THE DEVALUATION OF ASSETS IN BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS

The case of residential property

Andre Perry
Jonathan Rothwell
David Harshbarger

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Using census and real estate market data, a study of property values in U.S. metropolitan areas of owner-occupied homes located in neighborhoods at least 50 percent Black finds that:

In U.S. metropolitan areas, 10 percent of neighborhoods are majority Black, and they are home to 41 percent of the Black population living in metropolitan areas and 37 percent of the U.S. Black population. These neighborhoods hold $609 billion in owner-occupied housing assets and are home to approximately 10,000 public schools and over 3 million businesses. Though most residents are Black (14.4 million non-Hispanic Black) by definition, approximately 5 million non-Black Americans from every other racial and ethnic background live in majority Black neighborhoods.

In the average U.S. metropolitan area, homes in neighborhoods where the share of the population is 50 percent Black are valued at roughly half the price as homes in neighborhoods with no Black residents. There is a strong and powerful statistical relationship between the share of the population that is Black and the market value of owner-occupied homes. Location in a Black neighborhood predicts a large financial penalty for 117 out of the 119 metropolitan areas with majority Black neighborhoods, though the valuation gap varies widely between them.

Differences in home and neighborhood quality do not fully explain the devaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods. Homes of similar quality in neighborhoods with similar amenities are worth 23 percent less in majority Black neighborhoods, compared to those with very few or no Black residents. Majority Black neighborhoods do exhibit features associated with lower property values, including higher crime rates, longer commute times, and less access to high-scoring schools and well-rated restaurants. Yet, these factors only explain roughly half of the undervaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods. Across all majority Black neighborhoods, owner-occupied homes are undervalued by $48,000 per home on average, amounting to $156 billion in cumulative losses.

Metropolitan areas with greater devaluation of Black neighborhoods are more segregated and produce less upward mobility for the Black children who grow up in those communities. Using combined tax and census data from the Equality of Opportunity Project, this analysis finds a positive and statistically significant correlation between the devaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods and upward mobility of Black children in metropolitan areas with majority Black neighborhoods. Segregation is negatively correlated with Black home valuations.

The undervaluation of housing in Black neighborhoods has important social implications. Black homeowners realize lower wealth accumulation, which makes it more difficult to start and invest in businesses and afford college tuition. We believe anti-Black bias is the reason this undervaluation happens, and we hope to better understand the precise beliefs and behaviors that drive this process in future research.

On September 19, 2018 University of Mississippi alumnus, former faculty member and administrator, Ed Meek, posted on Facebook two separate pictures of African American women along with the caption, "Enough, Oxford and Ole Miss leaders, get on top of this before it is too late." For Meek, namesake of the Meek School of Journalism and New Media, the women's presence apparently signaled the decline of the town of Oxford, home of the University of Mississippi. "A 3 percent decline in enrollment is nothing compared to what we will see if this continues…and real estate values will plummet as will tax revenue," Meek wrote.

To be clear, the sheer presence of Black women doesn't devalue homes. However, signaling they do can negatively impact housing markets. Meek served as the university's assistant vice chancellor for public relations and marketing for 37 years.[1] Meeks' Facebook post suggests in word and deed that the values we place on people are strongly associated with proximate assets. Black people according to Meek lowers real estate values.

After community-wide condemnation, Meek halfheartedly backed in to an apology. "I have done as you requested, Chancellor," Meek wrote. "I am sorry I posted those pictures but there was no intent to imply a racial issue. My intent was to highlight we do have a problem in The Grove and on the Oxford Square."

Notwithstanding the underlying assumption of Meek's perceived problem at Oxford, the presence of a negative bias toward Blacks prevents even the most noble of efforts to improve neighborhoods from building upon the strengths of Black residents. That sentiment can be heard in a common refrain in Black communities that "reform is done to us, not with us."[2]

The value of assets is influenced by implicit societal cues. Researchers at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University define implicit bias as the "attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner."[3] They find that "implicit associations we harbor in our subconscious cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance." Through direct and indirect cues, people develop these associations over the course of a lifetime, beginning at a very early age.

Researchers have demonstrated the presence of unconscious bias in education, the criminal justice system and health care.[4] And since the murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in 2012, activists have raised public consciousness around the biases involved in the killing of Black men at the hands of police, captured so many times on cell phone video.

Much of the research on implicit bias focuses on individuals' perception of individual members of an oppressed class. However, we should expect some of these biases to carry over into *places* where there are high concentrations of Black people. The value of assets–buildings, schools, leadership, and land itself–are inextricably linked to the perceptions of Black people.

There is strong evidence that bias has tangible effects on real estate markets, both historically and today. During the 20th century, both explicit government institutions and decentralized political actions created and sustained racially segregated housing conditions in the United States.[5] This has created what has been dubbed a "segregation tax," resulting in lower property valuations for Blacks compared to whites per dollar of income.[6]

Contemporary work from social scientists has aimed to sort out whether these lower valuations are caused by differences in socio-economic status, neighborhood qualities, or discrimination.[7] The results tend to show compelling evidence for discrimination.[8] In one study, Valerie Lewis, Michael Emerson, and Stephen Klineberg collected detailed survey data on neighborhood racial preferences in Houston, Texas. They asked people to imagine that they were looking for a new house, found one within their price range and close to their job; they then say to respondents, "checking the neighborhood . . ." and then present difference scenarios based on racial composition, school quality, crime, and property value changes for the hypothetical neighborhood." Consistent with previous research, they find that these neighborhood features strongly predict whether someone says they would buy the house. Racial composition strongly predicted the preferences of whites in neighborhoods that were otherwise identical.

Researchers Jacob Fabera and Ingrid Gould Ellen examined the variation of rising housing prices among people of different racial categories who purchased their homes before the boom from 2000 to 2007 and kept them through the bust of 2008.[9] They found that Blacks and Hispanics gained less equity than whites during that period and were more likely to owe more than their home was worth. The researchers found

that "[b]lack-white gaps were driven in part by racial disparities in income and education and differences in types of homes purchased." They hypothesized that racial segregation and the corollary economic and education stratification between neighborhoods exacerbated existing equity disparities within neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty. Consequently, the recession hit those neighborhoods disproportionately harder, creating intense volatility in those particular markets. Declining incomes reduced people's ability to purchase homes, thus deflating prices in those neighborhoods. The findings around education and income may result from the disparities in wealth as it is "a powerful predictor of individual educational and economic outcomes, and despite their significantly lower homeownership ... the long-run consequences of these gaps are substantively important and difficult to overcome."[10]

But how does the concentration of Blackness impact demand among all buyers–whether from the community or not? Income and education certainly matter, but how much of the demand that impacts housing price is affected by how people around it are perceived? In other words, what is the cost of racial bias?

Real estate agents have been shown to direct Black and white home buyers differently based on racial stereotypes, reinforcing patterns of racial segregation. Researcher Sun Jung Oh and John Yinger reviewed four different national studies on the topic in a 2015 article and found a common thread: There is "evidence of statistically significant discrimination against home seekers who belong to a historically disadvantaged racial or ethnic group."[11]

Some of this research is not about devaluation, per se, but about steering and price discrimination. It indicates that Blacks actually pay more than whites for equivalent housing. The focus of this paper is on how lower prices in majority-Black neighborhoods convey lower value. Nevertheless, prior research forces us to assume that bias is baked into home prices. This study seeks to understand how much money majority Black communities have to lose from the devaluation of housing assets stemming from racial bias throughout the market.

MAIN CONCEPTS

We define the devaluation of housing in Black communities as the property value penalty that characterizes an owner-occupied home in a neighborhood that is 50 percent Black.

We provide three estimates for this penalty at the national and metropolitan levels. Our national analysis is restricted to only metropolitan areas, since estimates would likely have large margins of errors in rural counties with few census tracts or small Black populations.

Actual devaluation: We start with a simple description of the mean difference in home value (shown in percentage point terms) between properties in neighborhoods with zero African-Americans and neighborhoods that are 50 percent African-American.

Devaluation adjusted for structural characteristics of the home: This adjusts the predicted effect of Black neighborhood population by the physical characteristics of the home—such as when it was built, the number of bedrooms—and the distance between the home and centers of work and the type of homes in the neighborhood.

Devaluation adjusted for structural characteristics of the home and neighborhood amenities: This adjusts for all the above characteristics, as well as the number of people living in the neighborhood, the family structure of neighbors, their age, and, importantly, the quality of local schools and access to retail establishments.

Structural Characteristics

- Median bedrooms
- Median year built
- Single family detached share of owner-occupied units
- Single family attached share of owner-occupied units
- Mobile homes share of owner-occupied units
- Share of homes with no vehicle availability
- Share of homes with gas or electric heating
- Share of homes with kitchen

Neighborhood Amenities

- Mean commute of working adults
- Percent of working adults who carpool to work
- Percent of working adults who use public transportation
- Percent of units that are owner-occupied
- Population (natural log)
- Share of households with children under 18
- Share of households headed by single moms
- Median age of population
- EPA Walkability Index
- Number of professional service businesses
- Number of libraries
- Number of museums and historical sites
- Number of food and drinking places
- Number of gas stations
- Proficiency rate of 4th-8th grade public school students

WHY STUDY OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING

We focus on owner-occupied homes for two reasons. Home appreciation results in higher home values, and this brings wealth to owners. There is a large and well-known wealth gap between Blacks and other racial groups in the United States, much of which can be attributed to differences in homeownership rates and the value of housing. Second, the devaluation of rental properties is advantageous to renters, insofar as it results in a lower rental payment for similar quality housing. The devaluation of owner-occupied housing makes it easier to acquire the home, but once purchased, it is unambiguously disadvantageous to the owner and occupier, who would otherwise benefit from being able to refinance, borrow, or sell at a higher valuation.

DATA SOURCES

Home values

Home values, neighborhood demographics, and structural characteristics are from the 2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (ACS).

Our dependent variable from the ACS—median home values at the census tract level—comes from an item on the questionnaire that asks homeowners: "About how much do you think this house and lot, apartment, or mobile home (and lot, if owned) would sell for if it were for sale?"

These data are limited by the fact that they are self-reported and not all homes are actually for sale. Our primary measure of housing value overcomes these limitations. It consists of ZIP code data from Zillow, a housing market research company. Zillow provides median price listing overall and per square foot at the ZIP-code level.[12] There is some error in moving between ZIP codes and census tracts, which is needed to characterize ZIP-code racial demographics, but the property-level accuracy of the Zillow data is likely to be superior, since it is based on actual listing prices rather than self-reported valuations. Another advantage of Zillow data is that it includes estimates for price per square foot, a quality-adjusted price. We matched ZIP codes to census tracts using a correspondence engine from the Missouri Census Data Center (MABLE).[13] To make Zillow data as comparable as possible to the 5-year American Community Survey, we averaged Zillow's ZIP code-level data from 2012 to 2016.

In practice, the census and Zillow measures are highly correlated. The correlational coefficient between census tract median owner-occupied home values and the Zillow median listing price is 0.84. The census-based correlation with Zillow's median price per square foot is 0.78.[14]

Access to schools

To measure school quality, we consider that public school attendance areas roughly align with neighborhoods, and housing prices are higher in areas near high-scoring public schools, as previous Brookings research has discussed.[15] To account for school quality in our analysis, we obtained proficiency rates on state exams for all public schools covering grades 4-8 for both mathematics and reading. These data are available from the Department of Education.[16]

We matched schools to census tracts based on the latitude and longitude coordinates, which are available via the Department of Education. Our approach was to take a 5-mile radius around each census tract and consider every school in that radius as a potential school for that neighborhood. The nearest schools to the tract—including all those in the tract—were assigned to the tract until the cumulative school population in grades 4 to 8 equaled the population of 10-to-14-year-olds in the tract.

Our final measure of school quality is the mean proficiency rate of all 4th-8th grade students in the census tract. We take the mean of high and low-end estimates, since data for many schools are reported as ranges.

Access to businesses

To measure access to stores, restaurants, and other goods and service providers, we obtained data on the number of business establishments by industry by ZIP code from the 2016 Census Bureau's County Business Patterns database. We matched ZIP codes to census ZIP code tabulation areas (ZCTAs), using a crosswalk developed by GeoMapper, and then ZCTAs to tracts using a correspondence engine from the Missouri Census Data Center (MABLE).[17]

We examined all two-digit sectors and found professional business establishments best explained variation in home prices. It is unlikely that homeowners give much value to proximity to engineering and law firms. Instead, the significance of this variable likely comes from the fact professional establishments tend to cluster near neighborhoods with professional workers for commuting reasons.

We also examined three-digit industries in retail, restaurants, and other services. We found that the number of food and drinking places (e.g. restaurants and bars), museums, and gas stations were all significant predictors of home value (gas stations have a negative relationship) and reasonably independent of one another. Surprisingly, grocery stores and other retail had no consistent relationship with home value. Finally, we also tested libraries as another possible amenity, and that proved to be robust, so it was included in the final model.

Walkability

Another aspect of access to businesses and a desirable urban lifestyle is the concept of "walkability." For this, we rely on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Walkability Index.[18] It gives higher scores to neighborhoods with diverse businesses, a large number of housing units, and intersecting streets. These features predict more walk trips. We convert block measures to tracts.

Crime

Exposure to crime is an important neighborhood characteristic that likely affects home values. Unfortunately, comprehensive data on crime is only available at the county-level, and our analysis did not find that neighborhoods located in counties with higher crime rates had lower property values. We do, however, control for the median age of residents in the neighborhood and the percent of families that are single-mothers with children under 18 living in the home. Both are correlated with crime rates (-.28 and .47 respectively), suggesting that we are likely capturing crime effects in our analysis.

To further investigate this, we obtained data from 10 large cities from U.S. City Open Data Census where crimes were coded using geo-coordinates. The analysis is described in more detail in the Appendix. Adding crime to our model did not affect our estimates of the association between Black population and home values, providing further reassurance that explicitly measuring crime at the neighborhood level would not change the conclusions of this research.

Income mobility and other metrics

Using data from Chetty, Hendren, Jones, and Porter, we measure income mobility of Black children by showing the average income rank by metropolitan area for Black adults aged 31 to 37 who grew up in low-income families, defined as those at the 25th percentile of the national income distribution.[19] Chetty and his coauthors made these data available at the level of commuting zones, which are like metropolitan areas but defined to include non-metropolitan counties and use a slightly different algorithm to assign counties to areas. We assign commuting zones to metropolitan areas by assigning the largest county (by 2010 population) in each commuting zone to its metropolitan area.

We follow Chetty, Hendren, Jones, and Porter in supplementing our analysis with data from Stephens-Davidowitz on the prevalence of anti-Black Google searches in the metropolitan area.[20] In the absence of representative survey data at the metropolitan scale on racist beliefs, this metric is one of the few potential

indicators of racist or anti-Black sentiment available. If racism is a factor in the devaluation of Black homes, and Google searches that use anti-Black slang indicate racism, then this metric may explain some of the variation in devaluation.

We further supplement the analysis with a standard measure of segregation, the dissimilarity index, which measures the unevenness of racial group residency across census tracts. We construct this measure using the same 2012-2016 American Community Survey data used in the rest of the analysis.

Household income and educational attainment

We did not include household income or education directly in our model to estimate devaluation. Income and education reflect the buying power of individuals, and naturally, both tend to rise along with home values. Including them in the model would essentially test whether homes in Black neighborhoods are over or under-valued relative to the purchasing power of residents; in other words, it would be estimating the affordability of housing. That is a different question than the one we ask here, which is whether homes are over or under-valued in Black neighborhoods based on the qualities of the home and neighborhood in a

given metropolitan housing market. People who live outside of the neighborhood are potential buyers and so should be considered part of the market. Since we control for metropolitan area fixed effects, this is captured in our analysis.

To understand the consequences of omitting income and education in our model, we ran our preferred specification—a regression of the list price per square foot on our full model—while including median household income and the share of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher. Both are significant and positively related to home values, as expected, but their inclusion has no effect on our main variable of interest—the Black population share. Our devaluation estimate excluding income and education in this model is -22.7 percent, whereas it is -21.7 percent if we include them. We infer from this that home affordability patterns are similar for homeowners in majority Black neighborhoods and those outside them, controlling for everything else we see about the home and neighborhood. This result reinforces our finding that homes are devalued in Black neighborhoods in large part because they are in Black neighborhoods, and not only because the homes or neighborhoods have less desirable features or the residents have lowering purchasing power.

1. In U.S. metropolitan areas, 10 percent of neighborhoods are majority Black, and they are home to 41 percent of the Black population living in metropolitan areas and 37 percent of the U.S. Black population.

Black Americans are highly urbanized. 90 percent live in metropolitan areas, compared to 86 percent of all U.S. residents. And decades after the Civil Rights movement, Blacks remain highly segregated. Though Blacks comprise just 12 percent of the U.S. population, 70 percent live in neighborhoods that are over 20 percent Black, and 41 percent live in majority Black neighborhoods.

These majority Black neighborhoods may be overlooked as sites for economic development, but they contain important assets, in terms of people, public infrastructure, and wealth.

Majority Black neighborhoods in metropolitan areas are also home to 14.4 million non-Hispanic Black residents and 5 million residents from other racial and ethnic groups. They also house a large portion of the nation's human capital, in that 2.3 million adults 25 and older call majority Black neighborhoods their home, representing 5 percent of the nation's metropolitan population with a bachelor's degree, and 10 percent of its public schools and 6 percent of its libraries.

There is also wealth in these neighborhoods. In metropolitan America, there are 3.2 million owner-occupied homes in majority Black neighborhoods, 5 percent of the total, and they are collectively worth $609 billion.[21] Likewise, over 3 million business establishments are located in majority Black metropolitan neighborhoods, 7 percent of all metropolitan businesses.

TABLE 1

The distribution of neighborhoods and Black population by exposure to Black neighbors
U.S. metropolitan areas, 2012-2016

	Share of Black metropolitan population	Share of metropolitan neighborhoods
Blacks 0% to less than 1%	1%	22%
Blacks 1% to less than 5%	6%	28%
Blacks 5% to less than 10%	9%	14%
Blacks 10% to less than 20%	15%	13%
Blacks 20% to less than 50%	29%	12%
Blacks 50% or higher	41%	10%

Source: Authors' analysis of 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

2. In the average U.S. metropolitan area, homes in neighborhoods where the share of the population is 50 percent Black are valued at roughly half the price as homes in neighborhoods with no Black residents.

Across metropolitan America, housing prices are systematically lower where neighborhood Black population share is higher. In neighborhoods where less than 1 percent of the population is Black (which we refer to as "non-Black neighborhoods"), median listing prices on Zillow are $341,000 compared to $184,000 in majority Black neighborhoods. Using Census Bureau estimates from homeowners yield similar discrepancies. Comparing only homes within the same metropolitan area, both data sources suggest that home values are just over 50 percent lower in neighborhoods where the Black population is 50 percent compared to neighborhoods with no Black residents.

The devaluation of Black neighborhoods is widespread across the country. There are 119 metropolitan areas with at least one majority Black census tract and one census tract that is less than 1 percent Black. In 117 of these 119 metro areas, homes in majority Black neighborhoods are valued lower than homes in neighborhoods where Blacks are less than 1 percent of the population. Gainesville, Fla. and Sebring, Fla. are the only exceptions.

