

# STAY WOKE

A PEOPLE'S  
GUIDE TO  
MAKING  
ALL  
BLACK LIVES  
MATTER

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# On the Matter of Black Lives

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Let's imagine a street lined with high-rise buildings. One of them is burning. What do you do? All of the buildings matter, but the one on fire matters most at that moment.<sup>1</sup> The thing is, if you don't put out the fire in the burning building, you risk all of the surrounding buildings burning down as well. This is the message of the Black Lives Matter movement: Black lives are under attack, and we all ought to galvanize a sense of urgency to address the direct, structural, and cultural violence that Black people face.<sup>2</sup> It's not only the right thing to do, but the fate of the entire neighborhood depends on it. We, as a society, cannot say we are all free and equal until those who are at the bottom of various domains of our society—political, economic, social—are also free and equal.

Needless to say, this message of mattering sounds differently to different people. This is perhaps best illustrated by the competing hashtags in response to #BlackLivesMatter, such as #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter. These rejoinders, or at least the motivation behind these alternative hashtags, we believe, can best be understood with the help of social science research, which tells us that Americans across different racial groups see the world differently. This is one of the few facts that social scientists actually agree on.<sup>3</sup>

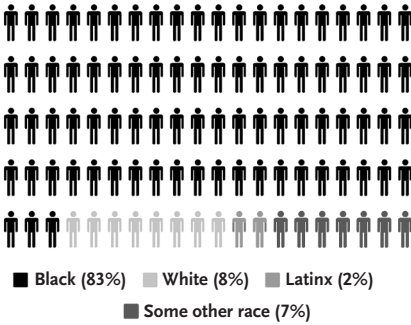
On matters related to **race** and **racism**, white Americans and Black Americans, on the whole, have almost diametric perceptions about the way the world works. Latinx<sup>4</sup> and Asian American attitudes often fall somewhere in between these viewpoints, sometimes closer to Blacks, other times closer to whites.<sup>5</sup>

There are many reasons for this divide, but one that strikes us as particularly noteworthy is the tendency for Americans to surround themselves with (or be surrounded by) people who are very similar to them. For example, one study showed that if the average Black American had one hundred friends, eighty-three of them would be Black, eight would be white, two would be Latinx, and the rest would be of some other race. If the average white person had the same number of friends, he or she would have one Black friend, one Latinx friend, one Asian American friend, a few friends of other races, and ninety-one white friends. Perhaps more striking is the finding that nearly 75 percent of whites do not have any nonwhite friends.<sup>6</sup>

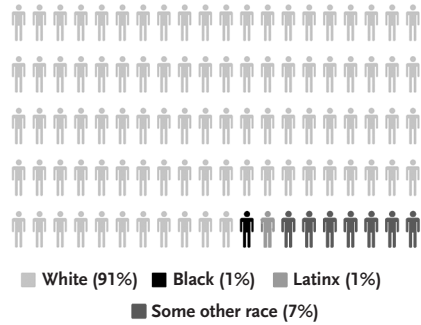
Intuitively, this makes sense. We live in a racially segregated society. We tend to live in neighborhoods with people of similar racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. We go to schools with people who are demographically similar to us. And at eleven o'clock in the morning on Sundays, when many Americans go to church to worship, their communion with one another still initiates the most segregated hour of the week.<sup>7</sup> As we will explain, this reality is the outcome of historical and contemporary public policies, but it is also due to the choices of individuals, some of whom have more choices and greater latitude to pick and choose than others. Ubiquitous racial segregation across several domains of American life means that whites, Blacks, Latinxs, Asians, and American Indians live very different social, political, and economic realities.

People across racial groups also have different relationships with racial inequality and racial injustice. As such, when members of different racial groups hear “Black Lives Matter,” some are likely to interpret the meaning of that message in different ways. Some folks may hear “White Lives Don’t Matter” or “Black People Hate the Police,” thus leading them to defensively declare, “All Lives Matter.” We should like to note that these interpretations are quite

### The Average Black Friend Group



### The Average White Friend Group



The average Black friend group and the average white friend group. (Ingraham, “Three Quarters of Whites”)

antithetical to what the participants of this social movement intend to communicate. Its supporters might be afraid, tepid, or even suspicious of some police officers, but they are not anti-police, mostly just anti-police brutality. They are not even anti-white, because that too would be antithetical to the purpose of the movement; although, to be clear, they are anti-**white supremacy**. While these alternative interpretations serve to undermine Black protestors’ efforts to codetermine the narrative that explains ongoing racial inequality, they show us that some people are simply oriented toward inequality in a totally different way than others.<sup>8</sup>

For other people, the message of “Black Lives Matter” resonates clearly. In this slogan, they hear, “Yep. Black Lives *Don’t* Really Matter” or “[Insert name of any Black person] Could Be Next,” thus leading them to suggest that something needs to be done about **racism** in US society. Supporters and participants of this movement, like those of previous Black social movements, believe that “we must do what we can do, and fortify and save each other—we are not drowning in an apathetic self-contempt, we do feel ourselves sufficiently worthwhile to contend even with the inexorable forces in order to change our fate and the fate of our children and the condition of the world!”<sup>9</sup> Again, different life experiences lead to alternative perspectives of how the world works, what our roles are in it, and what we can do to change it for the better.



Photo by Mariah Warner.

The phrase “Black Lives Matter,” generally speaking, is an odd thing to hear in the first place, particularly in the twenty-first century. If we could travel in time and report back to Frederick Douglass or Sojourner Truth, they might be surprised to learn that a major social movement that began nearly a century and a half after the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment (which abolished slavery) and during the first self-identified African American president’s *second* term in office is premised on the notion that Black people’s lives are in a precarious position. Indeed, that is the point: “The brilliance of the slogan ‘Black Lives Matter’ is its ability to articulate the **dehumanizing** aspects of anti-Black **racism** in the United States.”<sup>10</sup>

Many Americans often feel a sense of cognitive dissonance when they hear this slogan chanted in the street, printed on T-shirts, and debated by pundits on the evening news. On one hand, native-born Americans and immigrants alike have been taught that if people play by the rules and work hard, everybody has an equal opportunity to succeed. The path mapped out toward the **American dream** is indelibly imprinted on our brains; our shared language of individualism and value of **meritocracy** is practically learned through osmosis. We find comfort in knowing the formula to American-styled success like we know the back of our hand. On the other hand, a movement that suggests that some lives matter less/more than others has developed well past the historical era when Black Americans were first eligible for full **citizenship**. Something does not compute. Right?

These two dueling ideas existing at the same time is discombobulating. Martin Luther King Jr. predicted that this weird sensation might arise, noting that the thing about a Black political movement is that it “is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws—**racism**, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing the evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced.”<sup>11</sup> His insights are as true now as when he was alive.

What are these flaws? Where did they come from? How do they evolve and persist? People in US society tend to have different answers to these questions because they have different historical narratives about these aforementioned flaws. And the truth of the matter is that most white Americans are simply not proximate to some of these problems, especially that of racism, or at least not in a way that disadvantages them. What this means is that despite the fact that anti-Black racism is pervasive in US society, there are many people who are shielded from even taking **race** into consideration. Racism is so embedded in our language and rhetoric, our political and economic institutions, and our social interactions (or lack thereof) that without any intention to do so, scores of people end up perpetuating racism by simply going about business as usual.

## A NOTE ON THE STATUS OF BEING WOKE

Just so we're all on the same page, we should mention that having knowledge about the facts of racism and the mechanisms that (re)produce racial inequality doesn't necessarily make someone "woke." There are many people who know the facts and use them to insist on anti-Black narratives and pursue public policies that enhance inequity. Knowledge is a necessary but not sufficient component of being anti-racist. You have to put your knowledge to use in order to eradicate the problems of racial injustice.

By moving beyond the dominant **colorblind** or postracial narrative of US society, we gain more leverage to answer those questions as well as a few others: How could we ameliorate these flaws? What could our society look like if these flaws did not exist altogether? The contemporary Movement for Black Lives has served to highlight many of the modern-day factors that prevent the United States from listening to its better angels, thus providing an illustrative teaching moment for those who are interested in working toward developing an **antiracist** society. We hope to provide readers the tools to partake in the debates around **race**, to navigate spaces of contestation on issues of **racism**, and to participate in antiracist movements in contemporary US society in a more fully informed way. We wrote this book for students of racial justice to critically engage and interrogate these factors. *Stay Woke* is for those who seek to engage in life in the United States from a different perspective.

We focus on Black lives, specifically, for three reasons. First, anti-Black racism is deeply embedded in the foundations of this country, including its founding documents, its institutions, and its policies, past and present. Second, from birth to death, Black people, on average, experience a very different United States than do members of other racial groups. When these experiences accumulate, layering one on top of the other, it becomes clear that there is a necessity



for a social movement that reinvigorates calls for racial equality and racial justice in the twenty-first century. We do not mean to suggest that other groups do not matter, which brings us to the third reason: when we lump together the beautiful and the terrible histories and experiences of “people of color,” we do all of them a disservice. The history of genocide and contemporary marginalization of Indigenous Americans, the history of slavery and contemporary mass incarceration of Black Americans, the history of exclusion and contemporary double standards set up for Asian Americans, and the history of colonization and contemporary demonization of Latinxs are inextricable intertwined, but they are not synonymous. Our intention is not to participate in an Oppression Olympics but instead to avoid universalizing the experiences of Americans across ethno-racial groups.

