

The country has made tremendous progress since civil rights legislation outlawed racial discrimination in the mid-1960s. Jim Crow got the death sentence. Yet racial disparities have persisted in almost every aspect of American life, from life expectancy to wealth accumulation to academic achievement to incarceration rates. Studies have identified institutional racism, within banks for example, or insurance companies. Experts say the persistent racial inequity is more accurately described as structural racism. The Aspen Institute, which has taken the lead in identifying structural racism and educating people about it, describes it as the “system in which public policies, institutional practices and culture representation perpetuates racial group inequity in every key opportunity area, health, education, employment, income and wealth.” In many cases, the perpetuation of racial inequity is unintentional, making it difficult for people to recognize it. It’s not a “colored” sign above a cracked water fountain. But the impact on people of color, their communities and thereby the society as a whole, is just as tangible.

Perhaps one of the more dramatic examples of the unintended racial impacts of a government policy was the difference in federal mandatory sentencing for powdered and crack cocaine. There was a 100 to 1 disparity. A person possessing five grams of crack, about 10 to 50 doses, received a mandatory minimum sentence of five years while a person had to possess 500 grams of powdered cocaine, about 2,500 to 5,000 doses, to receive the same sentence. According to The Sentencing Project, while two-thirds of regular crack users are white or Latino, 80 percent of the people convicted of a federal crack cocaine offense were African American. As experts pointed out, it would have been difficult to purposefully design a system that was more racially inequitable. It took more than 20 years for the disparity in sentencing to be corrected. We may never be able to calculate the damage done to tens of thousands of individuals, their families and communities.

This report is designed as a tool for journalists and researchers. It lists links to more than 150 studies that, since 2000, have found racial disparities in the areas of health, education, housing, employment and criminal justice. The pervasiveness of racial inequity is shocking, even if you think you are aware of it. If there is a silver lining, however, it is that so many people and institutions are dedicated to documenting it and doing something about it. Thousands of our fellow citizens understand we can never be the country we have aspired to be until racial inequity is a rarity and not the norm.

Each section (except the one on employment disparities) includes examples of institutions and initiatives working to solve the problem, as well as sources. The studies that are highlighted provide an overview. Most of the studies can serve as launching point for journalists to investigate the specific issue in their communities. As extensive as this list is, it is only an introduction to the documentation of continued and pervasive racial disparity.

It begins with studies about structural racism.

STRUCTURAL RACISM OVERVIEW

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Aspen Institute Introduction to the Project on Structural Racism and Community Building <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/community-change/introduction-project-structural-racism>

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STRUCTURAL RACISM TOWARD SOLUTIONS

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<http://racialequity.org/docs/CIF3/CIF3finalweb.pdf>

Beginning Dialogue - Marking Progress: Movement Toward Racial Justice, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equality, 2009 roundtable on structural racism

http://racialequity.org/docs/Beginning_Dialogue.pdf

Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity <http://kirwaninstitute.org/>

Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equality <http://www.racialequity.org/index.html>

HEALTH

Racial disparities in health have probably received the most notice. The medical profession understands that these disparities are the most fundamental indictment of a society that claims to be based on equality. From mortality rates for almost every disease to saving patients after surgical complications to depression care, studies have found racial disparities. Even within managed care systems, where patients have equal access to health care, the racial disparities exist. The section begins with reports offering background and an overview, the Unnatural Causes series and website, The Institute of Medicine's Unequal Treatment, Confronting Disparities in Health Care and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services yearly reports on health care disparities. A sub-category looks at the racial disparity in access to healthy food, an obvious and basic component of health.

Unnatural Causes series and website <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/>

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HEALTH DISPARITIES – TOWARD SOLUTIONS

Kaiser webcasts of panel of experts on various disparity topics

<http://www.kff.org/minorityhealth/todaystopics.cfm>

Agencies and resources working to solve health care disparities

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/static/spotlight_minorityhealth_reference.cfm

NIH Summit: The Science of Eliminating Health Care Disparities

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/health_cast/hcast_index.cfm?display=detail&hc=3089

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http://www.kaiseredu.org/topics_reflib.asp?id=329&rID=5&parentid=67

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services meeting summary of experts on strategies for reducing health care disparities <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/dispmtgsum09.htm>

Stop disparities – lengthy source list on various racial disparities in health care, American Academy of Physicians Assistants, <http://www.stop-disparities.org/RESOURCES.html>

HEALTH DISPARITIES SOURCES

Dr. David Williams, professor at the Harvard School of Public Health, internationally recognized expert on social influences on health, including racial disparities, effects of racism and religious involvement <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/faculty/david-williams/>

Dr. Meredith Minkler, professor at the University of California at Berkeley School of Public Health, expert on community involvement in health issues <http://sph.berkeley.edu/faculty/minkler.php>

Commonwealth Fund list of experts on the issue of health care disparities <http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Newsroom/Expert-List.aspx?expertsonly=1&expertareaofinterest=Health+Care+Disparities>

EDUCATION

Education is a basic building block of families, communities and societies. More than 25 years after Brown v. Board of Education integrated the public schools, schools remain segregated. Studies establish that segregation perpetuates racial inequality. Teachers assigned to minority schools are more likely to be inexperienced or teaching outside their fields of expertise. Schools serving minority communities receive less financing and fewer schools are constructed in minority communities. Black and brown children are disciplined more harshly and frequently for the same offenses as white children. In an example of a subset of structural racism, experts have identified the schoolyard to prisonyard pipeline, documenting how zero tolerance policies in schools are pushing minority students out of the classroom, the school house and into jails and prisons

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EDUCATION DISPARITIES TOWARD SOLUTIONS

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HOUSING

Central to the American dream is the opportunity to purchase a home. A house secures a family's place in the middle class, serving as a source for college tuition, funds to start a small business and an inheritance to pass on to the next generation. Racial disparities persist in every aspect of home buying, from lending discrimination, which is directly related to subprime loans and foreclosures, to steering by real estate agents. In the rental market, paired-testing audits document how minority and white perspective tenants are treated differently. Neighborhoods remain racially segregated resulting in a racial disparity in housing values. In another example of structural racism, the distance between employers and the neighborhoods where minorities live – called a spatial mismatch – is a major contributor to higher unemployment and underemployment of African Americans and Latinos.

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EMPLOYMENT

Although some of the toughest anti-discrimination laws address employment, racial disparities persist. African Americans consistently have a higher unemployment rate than whites. During economic downturns, they suffer a disproportionate loss of jobs. Racial inequities are documented in hiring, promotion and pay and found in all levels of work, from blue collar jobs to the restaurant industry to advertising firms. One study found that applicants with African American sounding names were not called back as often as applicants with “white” names. Another audit found that white applicants with a criminal record were called back more often than African Americans with no record.

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