STRUCTURAL RACISM AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND IMPLICATIONS

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The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change (formerly the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives) is a forum in which leaders working on some of the country's most innovative and promising efforts to revitalize distressed inner city neighborhoods can meet, share lessons they are learning, and identify and seek solutions to common challenges.

Since 1997, the Roundtable has been focusing on how the problems associated with race and racism in America affect initiatives aimed at poverty reduction in distressed urban neighborhoods. The Roundtable's work has had a theoretical dimension that has explored how race shapes the social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of our society, and how those dynamics produce significant and ongoing racial disparities in the well-being of children, families, and communities. It has also had a more applied dimension that describes how to apply a racial equity "lens" to social and economic development work.

The premise behind all of the Roundtable's work on race is that adopting a more race-conscious approach to community building and social justice work will

- broaden our understanding of the causes of the problems of poverty, inequity, and community distress in America;
- clarify our understanding of the forces that maintain the racial disparity status quo and limit the success of strategies for change;
- identify how and why an emphasis on racial equity might enhance the possibility of success in current and future social change efforts; and
- highlight new approaches that could complement and reinforce existing activities.

This publication represents an effort to apply the Roundtable's perspective on racial equity to the youth field.

AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth of color have experienced poor outcomes relative to their white counterparts historically, and these disparities persist today. Researchers have offered a number of explanations for these disparities, some of the more popular of which have focused on individual deficiencies. If one elucidates the underlying theories of change of dominant practices and public policies in the youth field, it appears that, despite variation in approach and emphasis, they too have focused on individual behavior.

While behavior is clearly an important contributor to the outcomes that individuals experience, it is not the sole determinant. Rather, we contend that there are larger, structural factors that contribute to the racial disparities between youth of color and their white counterparts that deserve systematic and sustained attention.

We use the term *structural racism* to define the many factors that contribute to and facilitate the maintenance of racial inequities in the United States today. A structural racism analytical framework identifies aspects of our history and culture that have allowed the privileges associated with "whiteness" and the disadvantages associated with "color" to endure and adapt over time. It points out the ways in which public policies and institutional practices contribute to inequitable racial outcomes. It lays out assumptions and stereotypes that are embedded in our culture that, in effect, legitimize racial disparities, and it illuminates the ways in which progress toward racial equity is undermined.

We apply a structural racism framework to the youth field, paying particular attention to the local, institutional, and cultural contexts in which youth develop. We consider the ways in which policies and practices in education, juvenile justice, and the labor market contribute to racially disparate outcomes among youth.

Based on this analysis, we recommend that those in the youth field

- adopt racially equitable outcomes as an explicit part of their mission and vision;
- work through uncomfortable issues that often arise when dealing with race and racism;
- identify their civic capacity to address this challenge, given resources and position;
- distinguish racial equity outcomes that they can affect or control from those that require allies and collaboration; and
- recognize that racially explicit issues may or may not imply racially explicit interventions.

These suggestions are not intended to imply that the youth field has completely ignored racial equity. On the contrary, there are a number of youth-focused organizations, several of which are run by young people, that have engaged in efforts to address this challenge. Nor are we suggesting that the youth field needs to take on vast new agendas. Rather, we write this document with the hope that it will facilitate discussions about the range of roles and activities the diverse set of actors that comprise the youth field can adopt to address structural racism as it relates to the healthy development of young people.

Unless we identify and address the manifestations of structural racism, we may help youth do better *in spite of* a set of pernicious mechanisms that sort them by race, but we will not change the fundamental conditions that help produce and maintain racially disparate outcomes. Moreover, the depth, breadth, and enduring nature of structural racism require sustained attention from many actors on several fronts. There is a role for every actor. A major challenge is to carve out feasible and meaningful roles in the face of a complex situation that can appear to be overwhelming. Current efforts to address structural racism need to be amplified. The strategies and tools used in this work need to be examined systematically, made more widely available, and used as a foundation for building the capacity of a broader group of actors in the youth field and in allied fields to address this fundamental societal problem.

FAR TOO MANY YOUTH IN THIS COUNTRY FAIL TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO ADULTHOOD.

INTRODUCTION

There has been much attention focused on the fact that far too many youth in this country fail to make a successful transition into adulthood. Researchers and analysts have offered a number of explanations for this phenomenon, many of which have focused on individual deficiencies. Indeed, in several examinations of racially disparate outcomes among youth that have received widespread attention, analysts suggest that individual behavior is a significant contributor to such outcomes.[1] Similarly, if one elucidates the underlying theories of change of dominant practices and public policies in the youth field it appears that, despite variation in approach and emphasis, they too have focused on the individual. Public investments in programs charged with improving outcomes for youth have traditionally focused on changing youth behavior. Thus, funding has been targeted to teenage pregnancy prevention, school dropout prevention, juvenile delinquency prevention, and so on.

Many adolescent development specialists have advocated the need to look beyond fixing youth problems to developing in youth the broad range of capacities they need to transition successfully into productive adulthood, and to actively engage youth in this process. Youth development specialists have identified several areas in which youth need to develop and be engaged, including social/emotional, moral/spiritual, civic, vocational, physical, cognitive, and personal/cultural. The chart below, developed by Karen Pittman and her colleagues, provides a concise summary of these areas, while a more elaborated version can be found in chapter 3 of the National Research Council's book *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*.

Although widespread adoption of this approach remains an elusive goal, this shift in focus helped move the youth field forward in important ways. One outcome of this work has been increased attention to features in programs and communities that create positive developmental settings.

A youth development approach is certainly more promising than the problem-oriented approach of many youth services. It is not, however, without limitations. Youth development operates from a focus on individual behavior, albeit with an asset-driven orientation. As the National Research Council describes this approach:

> All are part of a new direction in public policy that places children and adolescents once again at the center of neighborhood and community life, where they can engage with caring adults inside and outside their families, develop a sense of security and personal identity, and learn *rules of behavior, expectations, values, morals, and skills* needed to move into healthy and productive adulthood [our emphasis].[2]

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1. See, for example, Lawrence Mead, *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Free Press, 1986); John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: Free Press, 2000); Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom, eds., *Beyond the Color Line: New Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 2002). Press Publication Number 479.

2. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development,* ed. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer A. Gootman. Board on Children, Youth, and Families. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2002),

Clearly, attending to the developmental needs of young people is critically important, as is the focus on the community context within which development takes place. Numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits that young people gain from participating in developmentally focused activities.

Human ecology theory, however, suggests that attention to the immediate contexts of young peoples' lives is necessary but not sufficient. This theoretical framework recognizes
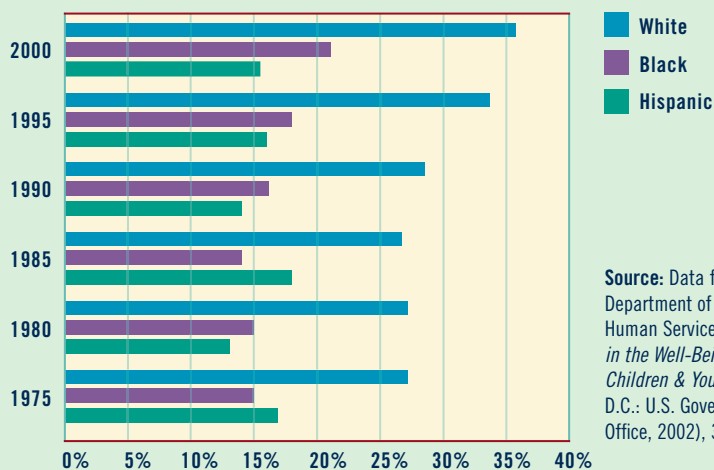
AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

- **Social/emotional development and engagement**—the ability to respond to and cope with positive and adverse situations, reflect on one's emotions and surroundings, engage in leisure and fun, and sustain caring friendships and relationships with others.

- **Moral/spiritual development and engagement**—the exploration of one's assumptions, beliefs, and values in an ongoing process of understanding how one relates to others and to the larger world, and developing a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

- **Civic development and engagement**—the growing recognition of one's impact on one's surroundings and responsibility to others, as well as the ability and opportunity to work collaboratively with others for a common goal.

- **Vocational development and engagement**—acquiring the functional and organizational skills necessary for employment, including an understanding of careers and options and pathways to reach these goals.

- **Physical development and engagement**—biological maturation and the developing ability to act in ways that best ensure current and future physical health for self and others.

- **Cognitive development and engagement**—the ability to gain basic knowledge, learn in school and other settings, use critical thinking, creative, problem solving and expressive skills and conduct independent study.

- **Personal/cultural development and engagement**—young peoples' increasing awareness of their own identity, including an awareness of the differences between and among individuals with different backgrounds, interests and traditions.

Development happens across a number of areas—not just academic and cognitive, but moral, cultural, physical, and many others. While development and engagement happen within a variety of domains or areas, this doesn't mean that these areas are distinct or unrelated. In fact, they are interdependent and overlapping. This list is meant only to give a sense of the range of tasks in which young people are involved as they grow and learn.

Source: Reprinted from Karen Pittman, Merita Irby et al. "Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?" (Tacoma Park, Md.: Forum for Youth Investment, 2001), 9. Based on K. Pittman and M. Irby, "Preventing Problems or Promoting Development?" (1996). Available online at www.forumforyouthinvestment.org.

A bar chart titled "High School Graduates Ages 25–29 Who Have Received a Bachelor's Degree or Higher" showing percentages for White, Black, and Hispanic groups across the years 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, and 2000.

Source: Data from U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children & Youth* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), 329.

the nested contexts within which youth development takes place. These contexts include the family and other local institutions and social systems such as community-based programs, schools, communities, and so on. Local contexts are subsumed within broader, often less tangible, political, cultural, and moral contexts that powerfully shape their features and boundaries. When we step back and take a look at the contexts in which young people live, we see that they are characterized by persistent racial disparities between people of color and white Americans.

Across neighborhoods, cities, and regions, well-documented racial disparity exists in overt and subtle forms in almost every quality of life arena.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Although the number of high school graduates who have received a bachelor's degree or higher has increased over the past thirty years, the gap between white, non-Hispanic graduates and those who are black or Hispanic has remained. In 1971, 23 percent of white, non-Hispanic high school graduates between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine had received a bachelor's degree or higher as compared to 12 percent of their black and 11 percent of their Hispanic counterparts. In 2001, 35 percent of whites had done so, as compared to 20 percent of their black and 18 percent of their Hispanic counterparts.

UNEQUAL CARE
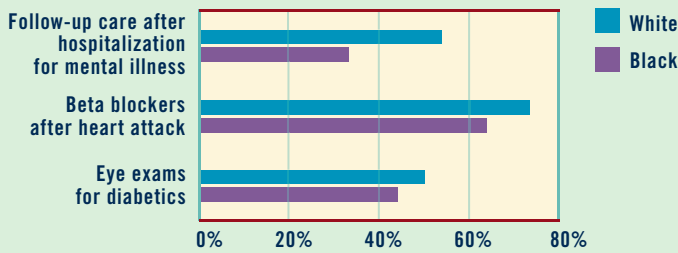
Source: Data from Eric C. Schneider et al., "Racial Disparities in the Quality of Care for Enrollees in Medicare Managed Care," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 287, 10 (March 13, 2002): 2.

- White
- Black

Follow-up care after hospitalization for mental illness
Beta blockers after heart attack
Eye exams for diabetics

0% 20% 40% 60% 80%

MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS 25 YEARS AND OLDER: 2001

- White
- Black
- Hispanic

Not High School Graduate
High School Graduate
Bachelor's Degree
Professional Degree
All Attainment Levels
Ph.D.
M.A.

$0 $20,000 $40,000 $60,000 $80,000 $100,000
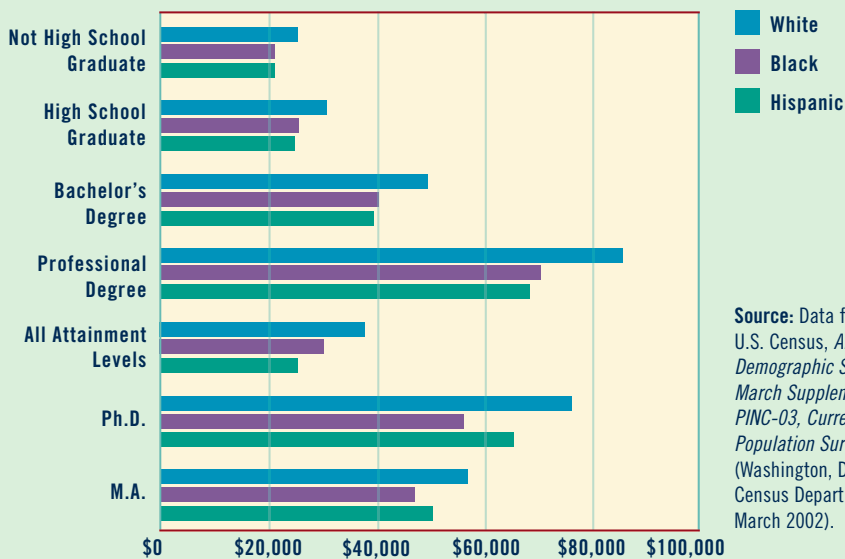
Source: Data from U.S. Census, *Annual Demographic Survey March Supplement PINC-03, Current Population Survey* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Department, March 2002).

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS: 1990 AND 2000

- 1990
- 2000

White (Non-Hispanic)
Black (Non-Hispanic)
Hispanic

$0 $20,000 $40,000 $60,000
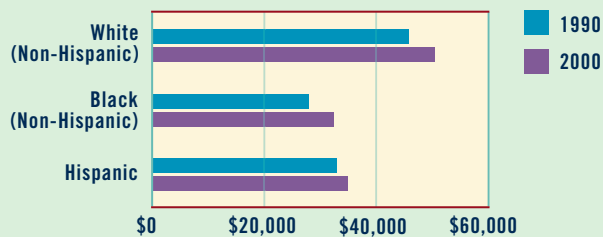
Source: John R. Logan, "Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks and Hispanics in Metropolitan America" (Albany, N.Y.: Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, October 13, 2002), 3.

