who represent 13 percent of the general population but account for 40 percent of people experiencing homelessness and more than 50 percent of homeless families with children. As we recognize the disproportionate representation of Black youth among those experiencing homelessness today, we should also recognize there has never been a time in which Black Americans have truly experienced equal housing opportunity in the United States. Housing has always been a racial equity issue, from the founding of the mortgage system wholly excluding Black people to the pervasive ways the crisis response system, and economic disempowerment has kept Black people from accessing permanent affordable housing today.

While racial equity can be an intimidating concept for many people, we hope to create a common language and give historical context to the Black struggle today. This section will define key terms, introduce concepts to better understand systemic oppression, and offer data and statistics highlighting the effects of white supremacy

Overrepresentation of Black People in Our Crisis System

In America Black people account for more than 40% of the homeless population, while only representing 13% of the population



Definitions

There are many more terms in the world of racial equity. [Click here for a deeper dive: Racial Equity Tools – Glossary](#)



Race

A social construct based on untrue discriminatory scientific processes intended to categorize people through perceived physical attributes and likeness.

Racism

Systemic, Institutional, and interpersonal prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or group of a different race based on the belief that one's race is superior over the other.

Racial Equity

The work to apply justice to create a world in which a person's race doesn't predict what their life will be like.

Anti-blackness

When institutions and individuals marginalize black people while also devaluing their contribution and livelihood.

White supremacy

The ideology that white people and their culture, thoughts, ideas, and beliefs are superior to those belonging to people of color.

Intersectionality

How we show up to the world in our multiple identities, for example: race, gender, class, sexuality. For example, a Black disabled trans woman will not face the same type of oppression as a cisgendered able-bodied white woman.

Implicit bias

The negative attitudes or stereotypes that unconsciously affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. For example, a landlord running more criminal background checks on Black tenants.

Microaggression

An indirect, unconscious, unintentional, or subtle statement or action towards a marginalized group, often meant negatively. For example, refusing to learn how to pronounce someone's name correctly is a microaggression.

White saviorism

The act of white people interacting with different cultures in an attempt to "repair" them, consciously or unconsciously.

Misogynoir

The culmination of misogyny and anti blackness that is directed at black women and femmes.

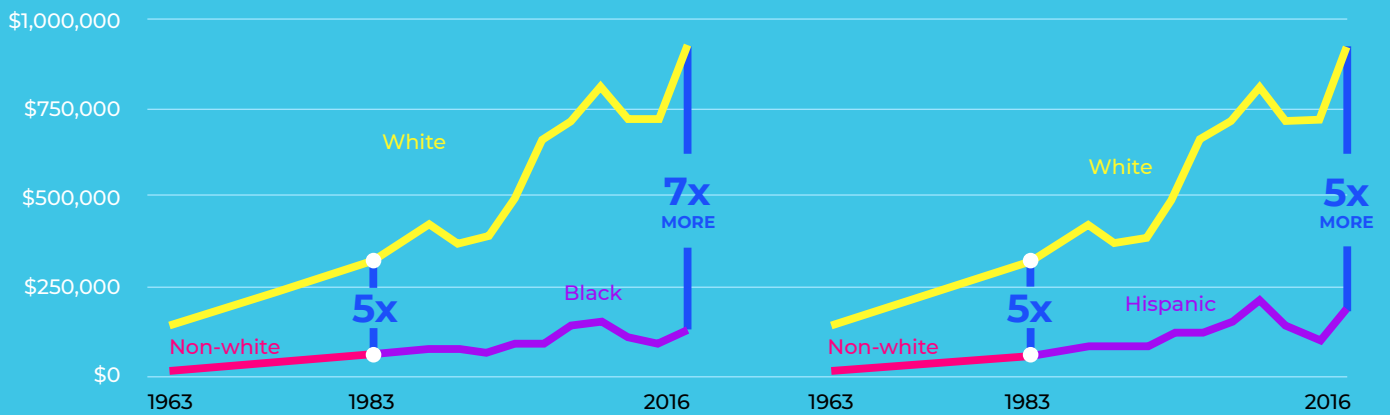
Redlining

The process by which lenders, real estate agents, and other invested parties would actually demarcate, in red ink on paper maps, where loans should not be issued.