Coming back to the issue at hand—the matter of perspective—we use this chapter to outline some cold, hard, uncomfortable facts about the precariousness of Black life in the United States. Our aims are to make sure that we are all on the same page about the matter of Black lives and also to illustrate the axiom that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”



## Some Uncomfortable Facts

The twenty-first-century Movement for Black Lives began to stir in 2013 after a jury acquitted George Zimmerman of the murder of Trayvon Martin. In reaction to the acquittal, Alicia Garza wrote a love letter to Black people, and she ended the letter by writing, “Black people. I love you. I love us. We matter. Our lives Matter.” Patrisse Cullors, her friend, put a hashtag on it, and Opal Tometi helped to build a network of folks who wanted to unite under that message: #BlackLivesMatter.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has become known as one that is primarily concerned with police brutality, but it is actually one that is broadly concerned with raising awareness of ongoing racial disparities, developing empathy for Black life, and ending

anti-Black **racism**. Since the development of the hashtag, many other organizations have joined to develop a united front under the moniker the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL)—which consists of about four dozen local and national organizations such as the Black Youth Project 100, Mothers Against Police Brutality, the National Conference of Black Lawyers, and BLM as well. While the focus of these organizations is on Black lives, the founders of the BLM movement assert, “when Black people get free, everybody gets free.”<sup>12</sup>

## AVERAGES, ANECDOTES, AND OUTLIERS

As social scientists, we aim to paint portraits of society that are not as detailed as Kehinde Wiley’s but also not as interpretive as Jackson Pollock’s. In order to find a happy medium, we rely on “averages,” central tendencies, or what is “most common.” We might use words like “many” or “most” almost synonymously with “on average.” Average describes what you are most likely to see in this world.

Sometimes, you will read something, and think, “That cannot be true because I once knew a guy who . . .” This is an anecdote. An anecdote relies on one case, perhaps illustrative, but it does not carry the weight of an average. “Averages” rely on many, sometimes hundreds, thousands, or even millions of cases. We rely on data from large opinion polls, nationally representative surveys, peer-reviewed journals and books, and even the US Census Bureau to make claims throughout this book. We provide facts rooted in data.

Sometimes, you will read something and think, “This cannot be true because Obama was elected . . . twice!” Yes, Obama, Oprah, LeBron James, and Beyoncé are *phenomenal*. But they are what we call outliers. These people represent exceptions to the rule and do not represent the average, everyday person. Some people achieve beyond our wildest dreams, but many people do not or cannot because of compounding inequality. In other words, there are other people who can do what these people can do, but most of us cannot and do not because we are *average*.

Most Americans agree that **racism** still exists in the United States, but many people have a narrow understanding of what racism is. This makes sense. There are various interests involved in making a particular definition of racism dominant. For example, the leaders and participants of the civil rights movement made an effort to define racism as systemic and institutional, but the Nixon administration only a few years later was able to narrow this definition to one of overt intention to discriminate on the basis of **race**.<sup>13</sup> While there is some overlap between the two conceptualizations, two individuals each relying on a different definition of racism will probably never come to a shared conclusion about how to eradicate racism and its progeny. Being cognizant of the cacophony of definitions of racism with which Americans are faced helps us, as educators, to realize how difficult it is for students of **antiracism** to separate misinformation and disinformation from an otherwise-complex reality.

Typically, when people think of racism, they think of Jim Crow, lynchings, police with dogs, the N-word, and other overt behaviors and attitudes.<sup>14</sup> That is an accurate depiction of *a type* of racism, but racism also exists in other, more covert and enduring forms, which we call structural racism. Structural racism refers to the fact that political, economic, social, and even psychological benefits are disproportionately provided to some racial groups while disadvantages are doled out to other racial groups in a systematic way. In the United States, this has resulted in white Americans having greater political, economic, social, and psychological benefits, *on average*, while people of color have more political, economic, social, and psychological disadvantages, *on average*. Nobody needs to do anything with bad intentions for structural racism to persist, but people across racial groups can intentionally or unintentionally assist in perpetuating racial inequalities. The thing about structural racism is that it is embedded in our everyday affairs, making it difficult to see if you do not know what you are looking for. Consequently, it is unclear to some people why such a Movement for Black Lives needs to exist.

In the remainder of this chapter, we provide a slew of data that illuminates the ways in which Black citizens find themselves at risk

in various domains of life in the United States. We start with the most contentious: policing and the criminal justice system. Then we move to highlight racial disparities in more mundane areas of our lives: housing, education, wealth, health, and employment. We hope that by presenting the evidence across various areas of society, the fact that Black lives are consistently marginalized becomes clearer.



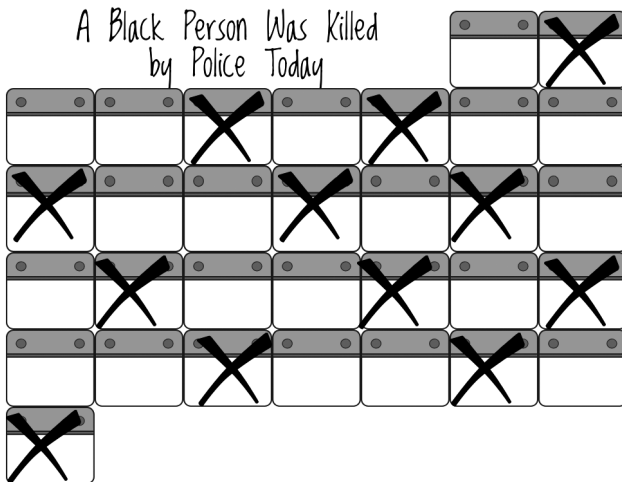
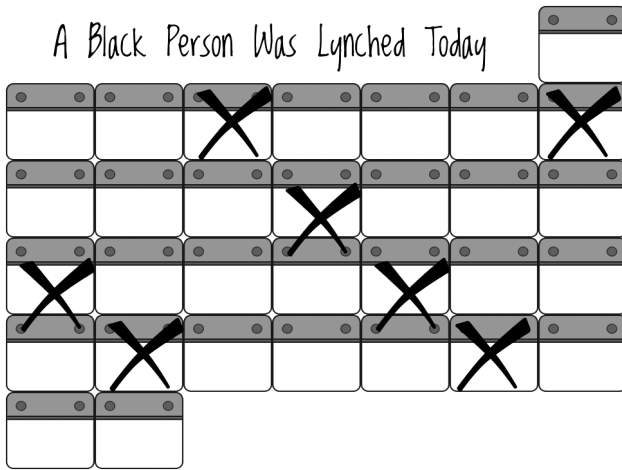
## Police, Crime, and Justice

Many people, including a number of the movement's supporters, believe the Black Lives Matter movement is primarily focused on the police and police brutality. To be sure, it is the protests against such violence that made Black Lives Matter a household name. While this social movement is assuredly concerned with broader conceptions of the way that Black people are marginalized and contend with violence in US society, its attention to policing has been so impactful because it is a domain where people can point to individuals, policies, and patterns of behaviors across police departments to show that something is wrong and has been wrong for some time. An understandable ire arises from knowing that “there was [a] lynching every four days in the early decades of the twentieth century. [Over a century later, it's] been estimated that an African American is now killed by police every two to three days.”<sup>15</sup>

The historian Russell Rickford explains,

By confronting **racist** patterns of policing, Black Lives Matter is addressing a reality that touches the lives of a wide segment of people of color. Structural racism in the post-segregation era generally has lacked unambiguous symbols of apartheid around which a popular movement could cohere. Yet mass incarceration and the techniques of racialized policing on which it depends—“broken windows,” stop-and-frisk, “predictive policing,” and other extreme forms of surveillance—have exposed the refurbished, but no less ruthless, framework of **white supremacy**.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike overt racial bigotry and racially discriminatory Jim Crow-era laws, structural **racism**, as we see it play out today, has a “now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t,”<sup>17</sup> elusive quality to it. Prior to the civil rights movement, folks could point to racial bigots in their legislature and racist laws in state constitutions; but today laws are written in a racially neutral way, and political leaders have become deft in their use of **dog whistle politics**, making it more difficult for many people to directly identify sources of racially disparate outcomes. However, when you see several videos of unarmed Black people shot by police



Timetables of injustice, one century apart.

officers across the country, in contrast to videos of police peacefully deescalating conflicts with armed white people, it is difficult to suggest that everything is kumbaya.

Although there are no comprehensive national data on police killings, there are a great deal of data about the ways in which Black (and Latinx and increasingly Muslim and Arab) people are treated differently not only by the police but by the criminal justice system more generally (and thus more pervasively). A lot of this begins with initial interactions with police. Policies such as “stop-and-frisk” increase the chances of Black and Brown people interacting with the police. At the most basic level, Terry stops, or stop-and-frisks, allow police to stop people on the basis of a reasonable suspicion of involvement with criminal activity. On its face, this policy is race-neutral, but the evidence shows that police use **race** in their execution of the policy. In 2011, New York City carried out nearly seven hundred thousand stop-and-frisk searches. The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) reported that only 11 percent of stops in New York City “were based on a description of a violent crime suspect. On the other hand, from 2002 to 2011, black and Latino residents made up close to 90 percent of people stopped.” Of these stops, 88 percent were innocent civilians. The NYCLU also found that “even in neighborhoods that are predominantly white, black and Latino New Yorkers face the disproportionate brunt. For example, in 2011, black and Latino New Yorkers made up 24 percent of the population in Park Slope, but 79 percent of stops.”<sup>18</sup> Overall, New York Police Department (NYPD) officers stopped and frisked more young Black men than the number who actually lived in the city!<sup>19</sup> What this suggests is that police are more likely to believe that Black people (and men especially) are viewed as suspicious even though police often fail to produce evidence of wrongdoing during these stops.