ACCESS TO AND DELIVERY OF HEALTH CARE

Relative to whites, African Americans—and in some cases, Hispanics—are less likely to receive appropriate cardiac medication, undergo coronary artery bypass surgery, and receive peritoneal dialysis and kidney transplants. They are more likely to receive a lower quality of clinical services such as intensive care, *even when variations in such factors as insurance status, income, age, co-morbid conditions, and symptom expression are taken into account* [our emphasis].[3] In addition, as the chart above indicates, these disparities are found in follow-up treatment. Significantly, these differences are associated with greater mortality among African American patients.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Black owners in 1992 were less likely than other owners to have received bank financing for their businesses.[4] Those who received financing obtained smaller bank loans, on average, than their white counterparts. Black borrowers received average loans of $0.92 per equity dollar, all factors constant, while whites received $1.17 per equity dollar in loans.

Prospective lenders were four times more likely to deny credit to black-owned firms and twice as likely to deny it to Asian-owned firms than they were to deny it to firms owned by non-Hispanic whites.

Instead, black-owned firms accessed less-favorable forms of consumer credit, such as credit cards and home equity loans (29.6 percent) more often than white borrowers (18.4 percent).

EARNINGS

For all educational attainment levels, the earnings of black workers who are twenty-five years old and over and work full time, year round, were 80 percent of the earnings of their non-Hispanic white counterparts. The earnings of Hispanic workers were 66 percent of their non-Hispanic white counterparts.

INCOME

Data from the 1990 and 2000 census show persistent disparities between the median household incomes of non-Hispanic-white households on the one hand, and non-Hispanic black and Hispanic households on the other. The gap in income was evident in every region of this country.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In 2000, African Americans represented 12 percent of the overall population, but constituted 46 percent of all prison inmates and 42 percent of all jail inmates.

State and national data show evidence of racial disparities in the treatment of comparable whites, African Americans, and Hispanics in the criminal justice system. For example, in a study of sentencing disparities in the criminal justice system in Pennsylvania, John Kramer

3. Brian D. Smedley, Adrienne Y. Stith, and Alan R. Nelson, eds., *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*. Committee on Understanding and Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care. Board on Health Sciences Policy (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2003), 2–3.

4. Cassandra Cantave and Roderick Harrison, "Minority Population and Business Trends" (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2000, fact sheet).

and Jeffery Ulmer reported that African American and Hispanic males were more likely to be incarcerated and to receive longer sentences than white males who had similar offenses and criminal records.

The racial patterns presented above are typical. Any other indicator of social or economic status would present a similar picture. In some arenas, the racial disparities have shrunk over time, but the correlation between race and well-being in America remains powerful. A similar pattern of disparity is obvious when we consider indicators of well-being for youth of color and their white counterparts in these and related areas.

Poor outcomes for youth of color relative to their white peers have been documented in nearly every sector. In education, for example, African American and Latino youth are less likely to complete high school than white, non-Latino youth. They are also less likely to attend college or to receive a bachelor's or higher degree than their white counterparts.

Regarding employment outcomes, African American and Latino youth who live in central cities are more likely to be out of school and out of work (71 percent) than their white peers (21 percent). Among out-of-school youth who are employed, with rates averaging 57 percent and 68 percent, respectively, African American and Latino youth are less likely to be employed than white youth (75 percent).[5] When youth of color complete their education and join the workforce, their earnings trail behind those of their white counterparts.
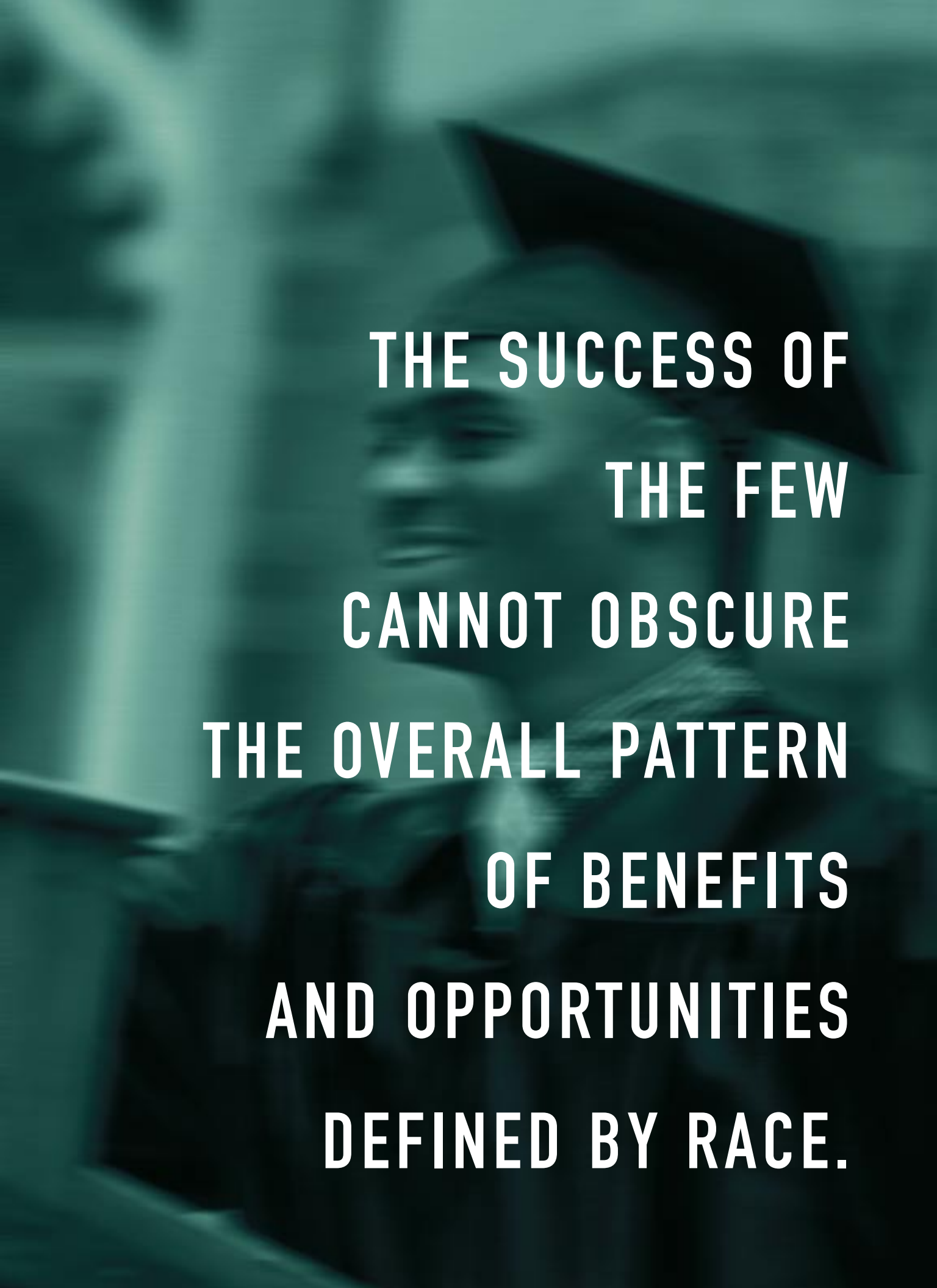
The disproportionate representation of African American youth in the juvenile justice system has been well documented. At nearly every stage of their involvement with this system, beginning with arrests and ending with sentencing, African American youth experience poorer outcomes than their white counterparts. For example, in 1997 African American youth were five times more likely to be in custody in a residential facility and, depending on the state, five to ten times more likely to be committed to a state prison than white youth.[6]

While there are fewer studies of youths' access to health care than there are for adults, researchers suggest that there is a similar pattern of racial disparity in the services that youth receive. In a systematic literature review, Arthur Elster and his colleagues found that African American youth—and in some cases, Hispanic youth—received fewer primary care, mental health, and asthma services than their white counterparts.[7] Like adults, this pattern persists even when family socioeconomic status and health insurance status are taken into account.

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5. Andrew Sum et al., "Left Behind in the Labor Market: Labor Market Problems of Out-of-School, Young Adult Population" (paper prepared for the Out-of-School Network, Chicago, November 2002).

6. Eileen Poe-Yamagata and Michael A. Jones, "And Justice for Some: Differential Treatment of Minority Youth in the Justice System" (Washington, D.C.: Building Blocks for Youth and Youth Law, 2000).

7. Arthur Elster et al., "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care for Adolescents: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 157, 9 (2003): 867. Researchers have also found that when controlling for important confounders, black children and adolescents were "12% less likely than white patients to be activated on the kidney transplant waiting list." See Susan L. Furth, "Racial Differences in Access to the Kidney Transplant Waiting List for Children and Adolescents with End-Stage Renal Disease," *Pediatrics* 106, 4 (October 2000): 756–62.

THE SUCCESS OF THE FEW CANNOT OBSCURE THE OVERALL PATTERN OF BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES DEFINED BY RACE.

HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES FOR 18–24-YEAR-OLDS: 1990–2000

White
Black
Hispanic

Source: Data from U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children & Youth* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), 325.
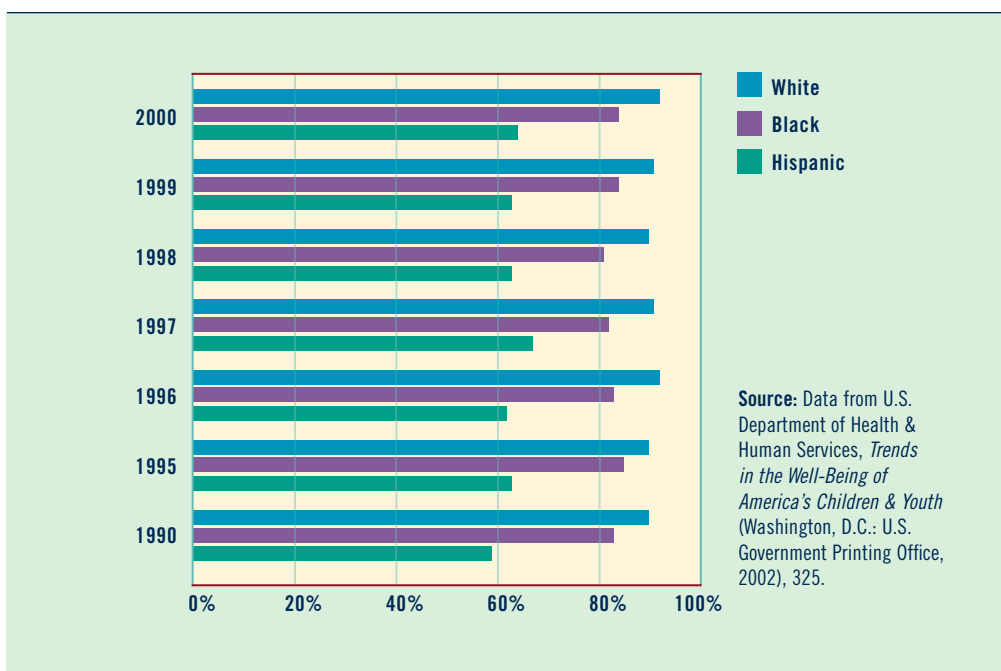
An examination of the ways in which race has shaped and continues to shape political, economic, and cultural life in this society—the broadest context within which youth develop—may shed light on these disparities and have implications for the youth field and the field of social change.

We believe this examination is important for deepening our understanding of barriers to the healthy, productive development of youth of color, and by extension, of barriers to promoting such development. White Americans remain significantly more likely than most racial minorities to have access to the elements that contribute to success, and to be rewarded fairly for their efforts. Without fully accounting for the historical and ongoing inequities between whites and people of color, the youth field and its allies in the antipoverty and community building fields risk pursuing strategies that are misguided, incomplete, or inappropriate to the challenge.

We believe this analysis is relevant to the youth field for at least four reasons.

Race and racism have implications for the areas of engagement and development that youth development specialists have identified as important. For example, identity formation is widely accepted as one of the most critical developmental tasks of adolescence. Achieving a well-integrated, solid racial identity is a key aspect of the developmental process. There are a number of factors that operate explicitly and implicitly to undermine this process for youth of color.

The disparities in outcomes between youth of color and their white counterparts, not unlike those among adults, are striking, enduring, and pervasive. The racial differences in the outcomes for youth of color and their white counterparts call for a deeper, more nuanced examination of broader societal, systemic factors that reach beyond individual assets, deficits, and behavior. This is not to suggest that individual behavior is unimportant. Rather, we assert that individual behavior is only one piece of a much larger picture.

In nearly every system that touches the lives of young people there are formal and informal policies and practices as well as cultural norms and stereotypes that contribute to racial disparities. A structural racism lens helps identify factors, even those that may appear neutral at face value, that contribute to racially disparate outcomes.

Finally, resiliency research has shown us that some young people are able to succeed even under the most devastating circumstances. Yet, the successes of a few individuals of color cannot obscure the overall pattern of opportunities and benefits that is defined by race.

There is an opportunity cost associated with having generations of youth growing up with the handicap of racial disparities that currently defines their lives. We contend that unless the broader structural factors that contribute to racial inequities are identified and addressed, youth development approaches may help youth do better *in spite of* a set of pernicious mechanisms that sort them by race, but will not change the fundamental conditions that help produce and maintain racially disparate outcomes.

The pages that follow review some of the ways in which race shapes political, economic, and cultural life in the United States. We begin with a discussion of the meaning of race. We then turn attention to *structural racism,* which refers to the factors that contribute to and facilitate the maintenance of racial inequities. It identifies aspects of our history and culture that allow privileges associated with "whiteness" and disadvantages associated with "color" to endure and adapt over time. We consider the legacy and enduring power of the racial history of this country, and characteristics of our national values, contemporary culture, and social processes. Following this we examine institutional policies and practices in education, juvenile justice, and employment. We conclude with an exploration of the implications of a structural racism perspective for the youth field.

SCIENTIFIC STUDIES CONCLUDE THAT RACE HAS NO BIOLOGICAL MEANING OR SIGNIFICANCE.