FIGURE 1

Neighborhood median home value by Black population share
U.S. metropolitan areas, 2012-2016
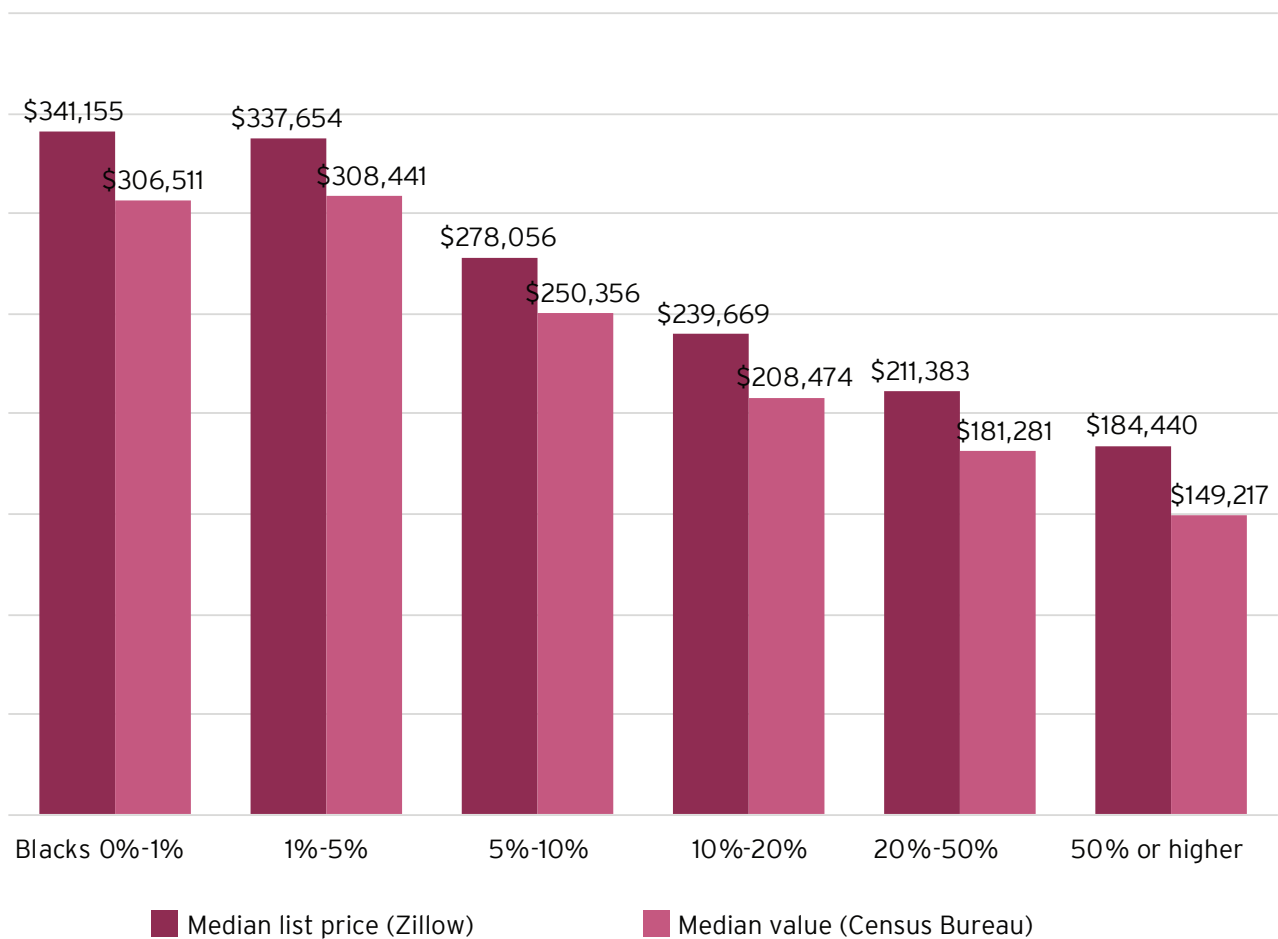
Source: Authors' analysis of Zillow and 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

The valuation gaps are extreme in a number of areas. The largest gap is in the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, Conn. metropolitan area. In neighborhoods where Blacks are less than 1 percent of the population, the median home value is $784,000, compared to just $131,000 in majority Black neighborhoods, a six-fold difference. Home values in majority Black neighborhoods are just 17 percent of those in non-Black neighborhoods. Likewise, very large differences are found throughout the South and Midwest—in Charleston, S.C., Cape Coral, Fla., Youngtown, Ohio, and Ann Arbor, Mich.

TABLE 2

The 10 metropolitan areas with the largest and smallest differences in the value of homes

Black neighborhoods in U.S. metropolitan areas, 2012-2016

	Median value of homes in majority Black neighborhoods	Median value of homes in neighborhoods with less than 1% Black population	Relative valuation of Black neighborhoods in percentage points
Areas with the largest difference in home value			
Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT	$131,011	$783,887	17%
Charleston-North Charleston, SC	$130,854	$717,711	18%
Savannah, GA	$112,539	$562,500	20%
Hilton Head Island-Bluffton-Beaufort, SC	$93,262	$460,712	20%
Youngstown-Warren-Boardman, OH-PA	$33,045	$131,484	25%
Port St. Lucie, FL	$65,880	$259,926	25%
Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, FL	$61,662	$241,853	25%
Lexington-Fayette, KY	$77,270	$301,526	26%
Cape Coral-Fort Myers, FL	$67,192	$259,118	26%
Ann Arbor, MI	$68,320	$259,985	26%
Mean of group	**$84,104**	**$397,870**	**21%**
Areas with the smallest difference in home value			
Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin, SC	$82,680	$114,743	72%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	$403,314	$559,706	72%
Baton Rouge, LA	$109,951	$152,543	72%
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	$313,353	$430,997	73%
Naples-Immokalee-Marco Island, FL	$390,200	$459,728	85%
Asheville, NC	$178,200	$195,882	91%
Lakeland-Winter Haven, FL	$82,559	$89,334	92%
Anniston-Oxford-Jacksonville, AL	$59,371	$61,200	97%
Gainesville, FL	$95,591	$95,237	100%
Sebring, FL	$134,600	$69,644	193%
Mean of group	**$184,982**	**$222,901**	**83%**

Note: Sample limited to metropolitan areas with at least one census tract that is majority Black and at least one census tract that is less than one percent Black.
Source: Authors' analysis of 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

There is nonetheless an extremely wide range of estimates across metropolitan areas for the housing market penalty for homes in Black neighborhoods. In the New York City metropolitan area, median home values in majority Black neighborhoods are over $400,000, reflecting the extraordinarily high overall cost of living and value of real estate. That is much less than the value for neighborhoods with fewer than 1 percent Black population shares ($560,000), but the percentage point gap is much lower than other parts of the country. Greenville, S.C., Boston, Mass., and Baton Rouge, La. are other examples of metro areas with relatively narrow gaps in valuations between majority Black neighborhoods and those with few Black residents.

3. Neighborhood quality is only part of the explanation for the devaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods.

During the 20th century, segregation and Jim Crow forcibly lowered the quality of neighborhood conditions for Blacks and impeded their financial ability to move to better opportunities. This occurred through deed restrictions, redlining, and zoning, as well as other mechanisms. As a result of that dynamic and the continuation of housing policies that exclude working-class housing from non-Black neighborhoods, majority Black neighborhoods suffer from lower quality housing and limited access to good schools and neighborhood amenities.

The quality of housing in majority Black neighborhoods differs from less Black neighborhoods in terms of age, size, and structure. The median home in majority Black neighborhoods is 12 years older than homes in neighborhoods where Blacks are less than 1 percent of the population. These older homes are also smaller, by nearly half a room, and are much less likely to be detached single-family homes. Majority Black neighborhoods are much more likely to have denser housing structures, such as attached single-family units, which also reflects the concentration of Blacks in America's cities.

Not only is the housing stock of lower quality, so is the surrounding neighborhood in several important dimensions. School performance is weaker, commute times are longer, and access to business amenities is more limited. There is also evidence that exposure to environmental pollution is greater, through, for example, proximity to a greater number of gas stations.[22]

TABLE 3

Physical characteristics of housing units by Black neighborhood population share
U.S. metropolitan areas, 2012-2016

	Median year structure built	Median number of rooms per unit	Single-family detached, % of units	Single-family attached, % of units
Blacks 0%-1%	1975	6.5	83.1	5.0
Blacks 1%-5%	1974	6.4	79.7	6.7
Blacks 5%-10%	1976	6.4	79.1	7.4
Blacks 10%-20%	1975	6.2	77.4	8.5
Blacks 20%-50%	1973	6.2	75.2	9.5
Blacks 50% or higher	1963	6.1	73.2	12.7

Source: Authors' analysis of 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

The school test score gaps between neighborhoods are particularly extreme. The gap in test scores between majority Black neighborhoods and those that have Black population shares that are 5 percent or lower is approximately 1.1 standard deviations. More concretely, the proficiency rate on state exams in majority Black neighborhoods is only 15 percent, compared to 60 percent in neighborhoods with less than 1 percent Black population shares.

Likewise, residents of majority Black neighborhoods confront longer commute times by several minutes compared to those in other neighborhoods, suggesting constrained access to jobs. Yet this interpretation requires caution because residents of majority Black neighborhoods are far more likely to commute via public transportation, which can be slower, especially via bus.

Still, the apparent weaknesses of Black neighborhoods can also be strengths. With homes more densely situated, residents of Black neighborhoods live in more "walkable" communities, with a greater diversity of business types and more frequent intersections. These qualities are associated with higher home values.[23] There is a striking difference on this score between majority Black neighborhoods and neighborhoods that are less than 1 percent Black; they differ by over half a standard deviation.

Given the above discussion of housing and neighborhood attributes, the central question of this study remains: Do the differences in housing and neighborhood quality fully account for the differences in housing values?

The analysis here suggests not. We use regression analysis to predict home values as a function of the Black population share, the qualities of homes in the neighborhood, and the qualities of the neighborhoods within each metropolitan area.

First, there is clear evidence that adjusting for the size of the home lowers the devaluation estimate for Black neighborhoods by a meaningful fraction—from -51 percent to -35 percent when we use the two Zillow-based measures for median list price overall and by square foot. Since Black homes are smaller, they have less market value, but that still leaves a very large gap unexplained.

TABLE 4

Neighborhood characteristics by Black population share

U.S. metropolitan areas, 2012-2016

Black population share	School test scores (Standardized)	EPA Walkability Index	Number of restaurants	Number of gas stations	Percent who use public transportation	Average commute time (minutes)
0%-1%	0.29	-0.31	53.2	6.9	3.6	26.7
1%-5%	0.28	-0.03	69.3	8.1	5.1	26.5
5%-10%	0.17	-0.01	69.7	9.2	4.7	26.6
10%-20%	-0.01	-0.01	67.5	10.0	5.4	26.5
20%-50%	-0.27	0.01	61.9	10.6	7.7	27.1
50% or higher	-0.85	0.23	50.0	10.8	15.0	29.2

Source: Authors' analysis data from 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Department of Education, Environmental Protection Agency, and County Business Patterns

The value metrics that do not include square footage are sensitive to the structural features of homes in the neighborhood—such as age, number of rooms, percentage detached, but adjusting these things did not greatly reduce the devaluation estimate. The Zillow median list price estimates for devaluation in neighborhoods that are 50 percent Black range from -40 percent to -44 percent, with census-based estimates from owner self-appraisals in the middle at -41 percent.

The next set of regression estimates includes neighborhood control variables, and these variables go further in explaining the devaluation of majority Black neighborhoods. The devaluation estimates are -22 percent for median list price and -23 percent for the list price per square foot and self-appraisals of all owner-occupied properties.

In the model that predicts value per square foot, three variables measured at the neighborhood level stand out as strong predictors: school quality—measured by state test scores (strongly positive); the number of gas stations (strongly negative) and access to public transportation (strongly positive). Majority Black neighborhoods are at a disadvantage on school quality and exposure to gas stations but have greater access to public transportation. Walkability

predicts modestly higher home values, and Black neighborhoods have an advantage on that score as well.

While this analysis explains roughly half of the devaluation effect, we are left with the fact that a square foot of residential real-estate is worth 23 percent less in neighborhoods where half the population is Black compared to neighborhood with few or no Black residents, even after adjusting for housing quality and neighborhood quality.

To put this devaluation value in perspective, we estimate that home values in majority Black neighborhoods should be worth an additional $48,000 per home, which amounts to a cumulative sum of $156 billion in aggregate value.[24]

It is certainly possible that our analysis has omitted variables that are correlated with both the Black-population share and the value of housing and that could go further in explaining the gaps we observe in value. Yet, we believe it is unlikely that any such factors would explain the gap entirely. We have included important variables in both formal property appraisals and variables that consumers can use as search criteria on popular real estate websites. For example, on Zillow, buyers can filter homes by the number of rooms, square footage, and year

TABLE 5

Average devaluation of homes due to location in a neighborhood that is 50% Black compared to 0% Black
Owner-occupied units in U.S. metropolitan areas, 2012-2016

	Actual price comparison	Adjustments for structural characteristics of home	Adjustments for structural characteristics of home and neighborhood amenities
Census median home value	-55%	-42%	-23%
Zillow median list price of houses per square foot	-35%	-40%	-23%
Zillow median list price of houses	-51%	-44%	-22%

Source: Authors' analysis of 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates and median values from Zillow averaged from 2012-2016. See text for list of structural characteristics and neighborhood amenities

built. These are included in our model. As explained in the appendix, the main results are also robust when including crime, at least in a subset of large cities where crime data are readily available at the neighborhood scale.

With more effort or with local knowledge, sophisticated shoppers can also find out information about school quality, using the same data included in our models, test proficiency rates. There are no publicly available metrics on school quality available to consumers beyond what we have included in our model. With further effort or by exploring the neighborhood, potential buyers can also get a sense of access to restaurants, libraries, and other business amenities. Our model uses measures for these amenities that best explain variation in housing, without regard to how inclusion of these variables affected the estimate for devaluation associated with Black population shares. We also adjust for the length of commute and the mode of commute and several variables that capture neighborhood household age and family relationships.

4. Metropolitan areas with greater devaluation of Black neighborhoods are more segregated and produce less upward mobility for the Black children who grow up in those communities.

Black males earn lower incomes as adults than white males, even when born to parents with similar incomes. In this sense, Blacks have lower intergenerational mobility than whites—as well as Hispanics and Asians. Intriguingly, this is not true for Black females, who have similar incomes as white females born to parents at the same income scale. These finding comes from recent research by Harvard economists Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren—along with Census Bureau economists—which linked records from the Internal Revenue Service to the Census Bureau to understand intergenerational income mobility for people aged 31 to 37 who were born between 1978 and 1983.[25]

We use these data to investigate whether or not Black children raised in areas with greater devaluation of Black assets experience less mobility. There are several reasons why this might be so. There are large gaps in wealth between races and residential

real estate wealth is a major reason for this gap.[26] If properties in Black neighborhoods were priced equally as those in white neighborhoods, Black children coming of age in the 1990s and 2000s would have had much more wealth to draw upon to pay for things like private schooling, tutoring, travel, and educational experiences, as well as higher education and greater access to higher scoring schools in the suburbs. Greater property wealth may have also facilitated higher rates of entrepreneurship among Black parents, which may have positively affected children.

In fact, there is a positive correlation between the valuation of properties in Black neighborhoods and upward mobility of Black children whose parents had incomes at the 25th percent of the national income distribution. In other words, Black children born to low-income families had higher income as adults if they grew up in a metro area that valued Black property closer to its observable market characteristics. We restrict this analysis to the 113 metropolitan areas with at least one majority Black neighborhood. We also give extra weight in the analysis to metro areas with larger Black populations to reduce the influence of measurement error; as such, the estimates should be thought of as characterizing the experience of the average Black person living in different types of metropolitan areas.[27]

As shown in Figure 2, metropolitan areas in the lowest quintile of valuation for majority Black neighborhoods compared to white neighborhoods generate very low upward mobility for Black children born near 1980. The average Black child born in these areas to families at the 25th percentile of the national income distribution advances only to the 31st percentile. In areas with greater valuation for Black neighborhoods, in the fourth quintile in particular, children end up in the 35th percentile. The positive relationship is more muted for the areas with the highest valuations of Black neighborhoods.

We also find that segregation is correlated with devaluation. Areas that undervalue homes in Black neighborhoods are much more likely to be highly segregated, using a standard Black-white segregation index.

FIGURE 2

Effect of housing valuation on upward income mobility of Black children

Majority-Black neighborhoods in U.S. metro areas, 2012-2016
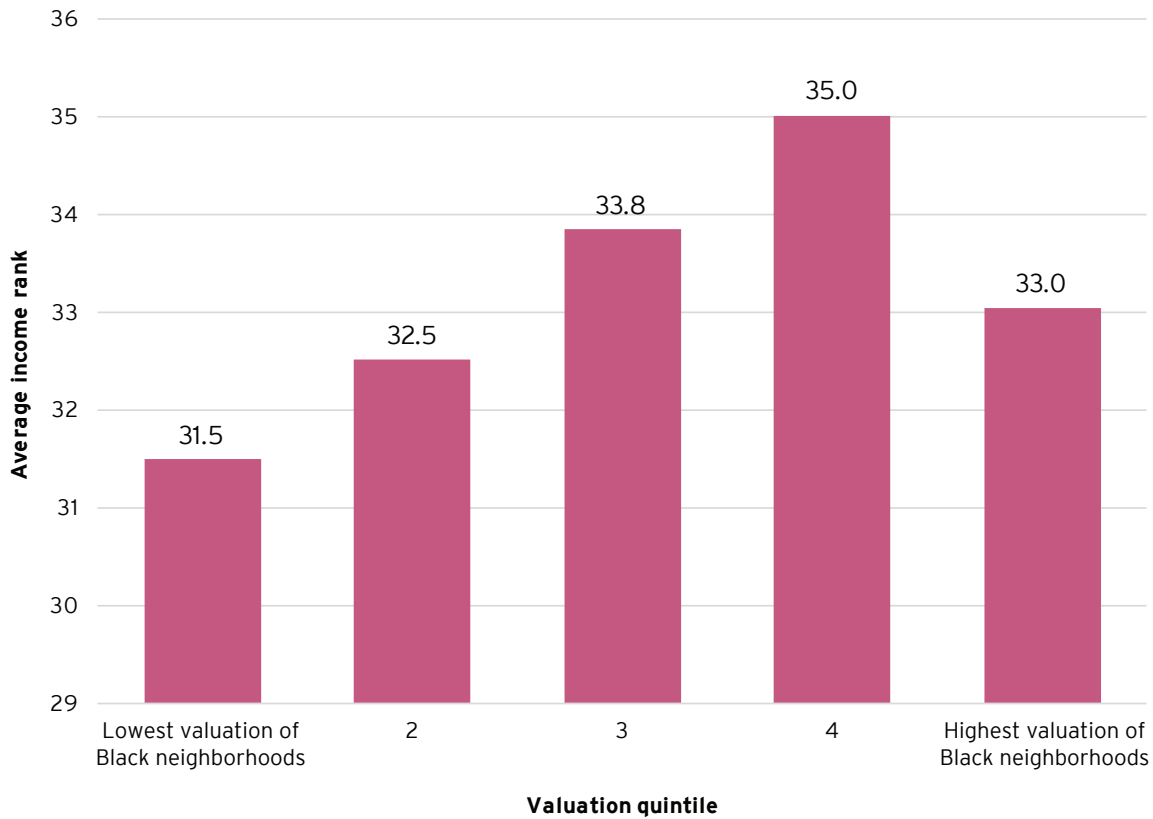
Note: Income rank calculated for Black children born to parents at 25th percentile of national income. Devaluation measure is based on median list price per square foot after adjusting for home and neighborhood quality. Analysis is of 113 metropolitan areas with at least one majority Black census tract and one tract with Black population shares under 1 percent. Means are weighted by the number of Black residents in metro area.
Source: Authors' analysis of data from Zillow, the 5-year 2016 American Community Survey and Equality of Opportunity Project. Devaluation measure is based on median list price per square foot after adjusting for home and neighborhood quality. Analysis is of 113 metropolitan areas with at least one majority Black census tract and one tract with Black population shares under 1 percent. Means are weighted by the number of Black residents in metro area

A regression analysis that predicts the quality-adjusted valuation of Black neighborhoods based on Black economic mobility, segregation, and racist internet searches finds all three are significant and help explain variation in the valuation of Black properties. The anti-Black internet search term variable, however, is less robust and only significant when controlling for the other variables.

Turning to specific metro areas, Rochester, N.Y. gives the lowest relative value to homes in neighborhoods that are 50 percent Black, after adjusting for housing

and neighborhood quality. These properties are listed with 65 percent less value per square foot. Rochester also exhibits high levels of Black-white segregation and anti-Black internet searches are common. Black children growing up in Rochester, New York in low-income families (at the 25th percentile) do relatively poorly as adults (the 31st percentile).