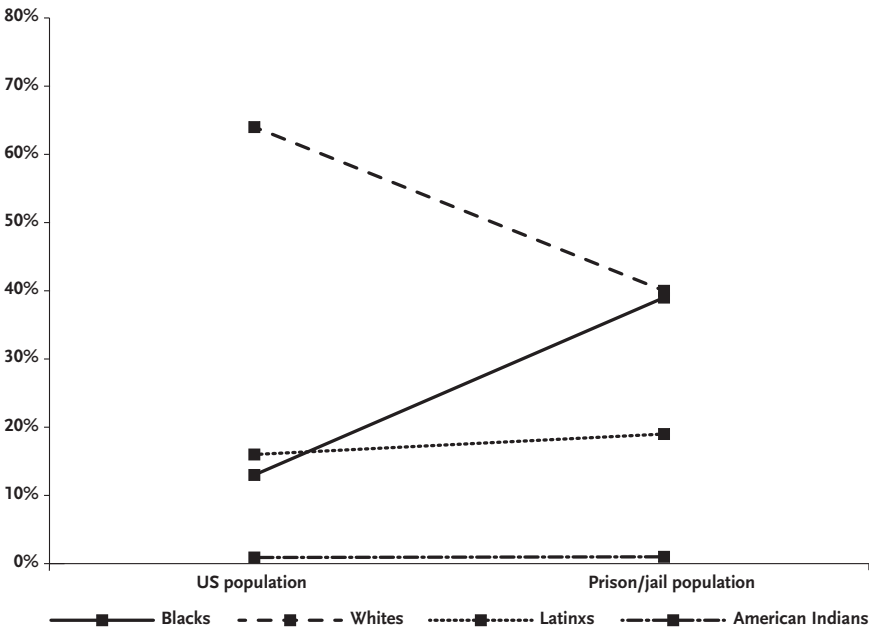
Stop-and-frisk policies are not enforced everywhere, but traffic stops are ubiquitous. The political scientist Frank Baumgartner and a team of researchers have collected nearly *thirteen million* data points of police traffic stops in North Carolina. They find that young, Black and Latino men are not only more likely to be pulled over than are all other racial and gender groups for all sorts of reasons (e.g., seat belts,

speed limit, stop lights/signs, vehicle regulation, and equipment issues) but are also more likely to be searched and arrested. Blacks are 80 percent more likely to be searched after a speed violation than are whites; Latinos are 174 percent more likely than whites are to be searched for the same purpose. For seat-belt violations, Blacks are 223 percent and Latinos are 106 percent more likely than whites are to be searched.<sup>20</sup> In a study of fifty-five million police stops for over six hundred police agencies across the nation—including North Carolina, Maryland, Connecticut, Vermont, Florida, and Texas—the team of researchers unveiled significant and clear patterns of racial profiling and racially discriminatory policing; they even found that police across states are more likely to stop Blacks than they are to stop other groups at the same time of day (around 5:00 p.m.)!<sup>21</sup>

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has investigated police departments across the country. The DOJ's reports of the Ferguson Police Department (FPD), the Baltimore City Police Department (BCPD), and the Chicago Police Department (CPD) find that through different policies, these police departments have systematically discriminated against Black residents. In Ferguson, police targeted Blacks in order to increase revenue for the city.<sup>22</sup> In Baltimore, a “zero-tolerance” policy “prioritized officers making large number of stops, searches, and arrests—often resorting to force—with minimal training and insufficient oversight from supervisors or through other accountability structures”; this zero-tolerance policy was highly enforced in African American neighborhoods and less so in wealthier, whiter neighborhoods.<sup>23</sup> And in the majority-minority city of Chicago, the DOJ found that police were “insufficiently trained and supported to do their work effectively,” thus fostering CPD's pattern or practice of “unreasonable force, [which] includes shooting at fleeing suspects who present no immediate threat,” “firing at vehicles without justification,” exhibiting “poor discipline in discharging weapons,” and making “tactical decisions that unnecessarily increase the risk of deadly encounters.”<sup>24</sup> Black lives are more at risk in their interactions with the police.

Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* reveals that at every step in the criminal justice system, Black people are treated differently than

whites are, putting them at risk for harsher penalties. Scholars have found that Blacks are no more likely to do illegal drugs than whites are, but Blacks face greater penalties for doing so when caught. One major consequence of this is that people of color now make up 67 percent of the US prison population even though they only account for 37 percent of the population. Black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as white men are, and Latinos are twice as likely.<sup>25</sup> Black women and Latinas are also overrepresented in prison populations, and nearly two-thirds of them are mothers of a minor child.<sup>26</sup> The journalist Matt Ford notes, “a brush with the criminal-justice system can hamstring a former inmate’s employment and financial opportunities for life.”<sup>27</sup> After individuals leave prison, they are likely to be treated as second-class citizens until the day they die.



**Racial representation in US jails and prisons.** The United States imprisons a greater proportion of its residents than does any other country in the world. Currently, the nation’s criminal justice system includes 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 942 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, and 79 Indian Country jails. There are also military prisons, immigration detention facilities, prisons in the US territories, and civil commitment centers. There are about 2.3 million people in this system. (Prison Policy Initiative)



All Men: 1 in 9



All Women: 1 in 56



White Men: 1 in 17



White Women: 1 in 111



Black Men: 1 in 3



Black Women: 1 in 18



Lifetime likelihood of imprisonment for US residents born in 2001. (The Sentencing Project)

Moreover, research on the death penalty also shows that while Black men are the most likely victims of homicide, their perpetrators are least likely to receive the death penalty. That is to say, the **race** of the victim has a great deal to do with how the criminal justice system treats perpetrators. The death penalty is most likely to be handed down to those who murder whites.<sup>28</sup> Relatedly, among the cases of people who shot another person and claimed that they were “standing their ground,” “individuals (i.e. defendants) in Florida were more likely to avoid charges if the victim was Black or Latino but not if the victim was White. Indeed, individuals are nearly two times more likely to be convicted in a case that involves White victims compared to those involving Black and Latino victims.”<sup>29</sup> Putting aside the debates about the morality, necessity, or effectiveness of either the death penalty or “stand your ground” laws, outcomes of the judiciary reveal that Black lives don’t matter, evidenced by the

lack of penalization for the loss of Black life. The current Movement for Black Lives has encouraged people to protest against the most blatant forms of state violence and discrimination against Blacks, but this violence plays out in different, subtler ways across other domains of American life.

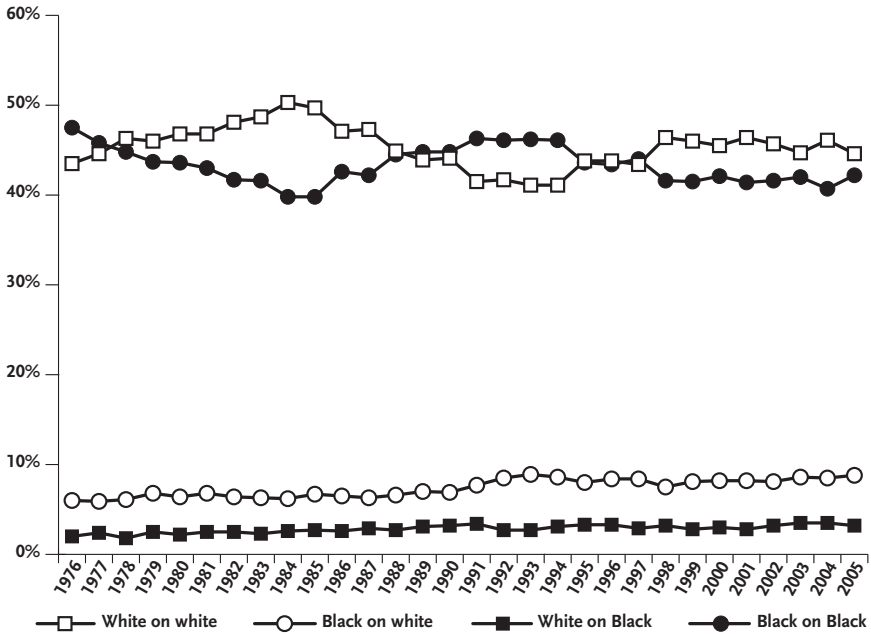
## FAQ

Wait a second. . . . Aren't there a disproportionate number of Black people in prison because they commit a disproportionate amount of crime?

No. Let's take a step back. We focus here on the disproportionate amount of Black and Latinx people in prisons and jails in order to highlight the inequities rooted both in the law as written and in the way the law is implemented. But generally speaking, when a person asks a question like the one above, they are asking if Black people are simply more prone to criminal behavior than other groups. The answer to that question is also no.