S cientific studies conclude that race has no biological meaning or significance. The gene for skin color is linked with no other human trait. The genes that account for intelligence, athletic ability, personality type, and even hair and eye color are independent of the gene for skin color. Humans are far more alike than they are different and share 99.9 percent of their genetic material.

Race does, however, have social and political significance. Social scientists call the term *race* a social construct, that is, it was invented and given meaning by humans. Why? Answering that question requires looking historically at the creation of racial categories, and what these categories have produced.

In the particular case of the United States, two racial groupings—white Europeans and all nonwhite "others"—emerged as primary categories early in our nation's history. Beginning with the expropriation of Native American lands, a racialized system of power and privilege developed and white dominance became the national common sense. This point of view opened the door to slavery, the taking of Mexican lands, and the limits set on Asian immigrants, and was woven over time into national legal and political doctrine. As a land committed to freedom, opportunity, and democracy, for example, America could justify the importation of slaves from Africa by defining them as nonhuman. This made it possible to deny Africans rights and freedoms granted to all "men who were created equal." Yet, when white Southerners wanted to increase their political representation in the legislature, they advocated the upgrade of Africans' legal status to three-fifths of a human being. Thus, from the earliest moments in our history, racial group identities granted access to resources and power to those who were "white" while excluding those who were "other" legally, politically, and socially. In the words of historian Manning Marable,

> When we talk about race, we don't mean a biological or genetic category, but rather, a way of interpreting differences between people which creates or reinforces inequalities among them. In other words, "race" is an unequal relationship between social groups, represented by the privileged access to power and resources by one group over another. Race is socially constructed, created (and recreated) by how people are perceived and treated in the normal actions of everyday life.[8]

Expressions of racism have evolved markedly over the course of American history, from slavery through Jim Crow through the civil rights era to today. Racism in 21st century America is harder to see than its previous incarnations because the most overt and legally sanctioned forms of racial discrimination have been eliminated. Nonetheless, subtler racialized patterns in policies and practices permeate the political, economic and sociocultural structures of America in ways that generate racialized differences in well-being between blacks (and other people of color) and whites. These dynamics work to maintain the existing racial hierarchy even as they adapt with the times to accommodate new racial and ethnic groups. This contemporary manifestation of racism in America can be called structural racism.

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8. Manning Marable, "Structural Racism and American Democracy" (paper presented at the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Related Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, 2000), 2.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

The notion of a structural racism system may not immediately resonate with everyone in our diverse society. Most Americans are proud of how far our nation has come on civil rights. Moreover, when most of us think of racism in the United States, the images that first come to mind tend to relate to slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the African American experience in particular. Few readily filter the histories of Native Americans, Chinese, Latino, and ethnic European immigrants through a structural racism prism.

Structural racism, however, touches and implicates everyone in our society—whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans—because it is a system for allocating social privilege. The lower end of the privilege scale, characterized by socioeconomic disadvantage and political isolation, has historically been associated with "blackness" or "color." Meanwhile, the upper end of the scale that gives access to opportunity, benefits, and power has been associated with "whiteness." Between the fixed extremes of whiteness and blackness there is a fluid hierarchy of social and political "spaces" that are occupied by different groups of color at various times.

Structural racism touches and implicates everyone in our society—whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans—because it is a system for allocating social privilege.

Racial status can change. A subordinated group in one era can move closer to or into the mainstream in another era through a combination of its own acculturation efforts and a favorable shift in mainstream public opinion. As we have seen with the Irish, Italians, and Jews in America in the past, and currently with some "model minorities," subordinated groups can "become white" given particular opportunity contexts.

It must be stressed that position and mobility within the structural racism system, which in some ways resembles a caste system, are never determined by its subordinated groups. How those who are at the blackness end of the spectrum perceive themselves, or how they behave, is less significant to their racial privilege status than broadly held stereotypes of them. European ethnic immigrants to nineteenth-century America could not "become white" by simply adopting the mainstream habits and declaring themselves its members. They had to be allowed access into occupational, educational, residential, and other settings that had previously excluded them. Racial group position, in other words, reflects the exclusionary or inclusionary exercise of political, economic, and cultural power by those in the dominant group.

A structural racism lens allows us to see more clearly how our nation's core values—and the policies, institutions, and practices that are built on them—perpetuate social stratifications and outcomes that all too often reflect racial sorting, rather than individual merit and effort. It allows us to see and understand

- the racial legacy of our past;
- how racism persists in our national institutions;
- how racism is transmitted, and either amplified or mitigated through community level institutions; and
- how individuals internalize and respond to racialized structures.

It also allows us to see that, as a society, we more or less take for granted a context of white leadership, dominance, and privilege. This dominant consensus on race is the frame that shapes our attitudes and judgments about social issues. It has come about as a result of the way that *historically accumulated white privilege, national values, and contemporary culture* have interacted to preserve the gaps between white Americans and Americans of color. We now turn to a discussion of each of these.

THE LEGACY AND ENDURING POWER OF OUR RACIAL HISTORY: WHITE PRIVILEGE

Historically accumulated white privilege refers to whites' historical and contemporary advantage in areas such as:

- Education
- Decent jobs and livable wages
- Homeownership
- Retirement plans and other employment benefits
- Health and access to health care
- Control of the media
- Political representation and voting
- Accumulation of wealth

All of these have helped to create and sustain advantages in the accumulation of wealth, power, and other dimensions of well-being.

An example of the way in which historical privilege has a legacy that carries through to today can be found in average levels of wealth accumulation between groups. Blacks and whites who earn the same salaries today have significantly different wealth levels (savings, investments, capital assets, and so on). As the following chart demonstrates, whites earning between $50,001 and $75,000 have a wealth level that is almost three times as high as their black counterparts.
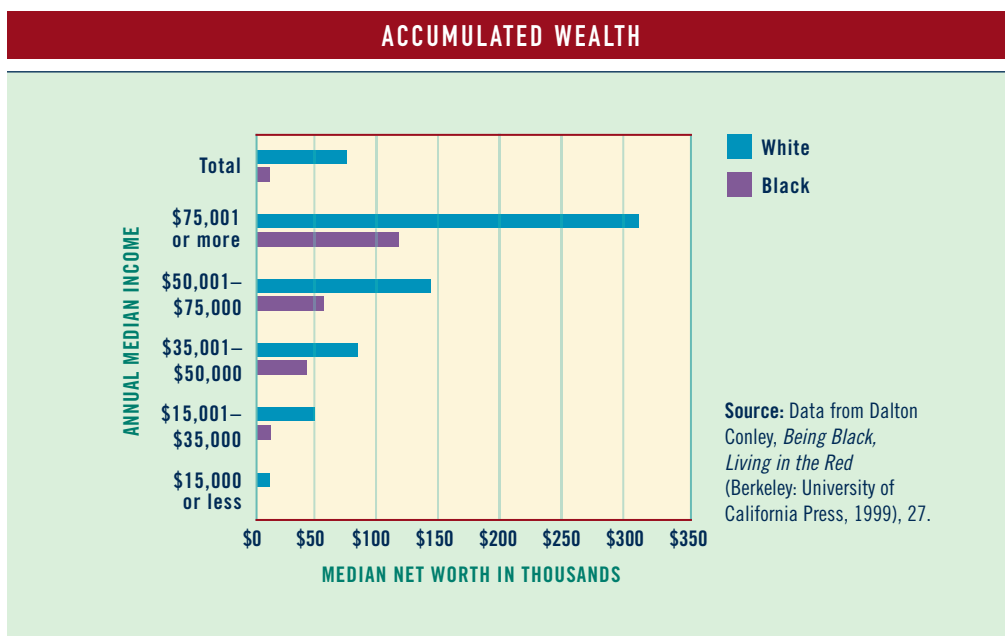
ACCUMULATED WEALTH

Source: Data from Dalton Conley, *Being Black, Living in the Red* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 27.

HISTORICALLY ACCUMULATED WHITE PRIVILEGE CREATES AND SUSTAINS A LEGACY OF ADVANTAGE.

What explains this difference?

Significant numbers in the current generation of white adult Americans, along with their parents, grandparents, and other forebears

- benefited from access to good educational institutions;
- had access to decent jobs and fair wages;
- accumulated retirement benefits through union membership and Social Security; and
- benefited from homeownership policies and programs that allowed them to buy property in rising neighborhoods.

By contrast, significant numbers in the current generation of adults of color, along with their parents, grandparents, and other forebears

- came from a background of slavery or labor exploitation;
- were limited by de jure or de facto segregation;
- Were generally confined to jobs in areas such as agricultural or domestic labor, and excluded from jobs that allowed them to accumulate savings and retirement benefits; and
- Were discriminated against by lending institutions as individuals and as residents of neighborhoods of color by way of redlining, among other policies.

In other words, at pivotal points in U.S. history when socioeconomic factors produced abundant opportunities for wealth and property accumulation—such as the GI Bill and home mortgage subsidies—white Americans were positioned to take advantage of them, whereas Americans of color were systematically prohibited from benefiting from them.

We can see how these dynamics play out today in one of the major avenues for wealth accumulation, homeownership.

HOME OWNERSHIP RATES: 2002

White
Black
Latino

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Source: Joint Center for Housing Studies, "State of the Nation's Housing" (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2003), 16.

HOME PURCHASE LOAN APPLICATION DENIAL RATES BY RACE: 2000

White
Black
Latino

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Source: Federal Financial Institutions Examinations Council, Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Data. www.ffiec.gov/hmcrpr/hm00table3.pdf.

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Statistics about access to credit, a key stepping stone on the path to homeownership, indicate that these inequities are likely to continue for some time.

As descendants of people who have a legacy of accumulated disadvantage, in nearly every aspect of life, youth of color start with an uneven footing relative to their white counterparts. Youth experience the effects of these racial inequities at multiple levels.

Lack of homeownership limits the opportunity for adults to experience one of the most fundamental sources of wealth accumulation. While the economic ramifications of the racial disparities in homeownership are borne largely by adults, youth of color are also disadvantaged. Parents who do not own homes lack access to home equity that can be tapped to pay for such as things as education for their children. They also lack a potentially valuable material resource that can be passed on to their children. Moreover, homeownership has been associated with a number of important youth outcomes. Richard Green and Michelle White report that children of homeowners, regardless of socioeconomic status, are less likely to drop out of school, get arrested, or become teen parents relative to children of families who are renters.[9]

That wealth is most likely to build upon itself, and poverty most likely to undermine those in its grip, is well known. These patterns have deep historical roots in the United States, a fact that is often forgotten in the blur of trying to sort out racial disparities and contradictions. The American mind-set is deeply invested with strong beliefs about opportunity. As a result, we tend to overlook the built-in advantages that whites have in most competitive areas.

In an article titled "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Peggy McIntosh describes how across the board white people benefit on a regular basis from privileges of which they may not even be conscious. According to McIntosh, white privilege is

> . . . an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious.

> . . . It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage . . . is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all.[10]

Race has been and continues to be a valuable resource for white Americans of all ages. It grants them differential access to and provides them better insulation from negative pre-judgments based on physical features, language, and other cultural factors, relative to their nonwhite counterparts.

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9. Richard K. Green and Michelle J. White, "Measuring the Benefits of Homeowning: Effects on Children," Wisconsin–Madison CULER Working Paper 94-05 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Center for Urban Land Economic Research, 1994). Cited in William M. Rohe and Leslie S. Stewart, "Homeownership and Neighborhood Stability," *Housing Policy Debate* 7, 1 (1996): 37–81.

10. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace and Freedom* (July–August 1989): 10–12.

The backdrop of core American values also sets the stage for our national consensus on race. We take great pride in our national values of personal responsibility and individualism, meritocracy, and equal opportunity, and we assume them to be race neutral. We understand these values to have the following significance:

Personal responsibility and individualism: The belief that people control their fates regardless of social position, and that individual behaviors and choices determine material outcomes.

Meritocracy: The belief that resources and opportunities are distributed according to talent and effort, and that the social components of "merit"—such as access to inside information or powerful social networks—are of lesser importance or do not matter much.

Equal opportunity: The belief that the employment, education, and wealth accumulation arenas are "level playing fields" and that race is no longer a barrier to progress in these areas.

In a perfect world, with all else held equal, our national values would translate directly into the reality of daily experience for all Americans. In our imperfect world with its many inequities, however, these values inevitably lead to different outcomes for different individuals.

Where one starts out in life affects where one ends up to a greater degree than our national sense of economic mobility would have us believe.

While we treasure notions of individual accomplishment, meritocracy, and equal opportunity, in fact, individuals are members of families, communities, and social groups, and their individual trajectories will be affected—though not necessarily totally determined—by the overall status of their group. Those born into disadvantaged communities cannot be blamed for the insufficient education they receive in their local public schools, and the consequent challenges they face as unskilled job seekers. Where one starts out in life affects where one ends up to a greater degree than our national sense of economic mobility would have us believe.

> A child born in the bottom 10 percent of families ranked by income has a 31 percent chance of ending up there as an adult and a 51 percent chance of ending up in the bottom 20 percent, while one born in the top 10 percent has a 30 percent chance of staying there and a 43 percent chance of being in the top 20 percent.[11]

Ironically, when one member of a minority group "makes it" and manages to make a successful transition to adulthood—graduating from high school with honors, attending prominent colleges and universities, getting impressive jobs, and so on—that young person's success is taken as evidence that the system is "working," that our national values do indeed create an equal playing field and opportunities. But of course, a star performer from any racial or ethnic group is just that: a star performer. While we should applaud the fact that a highly gifted person of any racial group should be allowed to succeed in this country, we need to pay attention to the averages. On average, a person with a resource-rich background has a greater likelihood of succeeding than one without. Unfortunately, the availability of many of those resources is correlated with race in this country.

A structural racism lens does not call for the abolition of our national values. It calls instead for the rearticulation of those values in ways that recognize where all Americans stand because of their historical group experiences on these shores. The tension here is that structural racism focuses on unequal group outcomes while our core national values emphasize social, economic, and political philosophies that are centered on the individual.

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11. Alan B. Krueger, "The Apple Falls Close to the Tree," *New York Times,* 14 November 2002.