Data

Unfortunately, the data paints a very clear picture of the overrepresentation of Black people in our crisis response systems. Holding these truths is key to building justice for systemic failings.

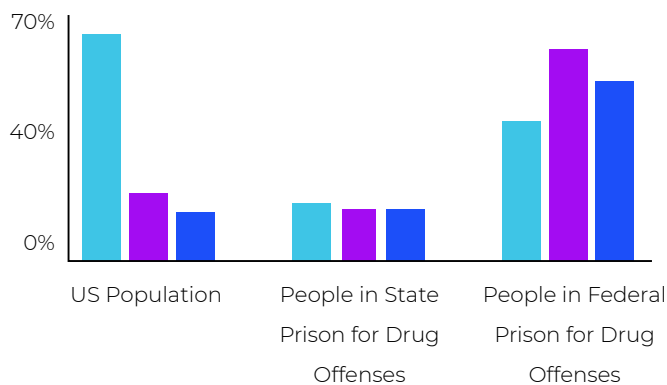
Average Family Wealth by Race/Ethnicity 1963-2016



In 1983 white families held 5x more wealth than black and hispanic families

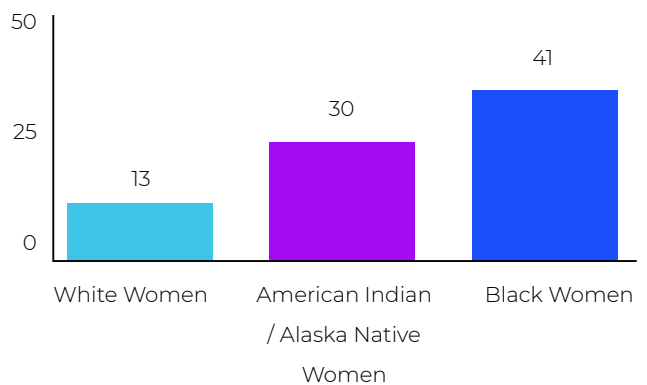
*Source: Urban Institute

Disproportionate Impact of Drug Laws on Black and Latino Communities

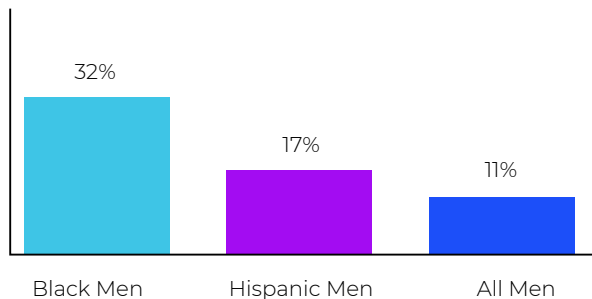


*Source: Center for Disease Control

Pregnancy-Related Deaths Per 100,000 Live Births

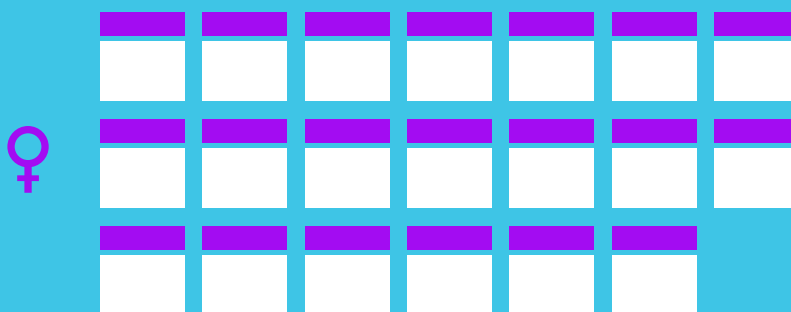
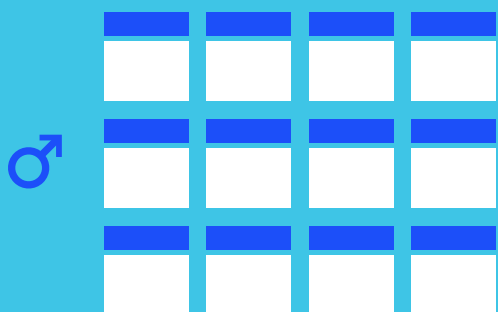
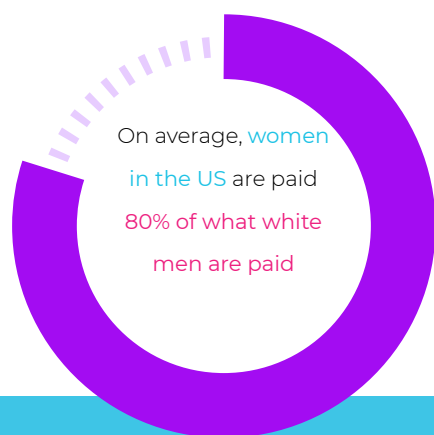