When we think about issues of crime and **race**, we have to keep in mind that we do not live in a vacuum. We have to consider the context. For example, the War on Drugs has had a disproportionate impact on communities of color. More communities of color, especially poor communities, were surveilled, and thus more people of color were arrested. Another way of thinking about this is that whites are systematically underrepresented in prisons due to drug-related crimes. Whites report doing more illegal drugs than Blacks do, but Black people are more likely to be punished for doing so. Research shows that contexts matters a great deal, and when scholars control for things like income and wealth,<sup>30</sup> nearly all of the things that people believe are distinctly pathological for Blacks, such as "culture," go away. Or in other words, once we account for poverty and wealth, Blacks and whites behave about the same way, but there are simply a greater proportion of Blacks who are poor and lack wealth.

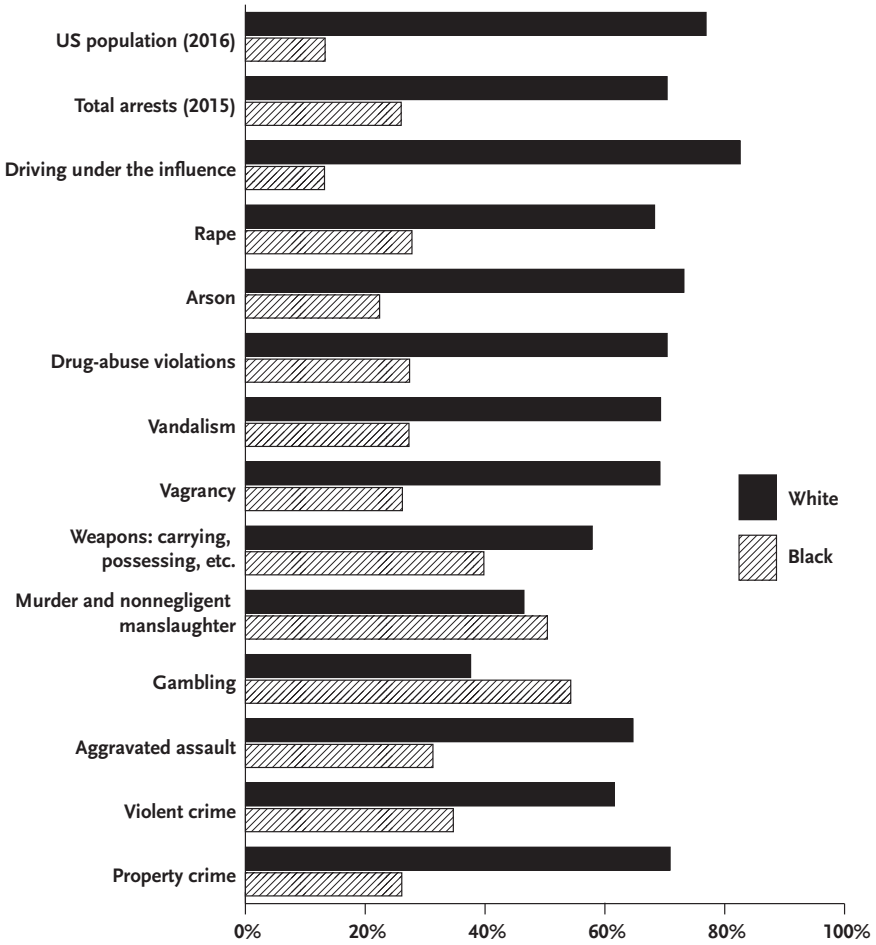
Second—let's just get this out of the way—it is true that a Black person who is murdered is most likely to be murdered by another Black person, but there is also such a thing as "white-on-white"



Inter- and intraracial homicides. (Baumgartner, Grigg, and Mastro, “#BlackLivesDon’t Matter,” 213)

crime. If someone is going to kill (or rape) you, he or she probably already knows you. Aside from being incredibly disturbing, this statistic is fascinating because what it really reveals is how segregated a society the United States is.

Third, according to the FBI, there were about 7.5 million people arrested for about three dozen crimes in 2015—ranging from violent crimes to vagrancy—so there are very few people, relatively speaking, who commit crimes. But we spend a lot of time thinking not just about crime but also about the supposed racial nature of crime. It’s true that there are some crimes that Black people are disproportionately arrested for and also more likely to be victims of, such as homicides. But there are some crimes that white people are *most likely* to be arrested for. Driving while under the influence, for example, is a crime that is disproportionately committed by whites, usually men. But whites are also most likely to be arrested for rape, violent crimes, property crimes, arson, and drug crimes. In fact, whites are more likely to be arrested for crimes, generally speaking.



Arrests in Black and white. (Data compiled from FBI Uniform Crime Reporting, 2015)

All in all, we would like to encourage you to think about why some crimes (or crime, generally speaking) are racialized as “Black” and are erroneously linked with “Black culture.” Furthermore, given that whites are more likely to be arrested, what are the factors that may prevent us from even considering the notion of *white criminality*? Why are crimes that are most likely to be committed by whites chalked up to the individual or seen as an aberration (e.g., mass school shootings, serial killing), rather than as a sign that there is something wrong with white people? Or, in other words, what are the implications of focusing on disproportionality by population size

rather than probability of occurrence by people across age, gender, ethno-racial, or class groups?<sup>31</sup> How would our discussions and policy recommendations change if we did shift our focus?



## Location, Location, Location

Racial disparities in one realm of US society are intricately related to disparities in other domains. But like the problem of the chicken and the egg, it's difficult to tell where it all starts. How do we best understand how privileges, advantages, burdens, and disadvantages that are systematically distributed across racial groups influence the ability or even the probability that any one person will attain the **American dream**? Let's consider housing, or where people live, because where one lives is inextricably linked to many other factors that allow people to access quality education, wealth building, and even good health outcomes. Why do people live where they live? Some of the reasons can be chalked up to personal preference, but it should be made crystal clear that personal preferences actually pale in comparison to the *huge* historical forces and accumulated public policies that help us to best understand why we live where we do.

Over time, residential segregation has been decreasing, but phrases like “other side of the tracks” and “rough neighborhoods” are popular **racial euphemisms** for poor, Black neighborhoods, or ghettos, “a word that accurately describes a neighborhood where government has not only concentrated a minority but established barriers to its exit.”<sup>32</sup> Though it sometimes feels that racially homogeneous neighborhoods are natural—you know, because “birds of a feather flock together”—we should keep in mind that political leaders implemented policies in order to *intentionally* segregate US neighborhoods by **race**. Racial zoning, restrictive covenants, redlining, urban renewal, annexation, spot zoning, expulsive zoning, incorporation, and redevelopment represent some of the innovative policies developed at various levels of government to accomplish these goals. Scholars like Jessica Trounstein, Richard Rothstein, and

Ira Katznelson show not only that there were laws and policies put in place in the early twentieth century that explicitly allowed for the development of white neighborhoods and suburbs, purposefully excluding Black citizens in the process, but that this segregation inherently and systematically advantaged white Americans and disadvantaged Black Americans and other people of color, on average. It still does. Old policies stay alive through their legacy (e.g., white wealth accumulation, persistent racial segregation), and some race-neutral policies are still pursued in order to have a similar effect (e.g., zoning).

This is a long list of wrongdoing to cover in one book, so we'll just study one perverse housing policy to give you a sense of not only how the US government took the lead in providing additional benefits to some of its citizens while leaving out others but also how policy developed almost a century ago still influences contemporary patterns of residential segregation and thus racial inequality in housing (and education and employment and health and wealth): redlining.

The concept of “redlining” comes from a rubric developed by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), a government-sponsored corporation created in the early 1930s. The appraisers of this organization divided neighborhoods into categories based on the occupation, income, ethnicity, and **race** of the inhabitants in efforts to make determinations about where banks would be “safe” to provide home loans, including Federal Housing Administration (FHA)–backed loans. Green areas were pristine, racially homogeneous areas where “American Business and Professional Men” and their families lived; these areas were predicted to be in demand in good times and in bad. Blue areas were “still desirable,” and though they “reached their peak,” they were expected to remain stable for many years. Yellow neighborhoods were “definitely declining” with a “threat of infiltration of foreign-born, negro, or lower grade populations.”<sup>33</sup> Finally, there were Red neighborhoods, which were considered the worst for lending: Black and low-income neighborhoods.<sup>34</sup>

In order to attain a high-quality, low-interest, government-backed loan, it helped (a) to be white and (b) to want to purchase a home in a neighborhood that the government deemed safe to invest in—Green

or Blue (though a Yellow neighborhood's status could be upgraded by building a wall to clearly separate itself from a bordering Red neighborhood). Whites were able to purchase federally subsidized homes in neighborhoods that were exclusively white. Meanwhile, neighborhoods where Black people lived were not eligible for federally insured loans, and Black Americans were, for many decades, legally prevented from living in areas that weren't redlined. What this means is that Black people were not provided the opportunity to buy a home with the same federally backed resources as white Americans were, and furthermore, this policy meant that Black neighborhoods were not invested in as white neighborhoods were. If Blacks wanted to access home ownership, they were not only relegated to ghettos but also required to rely on predatory, high-interest, non-regulated loans or other black-market (no pun intended) systems of financing.

As mentioned, these HOLC categories were developed nearly eighty-five years ago, but their influence still reverberates today. We can think of neighborhoods and suburbs such as Levittown in New York and Pennsylvania (built by the same Levitt & Sons family business) that did not allow Blacks to buy for decades and today are still overwhelmingly white. While people were able to buy homes for about \$7,000 in the early 1940s, today homes in Levittown, New York, are sold for upwards of \$500,000. Meanwhile, in neighborhoods on the West Side of Chicago, where Blacks were segregated and made to rely on predatory financing, some homes twice the size of those in Levittown may be purchased now for around or even less than \$150,000. This area is still predominantly Black.