CONTEMPORARY MEDIA
CONTRIBUTES TO
NEGATIVE
GENERALIZATIONS
OF YOUTH OF COLOR.

While national values help to organize broad views about what is fair, just, and equitable, Americans rely on many other commonsense cues as they make everyday judgments about other individuals and groups. These cues, which consist of bits of information about racial, ethnic, gender, immigrant, and other groups, accumulate and become stereotypes that are reinforced in multiple aspects of the mass culture.

Over our nation's history, many of the negative stereotypes associated with various demographic categories have become dominant and enduring. They now operate as the default cultural representations, or "frames," that organize many of our ways of understanding and interpreting individual behavior and group tendencies. Moreover, whether or not they are accurate, these cultural representations have become integral parts of the societal crucible in which public policies and institutional practices are fashioned and refined.

With respect to group attitudes, for instance, the 1990 General Social Survey found that 60 percent of whites surveyed believed that blacks *preferred* to "live off welfare," and 46 percent believed that the same was true for Hispanics (our emphasis). In contrast, only 4 percent of the same white survey respondents believed that other whites preferred to live off welfare. The same survey reported that whites were more than twice as likely as blacks to believe that blacks "lacked commitment to strong families." Similar stereotypes were reported about the intelligence level of people of color, the tendency of people of color to be violence-prone, and the tendency of people of color to be lazy. And, in a finding related to the highly stereotypical attitudes held about the outcomes of affirmative action programs, 77 percent of the whites surveyed believed that it was likely that less-qualified blacks would be admitted to college at the expense of their own admission.

While the information and entertainment media, art, language, religion, and commerce have the potential to contribute to progressive social change, they are too often avenues for stereotype formation and reinforcement. Television and print media have a particularly strong influence on American culture, and they act both to contribute to negative generalizations about people of color and to perpetuate the invisibility of people of color in legitimate or prestigious venues. Consider how television coverage of crime contributes to stereotypes that are important to the maintenance of structural racism.

In a study of local television news crime coverage, Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki found that African Americans are depicted as a single, undifferentiated, and more threatening group relative to their white counterparts. Entman and Rojecki reported that news shows are less likely to put on screen the names of African Americans who are accused of violent crimes than for whites, which the researchers noted "tends to efface the differences among individual blacks."[12] They also noted a disparity in the portrayal of physical custody and, although the database was small, in the use of mug shots.

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12. Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 82–83.

PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

Surveys continue to reveal the existence of harmful racial stereotypes.

PERCENTAGE SAYING . . .	WHITES	BLACKS	OTHERS
"Blacks tend to be lazy . . . "	40%	19%	45%
"Blacks tend to be violence-prone . . . "	51%	41%	60%
"Hispanics tend to be violence-prone . . . "	40%	41%	40%
"Blacks tend to be intelligent . . . "	27%	46%	29%
"Hispanics tend to be intelligent . . . "	22%	37%	36%
"Asians tend to be intelligent . . . "	46%	54%	50%
"Whites tend to be intelligent . . . "	50%	50%	52%

Source: Data from *General Social Survey Cumulative Data File* (1990). See http://sda.berkeley.edu: 7502/D3/GSS02/Doc/gs02.htm.

ATTITUDES TOWARD WORK AND SUCCESS

In contrast to these popular *perceptions*, surveys of blacks and whites generally find them equally likely to express strong beliefs in individualism and personal responsibility.

PERCENTAGE SAYING . . .	WHITES	BLACKS
"Welfare makes people work less . . . "	87%	73%
"I enjoy working even if I don't need the money . . . "	61%	63%
"Socioeconomic success comes from special abilities . . . "	49%	48%
"In our society everyone should look out for himself . . . "	31%	40%
"People get ahead by their own hard work . . . "	66%	60%

Source: Data from *General Social Survey Cumulative Data File* (1990). See http://sda.berkeley.edu: 7502/D3/GSS02/Doc/gs02.htm.

While there is substantially less research on the portrayals of youth in the news, it shows evidence of racial biases in essentially the same pattern as that characterizing adult portrayals. Youth of color are more likely to be associated with crime and violence than their white counterparts. A study of news magazines found that the first use of the phrase "young black male" in a *Time* or *Newsweek* cover story appeared in an article about black crime. Subsequent references to young black males and later Hispanic males were similarly linked to crime such that some noted that the phrase became "synonymous with the word criminal."[13]

Research on speakers and speaking roles in local TV news stories about youth and violence demonstrated that while adult males were the predominant speakers on such stories,

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13. Lori Dorfman and Vincent Schiraldi, "Off Balance: Youth, Race and Crime in the News" (prepared for Building Blocks for Youth, April 2001, mimeographed), 14.

PORTRAYAL OF BLACKS AND WHITES IN LOCAL CRIME NEWS STORIES: 1993–1994

Source: Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 82–83.
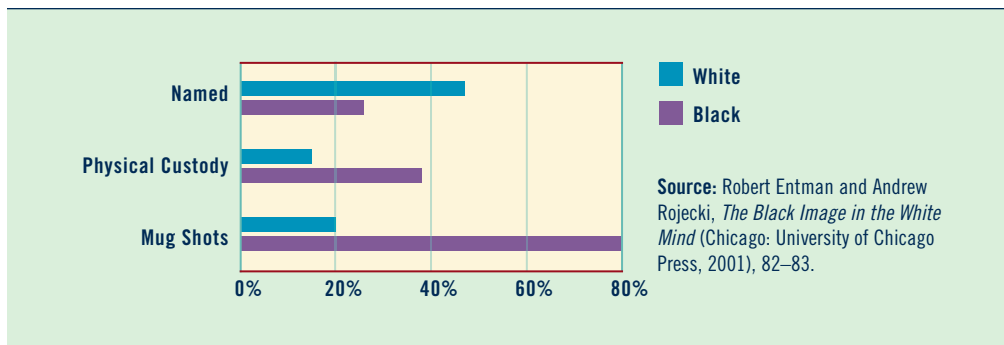
when youth did speak, youth of color were generally represented as victims or witnesses of violence, as threats, and as criminals or suspects. Their white counterparts were more likely to be portrayed in the more sympathetic role as victims of unintentional injury.[14] Research on youth images on the news showed a similar pattern. Youth of color appeared in crime news 52 percent of the time while white youth did so 35 percent of the time. In contrast, white youth were more likely to appear in health and education stories (13 percent) than youth of color (2 percent).[15]

Racial stereotyping is unhealthy for whites as well as blacks. Identity formation is one of the most critical developmental tasks of adolescence. Those who are able to develop a positive racial identity are more likely to experience positive mental health and psychological well-being. Negative stereotyping of people of color can produce an unfounded sense of entitlement and superiority among whites, and an internalized sense of failure or hopelessness among people of color. Psychological studies of African American adolescents have demonstrated that consistent negative imaging contributes to negative self-acceptance and mental health problems.[16]

Moreover, the attitudes that manifest themselves at the individual level can also aggregate all the way up into a national consensus about race that, in turn, influences policies and practices. There is consensus among social scientists that the kind of racial stereotyping that undergirds structural racism is virtually automatic, often unconscious, and widespread.[17] Sociologist Lawrence Bobo and colleagues characterize national attitudes about race and the acceptance of racial inequities as "laissez-faire racism." They observe that

14. Lori Dorfman, "The Roles of Speakers in Local Television News Stories on Youth and Violence," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 26, 2 (Summer 1998): 80–86.

15. Center for Media and Public Affairs, "What's the Matter with Kids Today? Images of Teenagers on Local and National TV News," *Media Monitor* 14, 5 (September/October 2000).

16. Cleopatra Howard Caldwell et al., "Racial Identity, Maternal Support, and Psychological Distress among African American Adolescents," *Child Development* 73, 4 (2002): 1322.

17. Nathalie F. P. Gilfoyle et al., *Brief Amicus Curiae of the American Psychological Association in Support of Respondents* in The Supreme Court of the United States, Barbara Grutter, Petitioner v. Lee Bollinger et al., Respondents, and Jennifer Gratz and Patrick Hamacher, Petitioners v. Lee Bollinger et al., Respondents (2003).

. . . in post–World War II U.S. society, the racial attitudes of white Americans involve a shift from Jim Crow racism to laissez-faire racism. As part of this change, we witnessed the virtual disappearance of overt bigotry, of demands for strict segregation, of advocacy of government-mandated discrimination, and of adherence to the belief that blacks are the categorical intellectual inferiors to whites. The decline in full-blown Jim Crow racism, however, has not resulted in its opposite, a thoroughly antiracist popular ideology based on an embracing and democratic vision of the common humanity, worth, dignity, and place in the polity for blacks alongside whites. Instead, the institutionalized racial inequalities created by the long era of slavery followed by Jim Crow racism are now popularly accepted and condoned under a modern free market or laissez-faire racist ideology. Laissez-faire racism involves persistent negative-stereotyping of African Americans, a tendency to blame blacks themselves for the black-white gap in socioeconomic standing, and resistance to meaningful political efforts to ameliorate U.S. racist social conditions and institutions.[18]

Experimental studies of the effects of news stories on the public suggest that television images have the potential to catalyze and reinforce public policies and decisions that contribute to racially disparate outcomes. Researchers found a strong association between crime stories that included youth of color as offenders and viewer's fears and public policy stances: "A mere five-second exposure to a mug shot of African American and Hispanic youth offenders (in a 15 minute newscast) raises levels of fear among viewers, increases support for 'get tough' crime policies, and promotes racial stereotyping."[19]

Research has also shown that when students were given the same information about black and white suspects, they rated the black suspects less favorably than the white suspects. Relative to their white counterparts, black suspects were viewed as being "more guilty, more likely to commit future violence and deserving of punishment."[20]

18. Lawrence Bobo, James R. Kleugel, and Ryan A. Smith, "Laissez-Faire Racism: The Crystallization of a 'Kinder, Gentler' Anti-Black Ideology," in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change,* ed. Steven A. Tuch and Jack K. Martin (Greenwood, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), 15–44.

19. F. D. Gilliam Jr. and S. Iyengar, "The Superpredator Script," *Nieman Reports* 52 (1998), 46.

20. M. Peffley, T. Shields, and B. Williams, "The Intersection of Race and Crime in Television News Stories: An Experimental Study," *Political Communication* 13 (2001): 309–27, as cited in Dorfman and Schiraldi, "Off Balance," 23.

THE PROCESSES THAT MAINTAIN
THE RACIAL STATUS QUO

Our history, national values, and culture are the backdrop for understanding structural racism. But it is important to recognize that the racial status quo is maintained in part because it adapts and changes over time. Racism in America has its own particular dynamics that sometimes move us forward toward greater racial equity, sometimes move us backward, and sometimes change the nature of the problem itself. The two most important of these dynamics are "racial sorting" and "progress and retrenchment."

RACIAL SORTING

Racial sorting refers to both the physical segregation and the psychological sorting of racial and ethnic groups that occur through social and cultural processes and stereotyping.

Although federal legislation barring racial discrimination in key domains such as housing, employment, and public accommodations was passed in 1964, racial and ethnic groups are largely isolated from one another in contemporary America. Analyses of the 2000 census show that, despite increasing racial and ethnic diversity in national-level statistics, the country remains as segregated as ever. Most visible is the consistent relationship between race and residence: white Americans live in neighborhoods that are, on average, more than 80 percent white and no more than 7 percent black, while the average black or Hispanic person lives in a neighborhood that is about one-third white and two-thirds nonwhite.[21] Because a person's place of residence is strongly linked to access to schools, business districts, jobs, and so on, this residential "hypersegregation" translates directly into racial sorting in education, commerce, employment, and other public venues.

Physical proximity to other racial groups may not necessarily create social equity, but hypersegregation is clearly problematic. When groups do not interact, their knowledge of one another is less likely to be based on personal experience and more likely to be informed by hearsay, media portrayals, and cultural stereotypes. Lack of genuine interpersonal contact contributes to a psychological distancing from those who are perceived as "other," which, in turn, undermines opportunities for trust, empathy, and common purpose to develop. This psychological sorting reinforces and compounds the physical and geographic sorting process. Face-to-face interaction among diverse groups, on the other hand, helps to reduce prejudice.[22]

In theory, physical and psychological racial segregation do not need to equate with advantage and disadvantage. But in the United States, historically and today, racial homogeneity of neighborhoods has been highly correlated with income and overall well-being. For the most part, neighborhoods that are predominantly white enjoy better schools, lower crime, better transportation access, better environmental conditions, and so on.

21. John Logan, "Ethnic Diversity Grows, Neighborhood Integration Lags Behind" (Albany, N.Y.: Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, 2001).

22. Gilfoyle et al., *Brief Amicus Curiae of the American Psychological Association*, 14.

Moreover, this racialized "neighborhood gap" in equality actually grew in the past decade as whites who earned more moved to neighborhoods that matched their own economic status while blacks and Hispanics continued to be less able to move to better neighborhoods.[23]

As a nation, we have not found a way to make "separate but equal" work. In our political economy, groups of color are continually "sorted" and experience marginalization, isolation, exclusion, exploitation, and subordination relative to those who are white. The links between whiteness and privilege and that between color and disadvantage are maintained, even today, through these sorting processes.

Youth of color experience racial sorting and its outcomes on at least two levels, which we refer to as first-order sorting and second-order sorting. The former refers to the sorting youth experience by virtue of the fact that they live with adults who are themselves subject to racial sorting. Second-order sorting refers to the sorting youth experience directly. Both forms reinforce the inferior status of youth of color in society and compromise their ability to make a successful transition to productive adulthood.