Tulsa, Okla., Omaha, Neb., and Jacksonville, Fla. are also among the 10 areas with the lowest valuations for Black neighborhoods, at -40 percent or lower. Economic mobility is low there as well, though better

FIGURE 3

Segregation and the value of housing in Black neighborhoods

Majority-Black neighborhoods in U.S. metro areas, 2012-2016
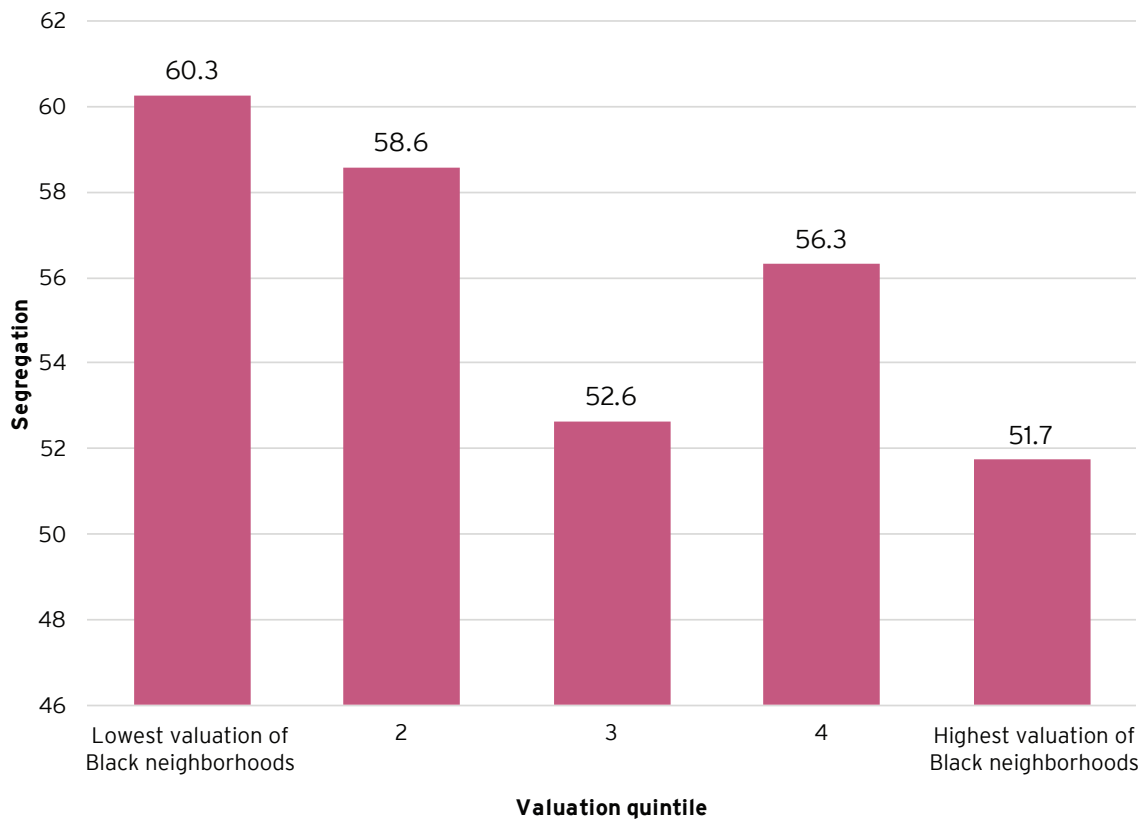
Note: Segregation is measured by the dissimilarity index at the census tract level. Devaluation measure is based on median list price per square foot after adjusting for home and neighborhood quality. Analysis is of 113 metropolitan areas with at least one majority Black census tract and one tract with Black population shares under 1 percent. Means are weighted by the number of Black residents in metro area.
Source: Authors' Analysis of 2012-2016 ACS estimates

in Tulsa, where segregation is relatively low and Google searches with anti-Black slurs are relatively rare.

Upward mobility tends to be somewhat higher where homes are more highly valued in Black neighborhoods. In Boston, Mass., for example, Black children reach the 39th percentile, on average, when growing up at the 25th percentile. Boston is also characterized by infrequent anti-Black internet searches but high levels of segregation. Black children born in the Hartford metropolitan area and Oklahoma City also did relatively well.

This evidence presented here is not meant to prove that devaluation causes lower mobility or vice versa. That cannot be answered with these data, but the evidence does suggest there may be underlying links between the two phenomena that warrant further exploration. Likewise, we intend to collect more relevant and targeted data on anti-Black sentiment in the future. The results linking anti-Black internet searches to the devaluation of Black neighborhoods are intriguing, but we believe the question requires new data sources.

The devaluation of majority-Black neighborhoods is penalizing homeowners in Black neighborhoods by an average of $48,000 per home, amounting to $156 billion in cumulative losses. Over the years, segregation has negatively affected neighborhood conditions–fewer quality schools, in particular–and reduced the quality of homes by limiting access to finance. However, differences in home and neighborhood quality do not fully explain the lower prices. In addition, there are positive but overlooked assets in Black communities like walkability of Black neighborhoods and access to public transportation.

The finding that Black children born into low-income families achieve higher incomes as adults if they grew up in metro areas where homes were less devalued is noteworthy and could be strengthened with further work that more directly links discrimination to barriers to mobility and explores the potential for neighborhood devaluation to serve as an active agent that worsens outcomes for Blacks and their children.

The undervaluation of Black assets in housing markets has other important social implications. Black homeowners realize lower wealth accumulation, which, among other effects, makes it more difficult to start and invest in business enterprises and afford college tuition for their children.

We hope to better identify some of the causes for this devaluation–including potential psychological mechanisms–in subsequent research. Some of the most enduring and pernicious effects of the more than 350 years of slavery, Jim Crow racism, as well as de jure and de facto segregation in the U.S., have been the internalization of stereotypes, insults, and dehumanizing innuendos about Black people, stemming from the malevolent use of such tropes by the (white) people in power to justify discrimination– what researchers describe as unconscious bias. Our findings are generally consistent with the widespread presence of anti-Black bias–whether unconscious or not, ingrained stereotypes and automatic associations of a particular group, and even outright discrimination and racism.

By controlling for commonly held causes of price differences including education, lower home quality, and crime, this paper suggests that bias is likely to be a large part of the unexplained devaluation of Black neighborhoods and some perspective on how anti-Black beliefs distort the value of assets. In the absence of representative survey data on racist beliefs at the metropolitan scale, we can't see the degree and nature of devaluation in the context of cities. Our future work will aim to collect and analyze subjective survey data to see how people from different races view each other and their neighborhoods.

TABLE 6

The 10 metropolitan areas with the most and least devaluation of homes

Black neighborhoods in U.S. metropolitan areas, 2012-2016

	Valuation of homes by sq foot in Black neighbor-hoods (full model)	Income rank for Black children born to parents at 25th percentile of national income	Anti-Black sentiment index from Google searches	Segregation index
Areas with the most devaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods				
Rochester, NY	-65%	31.2	71.1	60.9
Jacksonville, FL	-47%	31.3	59.1	51.1
Omaha-Council Bluffs, NE-IA	-44%	31.9	48.4	58.4
Tulsa, OK	-40%	32.7	40.6	50.7
Birmingham-Hoover, AL	-39%	32.0	65.3	63.1
Cape Coral-Fort Myers, FL	-38%	32.9	59.3	55.8
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	-37%	31.2	68.4	72.2
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI	-34%	30.8	70.5	76.7
Chattanooga, TN-GA	-33%	30.8	70.6	61.4
Buffalo-Cheektowaga-Niagara Falls, NY	-32%	31.2	76.0	68.3
Mean of group (weighted by Black population)	**-40%**	**31.4**	**66.0**	**66.1**
Areas with the least devaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods				
Winston-Salem, NC	-4%	30.9	67.9	52.1
Albany-Schenectady-Troy, NY	-4%	33.2	78.6	58.0
Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, CT	-3%	35.2	63.8	57.4
Oklahoma City, OK	0%	33.6	58.9	50.1
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	1%	30.4	68.7	50.1
Syracuse, NY	1%	30.8	69.6	63.8
Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin, SC	1%	32.0	71.7	40.1
Wichita, KS	4%	31.8	38.3	56.1
Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN	10%	31.9	63.4	50.8
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	23%	39.1	51.0	59.9
Mean of group (weighted by Black population)	**7%**	**33.5**	**62.5**	**53.2**

Notes: Devaluation measure estimates median list price per sq foot after adjusting for home and neighborhood quality. The number shown in the first column is the average price difference in percentage point terms for homes in neighborhoods that are 50% Black compared to those that in neighborhoods with no Black residents after making these adjustments. Metropolitan area sample is limited to those with at least one majority Black neighborhood and one neighborhood with a less than 1% Black population share. Segregation is measured by the dissimilarity index at the census tract level. Anti-Black sentiment is measured using Google search terms from data created and analyzed Stephens-Davidowitz.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from Zillow, 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, and the Equality of Opportunity Project

We did not include census tract measures of crime in our analysis because we are not aware of any comprehensive publicly available data source at the ZIP code or census tract level for crime incidence. Using data from U.S. City Open Data Census, we collected crime data reported by city police departments for 10 large cities covering each region of the country: Washington D.C., Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Boston, Chicago, Durham, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. We classified assault, rape, murder, and robbery as violent crimes and thefts, burglaries, and carjacking as property crimes. The data from these cities were organized at the incident level and included longitude and latitude coordinates, which we assigned to Census tracts. This gave us 3,917 tracts with crime data.

The first step was to analyze the correlation between property values and crime measures. We find that violent crime predicts significantly lower property values and is highly correlated with the Black share of the population. This makes violent crime a potentially confounding variable for our analysis, but it is noteworthy that the correlation with property values is rather low. Property crimes, by contrast, occur in census tracts with relatively high home prices, though the correlation is weak and has almost no correlation with Black population shares.

To more formally test how including crime would affect our estimates of devaluation, we include violent crime in our main models and re-estimate the effect of Black population shares. Again, the estimates are calculated within metropolitan areas—that is controlling for metropolitan fixed effects. Though the results use a much smaller number of census tracts than the national estimates, we again find evidence for significant devaluation. The magnitude of the results is very similar to what we find in the main models. With the full set of controls, we find that Black homes are devalued by 19 percent to 22 percent, depending on whether we use the Zillow square foot adjusted price or the census home value estimate. Moreover, in the census models, violent crime is never significantly predictive of property values, and even in the Zillow models, the relationship is relatively weak. An increase in 100 violent crimes predicts a decrease of only 4.9% in property values per square foot, while controlling for the other factors in our model.

TABLE 1A

Correlation between the number of violent and property crimes in a census tract and home value and Black population shares

Selected U.S. cities, 2016-2017

	Median list price per sq foot	Median list price	Median home value	Percent Black in neighborhood
Violent	-0.10	-0.19	-0.21	0.38
Property	0.15	0.10	0.08	0.09
Number of tracts	3,201	3,106	3,740	3,883

Source: Authors' analysis of data from Zillow, 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, and 2017 US City Open Data Census records

Estimates for the devaluation of owner-occupied homes in Black neighborhoods, controlling for violent crime

Selected U.S. cities, 2016-2017

	Absolute price comparison	Adjustments for structural characteristics of home	Adjustments for structural characteristics of home and neighborhood amenities
Estimated penalty of location in a neighborhood that is 50% Black compared to 0% Black			
Census median home value, 2012-2016	-42%	-40%	-22%
Zillow median list price of houses per square foot, 2012-2016	-43%	-37%	-19%
Estimated penalty for every 100 violent crimes per year (values in red are not statistically signifcant)			
Census median home value, 2012-2016	-10.6%	-4.8%	-0.8%
Zillow median list price of houses per square foot, 2012-2016	-2.9%	-7.3%	-4.9%

Source: Authors' analysis of data from Zillow, 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, and 2017 US City Open Data Census records

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For more information

Andre Perry
David M. Rubenstein Fellow
Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings
aperry@brookings.edu

Jonathan Rothwell
Senior Economist
Gallup
jonathan_rothwell@gallup.com

Still Running Up the Down Escalator

How Narratives Shape our Understanding of Racial Wealth Inequality
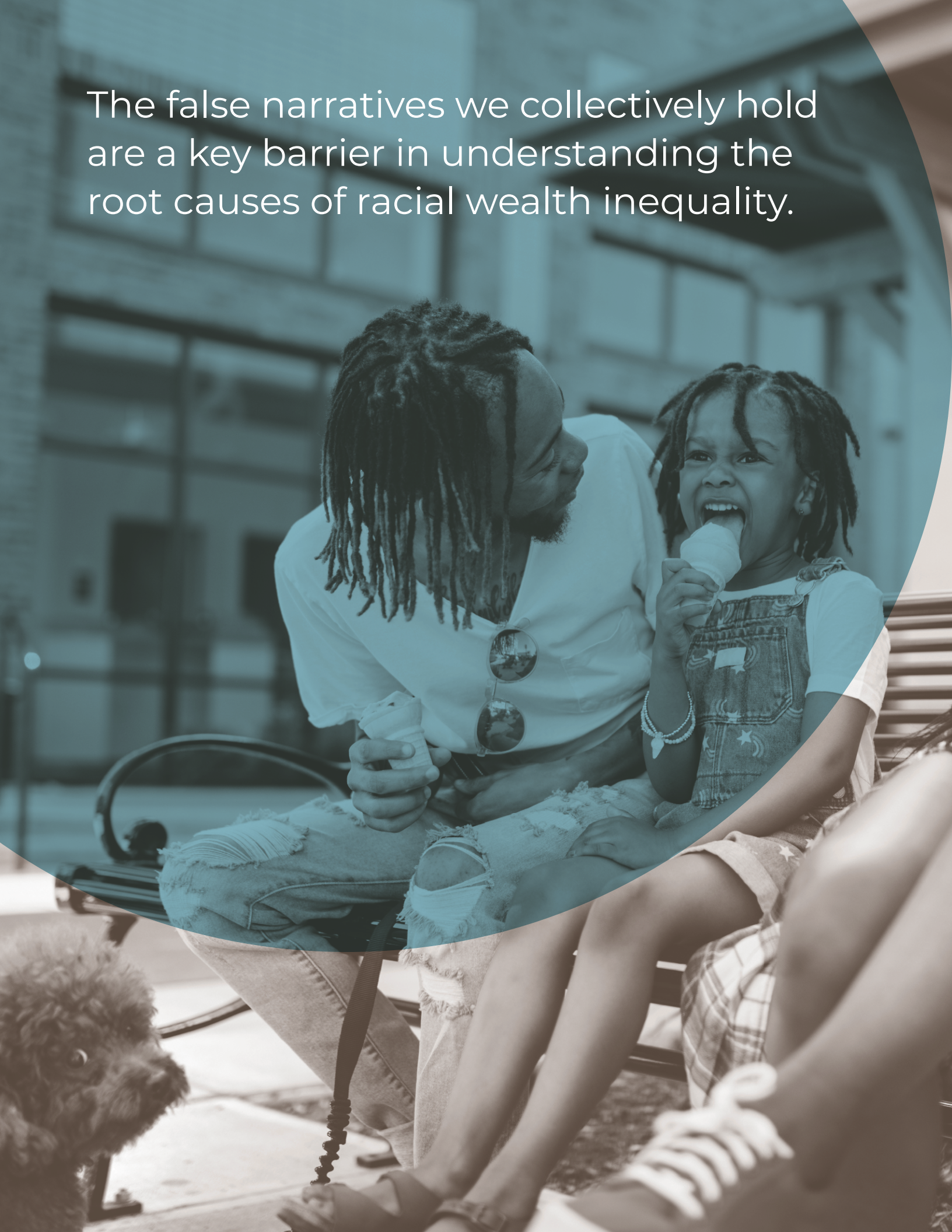
By Natasha Hicks, Fenaba Addo, Anne Price and William Darity Jr.
Insight Center for Community Economic Development
Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity

Insight Center

2021

THE SAMUEL DUBOIS COOK CENTER ON SOCIAL EQUITY
AT DUKE UNIVERSITY

The false narratives we collectively hold are a key barrier in understanding the root causes of racial wealth inequality.

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About the Organizations

The Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University is a scholarly collaborative that studies the causes and consequences of inequality and develops remedies for these disparities and their adverse effects.

The Insight Center for Community Economic Development is a national economic justice organization working to build inclusion and equity for people of color, women, immigrants, and low-income families. Through research and advocacy, narrative change, and thought leadership, Insight intentionally centers race, gender, and place in the pursuit of progressive economic change.

About the Authors

Natasha Hicks is a Senior Associate at the Insight Center for Community Economic Development. A trained urban planner and architect, she applies her housing, policy, and design expertise to Insight's racial and gender wealth inequality and economic security initiatives. Natasha spent several years in the public sector applying her interdisciplinary skillset to redesign systems, policies, and harmful mental models. Natasha authored the City of Charleston's first strategic plan for affordable housing called *Housing for a Fair Charleston* and authored a strategic plan for public art for the Municipality of Tirana, Albania called *tiranaART PUBLIK 030*.

Fenaba R. Addo is an associate professor of public policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her recent work examines debt and wealth inequality with a focus on family and relationships and higher education, and union formation and economic strain as a social determinant of health and well-being. Widely published in academic journals and policy outlets, her work on racial disparities in student debt, older Black women and wealth, and the racial wealth gap among millennials reflects her interests in bridging social demography with economic inequality, and sheds light on the ways that societal inequalities stem from historical legacies of racial exclusion and discrimination, and how they get reproduced over time. Dr. Addo was a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholar.

Anne E. Price is the first woman President of the Insight Center for Community Economic Development. She previously served as Director of the Closing the Racial Wealth Gap Initiative at Insight. She has worked in the public sector on a wide

range of issues including child welfare, hunger, workforce development, community development and higher education. Anne's work has been featured in *the New York Times, The Nation, The Washington Post, The Mercury News, The Wall Street Journal, Citylab, O Magazine, and the Stanford Social Innovation Review* and other publications.

William A. Darity, Jr. is the Samuel DuBois Cook Professor of Public Policy, African and African American Studies, and Economics and the Director of the Samuel Dubois Cook Center on Social Equity. Darity's research focuses on inequality by race, class, and ethnicity; stratification economics; schooling and the racial achievement gap. He received the Samuel Z. Westerfield Award in 2012 from the National Economic Association, the organization's highest honor. His most recent book, coauthored with A. Kirsten Mullen, is *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the 21st Century* (2020). He is a fellow with the Roosevelt Institute in New York.

INTRODUCTION

Racial wealth inequality remains a persistent defining American issue, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate toll on the physical and financial health of Black people. Despite a decade of philanthropic investment and renewed attention from progressive elected officials, policymakers and advocates, we have yet to make discernible progress in ensuring Black families have the power and freedom wealth bestows. A web of anti-black policies and practices have created drastically different economic realities for Black and White Americans when it comes to wealth accumulation: *White Americans have been provided with up escalators they can ride to reach their goals without hurdles. Meanwhile, Black Americans have been forced onto down escalators which they must run up to reach their destination.*

The false narratives we collectively hold are a key barrier in understanding the root causes of racial wealth inequality. Narratives — our cultural understandings, frames of reference, or mental models — play a significant role in how leaders create and implement policies, and how Americans receive them. Far too often, lawmakers and others in positions of power assert that poor personal choices and/or a lack of financial know-how cause racial wealth inequities. These harmful personal responsibility and bootstraps narratives, coupled with pervasive anti-blackness, have led us to believe education, financial literacy, and marriage, are the commonsense solutions to racialized and systemic economic inequality. These inaccurate narratives – and their corresponding inadequate solutions – do the work of masking the structural issues that lie at the root of these disparities. *We focus all our policy efforts on pushing Black people to run up the down escalator faster, rather than focusing on the fact that they are forced to climb a down escalator in the first place.*

The COVID-19 pandemic and the corresponding economic crisis have only exacerbated what was already a collective failing by policymakers and elected officials, who continue to invest in solutions focused on individual behavior instead of systems change. This approach reinforces inequitable economic structures and is an underlying cause of why our country has failed to move the needle on racial wealth inequality.

This paper begins by providing up-to-date estimates of the magnitude of racial wealth inequities, with a specific focus on Black and White populations. We then highlight how personal responsibility, bootstraps and anti-black narratives have distorted our understanding of both the *drivers* of racial wealth disparities and *solutions* to advancing racial equity. We then illustrate how these flawed and pernicious narratives prevent us from addressing root causes in five policy areas: education, homeownership, entrepreneurship, income, and family structure. Finally, we outline the necessary shifts that must take place to address the root causes of racial wealth inequality and center our COVID-19 recovery efforts on building a truly just and fair economy, where all Americans are able to thrive.

Black Americans are Running Up Down Escalators When It Comes to Wealth Building

Over the course of U.S. history, Black people have consistently been locked out of opportunities to amass assets through the major components that build intergenerational wealth, including, financial assets, homeownership, business ownership, retirement funds, and non-residential real estate. As a result, Black families never have had resources comparable to White families to pass down to future generations.

Intentional actions and policy decisions (see next page) rewarded White Americans while denying the same wealth building opportunities for Black Americans. Deep racial wealth inequality between Black and White Americans continues to persist and widen. Figure 1 reveals stark racial differences in median wealth for every quintile in 2019 (see appendix for quintile ranges). The typical Black household's wealth was $24,100; for White households it was $188,200. This translates into the typical Black household holding about 12 cents for every dollar of wealth held by the typical White family – *a disparity that has remained largely unchanged since 1989* (Kent and Ricketts, 2020).

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, politicians and government officials provided "wealth starter kits" that included land, government-backed mortgages and farm loans, a social safety net, and business end education subsidies to White families while intentionally excluding Black families. These wealth drivers of yesteryear continue to shape wealth ownership today.

While these median figures provide a conservative estimate of the extent of wealth inequality, mean figures better represent the magnitude of difference between Black and White Americans (Darity & Mullen, 2020). When looking at the wealth of Black and White households at the mean in 2019, the gap is a staggering $840,900 (SCF 2019).[1] Nevertheless, for ease of comparison, we utilize median values as the reference points throughout this paper, but the disparities generally are far wider with mean values.

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1   Paradoxically, the mean gap is more instructive for designing policies to eliminate racial differences in wealth. While the high degree of concentration of wealth usually steers policymakers to focus on the median gap, it is precisely because of the high degree of concentration in wealth that the mean gap is most relevant when considering racial disparities. Ninety-seven percent of the wealth held by White Americans is in the possession of households with a net worth above the white median. This is partly attributable to the presence of a handful of white billionaires but far from exclusively due to them. One-quarter of all white households have a net worth in excess of $1 million; the same is true only for four percent of black households (Darity, Addo, and Smith 2021).