Relatedly, in the case of Durham, North Carolina, the areas that were "redlined" in the 1930s, such as Wall Town, are still predominantly Black and low income today (although this area is undergoing gentrification). And the Green areas, such as Trinity Park, are still wealthy and white. These HOLC maps even influence the location of trees in the city! In the 1940s, the city of Durham planted trees in the Green neighborhoods. Now, the city cannot afford to plant trees in the Red areas, where low-income Blacks still live today, because they have to use money to maintain the trees in areas that were historically

white and still are today. Research shows that trees influence levels of pollution in the air, which means that there may be more pollution in Black neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods.<sup>35</sup> This specific kind of inequality is referred to as *environmental racism*, but as we see here, this is business as usual. Nobody needs to do anything sinister for this kind of inequity to persist.

Thinking as a rational actor, one is likely to want to live in a “better” neighborhood—one that is, at base, safe, clean, and has good amenities, one where your home will accrue greater value and equity over time. Indeed, the **American dream** hinges on the notion of climbing up the social and economic hierarchies and purchasing a nice home for your family, but research shows that even attaining a loan to buy a home is much harder for Blacks and Latinxs. Furthermore, once a person of color attains that loan, she or he will probably pay higher fees and interest rates than a white person, even controlling for important factors like credit scores, loan-to-value ratios, subordinate liens, income, assets, expense ratios, and neighborhood characteristics.<sup>36</sup>

During the last housing boom, which led up to the 2008 financial crisis and the Great Recession, Latinxs and African Americans were more likely to be directed into high-cost, high-risk loans, loans that have been characterized as “financial time bombs.” At the most basic level, this means they paid more for their homes. Some estimates project that Black borrowers will pay an excess of \$14,904 over the course of a thirty-year mortgage, but this grows to \$15,948 when we look at borrowers (Black or white) who borrowed in order to buy homes in Black neighborhoods. And the excess was still more for Black borrowers in white neighborhoods: \$19,415. And it was even more for Black borrowers who made over \$50,000 who wanted to live in predominantly white neighborhoods: \$22,864.<sup>37</sup> But more importantly, the attempt to live the American dream “left them [Blacks and Latinxs] uniquely exposed to risks of default, foreclosure, repossession, and the loss of home equity, thus serving to exacerbate already skewed racial inequalities in the distribution of wealth.”<sup>38</sup>

In many decades past, predatory contractors “targeted black people who had worked hard enough to save a down payment and dreamed



of the emblem of American **citizenship**—homeownership”;<sup>39</sup> in the past decade, the same was shown to be true. Middle-class Black homeowners were disproportionately affected by the housing crisis, nearly a quarter million people losing their homes. Much of their wealth, or the money people have after all their bills are paid, is in their homes, and a lot of people lost large swaths of their wealth after the Great Recession. American families’ wealth was reduced by 28.5 percent, but for Black families, there was a loss of about 47.6 percent.<sup>40</sup> Getting foreclosed on your home is like getting evicted, and Black families were asked, sometimes forced, to vacate from their home at egregious rates. Systemic and often intentional **racism** increased the vulnerability of Blacks even in an era when they are supposedly protected by policies like the Fair Housing Act and an American ethos of working hard in order to attain the **American dream**.



## Education

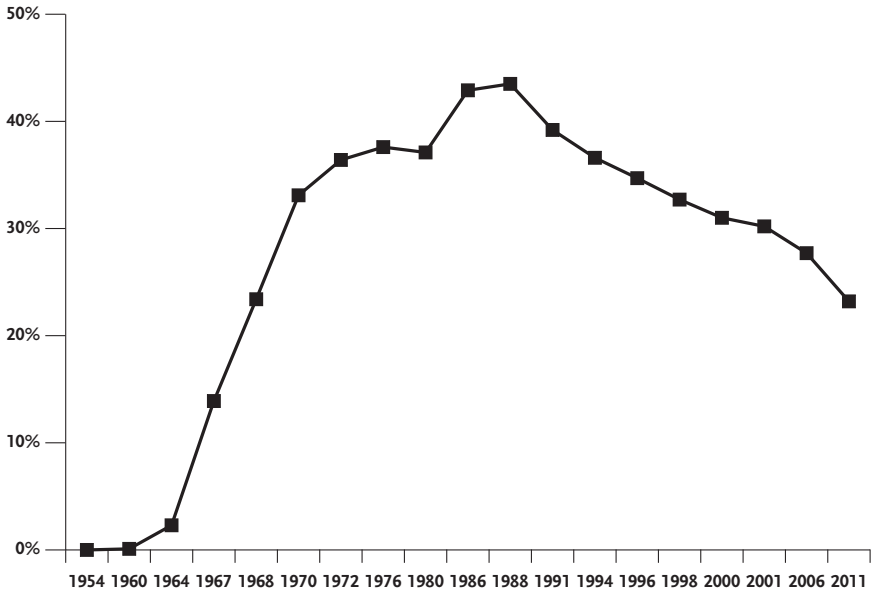
Where one lives often influences where one goes to school. Schools are racially segregated, in large part, because housing is racially segregated. Racial effects are further exacerbated by class inequities rooted in racial disparities. Put simply, there has never been an instance when Black people who were isolated from whites got the same positive benefits from public schools that white people did.<sup>41</sup> What makes the problem of the Black-white achievement gap in standardized testing scores such a fascinating problem to discuss is that anybody who knows anything about education policy knows that the problem can be largely fixed through racial integration. Needless to say, there is simply not enough political will to solve what seems to be a growing problem in the twenty-first century.

It’s not so much that Black students need to sit next to white ones to do better. It’s a matter of resources. Prior to the two *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court cases, “states spent very little on black schools relative to what they spent on white schools. Desegregation led to rapid increases in state spending on education,

driven by white-controlled legislatures' desires to ensure that white students' school quality did not decline with integration."<sup>42</sup> With more resources, students have access to better teachers and materials and enjoy a lower student-to-teacher ratio. There are also indications that schools with more resources have a positive impact on both the students' and teachers' outlook on the educational process and learning environment.

The first *Brown* decision said that segregation was wrong and should be fixed. In the second *Brown* decision, the Supreme Court demanded that the states move faster to integrate schools. Northern and southern states alike moved slowly, but by the mid-1970s, several hundred school districts were under court-ordered desegregation plans. "Court-ordered desegregation was the single most important factor shaping the rapid declines in racial segregation in the 1960s and 1970s," so much so that the threat of being under one of these orders influenced nonsupervised districts to initiate and implement their own integration policies.<sup>43</sup> Once school districts began integrating through policies like busing, the achievement gap between Black and white students began to close. Voila!

At the peak of integration efforts around 1989, the achievement gap had closed significantly. Education scholars show that "from the early 1970s until the late 1980s, a very large narrowing of the [Black-white achievement] gap occurred in both reading and math. . . . For some cohorts, the gaps were cut by as much as half or more."<sup>44</sup> The effects of these policies have reverberated for two to three generations. Black students who desegregated schools between the 1960s and early 1980s were more likely to graduate from high school, to attend and graduate college, and to earn more money than those who attended segregated schools, and they were less likely to spend time in jail.<sup>45</sup> Those who were exposed to schools that were desegregated due to court orders were less likely to be victims of homicide, arrested, or incarcerated. There were improvements to adult health outcomes, too. By the way, white students' outcomes were not diminished in any way by school desegregation policies.<sup>46</sup> School desegregation policies widened the geography of opportunity for a greater number of people.



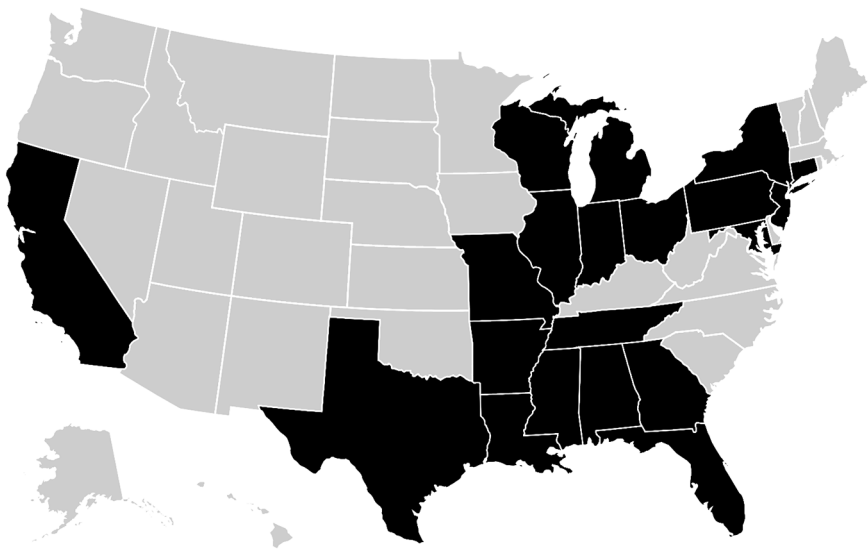
Percentage of Black students in majority-white schools, 1954–2011. (Orfield et al., “Brown at 60,” 10)

What’s the status of integration now? In 1972 (during strong desegregation enforcement), about 25 percent of Black students in the South attended “intensely segregated schools in which nine out of 10 students were racial minorities,” but between 1990 and 2011 (during the decline in court orders), this number jumped up to 53 percent.<sup>47</sup> This has occurred because of white flight, or the movement of white families to predominantly white districts or to private schools. Court orders primarily focus on within-district segregation, but they have little direct effect on between-district dynamics. As such, parents can move to racially homogeneous districts if they want their child to go to racially homogeneous public schools. Moreover, some neighborhoods and towns have pushed for the creation of new school districts in order to legally segregate schools (and to hoard resources). This is called *educational gerrymandering*.