First-order sorting is reflected in the data about the type of segregation that adults of color experience. Thus, many youths of color grow up in households that experience restrictions in where they can live. This sorting in turn affects access to a range of opportunities, not the least of which includes employment and high-quality education. For example, data suggest that the geographic racial sorting that characterizes cities across the country negatively affects the employment prospects of youth of color. Katherine O'Regan and John Quigley reported that the unemployment rates for black youth are higher in metropolitan areas where the black population is spatially isolated. O'Regan and Quigley acknowledge that the discrepancy in human capital is the largest source of racial disparities in employment rates for youth, but contend that youths' access to information networks and to jobs is a substantial contributor to these disparities. The authors conclude:

> Results suggest that the overall effects of space on employment outcomes are substantial, explaining between ten and 40 percent of the observed racial differences in employment in four urban areas examined. Of this "spatial" effect, the bulk arises from social/informational measures; job access appears to play a much smaller role. However, when measured more precisely, at the census tract level, job access does have a significant effect on youth employment. This effect is less important than other spatial influences. Spatial influences are less important in explaining outcomes than are differences in human capital.[24]

Second-order sorting occurs in all major systems in which youth participate. For example, in the schools, youth of color are more likely than their white counterparts to be sorted into special education, less challenging subjects, and disciplinary programs. In the juvenile justice system, youth of color are more likely than their white counterparts to be arrested, sent to detention, and sent to adult court.

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23. John Logan, "Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks and Hispanics in Metropolitan America" (Albany, N.Y.: Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, 2002).

24. Katherine O'Regan and John Quigley, "The Effect of Social Networks and Concentrated Poverty on Black and Hispanic Youth Unemployment," *Annals of Regional Science* 27, 4 (December 1993): 327.

PROGRESS AND RETRENCHMENT

Perhaps the most discouraging characteristic of structural racism is its adaptability and resilience. The forces that permit structural racism to endure are dynamic and shift with the times. So, as progress is made toward racial equity on a particular policy front, a backlash may develop on another front that could undo or undermine any gains, or powerful interests may move to preserve the racial order in other ways. The net effect tends to be a repositioning of the color line rather than its erasure.

The clearest examples of this retrenchment have been in the consistent challenges to affirmative action, but there are many more subtle and less direct ways in which equity gains can be counteracted. For example, the Fair Housing Act of 1968 guaranteed equal access to housing for all, but people of color continued to be quietly excluded from high-quality suburban housing by discriminatory lending practices, zoning regulations that dictated the size of a house or restricted multifamily dwellings, and public underinvestment in mass transportation between cities and suburbs. Or, while the historic 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision prohibited racial segregation in public schools, it was undermined by subsequent court decisions.[25] As a result of this and continued residential segregation, across the nation, black and Latino students are more racially isolated from whites in their schools today than just twenty years ago.[26]

It is helpful here to remind ourselves again that race is a social construct. Racial hierarchy preserves a social order in which power, privilege, and resources are unequally distributed, and no individual, institution, or policy needs to be activated to preserve the current way of operating: it is built in. Structural racism identifies the ways in which that system is maintained, even as it is contested, protected, and contested again.

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25. For a short summary of leading court decisions on desegregation between 1895 and 1995, see Applied Research Center, "46 Years after Brown v. Board of Ed: Still Separate, Still Unequal" (Oakland, Calif.: Applied Research Center, 2000, research brief), 10–11.

26. Erica Frankenberg and Chungmei Lee, "Race in American Public Schools: Rapidly Resegregating School Districts" (Cambridge, Mass.: Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, August 2002); John R. Logan, Deirdre Oakley, and Jacob Stowell, "Segregation in Neighborhoods and Schools: Impacts on Minority Children in the Boston Region" (paper prepared for presentation at the Harvard Color Lines Conference, Cambridge, Mass., September 2003).

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The backdrop of historically accumulated white privilege, national values, and contemporary culture is the context within which our major institutions, such as health care, education, the labor market, and the criminal justice system, operate today. While we expect the policies and practices of these institutions to be race neutral, they are inevitably influenced by this racialized context and, therefore, contribute to the production of racially disparate outcomes.

If background forces go unrecognized and unexamined, racial disparities such as those typically seen in the labor market and criminal justice systems are understood simply as unintended consequences of "neutral" or, by and large, "fair" industry policies and practices. Sorting and stereotyping reinforce this, as they work to legitimize, or at least explain, the inequitable outcomes in employment, housing, health care, education, and other opportunity areas.
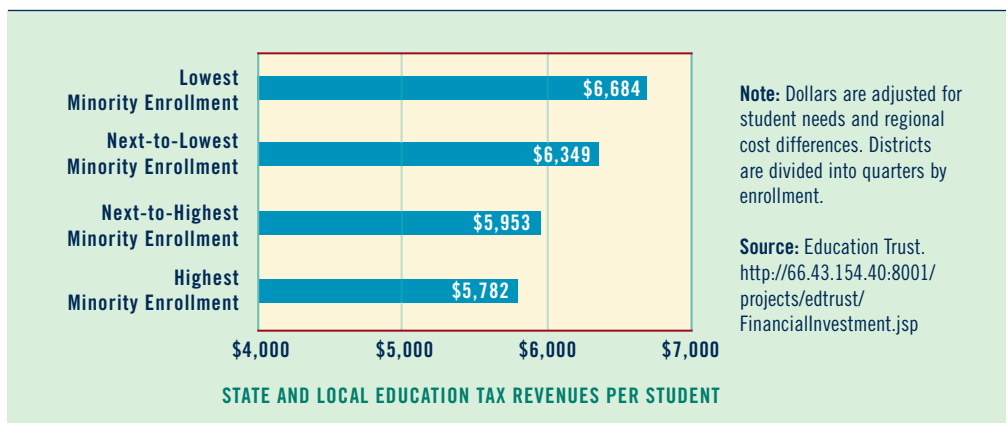
Following are some examples of how structural racism operates within the key areas of education, juvenile justice, and the labor market.

EDUCATION

Public education is probably the national system that holds the greatest potential for reducing racial inequities over time. It is universally available and invests in children at an early age when, in theory, environmental influences are less deterministic and youth can achieve according to individual talents. However, close examinations of educational systems across the nation reveal that black and Latino students are more segregated now than two decades ago, that the schools they attend are comparatively underresourced, and within the schools they are provided fewer academic opportunities and are treated more punitively than their white counterparts.

Nationwide, the school districts with the highest minority enrollment have, on average, $902 fewer dollars to spend per student than school districts with the lowest minority enrollment. This adds up to a difference of $22,550 per class of twenty-five students.

NATIONAL EDUCATION DOLLARS BY DISTRICT MINORITY ENROLLMENT: 1996–2000

Minority Enrollment	State and Local Education Tax Revenues Per Student
Lowest Minority Enrollment	$6,684
Next-to-Lowest Minority Enrollment	$6,349
Next-to-Highest Minority Enrollment	$5,953
Highest Minority Enrollment	$5,782

STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATION TAX REVENUES PER STUDENT

Note: Dollars are adjusted for student needs and regional cost differences. Districts are divided into quarters by enrollment.

Source: Education Trust. http://66.43.154.40:8001/ projects/edtrust/ FinancialInvestment.jsp

SCHOOL FUNDING IN SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE NEW YORK CITY AREA

SCHOOL DISTRICT	WHITE STUDENTS	STUDENTS OF COLOR	SPENDING PER PUPIL
Manhasset	80.0%	20.0%	$20,981
Jericho	85.7%	14.3%	$17,255
Great Neck	77.6%	22.4%	$18,627
Mt. Vernon	9.9%	90.1%	$11,095
Roosevelt	0.3%	99.7%	$10,320
New York City	15.0%	85.0%	$10,469

Source for spending data: New York State, Statistical Profiles of School Districts, June 2002.
Source for racial demographic data: New York State, Statistical Profiles of School Districts, 1997.

Looking closely at specific school districts reveals even greater inequities in investments. In the predominately white school district of Manhasset, just outside New York City, students receive twice as many resources as their predominately black and Latino counterparts in or close to New York City's urban core.[27]

These expenditure data are relatively reliable indicators of resources that are needed for schools to create settings that promote academic success for students: smaller class sizes; experienced teachers trained in their assigned subjects; high-quality academic, social, and physical development materials and infrastructure; up-to-date curricula; enrichment opportunities; and so on.
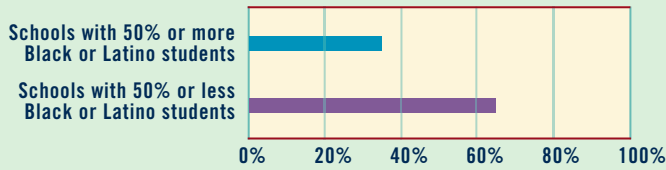
Differences in school financing by race are not the only indicator of unequal educational experiences between students of color and white students. Within school districts, schools with high concentrations of students of color allocate fewer instructional resources than schools in the same district that have lower concentrations of such students.[28] As one example, public schools where white students are in the majority are more than twice as likely to offer a significant number of advanced placement classes than schools where black and Latino students are in the majority. Moreover, there are racial differences in the ways in which students are treated within the schools themselves. Studies show that black and Latino students with the same test scores as white and Asian students are much less likely to be placed in accelerated courses and much more likely to be placed in low-track courses:

> As a group, African-American and Latino students scored lower on achievement tests than whites and Asians in Rockford and San Jose. However, African American and Latino students were much less likely than white or Asian students

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27. This chart is based on the format used in Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), updated with current data.

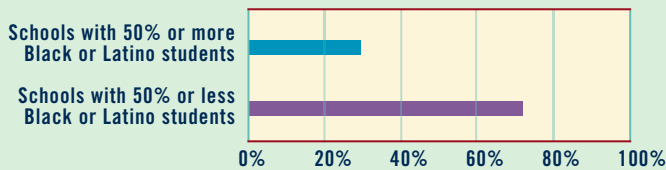28. Linda Darling-Hammond, "Apartheid in American Education: How Opportunity Is Rationed to Children of Color in the United States," in *Racial Profiling and Punishment in U.S. Public Schools: How Zero Tolerance Policies and High Stakes Testing Subvert Academic Excellence and Racial Equity*, ed. Tammy Johnson, Jennifer Emiko-Boyden, and William J. Pittz (Oakland, Calif.: Applied Research Center, 2001), 39–44.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OFFERING 15 OR MORE AP CLASSES

Schools with 50% or more
Black or Latino students

Schools with 50% or less
Black or Latino students

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Source: Applied Research Center, "46 Years after Brown v. Board of Ed: Still Separate, Still Unequal" (Oakland, Calif: Applied Research Center, 2000, research brief), 9.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OFFERING 19 OR MORE AP CLASSES

Schools with 50% or more
Black or Latino students

Schools with 50% or less
Black or Latino students

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Source: Applied Research Center, "46 Years after Brown v. Board of Ed: Still Separate, Still Unequal" (Oakland, Calif: Applied Research Center, 2000, research brief), 9.

with the same test scores to be placed in accelerated courses. For example, in San Jose, Latino eighth-graders with "average" scores in mathematics were three times less likely than whites with the same scores to be placed in an accelerated math course. . . . In a number of cases, Rockford's high-track classes included students with exceptionally low scores, but rarely were these students African Americans. Conversely, quite high scoring African Americans were enrolled in low-track classes; again, this was seldom the case for high-scoring whites.[29] [Our emphasis.]

School disciplinary actions also vary by race. In 1994 Congress signed into law the Gun Free Schools Act. This act mandates that any student who brings a firearm to school will be suspended for one year. Several states have extended these laws, which are commonly referred to as "zero tolerance policies," to include other weapons, and possession or use of drugs. Moreover, numerous school districts have expanded them to include a wide variety of behaviors and infractions.

Youth of color experience first- and second-order racial sorting with regard to zero tolerance policies. In the first order, these policies are found more often in school districts that are predominantly African American and Latino.[30] In the second order, zero tolerance policies are applied to youth of color in a decidedly more punitive way than to their white counterparts.

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29. Jeannie Oakes, "Two Cities' Tracking and Within-School Segregation," *Teachers College Record* 96, 4 (Summer 1995): 686.

30. Civil Rights Project, "Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline" (presented at the National Summit on Zero Tolerance, Washington, D.C., June 15–16, 2000).

PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND SUSPENSIONS BY RACE
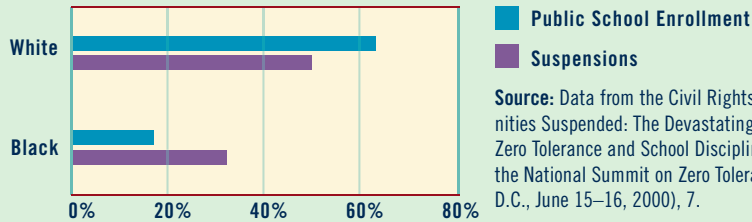
Legend:
- Public School Enrollment
- Suspensions

Source: Data from the Civil Rights Project, "Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline" (presented at the National Summit on Zero Tolerance, Washington, D.C., June 15–16, 2000), 7.

SOUTH CAROLINA STUDENT CHARGES OF MISCONDUCT BY RACE
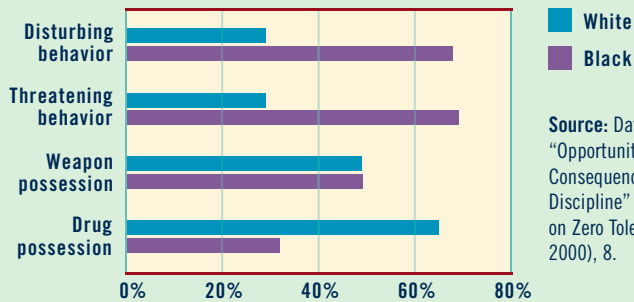

Legend:
- White
- Black

Source: Data from the Civil Rights Project, "Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline" (presented at the National Summit on Zero Tolerance, Washington, D.C., June 15–16, 2000), 8.

Unlike their white counterparts, African American students are suspended from public schools at rates that far exceed their proportion of public school enrollees. Twenty-five percent of all African American male students were suspended at least once over a four-year period.

One recent study examined school discipline statistics in depth and found that black students are identified as committing proportionately more infractions when the misconduct is subjectively determined—that is, when a faculty or administrator judges that a behavior is disturbing or threatening—than when the misconduct is identified according to a more objective standard such as weapon or drug possession.