Lifetime Chance of Being Incarcerated



*Source: Prison Policy Institute

The National Pay Gap



Black **women must work around 8 months extra** to earn the same amount men do in 1 year

*Source: Center for American Progress

Racial Equity Core Concepts

Levels of Oppression

Oppression refers to the devaluing and dehumanizing of people with certain social identities for the sole purpose of benefiting the dominant group. Oppression can take 4 different forms as defined here:

When reading through this graphic, ask yourself:

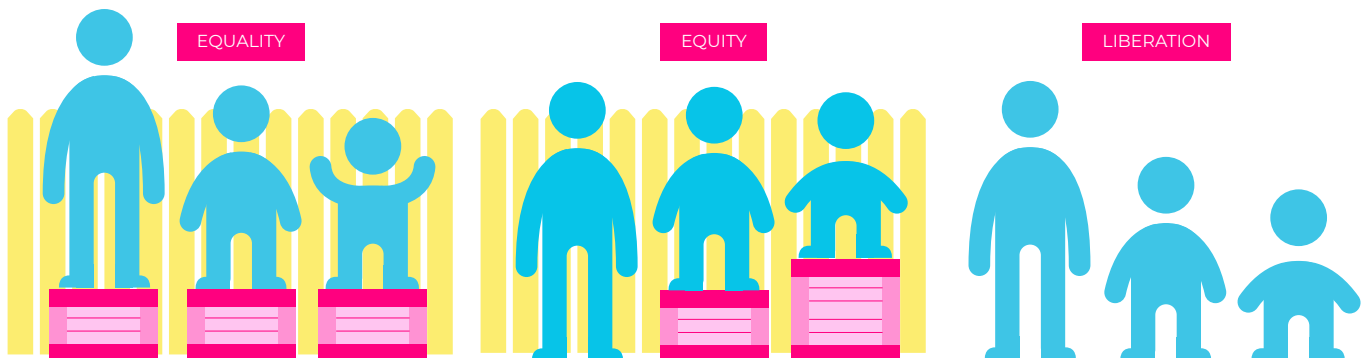
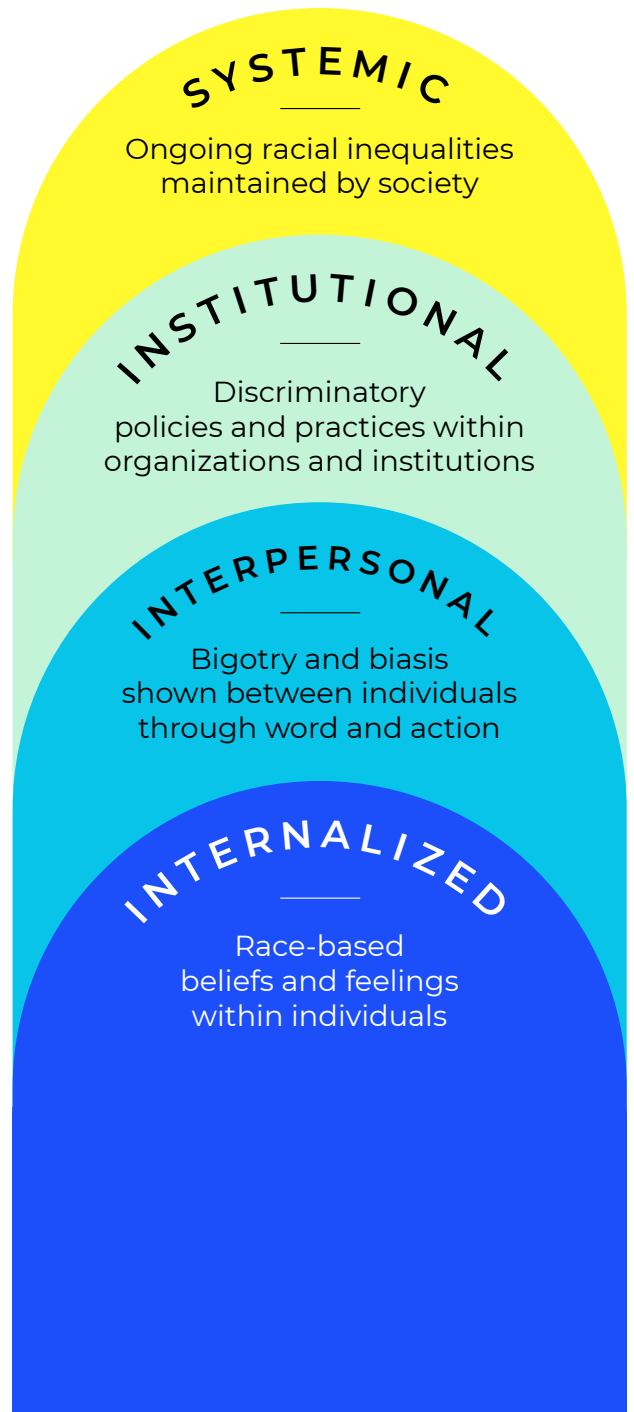
How do all these levels of oppression show up in your home, at your workplace or school, and in your community?