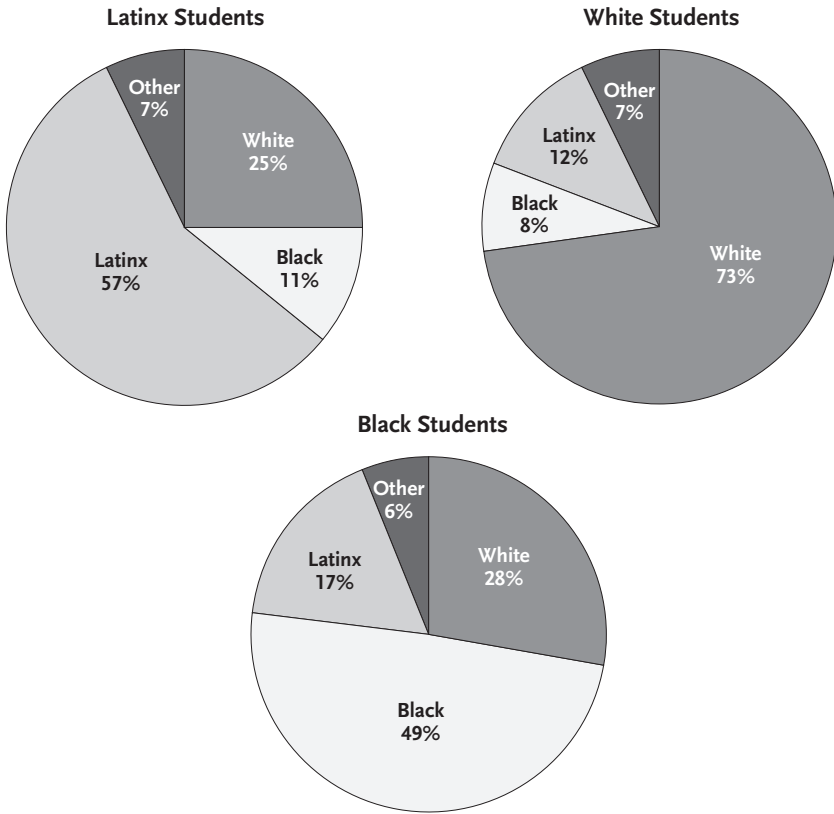
Between 1990 and 2010, hundreds of school districts were released from court supervision and thus are no longer required to implement desegregation plans, which has hastened a new era of segregation.

As such, most white schoolchildren go to schools that are largely white, and most Black and Latinx students go to majority-minority schools. The proportion of Black students going to majority-white schools nowadays mimics the figures from 1968! Appropriately, the term “apartheid schools” has been adopted to describe severely segregated schools, ones in which only 1 percent or less of the school population is white. Perhaps counterintuitively, many of these schools are in the Northeast and Midwest, and about 12 percent of students in the South attend these schools.<sup>48</sup>

Scholars have found that racial inequality has widened since the end of race-based busing efforts. Some have found that since the dismissal of these court orders, there has been an uptick in dropout rates among Black and Latinx students.<sup>49</sup> Others show that both whites and students of color are likely to score lower on tests when they are assigned to predominantly minority schools and, further, that students are less likely to graduate high school or attend a four-year college.<sup>50</sup> Scholars have expected inequality to increase as more court orders are dismissed, and cursory statistics from the US government provide evidence for this prediction. As we have seen before, poor



Top-twenty most segregated states for Black students, 2011–2012. (Orfield et al., “Brown at 60,” 20)



Who goes to school with whom? (Orfield et al., “Brown at 60,” 12)

Black and Brown children in isolated schools have not received the same opportunities as everyone else, and there is a growing population of students in that very vulnerable position.

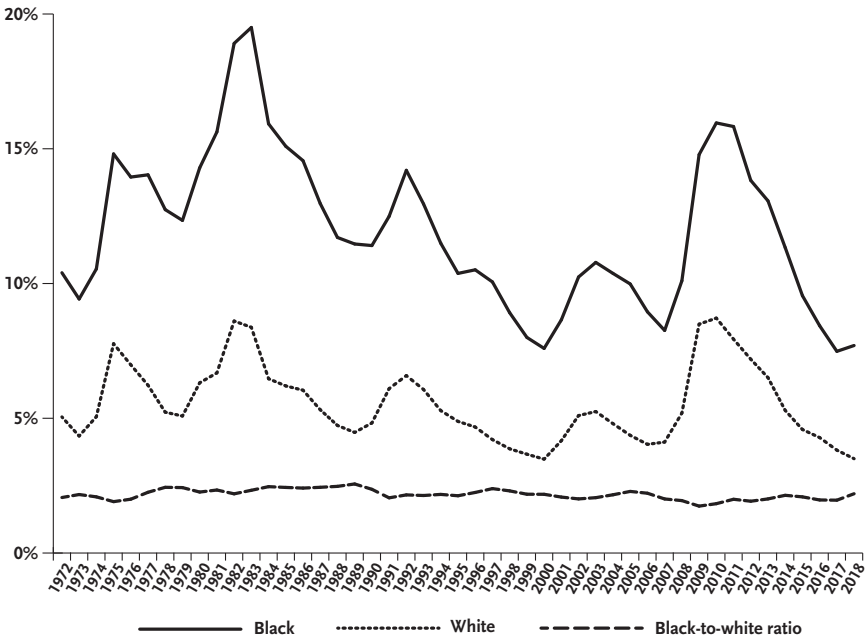


## Employment

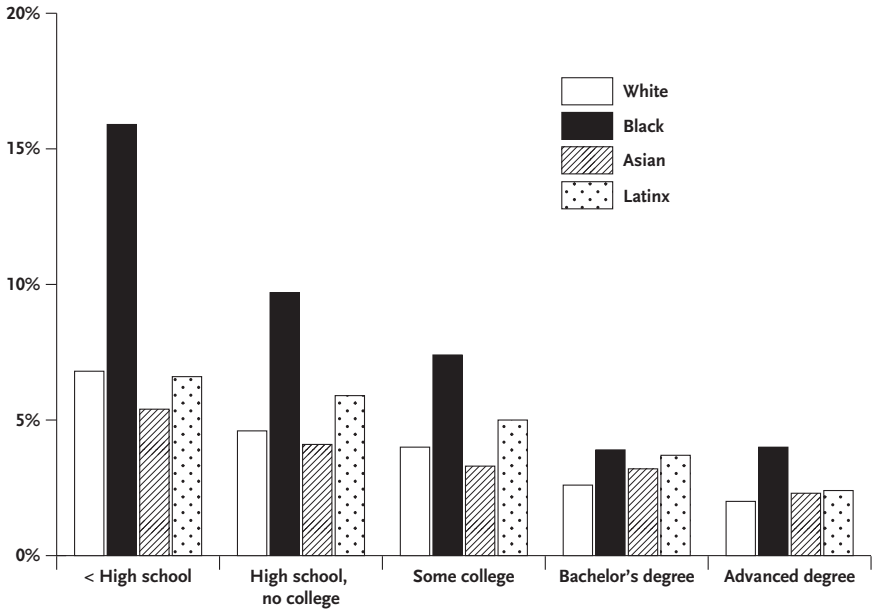
If you do not want to be poor, it is logical to believe that you should go to school and get a job. But layered on top of unequal access to high-quality education, Black people and other people of color, on average, are treated differently from whites in the realm of

employment, which results in racial inequality in employment rates, levels of income, and consequently, rates of poverty. Just for your information, most poor people are not Black (they are white), and most Black people are not poor; but Black people and other people of color, on average, do not fare as well as whites in the realm of employment in the United States.

During the forty-fifth president’s first State of the Union Address, he mentioned that Black unemployment rates were at the lowest in US history. The Black Congressional Caucus did not applaud, as most audience members did. This could be because they weren’t feeling the president, but it could also be that throughout recent US history, Black unemployment rates have been, and still are, twice those of whites. Our data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics provide evidence of this fact for over five decades, and the economist William Darity notes that the racial gap in the unemployment rate has not improved since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>51</sup>



Unemployment rate by race, 1972–2018. (Data compiled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018)



**Unemployment by race and education. (Data compiled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015)**

What's more, labor-force statistics from the US Census Bureau show that at every level of education, Black unemployment rates are about twice as high as white unemployment rates. Blacks with a college education or even an advanced degree have about the same rate of unemployment as whites without one, revealing that while more education does help to decrease chances of unemployment, the effects differ across racial groups. Blacks with a college education or even an advanced degree fare just about as well as whites with some college but no degree.