The educational system of the United States has not yet achieved its potential as an "equalizing" institutional investor in our nation's youth. Instead, many of the system's policies and practices continue to produce racially disparate educational outcomes. By the end of the public school experience, 7 percent of white students have dropped out of school compared with 13 percent of black students and 28 percent of Latino students.[31]

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31. Phillip Kaufman, Jin Y. Kwon, Steve Klein, and Christopher D. Chapman, "Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999," for National Center for Education Statistics (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2000), 12.

RACIAL INEQUITIES PLAGUE EVERY SIGNIFICANT PROCESS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

It is in the juvenile justice system where policies and practices produce some of the most highly visible racialized outcomes. Here, there is a cumulative effect, where racial inequities at every point along the way, beginning with well-known differences in the racial profiling of suspects, culminate in dramatically different incarceration rates by race.

Racial inequities plague every significant decision point in the juvenile justice system:

- Suspect profiling
- Arrests
- Referral to juvenile court
- Detention
- Formal processing
- Waiver to adult court
- Disposition
- Incarceration in juvenile facilities
- Incarceration in adult prisons

At each of these points, youth of color are overrepresented relative to their white counterparts. While one might assume that the commitment of criminal acts is the predominant force behind this overrepresentation, researchers have found negative "race effects" in studies on race and the juvenile justice system.[32] Moreover, research suggests that this disparity between youth of color and their white counterparts is quite large during their initial contact with the juvenile justice system and results in a "cumulative disadvantage" as they are processed through the system. In addition, like many educational policies, decisions about how youth are sent to and allocated within the juvenile justice system are based on the subjective decisions of adults. In writing about the juvenile justice system, Robert Schwartz notes:

> Whether a youth enters the juvenile justice system is often as much about adult decision-makers—and how much blameworthiness they attribute to the youth—as it is about the youth's behavior. Many children in the four major child serving systems—education, juvenile justice, child welfare, mental health—are remarkably similar, even though they wear different labels. Decision-makers allocate them to one of these systems based upon the conduct or traits of the children or of their parents.

> For purposes of assigning children into a system we label them as Bad, Sad, Mad or Can't Add. It is like attaching a mailing label—the Bad child gets sent to the juvenile justice system. The Sad child goes into the child welfare system. The Mad child enters the mental health system. Can't Add goes to special education. *Sorting often depends upon issues of race or class. Minority and poor children are more likely to be labeled Bad.* In addition, if one thinks of the four systems—dependency, special education, mental health and delinquency—as the four suits in the service delivery deck, one
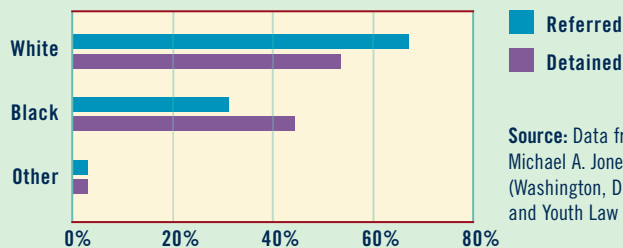
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32. Poe-Yamagata and Jones, "And Justice for Some."

RACIAL PROPORTIONS OF THE JUVENILE POPULATION AND REFERRALS TO JUVENILE COURT
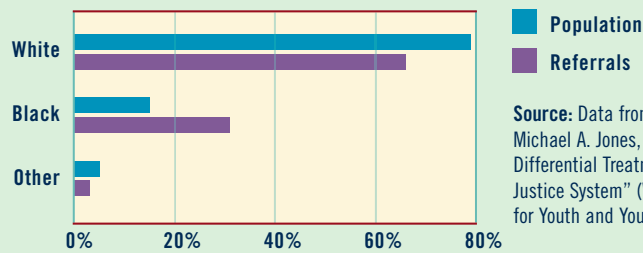
Source: Data from Eileen Poe-Yamagata and Michael A. Jones, "And Justice for Some: Differential Treatment of Minority Youth in the Justice System" (Washington, D.C.: Building Blocks for Youth and Youth Law Center, April 2000), 8.

RACIAL PROPORTIONS OF REFERRED AND DETAINED DELINQUENCY CASES: 1997

Source: Data from Eileen Poe-Yamagata and Michael A. Jones, "And Justice for Some" (Washington, D.C.: Building Blocks for Youth and Youth Law Center, April 2000), 9.

will find that delinquency is always the trump suit. If a juvenile court wants to find a child delinquent for misbehavior, it always can.[33] [Our emphasis.]

Referrals are made to juvenile court mainly by law enforcement officers but also by parents, victims, probation officers, and increasingly by schools. Black youth are referred to juvenile court at two times their proportion in the population.

Once referred to juvenile court, black youth are more likely to be locked in detention facilities than their white counterparts. This is true even when they are charged with the same offense. For some offenses, such as drug charges, the disparity between those referred to the juvenile justice system and those who are detained is even greater. Disparities are evident in the racial distribution of youth who are petitioned, that is formally processed, and those who are waived to adult court. African American and Latino youth are less likely to be placed on probation than their white counterparts. They are also more likely to be incarcerated in public facilities:

When white youth and minority youth were charged with the same offenses, African American youth with *no prior admissions* were six times more likely to be

33. Robert Schwartz, "Opportunities for Juvenile Justice Reform" (paper presented at the W. T. Grant Forum on Reforming Publicly Funded Youth Systems, New York, March 2003), 2.

DRUG CASE REFERRALS AND DETAINMENT BY RACE: 1997
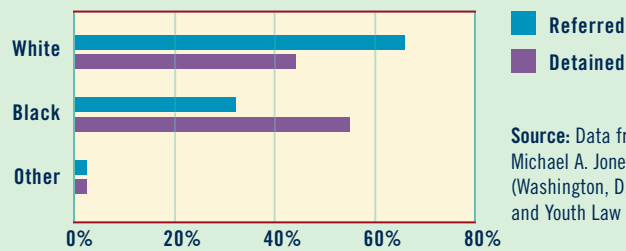
Referred
Detained

Source: Data from Eileen Poe-Yamagata and Michael A. Jones, "And Justice for Some" (Washington, D.C.: Building Blocks for Youth and Youth Law Center, April 2000), 9.

PERCENT OF YOUTH PETITIONED AND WAIVED TO ADULT COURT BY RACE: 1997
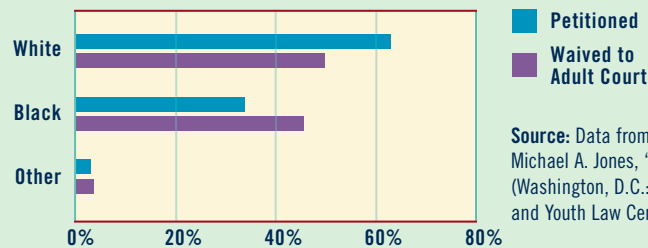
Petitioned
Waived to Adult Court

Source: Data from Eileen Poe-Yamagata and Michael A. Jones, "And Justice for Some" (Washington, D.C.: Building Blocks for Youth and Youth Law Center, April 2000), 12.

incarcerated in public facilities than white youth *with the same background*. Latino youth were *three* times more likely than white youth to be incarcerated.[34] [Our emphasis.]

Once youth enter the juvenile justice system, their ability to reenter systems that are supposed to facilitate their transition to healthy adulthood is typically blocked. Again, Robert Schwartz notes:

The boundaries between the four child-serving systems are like semi-porous membranes through which youth, dollars and services flow. The trend of recent years has been for education, child welfare and mental health to send increasing numbers of youth into the juvenile justice system. It has more and more become a one-way flow: the path from education, child welfare and mental health into the juvenile justice system is like a parking lot exit, where a forked grill prevents re-entry (this is particularly true of education, which sends more youth to juvenile court, and doesn't want them back, but it is also difficult for dependent children, after arrest and placement in the delinquency system, to return to foster care).[35]

34. Poe-Yamagata and Jones, "And Justice for Some," 3.

35. Schwartz, "Opportunities," 2–3.

THE LABOR MARKET

Theoretically, the labor market should be race neutral: supply and demand are not racialized concepts. Yet, there are innumerable examples of how youth of color are excluded, exploited, and marginalized in the labor market. Sometimes this occurs as a result of active or passive discrimination. One example of active discrimination is the job market where in oft-reported experiments "testers" of color and "testers" who are white apply for the same jobs with unequal results. Examples of more passive forms of employment discrimination include:

- Zip-code and name-based discrimination: job seekers perceived to live in "undesirable" locations or perceived as people of color based on their names may be excluded from consideration for job opportunities by employers.
- Occupational segregation based on race, ethnicity, or gender: racial minorities and young women are overrepresented in the lowest paid and least desirable jobs. Researchers have found that occupational segregation has been most pronounced for black male youths.[36]
- Hiring through informal mechanisms such as social networks: these employer practices often disadvantage youth who lack inside connections to job opportunities.[37]

EVERYTHING'S IN A NAME

A recent study found that job applicants with the same qualifications who had common black names on their résumés were less likely to be called for an interview than applicants with common white names.

Percentage receiving interview requests*

COMMON WHITE NAMES		COMMON BLACK NAMES	
Kristen	13.6%	Ebony	10.5%
Carrie	13.1%	Latonya	9.1%
Laurie	10.8%	Kenya	9.1%
Meredith	10.6%	Latoya	8.8%
Sarah	9.8%	Tanisha	6.3%
Allison	9.4%	Lakisha	5.5%
Jill	9.3%	Tamika	5.4%
Anne	9.0%	Keisha	3.8%
Emily	8.3%	Aisha	2.2%
Average	10.3%	Average	6.9%

*Based on 3,761 job applications

Source: Alan B. Krueger, "Economic Scene: Sticks and Stones Can Break Bones, But the Wrong Name Can Make a Job Hard to Find," *New York Times,* 1 December 2002, C2.

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36. Paul E. Gabriel et al., "The Relative Occupational Attainment of Young Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics," *Southern Economic Journal* 57, 1 (July 1990): 35–46.

37. O'Regan and Quigley, "Effect of Social Networks," 327–42.

RACIAL SORTING + INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES = TRIPLE JEOPARDY FOR YOUTH OF COLOR

Taken together, racial sorting and institutional policies and practices put youth of color at triple jeopardy for experiencing poor outcomes. By and large, their parents and, hence, they are also less able than their white peers to move to neighborhoods that provide a higher-quality public education and better access to employment. Because of school segregation youth of color are likely to find themselves in school districts that are not only separate but are also unequal in a number of dimensions. For example, they are more likely than their white counterparts to be in school districts that have punitive disciplinary policies. Disciplinary policies are applied in a racially disparate way, such that youth of color are more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts. Researchers have documented a relationship between suspensions and school dropouts, noting that one-third of youth who are suspended from school end up dropping out of school. Dropping out of school has been linked to a number of problems including involvement with the justice system, poor employment prospects, and so on.

This is but one example of the manifestations of structural racism, using neighborhoods, schools, and a specific institutional policy as the entry points. Clearly, similar patterns could be traced from other examples. Structural racism is a multifaceted problem. It manifests itself in ways that can be obvious or subtle, and it serves as a linchpin among many of the factors that define and influence the experience of youth in this country. In the section that follows we consider the implications of this analysis for the youth field.

WHAT DOES A STRUCTURAL RACISM
PERSPECTIVE IMPLY FOR THE YOUTH FIELD?

When we recognize the fundamental contribution of structural barriers like residential segregation or labor market discrimination to the proximate problems that the youth field seeks to address, there is a strong temptation to suggest that this field take on a broad agenda that addresses these distal sources. We are reluctant, however, to add another layer of work onto an aspiring field as it struggles to develop a solid infrastructure, secure scarce resources, and so on. Moreover, we are under no illusion that racial equity could ever become a guiding principle in housing, employment, or any other key public policy area without the sustained, concerted activism of citizens and organizations dedicated to social justice. Indeed, such fundamental change may be unlikely without pressure from a new civil rights movement.[38] We therefore do not presume to recommend or prescribe specific activities for the youth field. Rather, we offer a more general discussion of the broad implications of this analysis for the youth field, providing examples to ground our suggestions in ways that we hope will provide sufficient clarity to provoke rich and productive discussions about the practical meaning of this analysis.

A BROADER VISION FOR THE YOUTH FIELD

With a few exceptions, contemporary youth initiatives generally derive from the race-neutral premise that individual-, family-, and neighborhood-level incapacities and dysfunctions are principal barriers to successful transition from youth to productive adulthood. Some programs and initiatives seek to improve youth outcomes by changing youth behavior. Others concentrate on developing the range of capacities youth need for success in the productive sectors of the economy. Yet others seek mainly to link disadvantaged youth to services and resources that may not be readily accessible, or to increase local supplies of those assets. Generally speaking, these approaches are geared toward enhancing youths' capacities to become functional, self-sustaining, law-abiding citizens. A structural racism analysis suggests that these strategies are necessary and important, but may not be sufficient.

The structural racism framework links racialized local outcomes to broader public policies, institutional practices, and cultural norms, encompassing the entire ecology in which youth develop. It looks critically at the socioeconomic, political, and historical contexts in which people of color are located and demonstrates how and why those contexts affect individual, family, and community outcomes. It reveals the ways in which arenas assumed to provide opportunity and justice in the United States in effect guarantee racial disparity. Youth of color are so disproportionately constrained by racialized public policies, institutional practices, and cultural representations that racial equity itself needs to be a priority objective for all facets of the youth field.

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38. For a powerful statement of this view, see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's concluding discussion in *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, Md.: Roman & Littlefield, 2003), 177–85.

RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION AND LABOR MARKET DISCRIMINATION CREATE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO PROGRESS.

Racial equity can only occur when whites and Americans of color are equally likely to have positive or negative experiences in employment, education, homeownership, the justice system, and all the other arenas that determine progress and upward mobility in the United States.