From Equality to Liberation

Often taught in schools and textbooks, equality means evenly distributed tools and assistance for all. However, the even distribution of resources does not result in equal experiences or outcomes when the historical harm that has been done to communities of color has created dramatically different starting places before those resources arrive. The term equity is used by many organizations nowadays to address the work that needs to be done in order to achieve justice.

When reading through this graphic, ask yourself:

Where does equality show up in the movement to end youth homelessness? Where does justice?



Anti-Blackness in Housing

Historical

Our current work to end youth homelessness in this country should always consider the historical racial context. American history includes the genocide of Native Americans which cleared land for white people's homes, and the forced enslavement of Africans that made wealth building for white Americans possible. We also know to be true is that many middle-class families gain their wealth from equity in their homes. Within this racial context, we know that far too often a deep analysis on anti-blackness is left out of the conversation.

Anti-Blackness is defined as the debasement of Black humanity, indifference to Black suffering, and denial of Black people's right to exist. Given the stark reality and prevalence of anti-blackness during the 2020 pandemic, economic crisis, and movement uprisings, it is critical to engage this topic as we critique the failures of equitable housing and how these failures persist to this day.

This section will cover the modern roots of discrimination in the housing and homelessness system.

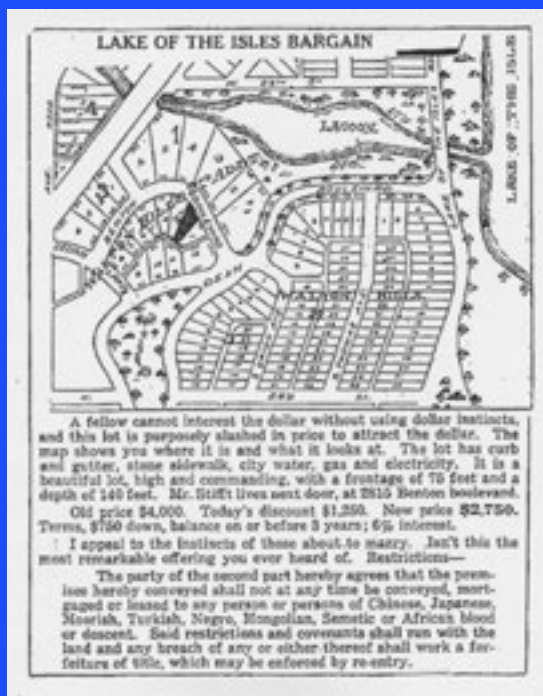


Racially Restrictive Covenants

In the early 1900s, it was possible to write in conditions to the deed of your house that kept people of color from being able to buy your house. For example,

In Minneapolis, the first racially-restrictive deed appeared in 1910, when Henry and Leonora Scott sold a property on 35th Avenue South to Nels Anderson. The deed conveyed in that transaction contained what would become a common restriction, stipulating that the "premises shall not at any time be conveyed, mortgaged or leased to any person or persons of Chinese, Japanese, Moorish, Turkish, Negro, Mongolian or African blood or descent."