Why does this happen? Because discrimination still occurs in hiring and promotion practices: “[Discrimination] is not the only or even the most important factor shaping contemporary opportunities. Nevertheless, it is important to understand when and how discrimination does play a role in the allocation of resources and opportunities.”<sup>52</sup> In an audit study, scholars sent out equivalent résumés with identifiably Black names (e.g., Jamal and Lakisha) and ones that are statistically white (e.g., Brad and Emily); they found that white names triggered 50 percent more callbacks than Black names.<sup>53</sup> In

a similar study, the sociologist Devah Pager found that white men with a criminal record have about the same chances of getting called back for a job as Black men *without* a criminal record.<sup>54</sup> These differences in callback rates provide evidence of a barrier in employment due to **race**. Despite the fact that there have been policies put into place to prevent discrimination, these inequities still exist, and there is little recourse one can gain in this environment because proving that an employer intentionally discriminates is an incredibly difficult feat these days.

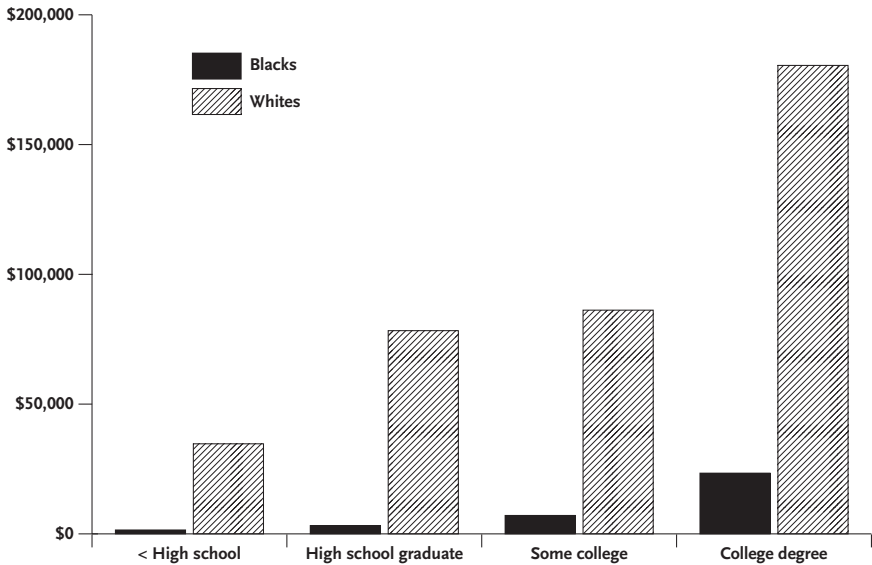


## Income and Wealth

Income is the money that you bring in from your job. It is typically the case that as people get promoted within an organization, their income also increases. As we see more people of color in management, seated at the table of executive boards, and in administrative positions in institutions of higher education, many of us conclude that nonwhites must be doing better financially. Unfortunately, there is still plenty of wage inequality across racial groups. For instance, Pew Research shows that in 1980, Black men's median hourly wages accounted for about 83 percent of white men's hourly wages, and in 2015, Black men's median hourly wages accounted for about 83 percent of white men's hourly wages. The income gap between Black and white men has not changed in three and a half decades!<sup>55</sup> When you add gender to the mix, researchers show that, with the exception of Asian men, all groups lag behind white men in terms of median hourly earnings.<sup>56</sup>

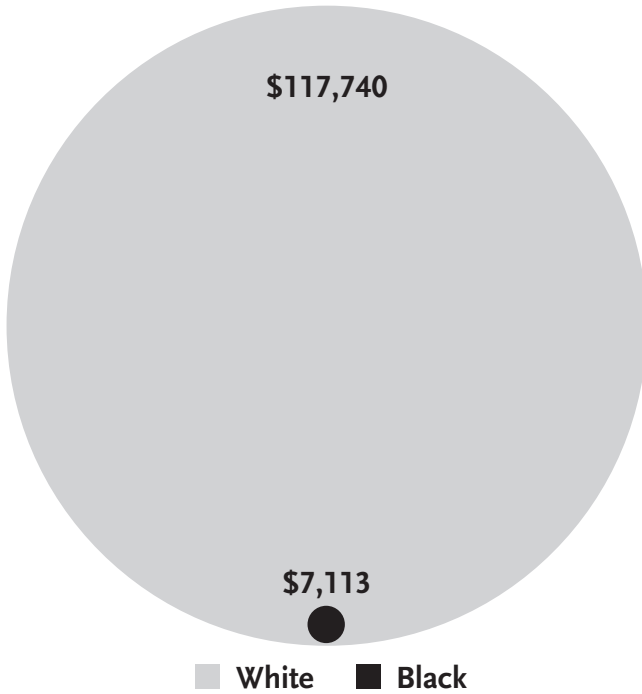
Some of this difference comes from the fact that Blacks and Latinxs do not attend college at the same rates as whites, but what happens when we account for these important differences? Researchers from the Economic Policy Institute reveal that in 2015, "relative to the average hourly wages of white men with the same education, experience, metro status, and region of residence, black men make 22.0 percent less, and black women make 34.2 percent less."<sup>57</sup> This gap





Family wealth, by race and education. (Hamilton et al., *Umbrellas Don't Make It Rain*, 5)

appears to increase as we move up the education ladder. Similarly, the *New York Times*' editorial board explained, "Last year [2016], black college graduates earned about 21 percent less per hour on average than white college graduates; in 1979, the gap was 13 percent. The racial disparity in earnings is even greater for men: Last year, the average hourly earnings of black college-educated men were about 25 percent less than of white college-educated men. The gaps widen up the economic ladder. The top 5 percent of black male earners make about 47 percent less than the top-earning white men."<sup>58</sup> That's a hard pill to swallow if you've been under the impression that education is the great equalizer. The thing is, income is actually a very superficial measure of financial well-being. Income pays your bills, but wealth is what you have left after all of your bills are paid. Examining wealth disparities is important because it reveals how being poor and Black is quite distinct from being poor and white. It also reveals that those high-income Black folks in management may be one or two pay checks from poverty. Even low-income white people have more wealth and more cushion to fall back on in really hard times than do well-paid and well-educated Black people, on average.



Median family wealth by race. (Hamilton et al., *Umbrellas Don't Make It Rain*, 4)

Currently, the median Black family's wealth is about \$7,113, compared to \$117,740 for the median white family. Here's the rub: it is generally difficult to attain wealth, and it is even more difficult for Black people. Blacks with an advanced degree have about \$84,000 in wealth. Whites with the same level of education have about three and a half times that wealth, and whites who do not even have a college degree tend to have about \$2,200 more in wealth. Black Americans with a college degree only have about 67 percent of the wealth that whites who never graduated from high school have.

Maybe all those Black people with doctoral degrees should just try to make more money? That doesn't do the trick. Blacks with high incomes (\$93,000+) have lower levels of wealth than do whites making between \$57,000 and \$93,000. All in all, research shows that "racial wealth differences cannot be explained by education,

employment, or income.”<sup>59</sup> Experts have calculated that Black households would have to save 100 percent of their income *for three years* to close the wealth gap!<sup>60</sup> And still, it is predicted that in 2053, the median wealth among Blacks will be \$0.00.

How does this all work? Much of the wealth people have comes from their homes, but another source is one’s family, especially one’s parents and grandparents: wealth is often intergenerationally passed down.<sup>61</sup> Let’s say your grandparents got a loan for a home in one of those Green neighborhoods we discussed earlier, and they passed it down to your parents. Your parents now live in a home with little or no payments, and their home is building equity (a house’s value minus what is owed on it). When you go to college, they can borrow from the equity so that you do not have to take out loans. You’re better off already.

Now let’s imagine that they pass the house to you, but you have a low-paying job. You’re still doing okay because you just have to pay utilities, upkeep, and taxes. Your kids can still go to the “good,” well-resourced schools even though you make little money. This scenario looks much different for a person who is the descendant of people who bought a home in the Red neighborhood. There is no wealth on which to fall back on for college, and if you do live in that home, your children may go to a school that is underresourced. In all, we have to remember that some people were legally (and sometimes violently) excluded from amassing wealth through home ownership—the path that many white Americans have taken to weave a tightly knit social safety net for their families.

It’s likely that you had very little to do with your inheritance—big or small—but the wealth gap that we see across groups is an outcome of historical, structural **racism** and racial terrorism. The wealth gap was fueled, in part, by the 1618 Headright System (which gave fifty acres of land in the “new colonies” to any European willing to travel across the Atlantic); exacerbated by the enactment of the Slave Codes in 1705 (which allowed whites to enslave and own Blacks, but not vice versa); ramped up by the 1785 Land Ordinance Act (which divided up the ancestral lands of Indigenous Americans); deepened by the 1862 Homestead Act (which provided free

land for citizens—note that Blacks were not eligible for **citizenship** until 1868); cemented by racially inequitable implementation of the 1944 Serviceman’s Readjustment Act (better known as the GI Bill); intensified by redlining policies encouraged by the Federal Housing Administration through 1968; and further worsened by the Great Recession of 2008. The wealth gap is rooted in many hundreds of years and thousands of policies that might be best characterized as **affirmative action** for white people.<sup>62</sup>

The thing about wealth is that it helps when you need help most. Individuals and families with more wealth can more easily maneuver about the world than those without it can. If you need an attorney (after one of those “unlucky” police stops), you can rely on wealth. If you want to help your child pay for college or help him or her buy a new home, you can rely on wealth. If you want to run for public office, you can rely on wealth. You can attain more stuff with wealth: education, property, power, and more wealth. These disparities make Blacks vulnerable to the negative outcomes of economic shocks (like the Great Recession) and make the fall harder to bounce back from when they are knocked down by the loss of a job or a sudden decline in health.