It is important to note here that racial equity awareness is already quite evident among some segments of the youth field, particularly in the youth organizing sector.[39] Youth organizers have documented long-standing misrepresentations of young people, particularly those of color, in the media. They have researched and analyzed the underlying conditions that contribute to poor youth outcomes in their communities. They have led campaigns to protest punitive and discriminatory policies in school systems and in the juvenile justice system. Youth organizing has the potential to make significant progress in this area, but like many evolving fields, there is room for this work to be deepened. These groups typically lack the resources and expertise to meet the developmental needs of youth in a structured and consistent way, and the infrastructure for this groundbreaking work is woefully underdeveloped.[40]

There are also intermediary organizations engaged in efforts to document and address structural factors that contribute to racial inequities. However, we believe that more of those within the youth field, and others engaged in community-level efforts to alleviate poverty and disadvantage, could help lay the groundwork for the type of social change that is needed. This could be done, in part, by systematically raising up the work of those in the youth and allied fields who are engaged in racial equity efforts, by encouraging others to take up racial equity work that is within their reach, and by pushing the boundaries of current agendas as far as possible given financial and human resources.

Operationally, convergence of youth practitioners around racial equity would not compel everyone to meld their agendas and operations into one. Rather, what it might mean is

- a shared recognition of the systemic sources of youth disadvantages and disparities;
- identification of the multiple and interrelated levels—cultural, governmental, regional, local, institutional, individual, and so on—at which racist norms, assumptions, policies, and practices pertinent to youth need to be tackled;
- commitment among the field's principal actors to working deliberately to dismantle structures, policies, and practices that contribute to racial inequities; and
- forging alliances with fields that are also concerned about these issues, such as community building, civil rights, social justice, and the like.

Convergence around these ideas would suggest that the youth field is committed as a whole to making our democracy work for all youth, even as it pursues its traditional objectives.

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39. Jee Kim et al., *Future 500: Youth Organizing and Youth Activism in the United States* (Chicago: Subway and Elevated Press, 2002).

40. Listen, Inc., *An Emerging Model for Working with Youth Community Organizing + Youth Development = Youth Organizing*. Occasional Paper Series on Youth Organizing No.1 (New York: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2003).

Focused attention on this issue would emphasize the important role that the youth field can play in developing and leveraging its civic capacity for engaging influential public and private institutions. In concert with community builders and others in allied fields, the youth field seems well positioned to harness an array of civic resources that could be used to influence policies in education, juvenile justice, youth employment, and other areas that directly shape young people's life chances.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN PRACTICALLY?

Structural racism can seem overwhelming, and racial equity, idealistic. It is a challenge to determine how organizations with limited reach and resources can make any significant difference. Without question, these are formidable issues that will not be resolved overnight. These issues deserve focused, sustained attention within the youth field, and between the youth field and others in the wider community-building arena who are concerned about chronic disadvantages facing youth of color. We offer some general steps that may facilitate such an examination.

Adopt racial equity outcomes as a central part of the work.

There is no better way to place and keep race "on the table" organizationally than by integrating it into mission statements and program goals. The structural racism perspective suggests that those in the youth field need to keep focused on racially equitable outcomes in all facets of the field's work with and on behalf of young people. Moreover, since the notion of equity is a comparative one, it should be made clear that the basic commitment is to closing outcomes gaps between youth of color and white youth within a specified spatial or jurisdictional setting. The organizational effort required to honor a commitment to, say, "reduce high-school dropout rates" may be different from one aiming to "reduce African American high-school dropout rates in Harlem to a level comparable to those of similar white students in New York City." This level of organizational visioning and commitment would have to be accompanied by a resolve to gather and disaggregate racial disparity data, set reasonable equity goals, create interim benchmark indicators, and to do what is necessary to meet these thresholds.

Be willing to work through uncomfortable organizational issues relating to race.

It is important for organizations to model racial equity internally if they are to take responsibility for achieving such ends in the wider community.

Working through these issues can be difficult. Staff may resent the implication that they have not been doing enough. Some whites may perceive veiled accusations of racism. Staff of color may dispute what they see as their "assigned position" in the structural racism hierarchy. There may be surprise revelations of feelings of racial victimization. Skilled facilitators and presentations of the racial analysis that reflect organizational and local realities can contribute enormously to negotiating these zones of discomfort. Clear demonstration of the value of this exercise to the organizational mission will go a long way toward easing anxieties that may come to the surface. The resources that have been developed to guide organizations aiming to improve their ability to address racial issues offer strategies for leadership development, staff training, workforce diversification, and so on.

Distinguish between racial equity outcomes that you can effect and those that require allies or collaboration.

A central insight of the structural racism analysis is that racial disadvantage is driven by interrelated policies and systems operating at multiple levels. This makes it unlikely that any single organization would possess all the capacities and resources required to achieve most equity outcomes. For example, reducing racially biased outcomes when child welfare workers make decisions about removing children from their homes might call for the development of tools that introduce a greater degree of objectivity into the decision-making process. Getting child welfare systems to utilize these tools may require legal intervention.[41]

Therefore, we must take into account all that is required to reach our objectives, recognize what we can do effectively, and identify others with capacities we lack, who might be potential allies. Addressing the policy, institutional, and cultural barriers associated with racial inequities may almost invariably require networking, communicative, legislative, research, civic, legal, and other kinds of expertise that are unlikely to be found in any single organization. Indeed, an organization's best role may not necessarily be substantive; it might instead be that of identifying, assembling, and coordinating the individual organizations needed to collectively make progress on racial equity issues.

Recognize that our organizations are located in the larger systems, institutions, and processes that reproduce inequity or injustice.

We all participate in the structural racism system, but understanding precisely where and how requires careful reflection. Demystifying the complex structures and arrangements that are a part of our lives by locating ourselves in them is a critical first step in assessing our capabilities. We might start by asking ourselves simple questions that focus on different levels of intervention such as the following:

- Where do young people and adults fit into, and help sustain, say, a television and film entertainment industry that continually reproduces negative images of Americans of color? It may be as consumers of the movies and TV programs produced by Hollywood, and of the corporate products advertised through these vehicles.
- What role do youth employment initiatives play in a private business sector that keeps African Americans and Latinos at the vulnerable end of the workforce? In this case, the connection might be through seemingly benign corporate partnerships that fund local youth initiatives. Or, it may be realized through an act of omission, such as failure to collect data by race and to compare outcomes for youth of color with those of white youths.
- What role do philanthropic organizations play in the maintenance of racial inequality? At this level it may be through funding priorities that focus only on remediating racial inequities rather than also addressing the sources of such inequities, or in funding practices that award primarily core support to some organizations but only project support to others.

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41. This example is drawn from the experiences of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, and the Children's Rights Institute.

Identify our civic capacities.

Civic engagement is critical to taking responsibility for racial equity. Racial equity goals would nudge all strands of the youth field toward a paradigm that assumes that civic capacities deserve equal priority to functional ones. Broadly, this means seeking access to and participating in the policymaking and governance processes that allocate public resources. To do this, organizations and individuals first must identify their actual and potential civic capacities: their abilities to gauge the impacts of new policies, to frame their concerns effectively and get their messages out, to get the attention of policymakers and power brokers, and to mobilize support among peers and across other levels.

Indeed, youth organizers, like their counterparts in the wider social justice arena, already know that structural changes—changes at the policy and institutional levels—are unlikely to materialize and endure without the exercise of civic power at the grassroots level. Hence, they stress civic engagement through education, training, analysis, resource mobilization, and collective action.

This is not to suggest a single youth organizing model for the entire field, but only that all within it honestly appraise their potential for civic engagement. Some of this potential may lie in opportunities to educate and mobilize young citizens for democratic participation.

Another relevant aspect of civic capacity may be the power, or influence, that comes with personal and organizational position within our institution, field, or sector. Individuals and organizations in the community building and youth fields differ in proximity to important structural processes and institutional actors. Their capacities also vary widely. Those with high national profiles and resources for research and analysis might, for example, be more effective at defining and promoting policy or regulatory alternatives to the status quo. Individuals or smaller organizations with fewer resources, on the other hand, might exercise responsibility by pressuring peers, and others within their reach who are powerful, to act responsibly.

Leverage our positions.

Recognize the privileges or benefits that come from current relationships to dominant structures and arrangements, and the potential multiplier effect that these advantages might have on the efforts of peers or colleague organizations that have fewer resources.

At the same time that structural racism disadvantages some, it benefits others. Organizations and institutions might, for a variety of reasons, occupy a privileged niche or possess extraordinary social capital in influential circles. They might therefore be in a better position to advance racial equity than other organizations that are in less privileged positions.

Recognize that racially explicit issues may or may not imply racially explicit interventions.

Working to achieve racial equity implies an awareness of the complexities of racial disparity. Disadvantages experienced by youth of color are often also associated with income, nativity, gender, language, and other factors. While race is inextricably linked to all these, it may sometimes make strategic sense to craft interventions or build alliances that do not "lead with race" explicitly. What ought not be negotiable, however, are racial equity outcomes.
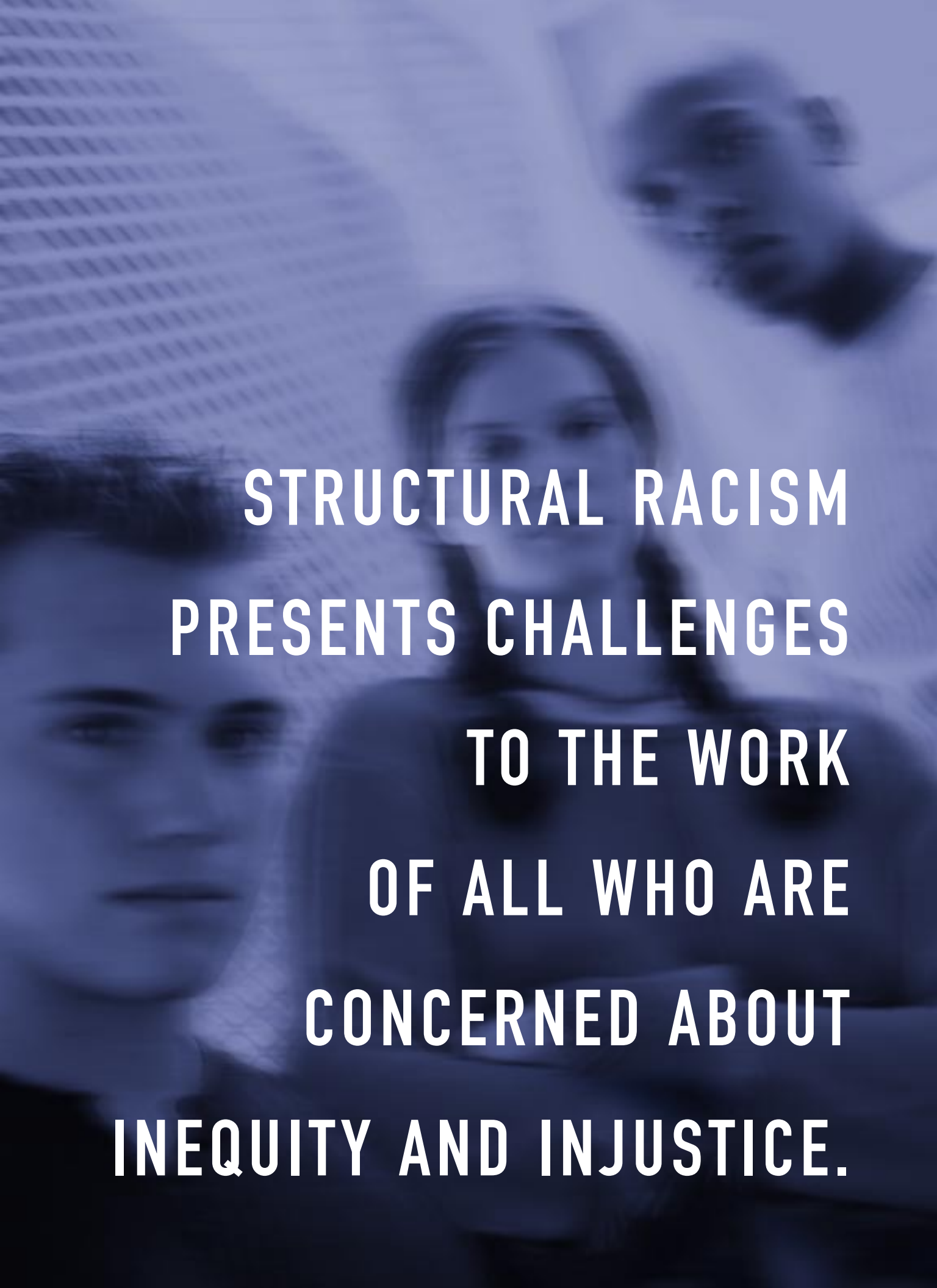
The structural racism framework offers those in the youth field and its allies in the community building and social justice fields not only a powerful and promising intellectual tool, but also valuable insights for individual and collective action toward racial equity. The framework can be thought of as a lens that brings into focus new ways of analyzing the causes of the problems that youth workers are addressing and suggests new approaches to finding solutions to those problems. Specifically, the structural racism lens highlights

- specific power arrangements that perpetuate chronic disparities, especially as they exist in public policies and institutional practices;
- general cultural assumptions, values, ideologies, and stereotypes that allow disparities to go unchallenged;
- the dynamics of progress and retrenchment, which highlight how gains on some issues can be undermined by forces operating in other spheres or by oppositional actors; and
- political, macroeconomic, regional, and other contextual factors that have enormous influences on outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities.

To practitioners in the youth field already hard-pressed by many funding and operational challenges, this call to responsibility for racial equity should not be perceived as the imposition of an even heavier workload. Rather, it is a call for reexamination of current goals and methods from a racial equity vantage point—one that brings policies, practices, and cultural frames into the foreground. Thus, for example, at the programmatic level, practitioners could ensure that all youth—whites and youth of color— are engaged in activities and learning processes that challenge harmful cultural stereotypes and that help them develop healthy, balanced self-identities.

At the organizational and system levels the field could develop tools to replace discretionary decisions with more objective and fair decision-making criteria, and strategies to facilitate the implementation of such tools across the range of settings as needed. Organizational actors could bring added value to their work by building strategic alliances with others whose racial equity efforts may be assumed to be beyond the youth field's functional boundaries. Such alliances are particularly critical for addressing policies and issues that tend to be off practitioners' everyday screens—such as trade policies that affect local job creation, or social welfare policies that affect family formation and cohesion, or transportation investment priorities that perpetuate minority community isolation. Finally, they might choose to work more directly with the media specifically to reframe dominant images of youth who are poor and disadvantaged in America.