As these racist covenants gained popularity, Black people were forced into smaller corners of the city. This practice expanded nationally, laying the groundwork for today's residential segregation by shrinking the housing stock that Black and non-Black people of color could own.



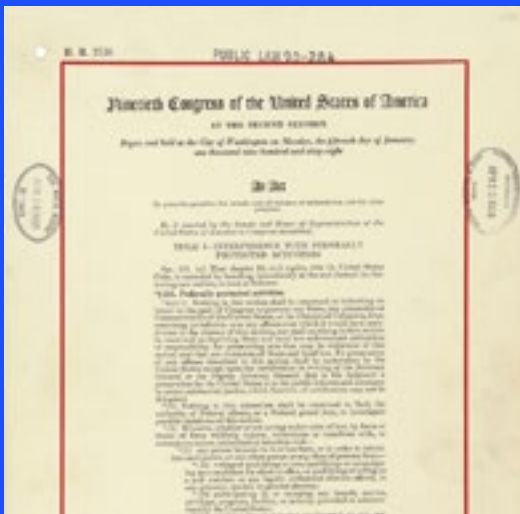
The first racially-restrictive deed, Minneapolis circa 1910



Redlining

In the 1930s, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) began to promote redlining - the nationwide practice of banks denying creditworthy people of color mortgages, as well as loans to renovate their homes. The **FHA did so by refusing to financially support the mortgages of Black people who wanted to buy homes in and near African-American neighborhoods.** As a result, many black families and individuals were unable to buy homes while white families and individuals with equal or lesser creditworthiness became homeowners and began to build generational wealth, securing a stronger long-term foothold in the middle class.

At the same time, the FHA lent that same financial support denied to Black people to developers who were widely building subdivisions for whites and the agency required that none of these homes in white neighborhoods be sold to Black people.³ This practice not only reinforced and perpetuated segregation, it created gaps in homeownership that have denied Black communities the opportunity to build and pass down wealth. This has impacted generations of Black families across entire communities.



The Fair Housing Act of 1968

Fair Housing Act of 1968

President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, expanding on previous acts and prohibiting discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, (and as amended) handicap and family status. **Title VIII of the Act is what we know as the Fair Housing Act (of 1968).** Despite the Act, data shows that segregation and discrimination in both housing and lending have persisted.

Not long after, **in the 1980s, the Federal government cut about 80% of its funding for public housing** which, alongside a major national recession, drove a massive spike in rates of homelessness.⁴ Funding levels have never been restored, and homelessness has been on the rise ever since. Today, Black individuals, youth, and families are 16 times more likely to live in shelters than white individuals, youth, and families.

³ Rothstein, R. (2018).

The color of law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company.

⁴ https://d3n8a8pro7vhnmx.cloudfront.net/funderstogether/pages/4844/attachments/original/1593036413/Copy_of_A_Brief_Timeline_of_Race_and_Homelessness_in_America.pdf?1593036413

Present Day

With the Fair Act of 1968 passed, legally people of color couldn't be discriminated against for housing. However, in the years it took to establish that law, the price of homes skyrocketed and Black people could no longer afford to buy homes in suburban neighborhoods. Again, this meant Black people were denied the opportunity to establish financial equity in those profitable neighborhoods.

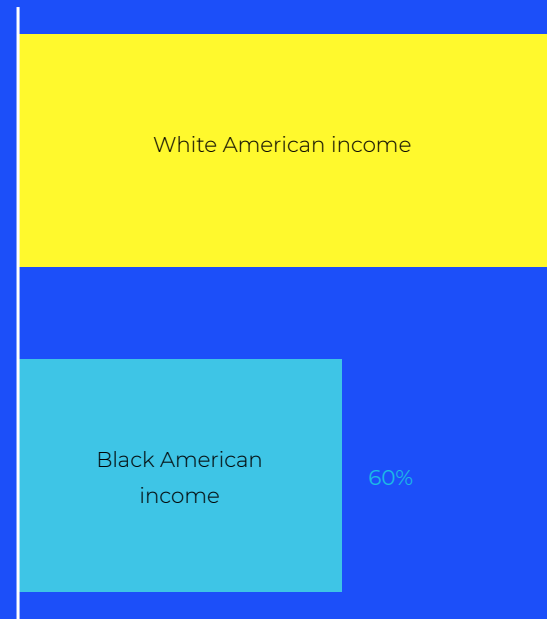
As redlining became harder to get away with, [zoning regulations were created to control density, protect open space, and artificially inflate housing prices](#). Strict zoning restrictions are still in use today that disparately impact African Americans and Latinos, particularly family households. That's because these zoning restrictions limit affordability and the number of rental multifamily housing opportunities.⁵