Racial Wealth Inequality Didn't Happen by Accident – It Was Designed by Centuries of Government Policies
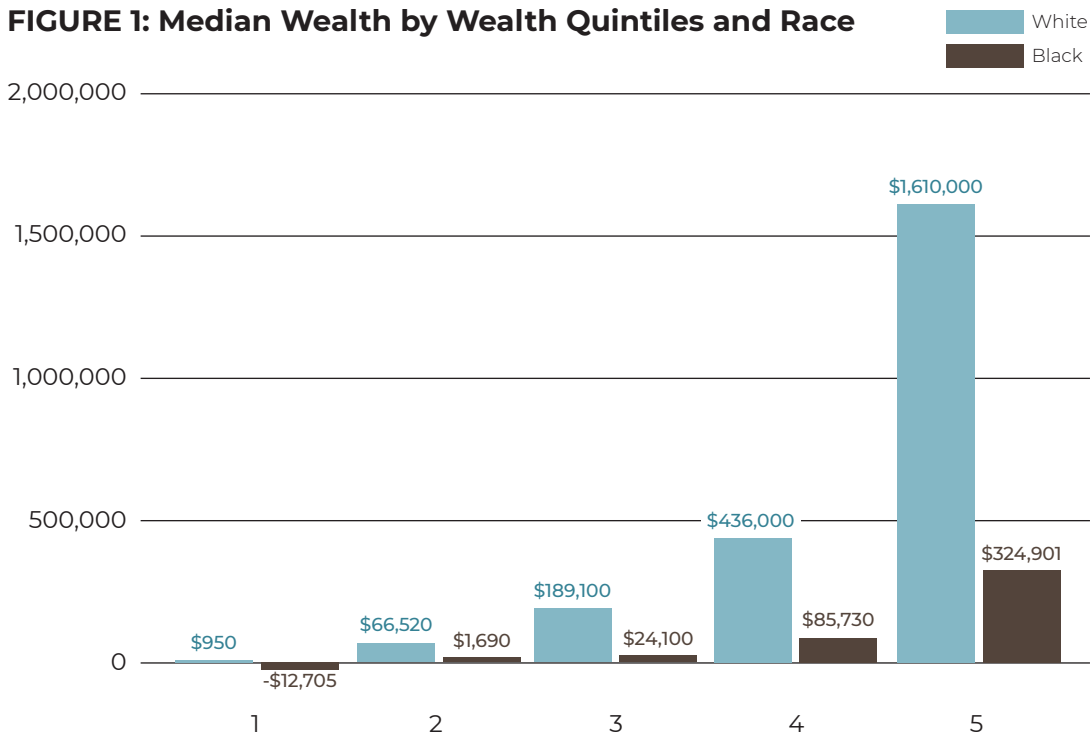
Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, politicians and government officials provided "wealth starter kits" that included land, government-backed mortgages and farm loans, a social safety net, and business end education subsidies to White families while intentionally excluding Black families. These wealth drivers of yesteryear continue to shape wealth ownership today. For example, many White Americans can trace their legacy of wealth and property ownership to a single government program, the Homestead Act of 1862. It expropriated and redistributed land from 42 Native American tribes to White homesteaders. Between 1868 and 1934, the government granted 270 million acres of western land – an area the size of California and Texas combined –to 1.5 million White families (Shanks, 2000, Merritt, 2016). Wealth building for Black Americans started with close to zero capital. After the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863, they owned 0.5 percent of the nation's total wealth and that figure has barely moved (Baradaran, 2017). Today, Black Americans own 1-2 percent of the nation's wealth (Merritt, 2016), while at least 45 million living white Americans continue to benefit from the Homestead Act land patents (Shanks 2000).

Politicians and government officials often colluded to impede Black people from building generational wealth. For example, under the New Deal in the 1930s, Black laborers were blocked from an estimated $143 billion in 2016 dollars in unemployment benefits (Stoesz, 2016). Anti-black racism in housing policies and practices created a structure in which Black families as neighbors were considered to be less favorable and the neighborhoods they live in were devalued. Between 1934 and 1963 the federal government backed $120 billion of home loans, and more than 98 percent of the funds went to White households (Adelman, 2003).

In addition to enacting policies that blocked Black wealth building, the federal government turned a blind eye to upward of 100 violent white riots and massacres that took place between the end of the Civil War and World War II. These horrific assaults not only resulted in the mass murders of Black people, but also led to the destruction and/or appropriation of their property, businesses, lands and communities by White terrorists (Bentley-Edwards et al., 2018).

These and many other policies and practices – enacted and reinforced in tandem by the public and private sector – work together in a powerful dance, creating a structure of systems that intentionally extract the little wealth Black families own, while also blocking the transfer of wealth to future generations.
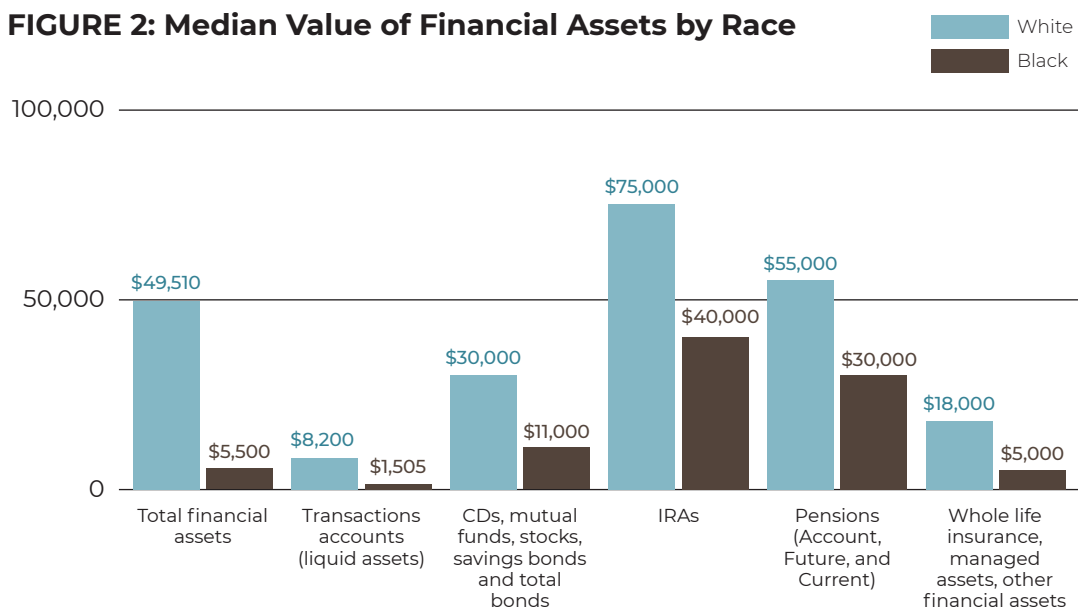
FIGURE 1: Median Wealth by Wealth Quintiles and Race

White
Black

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2,000,000 ─

1,500,000 ─                                                    $1,610,000

1,000,000 ─

                                           $436,000           $324,901
  500,000 ─                      $189,100
                                                    $85,730
           $950   $66,520                 $24,100
        0 ─      $1,690
        -$12,705
              1       2        3        4        5
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Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

A comprehensive understanding of wealth – the value of what you own minus what you owe – demonstrates how a public health and economic calamity like the COVID-19 pandemic can have vastly different consequences across racial lines. Wealth generates opportunity and White households are far more likely to hold assets, and the types of assets they hold have significantly higher median values than those of Black households. In 2019, the financial assets of White households were more than nine times higher, or $44,000, more than Black households (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: Median Value of Financial Assets by Race

White
Black

```
100,000 ─

                                       $75,000
                                                $55,000

 50,000 ─  $49,510                     $40,000

                            $30,000            $30,000
                                                         $18,000
           $8,200            $11,000
           $5,500                                        $5,000
      0 ─         $1,505
        Total    Transactions  CDs, mutual  IRAs  Pensions  Whole life
      financial   accounts     funds, stocks,     (Account,  insurance,
       assets   (liquid assets) savings bonds     Future, and  managed
                              and total           Current)    assets, other
                              bonds                          financial assets
```

Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

The wealth difference between Black and White households is striking when we consider liquid assets — those assets that can quickly be turned into cash. These funds act as the fence between emergency setbacks, like the negative income shock produced by the COVID-19 crisis, and economic catastrophe. They allow people to continue to pay their mortgage or rent, quit a dangerous job, cover an unexpected health care bill, and provide a financial cushion for their families during a pandemic. In 2019, the typical Black household had just $1,410 in liquid assets compared with $8,000 for their White counterparts. In four out of five income quintiles, Black households had less than half the median liquid wealth of White households (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Median Liquid Assets by Race & Income Quintile
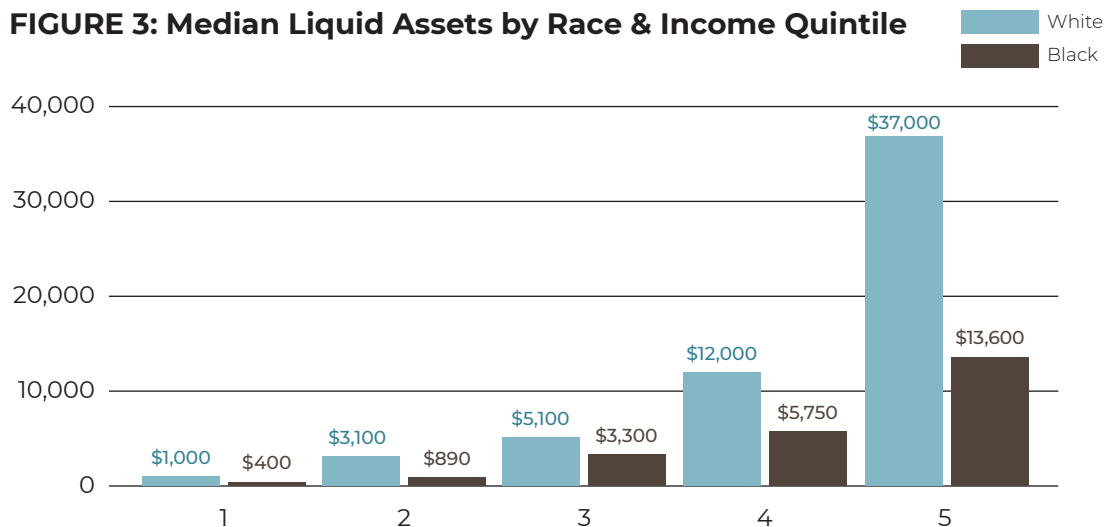
Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

Further fueling precarity, Black Americans also have to contend with predatory and extractive mechanisms that continue to strip and block wealth building. Black people are often the target of financial predation through payday loans, predatory banking schemes, installment loans, contract leasing and other mechanisms. In addition, predatory student debt, and - due to the over surveillance and targeted policing of Black communities - criminal legal fines and fees act as significant debt anchors that cement Black Americans in place, hindering future generations' chances of reaching their full potential.

Wealth begets more wealth, and White families have always been put in a better position to accumulate and build wealth across generations. Persistent discriminatory practices in the labor and credit markets, and education and health care systems have fundamentally placed Black Americans in a position of greater financial precarity than White Americans. *Black Americans are still running up a down escalator. And the way things are set up now in our economy, not all of us can get where we want to go.*

Narratives are Key Drivers of Racial Wealth Inequality

Narratives, or our mental models, contribute to how leaders create and implement policies, and determine how Americans are categorized and treated. More than just stories of specific people, narratives are how we make sense of the world. They determine the extent to which we build empathy, and they dictate who we recognize as *deserving* of support and dignity. We examine two interlocking narratives that are deeply embedded in the American psyche and hold undue power over how we imagine and implement economic and social policies in the United States.

Anti-blackness: Notions of anti-blackness, a "cultural disregard and disgust for blackness" (Dumas, 2016) manifests as a "mode of power, violence, dispossession and accumulation" that exists beyond social class position (Hartman, 2016, p. 16). It permeates the rules and practices of all our institutions and systems. Anti-blackness calls into question the deservedness of Black Americans and undergirds policies that marginalize and disproportionately punish them. Anti-black racism fueled American chattel slavery, contributed to the backlash to Reconstruction, and provided the foundation

> *Harmful narratives that characterize Black Americans as unintelligent, lazy, and criminal reinforce the notion that racial wealth disparities between Black and White households arise from differences in culture, values, skills, and behavior.*

for the Jim Crow era that followed. It has driven the neoliberal policy agenda of recent decades that exacerbated racial wealth inequality and resulted in a wide range of racial disparities and injustices.

Anti-black racism is omnipresent. A 2016 survey of non-Hispanic White Americans found that 39 percent of White Republicans and 33 percent of White Democrats believe that Black people are less evolved than White people (Jardina et al., 2016). Such dehumanizing views of Black people explain why much of the public is quick to believe and circulate myths such as the "welfare queen" and a "culture of poverty."

Harmful narratives that characterize Black Americans as unintelligent, lazy, and criminal reinforce the notion that racial wealth disparities between Black and White households arise from differences in culture, values, skills, and behavior.

Anti-black racism not only supports punitive and patronizing policies that dehumanize and deprive Black people of dignity, safety, and opportunity, but they also contribute to the erosion of our social safety net in ways that are detrimental for most Americans (Haney López, 2015).

Personal responsibility and bootstraps: Personal responsibility and bootstraps narratives are two sides of the same narrative coin. They are deeply interconnected and overlapping, but somewhat distinct. The *bootstraps trope* is predicated on the myth of the "self-made person" and the romanticization of Horatio Alger rags to riches stories. Anyone can achieve economic prosperity through sheer determination, hard work and playing by the rules. This notion of a meritocracy is a widely held American belief and profoundly shapes our thinking about economic mobility and informs our strategies to build wealth. Under a meritocracy, wealth and advantage are rightful compensation for skill and talent. Research reveals, however, that accepting meritocracy as true makes people more selfish, less self-critical and more prone to act in discriminatory ways (Mark, 2020).

The *personal responsibility* trope – a belief that financial insecurity and poverty are the result of moral failings, bad choices, and behaviors – has driven decades of neoliberal policies that prioritize financial market imperatives over human well-being, and justify the destruction of our social safety net. A focus on personal responsibility also conceals structural factors – inherited disadvantage, historical discrimination, racial segregation of the labor market, etc. – and blames Americans for their struggles, rather than policies that have resulted in a lack of shared prosperity.

While the personal responsibility narrative blames Black people for their depressed financial position and the inequities they experience, the bootstraps trope provides a logic for the mechanism in which wealth is accumulated. Both narratives are steeped in anti-blackness. They offer a rationale for disinvesting in Black people and their communities while ignoring the deep structural change needed to address who has power in our economy and democracy.

To create structural policy change that will truly address the root causes of the racial wealth gap, we must replace these dominant narratives with ones that frame inequality as the result of deliberate policy choices and practices.

How Narratives Blind Us: A Closer Look at How Personal Responsibility and Anti-Blackness Play out in Five Common Strategies to Build Wealth

Anti-blackness and personal responsibility fuel harmful misconceptions about the drivers of racial wealth inequality. This section explores how these dominant narratives – individually and together – play out in five policy areas frequently looked to in addressing racial wealth inequality and ultimately impede transformative policy action.
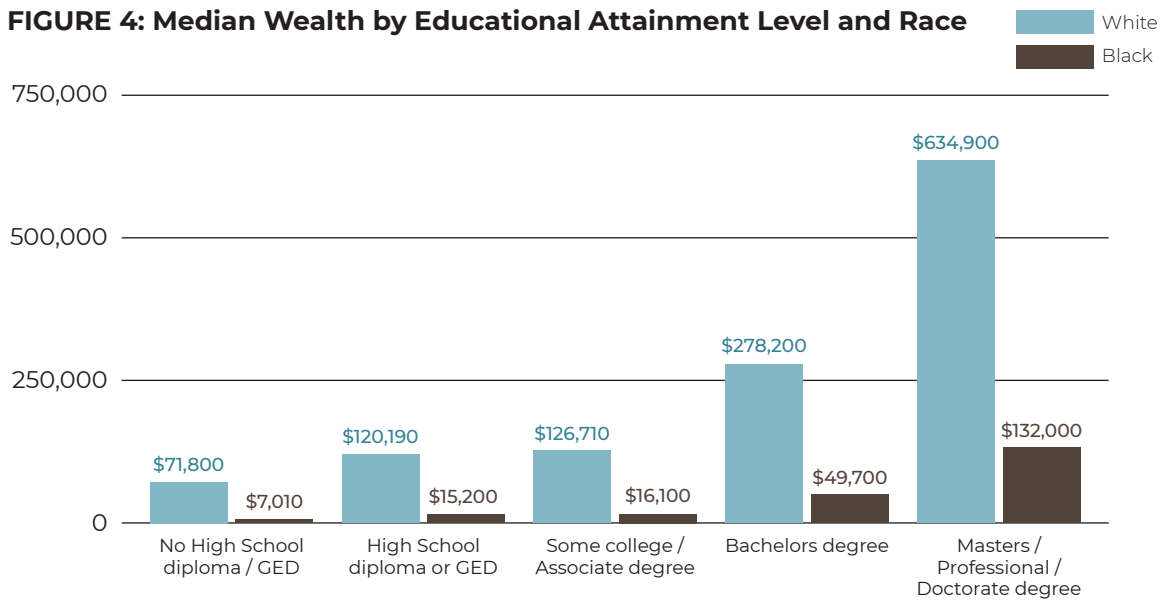
Education

Anti-blackness and bootstraps narratives manifest in our views on education and its role in addressing racial wealth inequality. At the core of the bootstraps narrative is the idea that people can make different choices when faced with financial precarity. However, the data demonstrates that Black Americans cannot gain wealth in the same way as White Americans with higher education. The bootstraps narrative directs us to search for solutions that stay at the individual level, rather than focus on structural solutions such as addressing the discrimination within the labor market that continues to ensure Black people will not be treated equally.

Cultural narratives asserting that Black Americans do not value education is another harmful trope rooted in anti-blackness. This long-standing myth exists despite Black parents being twice as likely as White parents to believe that college is extremely important for their children's futures (Stapler, 2016).

Higher education credentials do not yield the same benefits and advantages for Black people as they do for White people, nor do they eliminate or substantially reduce racial wealth inequality (Kent & Ricketts, 2021). Although educational attainment is associated with higher levels of wealth, the relationship between degree status and median wealth varies sharply between Black people and White people. Figure 4 illustrates stark differences in wealth between White and Black households at every level of educational attainment. Black household heads with a college degree hold $22,000 *less* wealth than White household heads who lack a high school diploma, and Black household heads with advanced degrees hold about half the wealth of White household heads with a Bachelor's degree. The typical Black household head with a college degree has about 17 cents for every dollar of wealth for the typical White household head with a college degree, and the typical Black household head with a masters/professional/doctorate degree has about 20 cents for every dollar of wealth held by the typical White household head with the same degree status.