## Health

Basic indicators of quality of life measure how healthy people feel and how long they are expected to live. According to epidemiological research, Black people live shorter lives than whites do. Also shocking is the fact that the Black-white mortality gap did not close for the forty years between 1960 and 2000. Researchers project that if this gap had closed, nearly eighty-four thousand Black deaths *per year* could have been prevented.<sup>63</sup> Obviously, how healthy a person is has a lot to do with individual behavior (e.g., eating well, exercise), but there is so much more to it than that. To begin, “public health research increasingly recognizes that racial/ethnic disparities

in health are rooted in social factors such as SES [socioeconomic status], discrimination, and residential segregation,”<sup>64</sup> things we have already discussed.

Again, where you live can have a tremendous influence on your life. Blacks are highly segregated, and Latinxs increasingly so, and thus are isolated from “high-opportunity neighborhoods,” or neighborhoods marked by “sustainable employment, high-performing schools, healthy environments, access to high-quality health care, adequate transportation, high-quality child care, neighborhood safety, and institutions that facilitate civic engagement.”<sup>65</sup> To a large extent, Blacks are excluded from the geography of opportunity, and their health outcomes are dampened as a consequence. Food deserts, or places where high-quality, affordable food is not easily accessible, are likely to form in low-income and Black neighborhoods.<sup>66</sup> When hospitals close, they are more likely to do so in low-income and Black neighborhoods.<sup>67</sup> When family-planning clinics are eliminated by state policies, Black and Latina women are the most negatively affected, as their access to reproductive health care services is substantially decreased.<sup>68</sup> If you thought we were being merely metaphorical by talking about the “geography of opportunity,” guess again. Your zip code, as structural inequality would have it, is a helpful predictor of your life expectancy, such that five miles can make a twenty-year difference.<sup>69</sup> That’s right, your zip code is a better predictor of your health than your genetic code is.

One thing that stands out to us is that even when Black people attain more education, there is not necessarily an increase in well-being (recall, for example, that even with more education, Blacks still fall behind in levels of wealth, and they pay even more for their homes). In the case of infant outcomes, research shows not only that Black babies are two to three times more likely to die than are white babies in their first year of life but also that even as Black women step into the middle class, infant-mortality rates do not decline. In fact, there is a larger disparity between Black and white women at the higher end of the socioeconomic spectrum than at the lower end. One emerging theory is that middle-class Black women have to

contend with chronic stress, including stress that results from exposure to racial discrimination.<sup>70</sup> Black lives are literally more likely to be lost.

As mentioned, all of these domains of life we've discussed so far are interrelated. "Educational attainment and income provide psychosocial and material resources that protect against exposure to health risks in early and adult life"; meanwhile, "persons with low levels of education and income generally experience increased rates of mortality, morbidity, and risk-taking behaviors and decreased access to and quality of health care."<sup>71</sup> As we know, Blacks are less likely to have access to quality education and are shut out of job opportunities more so than whites. Keeping that in mind, it's important to note, "unemployed persons tend to have higher annual illness rates, lack health insurance and access to health care, and have an increased risk for death. Several studies indicate that employment status influences a person's health; however, poor health also affects a person's ability to obtain and retain employment."<sup>72</sup> Rinse. Repeat. The cycle continues.



## When Black Lives Matter

James Baldwin wrote in a letter to Angela Davis, who was two decades his junior and imprisoned on false charges of murder, kidnapping, and criminal conspiracy,

The enormous revolution in Black consciousness which has occurred in your generation, my dear sister, means the beginning or the end of America. Some of us, white and Black, know how great a price has already been paid to bring into existence a new consciousness, a new people, an unprecedented nation. If we know, and do nothing, we are worse than the murderers hired in our name. If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own—which it is—and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.<sup>73</sup>

What's past is prologue, they say. Today, young Black people have again taken the United States to task, forcing it to face its greatest flaws, many of which are rooted in anti-Black **racism**. One of these problems is that many Americans have yet to come to the realization that though most of us value rugged individualism, this country thrives because it is upheld by the threads that weave together many interrelated—though segregated—communities. If we don't solve the problems that one community is facing, all Americans and the United States itself will suffer. If we do not protect the most vulnerable, we can be assured that we will find ourselves in that same undesirable position soon enough.

We see this dynamic playing out right now. For example, the War on Drugs served to punish people not only for the sale of drugs but also for drug use and addiction. When drugs such as crack cocaine ran rampant in highly segregated, poor, Black neighborhoods, African Americans bore the brunt of these policies, best evinced by the disproportionate number of Blacks who are incarcerated in the United States. As work disappeared from urban areas, Black unemployment rates skyrocketed, and all of the problems associated with highly unemployed areas developed: increased pessimism, drug use, homelessness, and crime. Behaviors that are stereotypically associated with poor Black people are neither unique to that group nor pathological. Instead, they are well predicted by structural factors, including the shape of the economy and the way that policy makers react to those who are most in need. Suffice it to say, policy makers tend to react negatively and with punitive policies to groups they see as undeserving.<sup>74</sup>

As a result of the Great Recession, many of these issues peaked again: unemployment, pessimism, drug use, homelessness. But this time, whites were affected as well, especially in the rural United States and in places where good-paying factory jobs left town. If we penalize whites who face similar challenges to what Blacks historically have in the same way, we will have an even bigger set of societal problems than we already do. What if whites were incarcerated at the same rate as Blacks? All things being equal (which they are not), then one in three white men would then have dealings with

the criminal justice system. Let that sink in. US policy makers could have already prepared thoughtful, helpful, effective, cost-saving public policies to deal with the issues now faced by an even greater proportion of Americans decades ago when Blacks were the test case, for lack of better words.

Another thing: remember when we mentioned that if the gap between Black and white mortality closed, eighty-four thousand deaths could have been prevented? The assumption behind this projection is that Blacks' rate of mortality inches closer to whites', but what we're actually seeing is that whites', especially poor whites', well-being is declining. A lot of the reason why the United States does not have a better health care system and stronger safety-net policies is because of anti-Black **racism**—plainly and simply. The legal scholar Ian Haney López tracks the strategic use of anti-Black racism by white, conservative politicians across several decades and reveals a pattern of behavior; by suggesting, or even hinting, that “undeserving” Blacks are likely to benefit from a social policy, politicians are able to convince (poor) whites that we should constrain that policy.<sup>75</sup> Remember that fire we talked about? It's becoming clear that it is already starting to spread.

The thing about the contemporary Movement for Black Lives is that it provides an imaginative vision of society based on human flourishing. Such a realization requires not just a tweaking of the existing political, social, and economic systems but a major transformation of the way US society works. What would it take to accomplish this? *Stay Woke* provides a set of tools for its readers to begin to unpack the ways that anti-Black racism prevents the United States from living up to its fullest potential, and it guides them to envision what each of us can do to work toward a more vibrant and egalitarian society.



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## Questions and Debate

- 1 This chapter begins with an analogy of burning buildings. Is this analogy helpful? If so, what is the next building or buildings that may begin to burn if anti-Black **racism** isn't smothered? If not, what is your critique?
- 2 We've provided lots of facts, figures, and statistics about racial inequality in the United States. How would you measure racial progress? What metric would you use?
- 3 When people hear "Black Lives Matter," different people take this slogan to mean different things. Why do people interpret this slogan so differently? Why do people have such visceral reactions to this phrase—either positive or negative?
- 4 The term "postracial" gets bandied about quite a bit in the US news media. What does "postracial" mean? How do you know when the United States has become a "postracial" society? What would that look like? Is it possible? Why isn't there more talk about a "post-racist" society instead?
- 5 We discuss a variety of laws and policies that contributed to structural racism (e.g., Slave Codes, Homestead Act, redlining, GI Bill). How, if at all, have those policies shaped your life, your family members' lives, or those of your ancestors?

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## Additional Materials to Consider

### BOOKS

- Barrett, Dawson. *The Defiant: Protest Movements in Post-Liberal America*. New York: NYU Press, 2018.
- Baumgartner, Frank, Derek A. Epp, and Kelsey Shoub. *Suspect Citizens: What 20 Million Traffic Stops Tell Us about Policing and Race*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

- Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, and Asha Bandele. *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*. New York: St. Martin's, 2017.
- Smith, Mychal Denzel. *Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching: A Young Black Man's Education*. New York: Nation Books, 2016.
- Trounstein, Jessica. *Segregation by Design: Local Politics and Inequality in American Cities*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

## FILMS

- The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*. Directed by Chad Freidrichs. First-Run Features, Films Media Group, 2011.
- 13th*. Directed by Ava DuVernay. Netflix, 2016.

## PODCASTS

- Seeing White*. Hosted by John Biewen and Chenjerai Kumanyika. Scene on Radio, Center for Documentary Studies, 2017. [www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/](http://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/).
- Undisclosed*. Hosted by Rabia Chaudry, Collin Miller, and Susan Simpson. <http://undisclosed-podcast.com>.
- 74 Seconds: The Death of Philando Castile and the Trial of Jeronimo Yanez*. MPR News. [www.mprnews.org/topic/philandocastile](http://www.mprnews.org/topic/philandocastile).

## WEBSITES

- Nelson, Robert K., LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al. "Mapping Inequality." *American Panorama*, edited by Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers. Accessed July 27, 2018, <https://dsl.richmond.edu>.