Subprime Mortgage Lending

In 2007, when the housing bubble burst, banks were making loans with astronomically high interest rates to people with flawed credit histories who wanted to become homeowners. These loans are called [subprime mortgages](#), and banks benefited from the practice by making money off the interest rate. To maximize profits, there was even a cash incentive for loan officers to aggressively market subprime mortgages in minority neighborhoods. In the end, the Justice Department found that 4,500 homeowners in Baltimore and the Washington, D.C. region were harmed by these flat-out racist lending practices.⁶ Today, Black homeowners in the D.C. region are 20 percent more likely to lose their homes compared to whites with similar incomes and lifestyles.

Poverty + Wealth Dispossession

Today, Black American incomes average about 60 percent of white incomes. But Black wealth is about 5 percent of white wealth. The most common way of building that wealth is through homeownership, making these issues self-perpetuating.



⁵ https://www.bostonfairhousing.org/timeline/1970s-present-Local-Land_use-Regulations.html

⁶ <https://prospect.org/civil-rights/collapse-black-wealth/>

Incarceration

A criminal record can keep people from passing background checks that many landlords run on potential tenants. This becomes a racial equity issue because the past four decades have seen the rates of incarceration for Black people tripled due to over-policing in Black neighborhoods, increased police budgets, and discriminatory policing. Additionally, federal law prevents formerly incarcerated people with certain criminal convictions from accessing public housing and many states criminalize “association” or shared housing between more than one formerly incarcerated person, further limiting what resources might exist through family support, nonprofit housing providers, or the public social safety net. [Homelessness itself has been criminalized with](#)

[more than a 60% increase in local bans on camping](#)⁷. Rarely do interactions with the police result in permanent housing, leaving Black people with higher barriers to housing and little done to support that process.

These factors pile up to create high barriers for Black people who try to access permanent affordable housing. All of these systems need to be re-envisioned in an equitable way to allow for wealth building and prosperity for Black people.

Looking Forward

Gentrification

Over the past 20 years, the US has seen the rate of gentrification double compared to the previous 20 years. Gentrification is the process whereby the character of a poor urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in, improving housing, and attracting new businesses, typically displacing current inhabitants in the process.

This means that neighborhoods that have historically been affordable to Black renters have seen an influx of more affluent residents, leading landlords to raise rents. However, income levels for people of color in those neighborhoods have not increased. This often results in displacement, putting those individuals forced out by gentrification at risk of homelessness.

Displacement can happen in various ways. For example, [direct displacement](#) happens when residents are forced to move out of their neighborhood because of rent increases.

[Exclusionary displacement](#) happens when housing choices for low-income residents are eliminated. And finally, [displacement pressures](#) describe what happens when supports, services, food accessibility, and resources such as clinics and community centers suddenly disappear from the neighborhood without any alternatives.

All these forms of displacement can happen at the same time and have a direct correlation between resulting evictions and homelessness rates.



⁷ Vitale, A. S. (2017). The end of policing.

Equity in Action

Just as systems of oppression exist at separate levels (interpersonal, institutional, and systemic), our work to dismantle white supremacy must happen at every level. In this section, we will explore concrete steps individuals and organizations can take to commit to anti-racism.



Leading while learning

While many Black and Non-Black people of color experience racism and are well acquainted with many of its manifestations, we all need to constantly push ourselves to envision a world without racism. To begin that work:

- Look inward: It can be hard to always identify when our beliefs and actions are based in white supremacy, but this introspection and self-analysis is key to authentically engaging in anti-racism.
 - [Start with this worksheet on internalized racism.](#)
 - [Consider the lifelong journey of racial equity.](#)
- Read up: There is no shortage of anti-racist reading [lists](#). And [lists](#). And [lists](#).
- While you're reading, ask yourself how you can deepen your understanding of racism and what actions you can take based on your learnings. It's not enough to just read.
- Connect with community: Look towards those doing similar work in your community and/or the community that you work in. Many organizations are already doing Black liberation work. For example, [Black Youth Project 100](#) has chapters all over the country. Join your local tenants union to build solidarity with lower income tenants and protect your community from illegal rent hikes.
- See what support they need and how you can help them access those resources.
- Make it last: Being in service to our communities requires us to take care of ourselves. Like Audre Lorde said "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."
- Intentionally carve out moments to celebrate joy, find calm, nurture relationships, and rest.