> *Black household heads with a college degree hold $22,000 less wealth than White household heads who lack a high school diploma, and Black household heads with advanced degrees hold about half the wealth of White household heads with a Bachelor's degree.*

FIGURE 4: Median Wealth by Educational Attainment Level and Race

Legend: White, Black

	No High School diploma / GED	High School diploma or GED	Some college / Associate degree	Bachelors degree	Masters / Professional / Doctorate degree
White	$71,800	$120,190	$126,710	$278,200	$634,900
Black	$7,010	$15,200	$16,100	$49,700	$132,000

Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

While Black families are likely to contribute financially to their children's higher education at all income levels, they face distinct racial income gaps throughout their lifetime and have limited access to credit. As a result, parents of Black students take on more expensive and risky forms of debt to finance their children's education. In 2019, 30 percent of Black households held education loan debt compared with 20 percent of White households; Black households held $7,000 more loan debt than White households (Figure 5). When restricted to households with advanced graduate degrees, most Black households reported having student debt, more than twice the number of White households, at both the master's and professional/doctoral levels.
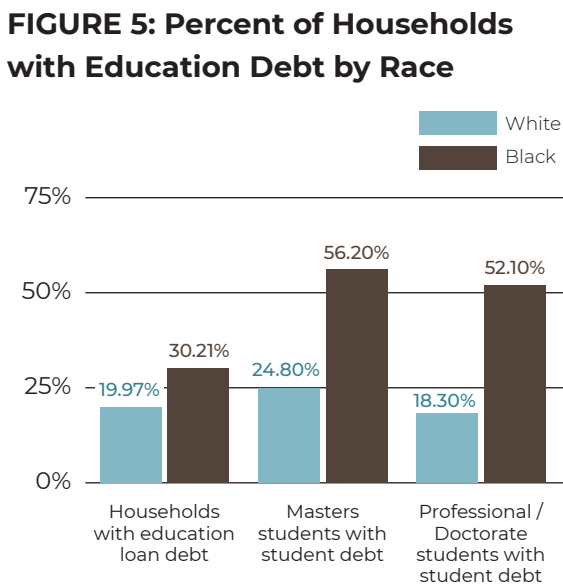
FIGURE 5: Percent of Households with Education Debt by Race

Legend: White, Black

	Households with education loan debt	Masters students with student debt	Professional / Doctorate students with student debt
White	19.97%	24.80%	18.30%
Black	30.21%	56.20%	52.10%

Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

Not only are Black people more likely to graduate from college or advanced degree programs saddled with costly student debt, but due to racial discrimination in the labor market, there are dramatic differences in the payoff for these degrees. Figure 6 illustrates the massive disparities in income between Black and White households with similar levels of education. Black household heads with a college degree had an income that was less than two-thirds of White household heads with a college degree, and Black household heads with a masters, professional or doctorate degree earned half of their

White counterparts. Over time, wage gaps have widened the most among college educated workers. In 1979 college educated Black workers were paid 86.4 percent of college educated White workers, and by 2019 that ratio had dropped to 77.5 percent (Wilson, 2020).
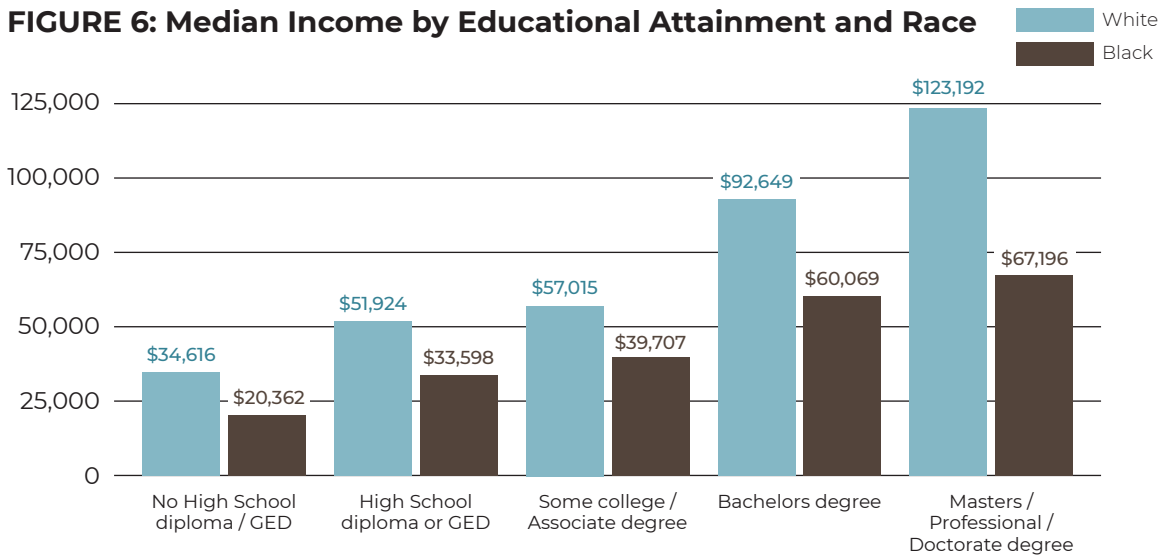
FIGURE 6: Median Income by Educational Attainment and Race

Legend: White, Black

Chart data (Median Income):

Educational Attainment	White	Black
No High School diploma / GED	$34,616	$20,362
High School diploma or GED	$51,924	$33,598
Some college / Associate degree	$57,015	$39,707
Bachelors degree	$92,649	$60,069
Masters / Professional / Doctorate degree	$123,192	$67,196

Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

Educational attainment also does not shelter Black workers from disparate employment outcomes. Black workers are more likely to be unemployed than White workers at every level of educational attainment (Williams & Wilson, 2019). Black workers are also more likely to be underemployed than White workers with the same level of education. For instance, 40 percent of Black college graduates are employed in a job that does not require a college degree compared with 30 percent of White college graduates (Williams & Wilson, 2019).

Black Americans can not educate their way out of the racial wealth gap by simply studying harder and gaining more credentials. Bootstraps narratives cause us to focus our investments in efforts at the individual level such as tutoring, mentorship programs, and student debt financial courses, rather than addressing structural impediments to wealth building such as the increasing privatization of financing for higher education and labor market segregation and discrimination.

> *Black Americans can not educate their way out of the racial wealth gap by simply studying harder and gaining more credentials.*

In our current system – where students must take on debt to finance education and labor market discrimination persists – educational attainment cannot possibly correct systemic and historic exclusion. Without changing the narratives that prevent us from addressing systemic barriers, Black students will not be able to experience the full promise of an education.

Homeownership

Anti-blackness, and particularly narratives of Black criminality, have shaped housing inequality for decades. The persistence of perceptions of Black people as a threat to safety remains a central part of our nation's cultural understanding and worldview (Archer, 2019). Ideas of Black criminality drive housing prices down in Black neighborhoods and serve as a justification for the exploitation of Black people in the credit market. It underpins notions of Black neighborhoods being "unsafe" and therefore undesirable. Research reveals that even when all characteristics of homes and neighborhoods are the same, White participants view majority Black neighborhoods as less safe and less desirable than majority White neighborhoods (Quick & Kahlenberg, 2019; Squires, 2007).

Wealth among White Americans realized through homeownership has been so disproportionately large because segregated White communities were able to hoard resources at the expense of other communities, and as a result, Black and White households do not experience the benefits of homeownership equally. In the U.S. in 2018, homes in neighborhoods with no Black residents were worth a median value of $341,000 while homes in neighborhoods with majority Black residents were worth $184,000 (Perry et al., 2018). The average equity held in White-owned homes is $216,000 while the equity held in Black-owned homes is $96,000 (Darity & Mullen, 2021). In 2019, the median value of Black real estate assets was about 60 percent of the value of White real estate assets (Figure 7). In addition, Black households were less likely to hold real estate assets than White households by 29 percentage points.

FIGURE 7: Median Value of Non-Financial Assets by Race
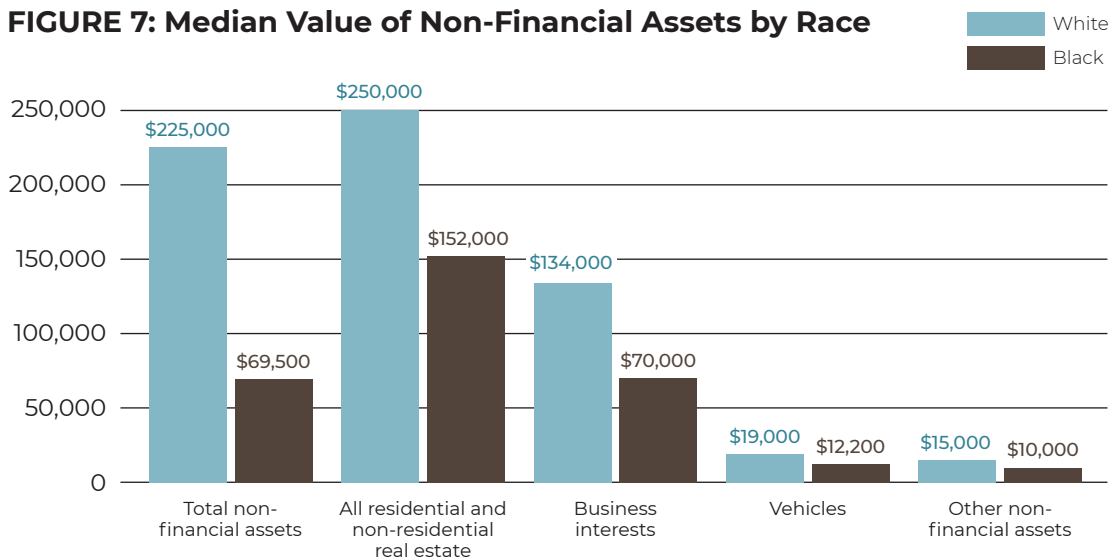
Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

Over the last 100 years the housing market has consistently perpetuated racial discrimination, and the 2008 foreclosure crisis was no exception. Leading up to the Great Recession, for example, many banks deliberately peddled Black people into bad mortgages. Despite Black women having higher credit scores, they were 256

percent more likely to receive a subprime mortgage than a White man with the same financial profile (Baker, 2014). The most recent federal data from the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act shows that lenders denied mortgages for Black applicants at a rate 80 percent higher than their White peers (Olick, 2020).

Since the Great Recession, homes in majority Black communities continue to be devalued. The rules of the housing market penalize racial integration. The higher the share of Black people in the neighborhood, the less the home is worth, even when controlling for age, social class, household structure, and geography.

For instance, a report by Brookings found that owner-occupied homes in Black neighborhoods are undervalued by $48,000 per home on average in comparison to neighborhoods with few or no Black residents. In addition, they found that differences in home and neighborhood quality do not fully explain the devaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods. Homes of similar quality in neighborhoods with similar amenities are worth 23 percent less in majority Black neighborhoods, reflecting the depth of racial bias in the home valuation process (Perry et al., 2018).

> *Solutions that look to homeownership to address racial wealth inequality often fail to provide real wealth building mechanisms for Black people because they do not look to address and shift the structural racism baked into the housing market or the lack of intergenerational wealth Black people face.*

Solutions that look to homeownership to address racial wealth inequality often fail to provide real wealth building mechanisms for Black people because they do not look to address and shift the structural racism baked into the housing market or the lack of intergenerational wealth Black people face. Often, investments in increasing the pipeline to homeownership for Black households focus on individualized solutions such as housing counseling programs or homeownership classes that focus on shifting behavior (budgeting, savings, and improving credit scores) rather than addressing the predatory and unjust credit system or the underlying anti-blackness baked into the housing market. Without shifting harmful narratives around anti-blackness and focusing on structural barriers, homeownership alone will do very little to address racial wealth inequality.

Entrepreneurship

Stories that perpetuate the fallacy of the "self-made man" (or bootstraps narrative) as well as notions of anti-blackness shape our beliefs that bolstering entrepreneurship among Black Americans will build their wealth and narrow racial wealth inequality. These narratives not only result in the support of individual solutions to address structural problems, but more importantly obscures the fact that White people amassed wealth to seed and sustain businesses over generations through a myriad of federal government

policies and programs,[2] while Black people have been denied these resources. In the face of economic exclusion and marginality, Black people have a legacy of responding by establishing their own businesses and economic ecosystems but have done so without significant government investment[3] as was provided for White Americans.

Similar to homeownership, Black business owners are faced with structural challenges to owning businesses at every step of the way — from deep-seated anti-blackness in financial markets to a lack of intergenerational wealth to support their business venture. For instance, Black-owned businesses start with approximately a third less capital than their White peers and have difficulties raising private investments from mainstream investment systems. And only 1 percent of Black business owners obtain loans in their founding year, compared to 7 percent of White business owners (Perry et al., 2020).

Once they own a business, Black business owners face many hurdles to sustain their business since a lack of intergenerational wealth makes sustaining their venture more challenging. In 2019, 58 percent of Black-owned firms fell into the category of "at risk" or "distressed" in comparison to 27 percent of White owned firms (Misera, 2020). Research shows Black entrepreneurs are more likely to experience downward economic mobility (eight out of 10 Black-owned businesses fail within the first 18 months) and the economic impact of business failure may be more severe for Black business owners (Kroeger & Wright, 2021). For Black people, being an entrepreneur (versus being an employee) is associated with a higher risk of downward mobility than similarly situated White people (Kroeger & Wright, 2021).

For decades policymakers and funders have looked to entrepreneurship as the key to solve racial wealth disparities, however this logic is backwards - it is only by first addressing racial wealth inequality that we will be able to close the racial entrepreneurship gap. While entrepreneurship can result in increased wealth levels for some Black households, Black business owners do not experience the same return on business assets as White business owners (Bradford, 2014). In 2019, the median value of Black business interests was about half of White business interests (see Figure 7 above). In addition, Black households were less likely to hold business interests than White households by 11 percentage points.

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2   For example, the largest federal public benefits program in the nation's history—The GI Bill—provided benefits to White veterans from World War II that helped cultivate white entrepreneurial talent. By 1951, nearly 2.4 million White veterans had received $190 billion in Federal loans for homes, farms, and businesses in today's dollars. However, the GI Bill shut out 1.2 million Black veterans who also sacrificed for their country (Humes, 2006).

3   In some cases, government officials were actively involved in violent massacres that destroyed Black owned businesses. The most well-known, perhaps, is the White massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921 that leveled a business district known as Black Wall Street (Canales et al., 2021, Brown, D.L. 2021)

Policymakers and funders continue to focus efforts to increase Black entrepreneurship through small one-time business grants, education, training/technical assistance and mentorship rather than addressing the lack of intergenerational wealth Black families were allowed to obtain, or the anti-blackness baked into financial and credit markets. The current approach to entrepreneurship policies and programs far too often focuses on individual solutions rather than looking to rectify the inequalities in business ownership that stem from little to no government investment.[4]

While entrepreneurship is often cited as one of the many solutions to address racial wealth disparity, creating policies and programs designed for individual entrepreneurs, rather than addressing systemic inequities, will not narrow racial wealth inequality.

Family Structure

Anti-black narratives fuel who we believe are good mothers and fathers, paving the way for policymakers to invoke marriage and traditional family structures as the key to addressing Black-White wealth inequality. For the past 50 years, American social scientists and policymakers have focused on single, Black mother families and "missing Black fathers" as perpetuating a "culture of poverty." These racist stereotypes are deployed to distract from the structural causes that shape family structure and undermine social policy (Robinson & Rodgers, 2020). By suggesting that changing family structure would lead to more stable economic conditions, anti-black narratives intentionally disguise the structural barriers that block access to economic opportunities regardless of family type and structure.

For decades, foundations and policymakers have touted marriage and two-parent families as the solution to addressing racial economic insecurity (Horn, 2001). However, marriage for Black families does not translate into wealth returns like it does for White families. When comparing families with the same family structure, stark racial wealth gaps remain, and Black families of all types – married and unmarried – have far less wealth than White families (Addo & Lichter, 2013; Kent & Ricketts, 2021).

Figure 8 shows that in 2019, two-parent Black families held about 60 percent of the median wealth of White single-parent families. In addition, the typical Black single-parent household had 6 cents in wealth for every dollar of wealth held by the typical single-parent White household. Research demonstrates that when you hold constant factors such as age, education, and marital status, Black households still have lower levels of wealth than White households (Percheski & Gibson-Davis, 2020).

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4   This approach is rooted in a legacy of President's Nixon's policies of the 1960s that promoted Black capitalism. These policies appropriated and corrupted the vision of Black self-determination imagined by Black activists who sought greater control of resources and start-up capital. Nixon purported to 'empower' Black Americans while simultaneously denying federal funding to make it happen (White, 2017).

FIGURE 8: Median Wealth by Family Structure and Race
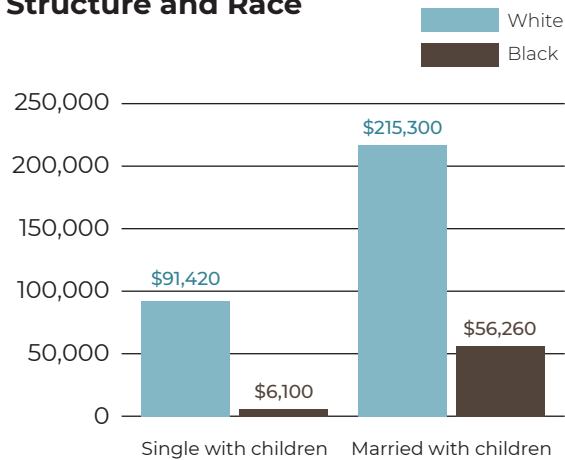
Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

A study on Black and White families between 1984-2009 demonstrated that getting married increased White wealth by more than $75,000 but did nothing to increase wealth among Black households (Brown, 2021, pg. 58). In *The Whiteness of Wealth*, Dorothy A. Brown, law professor at Emory University, outlines the role tax policy plays in providing privilege to White married couples, helping them build more wealth while punishing Black people. Because Black spouses are likely to earn similar salaries they are subject to the highest marginal tax rate and are less likely to get a tax cut compared to their White peers, which are more likely to follow the traditional breadwinner (one high-income earner) model (Brown, 2021).

Zeroing in on younger generations, marriage does little to help equalize wealth among White and Black millennial mothers. Black millennial women are the only group (in comparison to Latinx and White millennial women) with little difference in wealth holdings between partnered and single women: the median wealth of Black millennial mothers who are single was $4,200 in contrast to $4,065 for Black millennial mothers who are partnered (Bhattacharya et al., 2019). This is indicative of other barriers faced by Black communities, including embedded racism in housing markets, as well as within our criminal legal system and labor market, all contributing to lower levels of intergenerational wealth transfers.

Policies and investments that privilege the concept of the nuclear family also are shaped by anti-black narratives. For decades, economic and social policy has been shaped by the "welfare queen" myth, popularized by the Reagan presidency, which created a caricature of Black single mothers as devious and immoral. This narrative was designed to undermine social policy by questioning Black women's value and deservedness.

Policymakers also are so tied to the narrative of the "missing Black father" that they have built punitive policies and initiatives such as President Obama's My Brother's Keeper, based on the flawed thinking that Black men are absent parents. These policies have been created despite studies that show Black fathers are actually more involved in their children's lives than White fathers (Jones & Mosher, 2013). Dorothy Roberts, law professor at the University of Pennsylvania, argues that "making Black men symbols of fatherlessness…offers a convenient explanation for Black people's problems" but denies that their poverty is caused by "racism or the unequal distribution of wealth," (Roberts, 1998).

These anti-black narratives drive investments into programs such as the Healthy Marriage Initiative, which looked to promote marriage in low-income communities as a poverty reduction strategy. Programs and policies that keep us focused on "fixing" family structure to address racial wealth inequality distract from the fact that wealth is the driving force of education, employment and income outcomes, not the reverse. Rather than family structure shaping wealth, wealth shapes family structure. Black people cannot marry their way to parity in wealth – and focusing on changing individual behaviors rather than the structural causes will only perpetuate racial wealth gaps.

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Income and Employment

The personal responsibility narrative permeates thinking around income and its role in addressing racial wealth inequality. This narrative often points to individual interventions such as job training, "soft-skills," financial literacy or improving savings practices to solve racial wealth inequities. However, these approaches ignore both underlying labor market discrimination and the lack of intergenerational wealth Black people have been able to amass, which drive disparities in income and savings in the first place.

While income does play a modest role in the ability to generate wealth, income does not explain the massive Black-White wealth disparities. Figure 9 illustrates how Black and White households in similar income quintiles have starkly different median wealth levels. The typical Black household in the highest income quintile holds similar wealth holdings as a typical White household in the middle income quintile. The typical Black household in the middle income quintile holds *less* wealth than the typical White household in the lowest quintile. The typical Black household in the lowest income quintile has 1/15 of the wealth of the typical White household in the same quintile - which translates to about 7 cents for every dollar of wealth for White households.
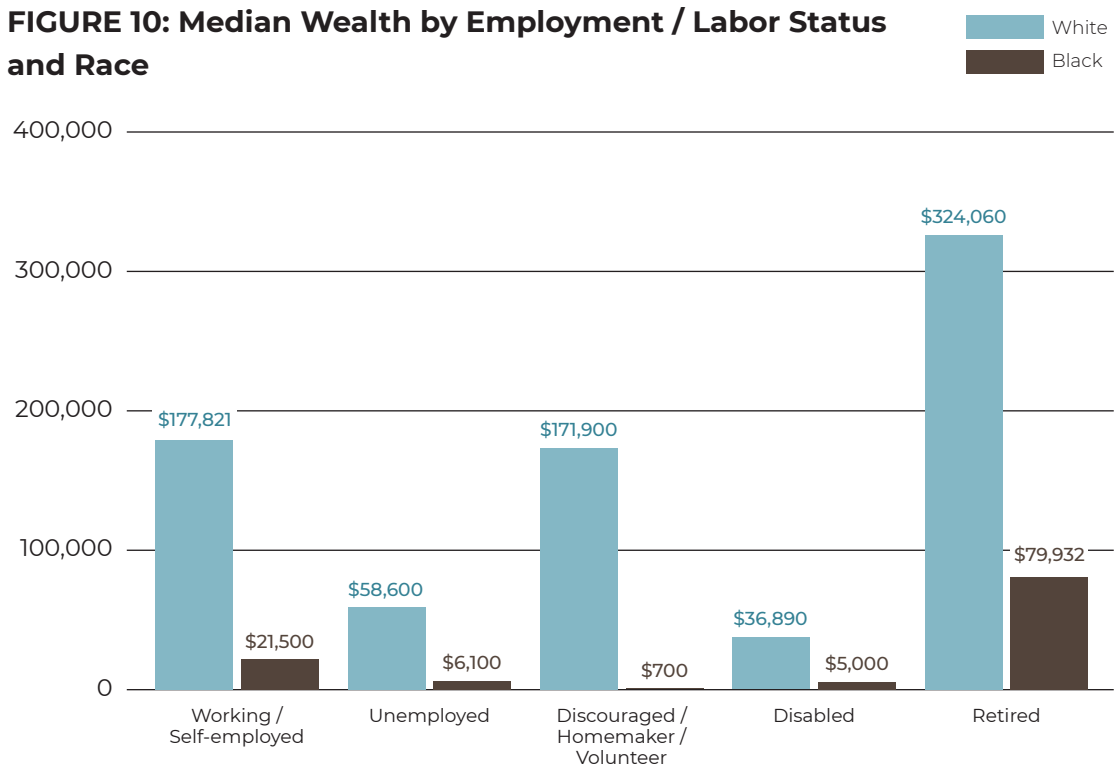
FIGURE 9: Median Wealth by Income Quintiles and Race
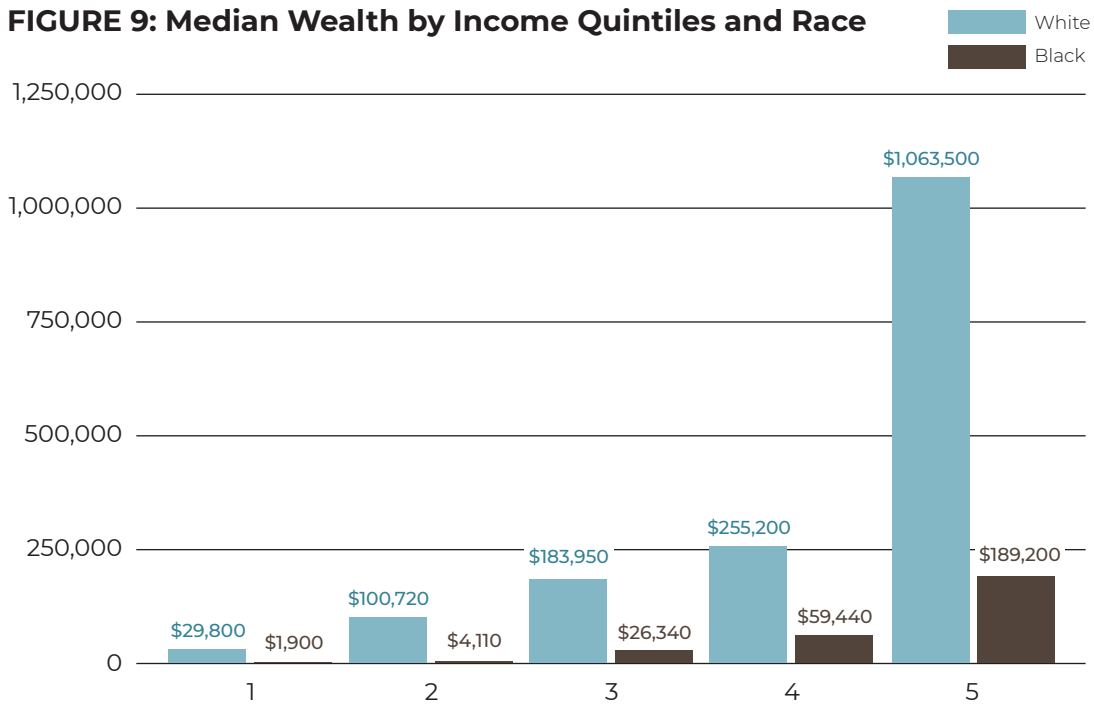
Legend: White, Black

Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

Employment also does not explain the massive racial disparities in wealth at each income level. Figure 10 reveals that White families with a head of household that is unemployed have 2.7 times the median wealth of Black families with a head of household that is working full-time ($58,600 versus $21,500).