In short, we suggest that there are many levels, broad and narrow, deep and shallow, at which the youth field might amplify its current racial equity efforts, and more broadly incorporate a structural racism lens into its work. Structural racism presents challenges to the work of all who are concerned about inequity and injustice and those most negatively affected by them. Time will be the judge of our ability to make progress on these issues without the usual retrenchment, so that the past ceases to be prologue. We believe that the ability to do so is tied to our collective efforts.

STRUCTURAL RACISM PRESENTS CHALLENGES TO THE WORK OF ALL WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT INEQUITY AND INJUSTICE.

What is structural racism?

The term *structural racism* is used to describe the ways in which history, ideology, public policies, institutional practices, and culture interact to maintain a racial hierarchy that allows the privileges associated with whiteness and the disadvantages associated with color to endure and adapt over time.

What is the structural racism framework trying to address?

A structural racism lens or framework explains the big picture of racial disparity—the chronic gap between Americans of color and whites when it comes to jobs, health, education, and other indicators of well-being. It examines how and why racial minorities experience the most severe and most intractable disadvantage in a nation where everyone is meant to have an equal opportunity to succeed.

What is race and how do we understand it?

Race is a social construct—it was invented and given meaning by humans. It is best understood in social and political terms: it is a yardstick for allocating power, and for distributing society's material benefits and burdens. There is no biological or scientific basis behind the concept. In fact, as Frederick Rivara and Laurence Finberg noted in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* (2001): "One of the great contributions of the human genome project is to point out the incredible biological similarity of us all; there is a greater range of genetic differences within such groups as 'white' or 'black' than between groups. There is no biologic or scientific basis for the term 'race' much less the categories commonly used to describe it."

America's racial system favors its majority population's European ancestry, culture, and physical features over those of people from other regional backgrounds. "Whiteness" is a highly valuable social resource that confers unearned privilege on its possessors, while "color"—and especially the "blackness" of those of African origin—carries stigma.

What about ethnicity? How does it relate to race?

Ethnicity refers to social characteristics that groups of people may have in common—language, religion, regional background, culture, foods, etc. Ethnicity is revealed by the way one behaves, the traditions one follows, the language one speaks at home, and so on. *Race*, on the other hand, describes categories assigned to demographic groups based mostly on observable physical characteristics, like skin color, hair texture, and eye shape. Race and ethnicity can overlap or they can diverge. For example, people with dark skin and African features can be ethnically American, Caribbean, or African; or, individuals with Hispanic ethnicity may be of African, European, or indigenous American ancestry.

The significance we attach to either race or ethnicity depends on social context. Either labeling system can be misused as a basis for social hierarchy and inequality. In Northern Ireland, where virtually the entire population is white, Catholic, or Protestant, ethnicity is a highly significant marker. Race is the dominant marker in America. While many Americans can choose to embrace, disguise, ignore, or even transcend their ethnicity, racial labeling

removes this option for many others. People of color are not able to opt out of the racial classification system because it is a deep-rooted, universal identifier sustained through institutional policies, aesthetic values, and social stereotypes.

Are there times when the structural racism framework does not make sense?

As a macro-level analysis, structural racism can't possibly address all the complexities of the race system in America. When you look closely at racial categories and outcomes, many individual cases do not fit the general patterns of success and disadvantage. But this doesn't mean that we should ignore the broad patterns. They account for the lives of millions of individuals and represent a fault line in the realization of our democratic ideals.

Why should those working to improve developmental outcomes for youth pay attention to structural racism?

Youth development theorists have outlined several personal and social assets that are important contributors to positive youth development, including physical development, intellectual development, psychological and emotional development, and social development. Yet, the primary contexts within which young people can develop these assets have important racial dimensions. We know that African American, Latino, and Native American youth are disproportionately represented in our nation's poorest communities, as are some Asian groups. Youth of color are more likely to experience high unemployment, poor educational opportunities, and less access to adequate health care than their white counterparts. This is not mere coincidence. We cannot hope to find lasting solutions to these problems without attending to their root causes—a powerful one of which is the racial bias embedded in the policies and practices of major opportunity arenas and a social context that allows bias to persist.

Wouldn't it be better to approach poverty and disadvantage from a class perspective? Wouldn't it be more pragmatic, especially since adopting race-based strategies alienates some constituencies?

The convergence between race and class is well documented and widely known. Ironically, the fact that the two are so tightly intertwined can actually make it more difficult to discern the independent effect of race on poverty, and more difficult to determine which strategies for change are most appropriate.

Race is a label and a judgment about who you are that is based on the physical characteristics with which you were born. Class, on the other hand, is mostly a function of income, wealth, education, and social manners. As such, class barriers are much more permeable; individuals can move from one class status to another through effort and luck. Nineteenth-century European immigrants to the United States provided classic examples of class mobility. In contrast, race cannot be transcended completely in America. And when race coincides with lower class status, it compounds the barriers to easy class mobility.

Politically, there's no question that class is a lot more appealing as a mobilizing idea for most liberal reformers. But focusing on class may not address the unique features of race that are critical to the success of antipoverty efforts. The structural racism perspective on the American equity dilemma is that even after significant national investment in anti-poverty (i.e., class-based) efforts, the race/class Gordian knot has not been untied. African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians remain highly underrepresented within

the ranks of the American middle and upper classes and still represent a disproportionate share of the poor. Moreover, research continues to point out ways in which being a person of color brings disadvantages, regardless of income level or class. The pervasiveness of racial profiling in law enforcement, hiring practices, educational tracking, home mortgage lending, real estate appraisals, health care access, and many other areas suggests that we cannot yet analyze our society in race-neutral terms if we seriously want to address its inequities.

Structural racism sounds like it refers to whites, African Americans, and Native Americans. Where do Asians and Latinos fit in this picture?

Because it is a system for allocating social privilege, structural racism affects everyone in our society. There is no doubt that the historical building blocks of the American race system were formed by relationships between whites and Native Americans and whites and African Americans, creating a spectrum of privilege with "whiteness" at the top and "blackness" or color at the bottom. This spectrum affects Latinos and Asians, and interacts with their own independent racial experiences and issues.

America's historical racial hierarchy defines Asians and Latinos as nonwhite, as people of color. But historically, the racial identities of many nonblack ethnicities have been quite fluid. Most of those who are not "white" continually struggle to reduce their distance from that location of privilege through adaptation, emulation, and achievement. Historically, many "indeterminate" groups such as the Irish and the Italians have effectively closed that gap. For others, especially those of visibly black African descent, assimilation into whiteness has not been a viable option. Asians and Latinos and others today must navigate a fluid, ever-evolving position in the American race system.

Latinos and Asians are also experiencing new and different racial problems than those that dominated our nation during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The sheer diversity within these groups has given rise to strong intra group differences between those who are perceived to be "doing well" such as Cubans or Japanese, and those who are perceived as "doing poorly," such as Dominicans or Hmong. In this landscape, language and cultural issues interact with race in ways that are unique to particular groups.

This framework is also helpful in examining the impact of immigration and rapidly changing demographics on disadvantaged communities. Many poor urban neighborhoods have been shaped by the historic oppression of people of color and the resistance to that oppression. The influx of poor immigrants from Latin America, Asia, and Africa both intensifies historic issues of oppression and racism and adds new layers of complexity to them. One of these is cultural and political rivalry between old and new residents. These intergroup tensions cannot be addressed effectively without considering them against the backdrop of America's racial hierarchy. At the same time, a historical and institutional perspective can help local change agents keep their focus on the bigger systems and forces that subordinate everyone of color in distressed neighborhoods.

How does structural racism differ from institutional racism?

Institutional racism is one aspect of structural racism. *Institutional racism* describes the biased racial outcomes associated with public policies and institutional practices, some of which may be intentional but some of which may appear to be race neutral. For instance,

the fact that African American youth were six times more likely to be incarcerated in public facilities than their white counterparts who had been charged with the same offenses and had the same background suggests that the juvenile justice system must have some institutional features that end up criminalizing African American youth more often. Some practices are, by definition, racialized, such as racial profiling. Others, such as differential sentencing for possession of crack cocaine versus powder cocaine, may appear race neutral but have racially disproportionate consequences.

For some people, institutional racism also highlights links across multiple opportunity institutions that can compound disadvantage. For instance, decisions about affordable housing, business subsidies, welfare eligibility, and levels of childcare resources can collectively reinforce or alleviate disadvantage for those who are most vulnerable.

Regardless of how we understand institutional racism, however, the structural racism framework goes a step further. This is because it also recognizes the racialized cultural and historical context in which institutions and individuals are unavoidably embedded.

On the cultural side, there is national "common sense" about race—a widely shared set of beliefs and stereotypes—that is revealed in surveys of attitudes about racial groups and in cultural norms. For instance, there are the pervasive assumptions that African Americans are lazy, violence-prone, and disinterested in family formation. Many aspects of our culture sustain beliefs like these. They add up to a racialized "frame" or way of looking at the world that allows us, as a nation, to accept the fact that in 1997 youth of color made up 67 percent of young people confined to public facilities as normal rather than as a national emergency.

Structural racism sounds like it suggests that individuals have no power to affect their own well-being. Don't individuals have responsibility for their own outcomes?

Some observers worry that a structural racism analysis of racial disparities among young people does not say enough about the responsibility that all individuals, including people of color, bear for making the most of their lives. In a way, they are right. By its very nature, structural racism is mainly concerned with the role of public and private institutions that are supposed to allocate basic resources to groups and communities equitably and ideological factors that reinforce this allocation. It assumes that ideology and the actions of these institutional actors significantly define the contours of opportunity for individuals.

Few themes are as powerful in the American psyche as that of individual responsibility. Moreover, the success of the civil rights movement reinforces the perception that all individuals now have the freedom and opportunity to succeed in America—that there is a level playing field, and personal achievement now depends solely on merit. Certainly, there are many whites who are poor and disadvantaged, and there are many youth of color who are doing well. The success stories of individuals of color seem to suggest that anyone, regardless of race, can rise above poverty and disadvantage once they are prepared to work hard and take responsibility for their own successes and failures.

The structural racism lens helps us to see the relationship between individual and group identity. It highlights how our nation's core values—and the public policies and institutional practices that are built on them—perpetuate social stratifications and outcomes that all too often reflect racial group sorting, rather than individual merit and effort. The structural

racism framework is not meant to excuse individual responsibility; it only identifies how much harder it is given those structural constraints.

To what social outcomes does the structural racism framework aspire? What is the vision of a racially equitable community?

Undoubtedly, there is no single model of an equitable community that will satisfy everyone, and a structural racism perspective conjures up a number of alternative futures for social change—some more realistic than others. The desired outcome is racial equity: fair allocation of opportunity and resources, regardless of race and ethnicity, and no more than a fair share of society's burdens within systems and settings that support rather than undermine positive development. Put into practice, this would mean that all people, including youth and adults of color, have

- genuine voice in policy agenda-setting and decision-making;

- real opportunity in the opportunity marketplaces of employment, housing, and education;

- equal opportunity to build wealth and invest in the future;

- no disproportionate concentration of environmental hazards, involvement in the juvenile justice system, poor health conditions, and other negative factors; and

- access to systems and settings that incorporate the features that maximize positive development, as identified by developmental scientists.

The structural racism perspective seems like a huge challenge to current ways of working on equity and justice. Can we really expect community builders, social policymakers, and their colleagues to adopt this perspective?

A structural racism framework does challenge many mainstream approaches to improving youth outcomes. And to those already overwhelmed by multiple programmatic and operational challenges, deliberate incorporation of broad structural racial factors into the work is indeed daunting. Yet, we can see how structural racism undermines the success of those working to improve outcomes for young people. Raising the profile and centrality of racial equity, though difficult at times, is not a choice: it is a requirement in order for us, as a nation, to be able to make significant improvements in the quality of life of young people and the families and communities in which they develop.

Although it can seem too big, the structural racism framework offers those in the youth field and their allies in the community building and social justice fields a way to move forward. It is a powerful and promising intellectual tool, and it provides valuable insights for individual, organizational, community, and collective action toward racial equity—all of which is supportive of broader youth development goals.

What can we do, as individuals or as organizational actors, to integrate a structural racism framework into our work and to promote racial equity?

Change will come only with deliberate attention and effort. Because the issue is so broad, it is not possible for any individual or any single organization to possess all the capacities and resources needed to achieve racial equity, but here are some key actions that should guide us all:

- First and foremost, take responsibility for racial equity. We all must educate ourselves about the ways in which structural racism plays out in our own personal and professional worlds. We must be willing to examine and challenge our own uncritical participation in the systems and processes that sustain structural racism.

- Model racial equity internally in our own organizations. Seek out resources to guide organizations aiming to improve their ability to address racial issues. (See, for example, *Training for Racial Equity and Inclusion: A Guide to Selected Programs,* by Ilana Shapiro.)

- Focus on racially equitable outcomes produced at all stages of the work. Examine the impact of our work on reducing racial disparities.

- Use racially disaggregated data to uncover outcomes gaps between youth of color and their white counterparts in key opportunity arenas.

- Emphasize capacity building.

- Identify key public policies and institutional practices that need reform, and develop alliances that have the power to change them. Step outside traditional boundaries to form new relationships with other fields that are concerned about these issues.

- Educate leadership groups, especially public and private funders, about the value of a structural racism framework.

- Counter popular assumptions that work to reproduce the status quo in the media, in the community, in everyday personal life.

- Get political. Become aware of policies likely to worsen racial inequity, and get involved in collective efforts to challenge those policies. Carefully scrutinize policies that seem peripheral or even irrelevant to local disparities, as they often have more influence on well-being than we recognize.

- Engage young people in this work. Some youth organizing groups have led the way in engaging young people in the development and implementation of racial justice agendas regarding educational, environmental, and juvenile justice issues. Seek information about the strategies and experiences of these groups. Work to enhance these approaches and to facilitate their application more broadly in the youth field.

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