Organizational

Workplaces can be a powerful space to embody and practice racial equity. Oftentimes, the work of “Diversity and Inclusion” is left to women of color, [to their own detriment](#).

In order for organizational changes to be meaningful and sustainable, you will need to educate and have buy-in from the whole team.

Workplaces looking to walk the long walk of racial equity will require a commitment to change. The following steps to address and combat organizational racial equity can serve as a roadmap for your agency. Please keep in mind that the order of each step can be switched around depending on your organization’s structure, resources, and capacity.

1. Conduct a Racial Equity Survey

- Gauging how individuals at your organizations feel about equity in the workplace will guide your work plan.

Sample Questions

- How does the organization handle race-related issues or racial injustice?
 - How does white supremacy show up in the workplace?
 - How is the organization oriented towards Black liberation?
- Consider working through [white dominant culture norms](#) and having a separate meeting or survey to discuss how these norms show up in the organization.
 - For each norm that is identified, establish pivot points towards something new and different that your organization can work towards.

2. Form a Racial Equity Team

- Forming a racial equity team illustrates your organization's
- Commitment to dismantling white supremacy. Before setting up the team, gauge the capacity and interest of the organization through channels such as anonymous surveys, small group check-ins, and all-staff meetings.

Considerations

- Begin with leadership: Organizations often try to do the external racial equity work before getting their own house together internally. A step that should be included is sitting down with leadership to see if they are resistant to or affirming of this work.
 - Diversity of staff within the RE team. Are high-level decision makers present? What about staff from various departments?
 - Determine the RE team's structure
 - How does the group make decisions?
 - How often does the group meet?
- Consider drafting a mission and vision statement for the RE Team that's separate from the organization as a whole.

3. Racial Equity Training

- Once your staff have expressed what they need, start reaching out in the community to find facilitators. Consider reaching out specifically to those who are familiar with your particular sector.
- External trainings are one form of political education, but there are additional ways that staff should be challenging and educating each other towards continued learning beyond bringing in an outside expert. **For example,**
 - Host a “brown bag” series of lunch discussions around equity
 - Host equity talks at staff meetings
 - Send around racial equity newsletters to highlight continued equity work taking place within your field

4. Consider Caucusing

- Creating space for Black staff and staff of color to meet and support one another can be a powerful tool. At the same time, an accountability caucus made up of white and non-Black POC people at the organization can focus their work on their own accountability in the workplace.

5. Hiring

- Prioritize candidates with lived experiences of oppression (including homelessness) for new hires.
- Ask candidates specific questions about how racial equity has shown up in their work and what role they see themselves playing in advancing black liberation.
 - Avoid [tokenizing people of color](#) by placing them in roles that fit their strengths and promoting them.
- Make a point to hire consultants, auditors, and outside contractors that are POC and women led. If you're not familiar with organizational leadership or staff makeup, you can request a demographic makeup of the organization.



In your Community

The work to end white supremacy is one that cannot be fought alone. Right now, the impact of COVID-19 has brought even more front and center the need for community. Caring for your community, being engaged, and supporting those around you will give you the necessary fuel to sustain and expand the movement to end youth homelessness while grounding it in Black liberation.



Black Lives Action Center (BLAC)

Created by True Colors United staff, we have launched our [Black Lives Action Center](#) where anyone can go to find resources for how to support the Movement for Black Lives. We'll be updating this page regularly with resources and action items for people working in the field, advocates looking to make a difference, and young people looking for support.

Celebrate Black People and Resistance

One thing we cannot forget is the role of Black joy in these times. Black people have over and over again proven their ability to not only survive but continuously uplift the spirit and well being of their communities. We are committed to walking alongside Black people and their joy and resistance whenever possible while doing our part to reduce the presence of white supremacy and systemic racism in ourselves, our organizations, and our communities. [Join us.](#)