FIGURE 10: Median Wealth by Employment / Labor Status and Race

Legend: White, Black

Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

Higher income jobs with good benefits *can contribute* to increased wealth, yet these are precisely the jobs that Black Americans are more likely to be locked out of. After taking education into account, almost 90 percent of occupations are racially segregated in the U.S., and pervasive labor market discrimination means that the lowest paying jobs are relegated to Black Americans (Adams & Hollenhorst, 2020). When doors to job opportunities with better pay and benefits are closed for Black people, their wealth-building opportunities are stymied. Median wealth among Black people would increase 25 percent if they had employer-based health coverage equal to that of White people and 53 percent more wealth if pension rates were equalized (McGirt, 2019).

However, Black people are disproportionately channeled out of more stable jobs and into less reliable work that is more susceptible to precarious work hours and job instability. For instance, Black workers are disproportionately given temporary work, and earn 40 percent less for the same jobs as permanent workers in the same position. While Black people make up 12.1 percent of the labor market, they make up 25.9 percent of temporary workers (Wilson, 2020).

Persistent and pervasive racism and sexism embedded in the labor market have also created a system where the starkest disparities in the labor market fall on the backs of Black women. While women make up about half the workforce, they constitute 70 percent of employees whose jobs paid less than $10 per hour in 2015 (Bhattacharya et al., 2019). In 2017, the median annual earnings for full-time Black women workers was 21 percent lower than that of White women and 39 percent lower than that of White men, reflecting the overrepresentation of Black women in low-wage service and sub-minimum wage jobs (Banks, 2019). However, 80 percent of Black mothers are the breadwinners in their families, and Black families are more reliant on their income (Banks, 2019).

> **For decades, large scale investments in workforce training and upskilling have kept the focus on individual solutions rather than on the broader exclusionary policies and practices that shape labor market opportunities and outcomes.**

For decades, large scale investments in workforce training and upskilling have kept the focus on individual solutions rather than on the broader exclusionary policies and practices that shape labor market opportunities and outcomes. While increasing income for Black people is absolutely necessary, without shifting the personal responsibility narratives that keep us focused on individual choices rather than labor market segregation and discrimination, it will do little to address racial wealth inequality.

It's Time to Get Serious about Narrative Change and the Root Causes of Racial Wealth Inequality

Anti-blackness and personal responsibility narratives blind us from the root causes of racial wealth inequality and prevent us from enacting structural policy solutions that are long overdue. Our nation's current set of policy strategies has yielded virtually no progress in tackling racial wealth inequality for Black Americans, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only further fueled financial insecurity and ever-widening racial wealth inequality (Darity, Addo, & Smith, 2021).

During the pandemic, 60 percent of Black families reported serious financial problems in comparison to 36 percent of White families, and 40 percent of Black households have dipped into savings or retirement to pay the bills since the beginning of the pandemic (Chatterjee, 2020; Parker et al., 2020). Black workers faced devastating job loss during the pandemic and the road to recovery has been more sluggish for Black workers, especially Black women. In December of 2020, Black women's unemployment rate was 8.4 percent - still 1.7 times higher than before the pandemic (Boesch & Phadke, 2021). The scale of current economic hardships underscores not only how racial wealth inequality will widen in the anticipated post-pandemic world, but also how difficult it will be for Black people to recover in the months and years ahead.

The past year of crises is exposing the fact that we created systems, rules, and policies that actively and intentionally harm Black people. In order to truly address racial wealth inequality and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, policymakers and funders must move away from solutions focused on behavioral changes and individual choices. Rather, they must take bold actions (backed by large scale financial investments) to shift dominant narratives and reimagine economic structures that support, uplift and protect Black people.

We propose four foundational actions and provide corresponding examples of the types of policies that together can address the root causes of racial wealth inequality.

1. Shift Harmful Narratives: We cannot build power to change the rules that have resulted in low wealth levels among Black people without shifting narratives about Black people, neighborhoods and institutions that are steeped in deficits, falsehoods, and stereotypes. We must shift mental models that lead people

We cannot build power to change the rules that have resulted in low wealth levels among Black people without shifting narratives about Black people, neighborhoods and institutions that are steeped in deficits, falsehoods, and stereotypes.

to believe that wealth accumulation is predicated on hard work and making the right economic decisions. We propose major investments in narrative change efforts to build a movement led by Black people and supported by allies. This vision calls for immersing Black change agents and other cultural curators in a sustained series of culture shift experiments to create and deploy new counter-narratives.

There are a few examples of Black change agents currently working in different sectors to address dominant narratives about Black people. For instance, Alicia Walters through her work, the Black Thought Project (a collaboration with the Insight Center), creates interactive art installations where Black people are given a space to share their perspectives while others protect, witness and honor what is shared. Artist Alexandra Bell through her "Counternarratives" series uses the headlines in media articles to reframe racist narratives (Harmon, 2018). In his cultural practice, landscape architect Walter Hood uses art and symbolism to re-centre Black people in public spaces; and, associate professor of social work Courtney Cogburn has translated her research on racial inequities in health to a VR experience that looks to create shifts in social perceptions and attitudes (Pagliacolo, 2021; Cogburn, 2017). New narratives created by Black cultural curators and advocates will inspire action on a series of change levers — in education, popular culture, media, philanthropy and economic policies and practices —and when leveraged with movement building efforts, will help create deep lasting change that is a fundamental precursor to truly addressing the root causes of racial wealth inequality.

Policymakers have also started to recognize the importance of investing in narrative change. In the summer of 2020, Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced a resolution to create a US Commission on Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation, with an explicit goal of narrative change through platforms including school curricula, news media, movies, radio, digital media, gaming platforms, and memorials (Ramirez, 2021). A narrative effort that is confronting and acknowledging the true history of systemic racism and violence is a critical precursor for the proposed solutions that follow.

2. Eliminate the Racial Wealth Gap:

While increasing homeownership, entrepreneurship, job opportunities and educational levels among Black Americans may improve the wealth position for some, they will not result in a fundamental change in the conditions of structural racial economic inequality or close the racial wealth gap. The only way to address the cumulative intergenerational effects of anti-black racism and violence and close the racial wealth gap is through direct payments to Black American descendants of slaves. A federal reparations program that makes direct payments to eligible recipients

> *The only way to address the cumulative intergenerational effects of anti-black racism and violence and close the racial wealth gap is through direct payments to Black American descendants of slaves.*

solves for the cumulative damages of slavery, Jim Crow, and the enormous racial wealth gap. A federal reparations program is the most transformative step forward to address racial wealth inequality.

Black people became the only race in the U.S. ever to start out, as an entire people, with close to zero capital. After the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863, Black people owned .5 percent of the nation's total wealth and that figure has barely moved (Merritt, 2016). In 2020, Black American descendants of U.S. slavery were twelve percent of the nation's population but possess less than two percent of the nation's wealth (Darity & Mullen, 2021). Black-White wealth inequality is the most powerful economic indicator of the full effects of racial injustice in the United States, and to erase these differences, which as of 2019 stood at $840,900 per household, the nation must provide the large-scale investments to build Black assets to a level comparable to those given to White Americans. Raising the Black share of wealth up to the Black share of the nation's population would require an expenditure of at least $11 trillion (Darity & Mullen, 2021).[5] Current policies and programs that claim to close the racial wealth gap fail to adequately account for an economic system built to harm Black Americans and the cumulative impacts of racial injustice. A federal reparations program will correct for these fundamental harms.

3. Dismantle Extractive Policies: While a federal reparations program is the only way to close the racial wealth gap for Black descendants of the enslaved, without also addressing the ways that wealth is extracted from Black Americans writ large, we will not be successful in providing pathways for wealth building for all Black Americans. This will require us to tackle head on the predatory systems of debt that continue to strip wealth from Black Americans. For instance, one policy that would address an extractive practice is large scale student debt relief. Policymakers have created a higher education structure that relies on a debt-financed system that disproportionately harms Black people and has allowed for a predatory industry of for-profit colleges to proliferate and specifically target Black students. As explored earlier, Black households are more likely to take out student loans as well as rely on riskier private loans, which creates a debt anchor that puts Black student graduates at a severe wealth disadvantage. Student loan cancellation would have an immediate impact on improving the financial security of Black households (Addo & Harrington, 2021) and would provide much-needed relief to Black women who are disproportionately saddled with large sums of student debt (Miller, 2017). Canceling student debt would not only have a dramatic impact on the financial stability of Black households, freeing them up to opportunities to build wealth, but would also relieve the high stress levels many Black student debt holders report, improving the health and quality of life for Black households (Hoskin, 2021; Friedline & Morrow, 2021).

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5   This estimate uses the mean gap in wealth as the policy target rather than the median gap in wealth. This is because the median gap in wealth looks to the middle of each group's wealth distribution as representative of the group as a whole. However, this does not reflect how wealth for White Americans is densely concentrated above the median. For instance, 25 percent of White households hold more than $1 million in wealth and 97 percent of White Americans' total wealth is held by households with a net worth above the median. By focusing on the mean, or average, we can create a reparations program that takes into account the high concentration of wealth by White Americans above the median value (Darity, 2021).

Another important example of an approach to address predatory practices is by tackling criminal legal debt through the elimination of fines and fees. The rise of mass incarceration is reshaping economic inequality and poverty and has become a permanent feature of the American experience, particularly for Black people. Black people make up more of the federal and state prison population than any other racial group (Gramlich, 2019). Additionally, Black women are incarcerated at a rate almost double that of white women. People leaving prison are saddled with an average of $13,607 in fines and fees, and estimates reveal that as much as 60 percent of a formerly incarcerated person's income goes toward criminal legal debt (Evans, 2014; Bozelko & Lo, 2018). Criminal legal fines and fees that come with incarceration, arrest or even a traffic infraction can have multigenerational effects on wealth and long-lasting economic consequences for Black communities because fees for things like probation supervision, presentence investigations, and drug and alcohol testing can compound and act as a debt anchor for Black families (Frankel, 2020). In order to tackle criminal legal debt we must build on current progress to completely eliminate state and local governments' criminal administrative fees along with the corresponding debt. At the federal level we must repeal and replace the 1994 Crime bill. Addressing criminal legal debt will help to eradicate one of the most pervasive wealth stripping practices that impact Black Americans.

While student debt and criminal legal debt elimination are two examples of ways to remove the barriers designed to impede wealth building for Black Americans, it is important to not conflate these policy proposals as ways to close the racial wealth gap (which can only be done through direct payments). Instead, these two examples serve as illustrative policies that will be critical in creating an economy where predatory and extractive practices no longer exist as barriers for Black Americans to build wealth.

4. Design Programs to Seed Intergenerational Wealth: In addition to dismantling extractive policies and practices, we must also design policies and programs that seed capital and generational wealth. One example of a policy that would increase intergenerational wealth building opportunities for Black people is the creation of a baby bonds program. A system of federal trust accounts for all children born in the U.S, "baby bonds," would extend the benefits of seed capital to purchase the economic security of an appreciating asset to every newborn regardless of race and the family economic position in which they are born. The federal government would make deposits annually into these accounts and kids could access the funds once they reach adulthood. For kids coming from lowest wealth families, it is estimated that these funds could average $46,000 by the time they reach age 18 (Matthews, 2019). This type of seed funding could be a great first step at helping young Black adults gain access to and dream of opportunities such as going to school debt free, starting a business, or buying a home. Baby bonds would be a step to build seed funding which Black children have often been denied, due to centuries of government policies and programs that have stymied Black intergenerational wealth building.

CONCLUSION

America offers a false promise of equal opportunity and individual agency. For Black Americans, making all the right choices does not equal all the right outcomes. Just as wealth building for White people in America was by design and government action, we need intentional and structural wealth building strategies for Black Americans with investments comparable to those given to White Americans. This requires a paradigm shift to truly tackle racial wealth inequality. *Rather than focusing our policy strategies on how to assist Black people in running up the down-escalator faster, we need to dismantle the down escalator in their path and create a new up escalator for Black Americans.* Through a combination of large scale investment in narrative change-efforts, a federal reparations program, the dissolution of extractive practices, and new fiscal policies to seed intergenerational wealth, we can get serious about breaking down the barriers that continue to bind us, and finally work toward the structural solutions that will allow us to achieve an economy where all Americans can prosper.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Income Quintile Ranges by Race

	White	Black
1	$0-$30,544	$509-$19,344
2	$30,645-$53,960	$20,362-$32,580
3	$54,032-$85,522	$33,589-$48,870
4	$85,929-$142,537	$49,888-$81,449
5	$143,147-$704,000,000	$82,468-$11,400,000

These are within race distributions. The Black and White columns list the income ranges by quintiles (0-20%/20-40%/40-60%/60-80%/80-100%) for all Black and White households.

Table 2: Wealth Quintile Ranges by Race

	White	Black
1	($629,500)-$18,480	($350,460)-$1
2	$18,500-$118,470	$2-$8,000
3	$118,550-$284,320	$8,010-$50,690
4	$284,500-$771,400	$50,700-$166,500
5	$771,430-$1,970,000,000	$167,500-$763,000,000

These are within race distributions. The Black and White columns list the wealth ranges by quintiles (0-20%/20-40%/40-60%/60-80%/80-100%) for all Black and White households.

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PLANNING MAGAZINE

The Infrastructure of Wellbeing

The new infrastructure package could be one of the nation's most consequential investments in equitable wellbeing — but only if we make it so.

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VOICES VIEWPOINT

The Ella Fitzgerald Park in northwest Detroit, which replaced a patchwork of vacant and overgrown lots, is part of a sprawling redevelopment project driven by local residents and has become a community hub. Photo courtesy of Earthscape Play.

Nov. 11, 2021

By KATYA F SMYTH; XAVIER DE SOUZA BRIGGS

Viewpoint is Planning's *op-ed column. The views expressed here are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the American Planning Association.*

Across our many differences as human beings, research confirms what we know intuitively: We are hardwired to seek out connection and belonging; safety; familiarity and predictability; influence on our surroundings and future with purpose and creativity; and access to food, shelter, and other resources that is free of danger and shame. These basic

needs and experiences make us human and, as such, connect us. Together, they also constitute our wellbeing.

Unlike wellness, which has acquired health-only, upper-income connotations, wellbeing is foundational. It is not an add-on or a mere lifestyle choice. Instead, backed by cutting-edge research and practice synthesized by the nonprofit [Full Frame Initiative](#), we define wellbeing as, "The set of needs and experiences universally required in combination and balance to weather challenges and have health and hope."

Many think of wellbeing as an internal state, but as leaders in the [building industry](#) and other uncommon voices are beginning to acknowledge, what's outside our bodies often matters more.

On some level, everyone who helps shape the built environment knows this. We cannot will ourselves to be safe, feel included, or have shame-free access to shelter. That's why we care about things like safe tap water and street lighting; how park monuments signal who belongs in a public space; and whether we can telecommute and access telehealth services. Our environments provide or constrict our access to wellbeing in predictable yet profoundly unequal and unfair ways, particularly along lines of race and income. In short, our drive for wellbeing is universal, but our access to wellbeing is not.

The pandemic, its fallout, and our country's racial reckoning have underscored that fact, forcing wellbeing — and the question of who has meaningful access to it — into the foreground of our culture and public conversation. As we plan for one of the largest [infrastructure investments in American history](#), we must reckon with how past investments have been used to institutionalize and deepen inequities *and* make concerted decisions to steer funding into the creation of a built environment that provides universal access to wellbeing.

In the next month or so, we will share in *Planning* magazine an actionable framework to do just this. But first, it's important to explore why such a shift is possible, opportune, and essential.

Harm or heal

Access to wellbeing is forged at the intersection of people, space, and systems — which is also where structural racism, misogyny, homophobia, classism, and more collide. To cite one example that last year's mass protests for racial justice compel us to face, the premium our country has long placed on the wellbeing of affluent white people is reflected and reinforced in our built environment: Assets are concentrated in some communities, while compounding trauma and disinvestment are concentrated in others.

How we choose to build will either harm or heal; history suggests it cannot be neutral. Over the course of the postwar federal urban renewal program, for example, an estimated one million people were displaced in the rush to build interstate highways and higher-income housing. The gains promised by those investments were not shared by all, and neither was the harm. Many of the vibrant neighborhoods displaced by this massive build were communities of color and, in some cases, working-class, predominantly white neighborhoods like Boston's West End.

Psychiatrist and urbanist Mindy Fullilove defines the impact on affected communities, including a staggering 1,600 predominantly Black neighborhoods, as "root shock," or a profound traumatic stress that has contributed to intergenerational harms, including a loss of economic vitality, social cohesion, and sense of place. Yet half a century after widespread community protests stopped many urban renewal plans, we continue to propagate harms through what, where, and how we build — or don't.

Removing some of those highways, as Milwaukee, San Francisco, and roughly a dozen other cities have begun to do, is a start toward healing. As of this writing, a federal proposal to set aside $25 billion to take down more highways and rebuild communities has been pared back significantly in negotiations on Capitol Hill. It's now a $1 billion Reconnecting Communities program in the surface transportation reauthorization that is a core part of the broader bipartisan infrastructure package.

When the Park East Freeway in Milwaukee came down, it was replaced by tree-lined McKinley Boulevard. Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Department of City Development.
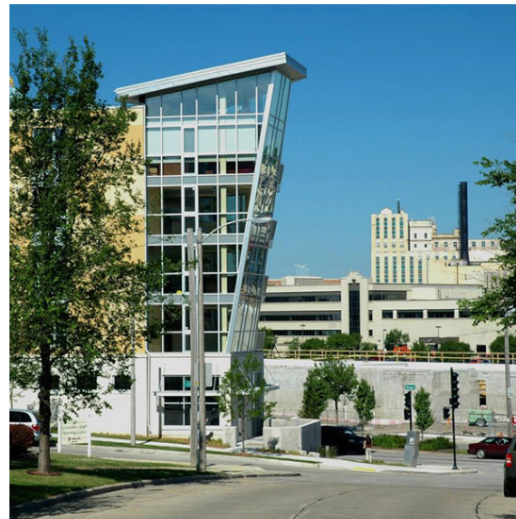
The Flat Iron building in the Park East redevelopment zone, part of the restoration of the city's pre-highway urban grid. Photo courtesy of City of Milwaukee Planning Department.

Climate change — and the way our infrastructure responds to it — also threatens disparate access to wellbeing. A recent analysis by the Natural Resources Defense Council and WE

ACT, a community-based environmental justice group in New York City, shows that low-income communities of color experience more extreme heat than whiter, more affluent neighborhoods in the same city. One significant cause is wide disparities in tree cover and green space. The enormous stakes and inequities associated with climate risks and action — from major new flood works to managed retreat and more — will only become greater and more urgent in the months and years to come.

Planning for wellbeing

Importantly, planning for equitable access to wellbeing is not in tension with traditional infrastructure concerns like state of good repair. In fact, it's just the opposite. And while the concept might be new to many planners, the work ahead aligns with long-cherished planning goals, like public engagement and innovative and adaptive solutions. It also offers a powerful way to deliver on other vital goals related to climate action, economic opportunity, and racial equity by committing to avoiding new harms, enhancing lives, and building community.

Significantly, this effort doesn't require us to start from scratch; we can learn from many existing built examples, some of which integrate infrastructure into larger development plans. It does, however, require a renewed dedication to meaningful and creative public engagement.

Take Detroit's Fitzgerald neighborhood. With the prospect of major public and private reinvestment on the table, re-visioning and planning redevelopment centered on the community's priorities by empowering residents to help select contractors and vendors.

Over the past decade, new investment, including public and philanthropic subsidies to enable housing revitalization after years of abandonment and disinvestment, helped lead to repaved streets and upgraded public transportation. New parks and a collaborative center are also strengthening community connections and resilience. And when local Marygrove College went out of business, the community helped swiftly reimagine the campus as a cradle-to-career educational, civic, and economic engine. Longer-term plans include creating a community land trust to minimize displacement and support Black homeownership and ongoing stewardship.

Linking new or upgraded infrastructure to well-programmed public space, an increasingly popular approach in many parts of the country, can likewise expand access to wellbeing. A new bridge spanning Washington DC's Anacostia River will produce a major community benefit: the city's first elevated public park. When complete, the park will incorporate environmental education and the arts, provide a space for healthy recreation for many

under-served residents, and connect two neighborhoods that were economically and socially divided by the river.

The proposed elevated public park on the 11th Street Bridge crossing Washington, D.C.'s Anacostia River features community spaces for recreation, education, and the arts. Rendering courtesy of OLIN+OMA.

What's more, the planning process produced an [Equitable Development Plan](#), with housing, small business, workforce, and other strategies to address concerns related to historic disinvestment, rising real estate prices, and resident displacement. In multiple dimensions, the bridge park and the process used to create it reflect a commitment to "[transformative placemaking](#)" that goes well beyond traditional infrastructure service standards — in this case, what makes for a good bridge, and how to use infrastructure to advance inclusion, connection, vibrance, and overall wellbeing.

These efforts illustrate that creating equitable access to wellbeing can be an instrument not only for advancing social and economic justice, but also related concerns of the planning community, like climate, spatial, housing, and health justice.

A critical opportunity

It's wonderful that we can point to examples of places and planners getting it right, especially to punctuate a history of investments that have been much less aligned with wellbeing. But with trillions of dollars on the line, and without a shared commitment and tools for decision making to guide us, these positive examples will continue to be outliers.

As a country, we simply cannot afford this. The climate crisis and the pandemic have reminded us that while we can't predict the future, we can certainly inform and design for it. The infrastructure, housing, and other built environment decisions made in the months

and years to come will be a powerful part of that. To that end, we must — and we can — consciously and ambitiously shape our future built environment in support of a country where everyone has a fair shot at wellbeing.

In our upcoming *Planning* article, we'll share an actionable framework of principles for planning and designing major investments in ways that expand access to wellbeing. We'll also invite the planning community to generate questions and open source ideas and solutions.

Tailoring plans and projects with widely available, evidence-based, and flexible frameworks is essential, because most decisions about how to deploy infrastructure funding will be made at the state and local levels, not in Washington. And when it comes to compliance-driven infrastructure agency cultures and the value-engineered solutions they typically accept, we need to shift quickly from "that's not my job" to "this is a critical opportunity and a moral obligation."

In other words, let's make shovel-worthy our new default. Shovel-ready no longer suffices.

[Katya Fels Smyth](#) is the founder and CEO of The Full Frame Initiative and the founding co-author of the [Wellbeing Blueprint](#). She is a former fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and affiliate of MIT's CoLab. Xavier de Souza Briggs is a senior fellow in The Brookings Institution's [Metropolitan Policy Program](#) and visiting fellow in the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University. He previously served in The White House and was a planning professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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Article

Detroit Works Long-Term Planning Project: Engagement Strategies for Blending Community and Technical Expertise

Toni L. Griffin [1,*], Dan Cramer [2] and Megan Powers [2]

[1] J. Max Bond Center on Design for the Just City, Spitzer School of Architecture, The City College of New York, 141 Convent Avenue, New York, NY 10031, USA

[2] Grassroots Solutions, 2828 University Avenue SE, Suite #150, Minneapolis, MN 55414, USA; E-Mails: dan@grassrootssolutions.com (D.C.); megan@grassrootssolutions.com (M.P.)

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: tgriffin@ccny.cuny.edu; Tel.: +1-202-679-7668.

Abstract: In January 2013, civic leaders, community stakeholders, and residents came together to release *Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*, a guiding blueprint for transforming Detroit from its current state of population loss and excessive vacancy into a model for the reinvention of post-industrial American cities. Three years prior, the U.S. Census had reported that the city had lost 24% of its population over the last decade and had experienced a 20% increase in vacant and abandoned property, bringing total vacancy to roughly the size of Manhattan. In addition to physical and economic challenges, Detroiters had also acknowledged significant barriers to effective civic engagement. Foremost among these barriers were a profound sense of immobilization, planning fatigue, and a general perception of cynicism about planning and engagement efforts. These challenges were compounded by historic racial dynamics and tension. This case study elaborates on the comprehensive and innovative civic engagement executed in a citywide planning process called the Detroit Works Project, which took place from late 2010 through late 2012. For the citywide planning process to be successful and sustainable, civic leaders and project funders committed to a planning initiative that would be different from previous efforts, in large part because the "owners" of the process would be diverse and inclusive across all community sectors. The case study, written by three of the key consultants from the project, describes four key civic engagement strategies deployed in the

creation of the strategic framework: (1) addressing profound challenges of culture, race, and politics by deliberately building trust; (2) elevating community expertise by fostering a sense of ownership of the process; (3) blending technical and community expertise; and (4) viewing civic engagement as an ongoing two-way conversation rather than a series of large-scale episodic events. This article elaborates on important lessons that other communities might learn from Detroit's planning initiative in relation to these strategies. It concludes with a brief summary of the results and implications of the civic engagement process.

Keywords: Detroit; Detroit future city; civic engagement; community expertise; community; participation; stakeholder; civic infrastructure

1. Introduction

Increasingly, authentic and inclusive civic engagement has grown to be a core element of many planning processes [1] Though definitions of civic engagement (sometimes called "community engagement") vary, many people understand it as inclusive of both political and non-political processes [2]. Participating in civic life can include activities like voting, attending public meetings, advocacy work, and placemaking efforts, among others. Within the urban planning space, those who spearhead initiatives and planning processes have seen firsthand the tremendous benefits of engaging a wide variety of stakeholders around planning concerns that affect them and their communities. Not only does meaningful civic engagement inform the process and help ensure that planning recommendations and decisions reflect community priorities and experiences, but it can also improve the traction and sustainability of an initiative by building credibility and trust, fostering transparency, and, ultimately, helping to raise visibility and spark demand and support for the plan. Scholars now refer to this type of engagement as "robust civic engagement", where the overarching goals are to build a civic community, where civic infrastructure is supported, and long-term community capacity and leadership is enhanced [3]. In short, civic engagement, whether at the neighborhood or citywide scale, strengthens both the planning process itself as well as its lasting outcomes.

Certainly, designing and executing a successful civic engagement process in ways that are meaningful to both organizers and participants can be challenging. The number and diversity of voices participating, the quality of data and input, the credibility of organizers and presenters, and the presence of political trust and transparency are just some of the factors that can influence whether or not an engagement process is effective and substantive [4].

This article explores civic engagement in the successful multi-year comprehensive planning process of the citywide Detroit Works Project: Long-Term Planning (DWPLTP) initiative. The purpose of the project was to develop a citywide strategic framework that represented a shared vision for Detroit's economic recovery, creating more sustainable land use patterns, revitalizing neighborhoods, reconfiguring infrastructure and city services, utilizing public land assets, and increasing civic capacity. This descriptive case study of the project, written by three of the project's key consultants, offers the perspective of practitioners who were anything by objective observers of DWPLTP but rather were deeply invested in the process. We hope that our critical analysis of the four key civic engagement

principles that underpinned our work and the tangible evidence of its outcomes substantiates the fairness of our interpretation.

The case study characterizes the four civic engagement principles as they evolved and shaped the resulting strategic framework, which we believe could be instructive for other communities. The four principles are:

1. Recognize the profound challenges that culture, race, and politics can present to a civic engagement process. Address these challenges through a deliberate strategy of building trust and enthusiasm with and within the community;

2. Elevate community expertise by fostering a sense of ownership of the process among local civic leaders, as well as adopting an expansive view of community that includes the perspectives not only of residents, but also of multiple sectors and segments of the community;

3. Create an intentional approach for blending technical and community expertise on a citywide scale. Acknowledge experiential and anecdotal inputs as valid, and integrate them with technical research and analysis to create a more accurate and inclusive case for change and implementation;

4. View civic engagement as an ongoing two-way conversation rather than a series of large-scale episodic events. Provide a wide range of opportunities and methods for people to interact with, learn about, provide feedback to, and in other ways shape the resulting plan.

2. Project Overview

2.1. Origins of the Strategic Planning Process and Key Players

The Detroit Works Project was initiated by newly elected Detroit Mayor Dave Bing in mid-2010. It stemmed from a desire by the mayor, civic leaders, and the Kresge Foundation (the principal funder of the project) to better address the city's growing challenges of vacancy, abandoned buildings, and population loss. The Foundation enlisted urban planner Toni L. Griffin, who had extensive experience working for other large cities on urban redevelopment and urban design, to lead the technical work for the initiative. Griffin assembled a world-class technical and civic engagement team that included the Detroit firm Hamilton Anderson Associates, along with a number of other consultants and technical experts (*see the Appendix for the complete list of Planning Team members*).

The duration of the entire Detroit Works Project was from mid-2010 to the completion of the strategic framework in January 2013. After the first phase of the project in late 2010, and upon completion of initial existing conditions audits and early rounds of civic engagement, project leaders recalibrated the process, bringing on additional technical expertise to address specific challenges like infrastructure and local expertise to lead a more robust civic engagement component. In mid-2011, a dedicated civic engagement team was assembled to complement the technical team, led by the Detroit Collaborative Design Center at the University of Detroit-Mercy. The local nonprofit organization Michigan Community Resources and the engagement consulting firm Grassroots Solutions joined the civic engagement team as well. In addition, a volunteer group of more than a dozen local community and organizational leaders, called the Process Leaders, was enlisted to help guide and advise civic engagement for the project as activities began to ramp up. Finally, a team of communications consultants led by Lovio George and Canning Communications helped to craft and disseminate regular

project communications and a media strategy. The entire DWPLTP was managed by a multi-sector Steering Committee with representatives of city government, philanthropy, nonprofits, business, and other local institutions.

2.2. Engagement Tactics for the Strategic Planning Process

The civic engagement team, with support from the Process Leaders, worked with the technical team to design a set of engagement methods not only to gather community input to inform the strategic framework, but also to build trust and enthusiasm in the process, as well as provide opportunities for community stakeholders to learn about and discuss urban planning issues that were relevant to their lived experiences. To this end, an innovative mix of in-person and virtual civic engagement tactics were layered and deployed throughout the process, with an average of three to four engagement opportunities per week. Some of these tactics were designed to accomplish one objective—such as gathering community input—while other tactics helped advance all the objectives (gathering input, trust-building, and community learning/dialogue). Following is a list of tactics and their primary purpose.

2.2.1. In-Person Engagement Tactics

1. Large-scale town hall meetings (community learning);
2. Topic-based summits (gathering input, community learning/dialogue, and idea generation);
3. Community conversations (gathering input, building trust, and community learning/dialogue);
4. The "Roaming Table" (building trust);
5. Open houses and drop-in visits to the project's Home Base office (gathering input, building trust, and community learning/dialogue);
6. Attending or presenting at existing community meetings (gathering input and community learning/dialogue);
7. Street team door-knocking and leafleting (building trust);
8. Technical team working sessions (synthesizing input).

2.2.2. Virtual Engagement Tactics (Including both Online and Phone)

1. Telephone town halls (building trust and community learning);
2. "Detroit 24/7" online planning game (gathering input, idea generation, and community learning/dialogue);
3. E-newsletters (building trust and community learning);
4. Home Base "hotline" calls (community learning);
5. Website updates and social media (building trust and community learning);
6. "Detroit Stories" video history project (building trust and community learning/dialogue);
7. Earned media, such as print, radio, and television media and communications features (building trust and community learning).

Evaluation staff members of the civic engagement team carefully documented and created a quantitative analysis of the engagement inputs collected, capturing common themes within the key challenges, opportunities, and ideas expressed. This analysis was shared with the technical team during

the development of the strategic framework. More information that describes the engagement methodology, participation and demographics, as well as content and themes of community input can be found in an extensive 300-page DWPLTP Civic Engagement Appendix [5]. In addition, several of the key engagement tactics that helped to shape civic engagement as an ongoing two-way conversation are described at greater length in Section 3.2.4 (Strategy #4) of this article.

2.3. References for This Case Study Analysis

This descriptive case study offers four key strategies used in Detroit that may prove instructive to other cities in making urban planning processes inclusive and viable, especially in a complex economic and sociopolitical environment. The four key strategies were shaped by a comprehensive audit [6] of civic engagement conducted by Grassroots Solutions in the city of Detroit previous to the Detroit Works Project. Completed in 2010, the audit surfaced themes and insights about Detroit's context, past planning efforts, engagement assets, challenges, and opportunities. Several of these insights are shared in Section 3.2.1 (Strategy #1) of this article.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Setting the Stage

In March 2010, after months of an interim mayor and a special election, newly elected Detroit Mayor Dave Bing delivered his first State of the City address to a hopeful citizenry eager to stand behind local leaders who represented a new era of integrity and access. Mayor Bing was well aware of the profound fiscal, operational, economic, and social justice challenges he inherited, and he had already begun conversations with civic and philanthropic leaders about organizing a process to address these concerns comprehensively. In his first public address to the city he noted that "*we have an opportunity to reinvent Detroit like never before…. Any plan will involve direct participation from our community because that's where our real strength is—in the commitment and connection Detroiters share with our city and each other. Every Detroiter has a voice and a role in this process* [7]."

This statement lifted the community and raised expectations that the new administration would be transparent, inclusive, and willing to work with communities towards positive change. But Detroiters were not new to civic participation, and they had certainly been let down by hollow public commitments of inclusion numerous times before. A healthy amount of skepticism was present.

The city's leadership had been plagued by corruption for many decades, and city government had not been viewed as a reliable partner in recent years. The Detroit civic community of business, nonprofits, philanthropy, and community development sectors had retreated into their own silos to effect change on the ground [8]. As a result, there were many "messengers of change" in Detroit, each with different levels of credibility and currency within the larger community. In addition, the local economy was in grave trouble. The city had experienced a 24% loss in population over the previous decade, as well as a 20% increase in vacant and abandoned property—equivalent to 20 square miles (roughly the size of Manhattan) [9]. Finally, the city's rate of physical deterioration and struggle to provide resources and deliver basic services had intensified in recent years. It is within this context that DWPLTP began.

3.2. Process and Strategies

Echoing the mayor's pronouncement that every Detroiter would have a voice and role in the citywide planning process, the project funders—the Kresge Foundation and the Ford Foundation—also expressed a strong interest in designing inclusive and meaningful civic engagement. After months of collaboration to develop a scope of work, create a project schedule, and assemble technical and civic engagement teams, city officials, community leaders, consultants, and foundation leaders launched the project in September 2010. It kicked off with five town hall-style meetings to introduce the planning process and articulate how it would fulfill Mayor Bing's State of the City address commitment of including the voices of Detroiters. The purpose of the collaborative project was to develop a strategic framework—essentially a blueprint for decision-making that could be used by multiple sectors—reflecting the best of Detroit's imagination and innovation to create a more prosperous, connected, sustainable, and socially-just city.

Residents' response was tremendous in this early phase of the project; Detroiters were eager for the opportunity to engage with the new city leadership. Nearly 5000 people participated in the first five town hall meetings alone, which proved to be logistically challenging and inhibited the kind of interactive dialogue and community learning that could take place. It was immediately apparent that the community was not yet ready to turn its attention towards visioning Detroit's future in the face of urgent day-to-day challenges and inefficiencies. Many attendees wanted to talk more or first about pressing problems in their neighborhoods such as vacant property, crime, and unreliable trash collection. In addition to frayed relationships with city officials, there were concerns and fears about "outsiders" leading the meetings and planning process—individuals with whom trust had not yet been established. Meeting participants wanted instead to interact and have dialogue with local Detroiters and people they knew.

Given the high levels of frustration, especially among residents, about how immediate concerns were being addressed in the city, project leaders recognized the need to make an important shift. The mayor and project funders split the project into two tracks—one to concentrate on immediate needs and interventions called "Detroit Works Short-Term Actions", to be led by the mayor's senior staff, and another to focus on creating a shared and comprehensive vision for long-term transformation called "Detroit Works Project: Long-Term Planning" (DWPLTP) [10].

From the outset of the DWPLTP process, project leaders sought to recalibrate and increase engagement opportunities to optimize the degree of community knowledge, learning, and interactive dialogue. In other words, the project aimed to build stakeholders' awareness and learning about planning issues and solicit their personal views of such issues [11]. In essence, project leaders sought to achieve greater authenticity, scale, credibility, and value through civic engagement efforts. The following elaborates on the civic engagement strategies that evolved as we applied, and adapted, the four key civic engagement principles in the field.

3.2.1. Strategy #1: Overcoming the Challenges of Culture, Race, and Politics

The engagement audit from early 2010 had highlighted and confirmed many of the engagement assets that existed in Detroit, such as the resiliency of residents, a vibrant faith community, a legacy of

organizing, and robust neighbor-to-neighbor efforts and networks. In particular, audit interviewees considered the people of Detroit to be the city's greatest asset, describing them as resilient, tenacious, loyal, and deeply attached and invested in the future of the place they call home [12]. In addition to the audit, around this time there was an increase in philanthropic investments in Detroit, and energetic and innovative entrepreneurial approaches were beginning to have positive impacts in several neighborhoods. Perhaps most notably, a common sense of readiness for transformational change was emerging among people working and living in the city.

However, the audit also surfaced many historic dynamics and dysfunctions around effective civic participation that remained a stark reality in Detroit, including three important challenges of note. First, and not least among these barriers to effective engagement, was a generally weakened civic infrastructure. The local nonprofit sector was reportedly under-resourced for engagement efforts and projects, which affected the ability of organizations to achieve both scale of reach and depth of outcomes. Much of the existing local organizing or engagement capacity seemed to be constrained by narrow program parameters, shoestring budgets, and limited staff. As one person noted, "*In order to get individual voices you have to go door-to-door, but this takes increased resources, and who has the capacity* [13]?" In addition, established power centers within various local sectors sometimes impeded new approaches, ideas, and voices. Organizations and sectors in Detroit were often described as "siloed"—with tense or frayed relationships common among sectors—as well as highly turf conscious [14]. Due to many of these capacity and infrastructure challenges, taking engagement efforts to a multi-neighborhood or citywide scale had been historically an intimidating endeavor.

A second challenge was the common feeling in Detroit of being "planned to death." The severity of the economic crisis and the physical devastation within the city was palpable. As one participant said, "*I tend to be little more than skeptical until I see some (any) evidence of change, first. Planning sessions do not make me hopeful*". There was a sense of collective cynicism about systemic change, even as people expressed urgency and impatience for tangible progress. However, long-term solutions are both complex and daunting, and, therefore, it was not always easy to gain traction on implementation, leaving residents to feel like nothing was happening [15]. These kinds of factors combined to fuel a culture of profound immobilization among Detroiters [16]. As one leader noted early in the process, "*It's easy to get bogged down in big problems*".

Lastly, the challenges of racial disparity and racial tension were a constant undercurrent in the city. Despite a majority population of 82% African Americans in Detroit in 2010 [17], there was a strong sense among residents that there had not been an adequate presence of African-American voices in positions of leadership and power within city institutions, corporate businesses, and the philanthropic sector. Similarly, many people articulated the need for more proportional access and representation by African Americans and other communities of color as active participants in decision-making about Detroit's future. Broadly speaking, achieving racial equity had not been a leading driver for planning decisions in the city. As one person noted, "*There is deep and historical racial distrust. The divisions that we have here are significant. The economic disparities around race are so huge it makes it hard to get past it* [18]". Compounding this tension was a common fear of "outsiders [19]", stereotypically defined as nonresident, influential, wealthy, professional, and white, running the process as well as outsiders "taking over the city". When considered in the context of place attachment, the bond between people and place, race, class and gender identity have a large influence on how the "insiders"—typically

the marginalized people of a community—feel a lack of empowerment or position in affecting future decisions about their community [20]. The insider-outsider dynamic was racially based (black *versus* white populations, which sometimes translated to class differences); geographically-based (city *versus* suburbs *versus* out-of-town); and tenure-based (recent *versus* long-standing residents).

To be sure, issues of race, culture, and politics often complicate and strain attempts to develop and implement citywide planning processes. However, what was unique about the case of Detroit's planning process was that the civic engagement team acknowledged these challenges, considered public sentiment after the tense first set of large-scale meetings, and was determined to craft a deliberate strategy to overcome such infrastructural, racial, and political barriers by intentionally and intensively focusing on building and rebuilding trust. This helped the project achieve the objectives of scale and credibility. Civic engagement team leaders realized that building trust explicitly within and across all segments of the Detroit community could improve significantly the community stakeholders' impressions of, participation in, and ultimate buy-in of the effort. Building trust meant focusing on inviting people into the planning conversation both earlier and more inclusively than had been done in the past, and it required investing time and resources in outreach and cultivating relationships. This trust building felt at times like a case of one step forward and two steps back. One participant in the project in mid-2012 put it this way: "*I came into this with the utmost respect for DWP, and I still have that, but there is an apparent disconnect with the community that I can sense*".

Project leaders attended existing community meetings across the city to listen to people's questions and perspectives on their own turf and in their own terms. They made a concerted effort to reach out to people and groups that may have been overlooked in prior planning processes. Project staff members were also trained in responsive listening skills and on how to conduct productive one-on-one meetings. In addition, transparency and accountability were crucial to building trust. Thus, project leaders developed an ongoing feedback loop—meaning both delivering frequent and timely updates and notifying stakeholders of upcoming engagement opportunities, as well as soliciting community input in targeted ways. Communications methods (also known as information out) included a regular e-newsletter, project website [21] and social media posts, periodic canvassing and distribution of materials, and coverage in print, radio, and television outlets. Community input and perspectives (also known as information in) were sought through dialogue at meetings, events, one-on-one conversations, and story gathering, among other methods. These concurrent and complementary feedback mechanisms encouraged greater levels of engagement, trust, constituency building, and support from community stakeholders; contributed to the credibility of the process; and ameliorated the aforementioned challenges of planning fatigue, weak civic infrastructure, and negative racial and cultural dynamics.

Certainly, cultivating trust and enthusiasm through relationship-building and real-time feedback loops took time and resources. In fact, some of the project's Steering Committee members were hesitant at first to make the significant investment of time and resources in engagement activities that would not inform the content of the strategic framework plan directly. However, in the end, building trust proved a worthwhile investment. More than 60% of DWPLTP survey respondents indicated that they felt "more hopeful" after participation in the initiative [22]. In the words of one participant, "*I see how feedback has been used, I see that the team is thinking about implementation*". Not only did the

trust-building strategy improve the transparency and authenticity of the process, it also better positioned the Framework Plan for sustained demand and buy-in when the time came for implementation.

3.2.2. Strategy #2: Designing a Process that Elevates Community Expertise

The civic culture of Detroit has worked frequently in an "us *versus* them" environment [23]. For example, local community groups have often organized for dialogue and change out of necessity because of the absence and/or distrust of institutional leadership, including government, philanthropy, and business. "Community" in this case refers to the "grassroots", defined as Detroit residents and those organized to work on behalf of local Detroiters. The anger expressed by the audience at the first public meetings in September 2010 had built from a desire to have Mayor Bing address them directly, particularly after having emphasized the importance of community engagement in his first State of the City address just a few months earlier. There was also a common feeling that once again, the usual public officials ("grass tops") and "outsider" consultants already had a plan. Evidence of how the grassroots would be meaningfully a part of the process was not presented or represented clearly in the initial engagements.

Often in planning processes, the tension between adopting a "community-driven" approach *versus* the perceptions of a "stakeholder-led" approach surfaces early, and usually a choice is made to adopt one or the other. It became clear that DWPLTP's goals of robust and authentic engagement required not settling for a "grassroots" *versus* a "grass tops" approach to engagement, but rather creating a new paradigm of engagement that expanded the definition of community to include multiple sectors in dialogue together to share expertise and inform the final planning outcome. In other words, project leaders opted to avoid the dichotomy of either a "top-down" or "bottom-up" approach. Instead, they explored how to involve community members deeply in participating in the process and influencing its outcomes without misleading the public into thinking that all decisions would stem from the ground up. In this way, civic engagement for the project was reconceived to be *citizen-shaped*, not *citizen-driven*. This was an important distinction that helped clarify expectations and roles, although it proved a challenge at times not to revert back to one end of the spectrum or the other.

While the initial five town hall meetings were difficult to manage logistically, and, in some cases, became a forum for residents' anger and frustration, the meetings surfaced ultimately an enormous amount of data about what Detroiters witnessed firsthand about the condition of their neighborhoods. In the early meetings, many people spoke in great detail about their communities, often citing problem addresses, blocks and intersections, as well as about the resources and local activism already working to remedy the problems. Pivoting from the early large-scale meetings, which represented primarily residents as just one segment of Detroit's larger community, project leaders sought to adopt a more expansive and inclusive view of community. This more expansive definition of community included large and small business owners, the financial and philanthropic sectors, health and educational leaders, and academics. This local knowledge about current conditions and expertise about urban issues were highly valued by project leaders. Since many local leaders wore multiple hats as different segments of community crossed over, DWPLTP sought to weave these segments together at meetings, events, and activities where possible, rather than approaching them in isolation from one another. Indeed, early

project planning by the Detroit Collaborative Design Center often featured a graphic image of the interconnected segments of community (depicted in Figure 1).

Figure 1. Segments of community. (Image credit: Detroit Collaborative Design Center).

Local expertise was elevated by both a more expansive definition of community and by the careful consideration of who would be at the table to shape and execute the engagement. Another key engagement strategy that the DWPLTP developed and executed was the intentional strengthening of local capacity for ongoing and future engagement efforts. An essential part of this, and one that grew directly out of the early investment in trust building and relationship building, was the creation of a new group called the Process Leaders.

The more than a dozen local community leaders who comprised this group were selected for their expertise in civic engagement and local community knowledge among different racial, cultural, and age groups, as well as geographic areas of the city. The Process Leaders were charged with meeting weekly to advise and guide the engagement team and to help design and execute particular engagement activities and events. This role went beyond the typical "community advisory group" to active participation in decisions about where, when, and how engagement would roll out. This ameliorated the widespread perception of "us *versus* them" that had plagued previous projects. The Process Leaders helped to signal to Detroiters that engagement would go beyond the "usual suspects", and this generated broad excitement.

Examples of Community "Fingerprints" in DWPLTP

One of the richest areas of community input dealt with the Neighborhoods planning element—mentioned most frequently out of more than 180 DWPLTP planning topics. Participant comments and reflections about the most critical quality of life indicators shaped this aspect of the strategic framework. Such comments and ideas included:

- ✓ Reduce blight by making properties cleaner and safer;
- ✓ Encourage people to stay in Detroit, contribute to community, be neighborly, and maintain property;
- ✓ Get together with a group of neighbors and fellow citizens as a way of improving the neighborhood;
- ✓ Encourage community-based and youth-focused programs to improve safety in moderate vacancy areas.

The Process Leaders group was an innovative way to respond to the sense of weakened civic infrastructure and the sense of us *versus* them or insiders *versus* outsiders that often permeated previous planning projects in Detroit. It was a method used not only to cultivate broad participation and collaborative ownership, but also to build the local capacity for ongoing and future engagement efforts. Process Leaders strengthened relationships with each other, and in some cases, sought opportunities to work together even beyond DWPLTP. Engagement capacity was also built by training project ambassadors and street team canvassers, connecting people across silos and sectors where possible, and exposing the local civic leaders to new engagement tools and methods. The Process Leaders group also benefitted the engagement process by helping to build trust and getting resources to flow back into the city. In sum, the principle of developing and supporting local leadership helped address the capacity and infrastructure challenges and take the effort to scale. As one Process Leader reflected, "*I think over the next three to five years, you're going to see radical change in Detroit. It's already underway* [24]".

3.2.3. Strategy #3: Creating an Intentional Approach for Blending Technical and Community Expertise at a Citywide Scale

The first two strategies described how the engagement process was improved through methods that helped build trust and develop local capacity. In addition to these process design elements, an optimal outcome—the actual content of the Framework Plan—was also extremely important to all involved. Given the community's concerns about a "top-down" planning approach, where city leaders and their planners were perceived to already have the solution to an already framed set of problems, there was early push back that the process should be "community-driven". A community-driven process was understood as a process where the knowledge of local residents, both subjective and spatial, reflects their common experience and knowledge of everyday life, therefore better equipping them as the "experts" at identifying technical solutions that meet their realities and needs [25]. It was clear that this either/or proposition would not yield the best solution for addressing Detroit's severe economic, social, and spatial challenges that operated at both the citywide and neighborhood scale. Instead, an interdisciplinary approach was needed, integrating the best practices of planning and design, social science, and community-based problem solving. Values around immediate needs combined with innovative spatial solutions allowed both the practical and the aspirational. The technical solutions reflected the complexity of city dwellers' everyday lives.

Therefore, one of the unique features of the DWPLTP process was the aspiration to truly blend technical expertise with community expertise. Community expertise was defined as the inputs collected by community participants that included experiential knowledge and observations about current conditions and activities on the ground. That is, Detroiters were seen as the data "recorders" or experts of their own communities. Including their observations and ideas in the work would ensure that they could see their "fingerprints" on the resulting strategic framework. Technical and planning experts accepted the premise that these types of experiential and anecdotal inputs are valid.

Towards this end, project leaders designed ways to gather and record significant and wide-ranging input and perspectives, incorporate them into the technical analysis in real time, and demonstrate to the community how their inputs were incorporated. This process was referred to as a "civic engagement

feedback loop" (see diagram in Figure 2). In terms of the precise methodology for gathering and analyzing community input, extensive methods were built into the process and were used in a variety of face-to-face and virtual engagement efforts (see Figure 3 for types and locations of face-to-face engagements). These included participant comment forms (largely handwritten responses which were then transcribed), electronic and phone surveys and snap polls, Facebook surveys, comment forms on the project website, Keypoint®/"clicker" polls, interactive mapping exercises, geographically-linked responses through the Detroit 24/7 online game, dot voting exercises, extensive meeting notes, live court reporter scribes and transcriptions, video interviews, small group participant note taking, one-on-one interview notes, and evaluation forms. Both open-ended and close-ended questions were asked. All of these data inputs were analyzed using Microsoft Access and Microsoft Excel.

Figure 2. The civic engagement feedback loop. (Image credit: Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan).

Figure 3. Map of all face-to-face civic engagement activities executed by the Detroit Works Project throughout the city. (Image credit: Detroit Future City: Civic Engagement Appendix).
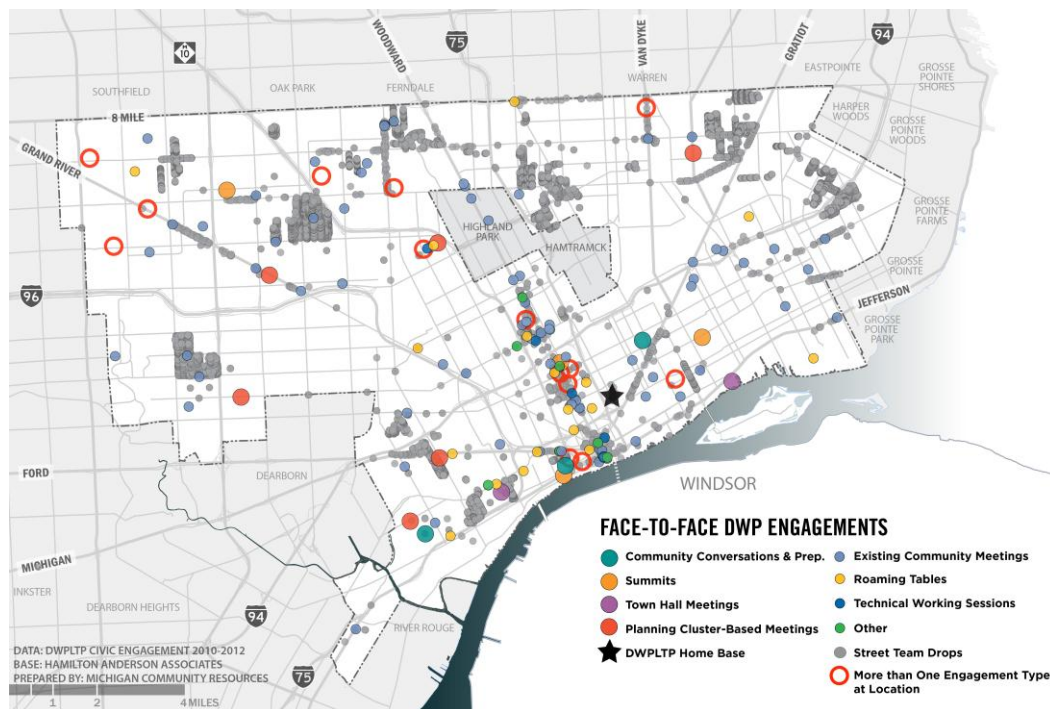
Project leaders strove to make engagement authentic, meaningful, and ongoing in the creation of a strategic framework that would be reflective of community perspectives and priorities, combined with technical data research and analysis. The goal of blending technical and community expertise was seen not only to benefit the final plan itself, but also to prime all community sectors to sustain its demand and implementation after the planning process was completed.

However, this ambitious aspiration of blending community and technical expertise came with pitfalls as well. For one, it was messy. The observations and priorities articulated by residents did not always translate laterally to the levels and types of analysis on the technical side. For example, parents shared specific input about the quality and characteristics of particular Detroit public schools, with comments such as: "*Safety at a school is the number one thing that determines whether or not a parent will send their child to that school—is my child safe and do you care about my child* [26]?" While valid and deeply important to residents' quality of life in neighborhoods, such input sometimes did not translate easily to technical assessments and recommendations at the systems level.

In addition, the integration of community expertise proved logistically and intellectually challenging at times. It proved enormously difficult to incorporate feedback from community sectors in real time (and to circulate out what was heard, what changed, and why) in the midst of also developing and advancing the rigorous, multifaceted technical work. Several reasons explain this difficulty. For one, resource and timing constraints—and sometimes unjustified deadlines—competed constantly with the need for depth and assessment of the community inputs. Certainly, this inhibited the ability to incorporate community input, but project leaders and advisors strove for the ideal of blending as much as possible. A second reason for the difficulty in blending inputs in real time was imbedded in the very nature of the "wicked problem [27]" of the planning scope. The large amount of content coming from both technical and community data created a constant cycle of discovering the nature of the problems while at the same time also investigating their dimensions and solutions in order to make timely decisions to move the process forward. And finally, even with a robust community engagement process, the thousands of people who participated and provided significant input still represented only 15% to16% of Detroit's total population. Still fewer of this number were signed up to receive ongoing project communications and updates via email, so the project was unable to stay connected over time with most participants.

Perhaps the greatest degree of successful technical and community blending came within the three months following the initial meetings in 2010 through smaller organized follow-up conversations designed to gather more community intelligence about the challenges and opportunities for Detroit's neighborhoods. These smaller meetings engaged not only residents, but also attracted other segments of the community to surface insights and data. For instance, many participants (32.8%) felt that access to high quality education was "the most critical" to their quality of life [28]. A careful recording of these inputs represented the initial set of "community expertise data" incorporated into the early phase of analysis. These dialogues ran parallel to an intensive technical assessment of several land use, economic, and social indicators of Detroit's current conditions. When the technical policy audits were blended with the community data, the technical team was able to develop a more accurate and inclusive "case for change"—a comprehensive set of data, both quantitative and qualitative, about issues most critical for the city to address in order to transition towards a more sustainable future.

The results of these integrated discussions between the community and the technical team produced twelve Imperative Actions—the important core values, goals, and quality of life/quality of business elements necessary to move Detroit into a more sustainable and affordable future. The Imperatives were set during the initial six months of the project and established the direction for subsequent phases and the final recommendations of the Framework.

12 Imperative Actions

1. We must re-energize Detroit's economy to increase job opportunities within the city for Detroiters and strengthen the tax base;
2. We must support our current residents and attract new residents;
3. We must use innovative approaches to transform our vacant land in ways that increase its value and productivity and promote long-term sustainability;
4. We must use our open space to improve the health of all Detroit's residents;
5. We must promote a range of sustainable residential densities;
6. We must focus on sizing the networks for a smaller population, making them more efficient, more affordable, and better performing;
7. We must realign city systems in ways that promote areas of economic potential, encourage thriving communities, and improve environmental and human health conditions;
8. We must be strategic and coordinated in our use of land;
9. We must promote stewardship for all areas of the city by implementing short- and long-term strategies;
10. We must provide residents with meaningful ways to make change in their communities and the city at large;
11. We must pursue a collaborative regional agenda that recognizes Detroit's strengths and our region's shared destiny;
12. We must dedicate ourselves to implementing this framework for our future.

Moving into the strategy development phase, blending community and technical expertise became more difficult for the DWPLTP team mainly because: (1) the technical work was at least two to three months ahead of the engagement due to gaps in the civic engagement process to redesign more effective approaches; and (2) the accelerated project schedule with deadlines driven by the political calendar—local elections, legislative conferences, *et cetera*—constrained greatly the amount of time that the team had for multiple rounds of data synthesis, confirmation, and integration with community sectors. And certainly, the skepticism and planning fatigue mentioned earlier still arose throughout the process, as participants voiced concern about the timeframe for implementation. "*You all have collected great ideas for improving the city, but I fear it will go into a report and no action will be taken. I would like to see how these things can become a reality and soon* [29]", cautioned one participant.

In hindsight, working groups, inclusive of all community sectors, working across the various planning elements of land use, economic growth, neighborhoods, city systems, public assets, and civic engagement should have been put in place earlier in the process to ensure deeper integration of the blended expertise. That said, the attempt to blend community and technical expertise was successful in the following ways. First, there were many instances where strategies developed by the technical team

and community expertise were compatible and well aligned. For example, one common idea that surfaced repeatedly in the civic engagement process was to "*target different industries and businesses (for growth and development) in different areas of the city*". This idea took shape on the technical side as well, as the technical team examined how best to connect the strategies of economic development and land use. Second, the technical team included several Detroit residents who were able to add to as well as validate community expertise coming from the engagement process. Community perspectives about blue-green infrastructure, public safety, and environmental health, in particular, surfaced many times—as one person put it, "*We need to transform the city of Detroit into a cleaner, healthier, safer environment* [30]." Third, a constant dialogue between the technical team, civic engagement team, and process leaders through weekly coordination meetings helped ensure the most critical and commonly expressed issues and ideas from the community sectors were directed back to the technical team.

3.2.4. Strategy #4: Viewing Civic Engagement as an Ongoing Two-Way Conversation Rather Than a Series of Large-Scale Episodic Events

Oftentimes, civic engagement equates to large-scale events open to the public at large. Routinely a passive experience for attendees, the series of events tend to culminate in a tally of the total number of attendees as proof that the community was, in fact, engaged [31]. Through the DWPLTP process, particularly after its first set of town hall meetings, we learned that the approach needed to be more interactive and responsive to the readiness of the civic community to discuss and participate in designing change for the future.

Authentic civic engagement for this effort demanded that a relationship be built across all community sectors and neighborhoods around the city, not only to complete the planning process successfully, but also to strengthen the capacity to implement the strategies for change (see Figure 4 for the distribution of participant engagement by city zip codes). The process had to involve local participants actively and more visibly in leadership positions. Also paramount was creating a constant demonstration of transparency to maintain engagement, enthusiasm, and trust. In part, this meant placing a high value on the inputs of the community sectors equal to that of the technical data and expertise brought in to provide the best practices from around the world. Small and big creative ideas were shared throughout the civic engagement process, from raising people's awareness of the "*LightsOn! Detroit online tracking system allowing residents to communicate where street lights need to be fixed* [32]" to discussions of "*how we retrofit our built environment, [which] has implications for future costs and usage. You may be paying a higher rate, but with energy efficiency, you are using less* [33]".

While project leaders recognized that face-to-face community meetings and events would provide ways for people to connect, learn, and engage, DWPLTP also layered on a host of virtual and in-person engagement methods for engaging a wider and more diverse range of community participants to learn about, interact with, and provide feedback to shape the strategic framework. These innovative, fun, and interactive tactics were meant to engender an open and ongoing two-way dialogue among all community participants.

Figure 4. Map of registered participants by zip code. (Image credit: Detroit Future City: Civic Engagement Appendix).
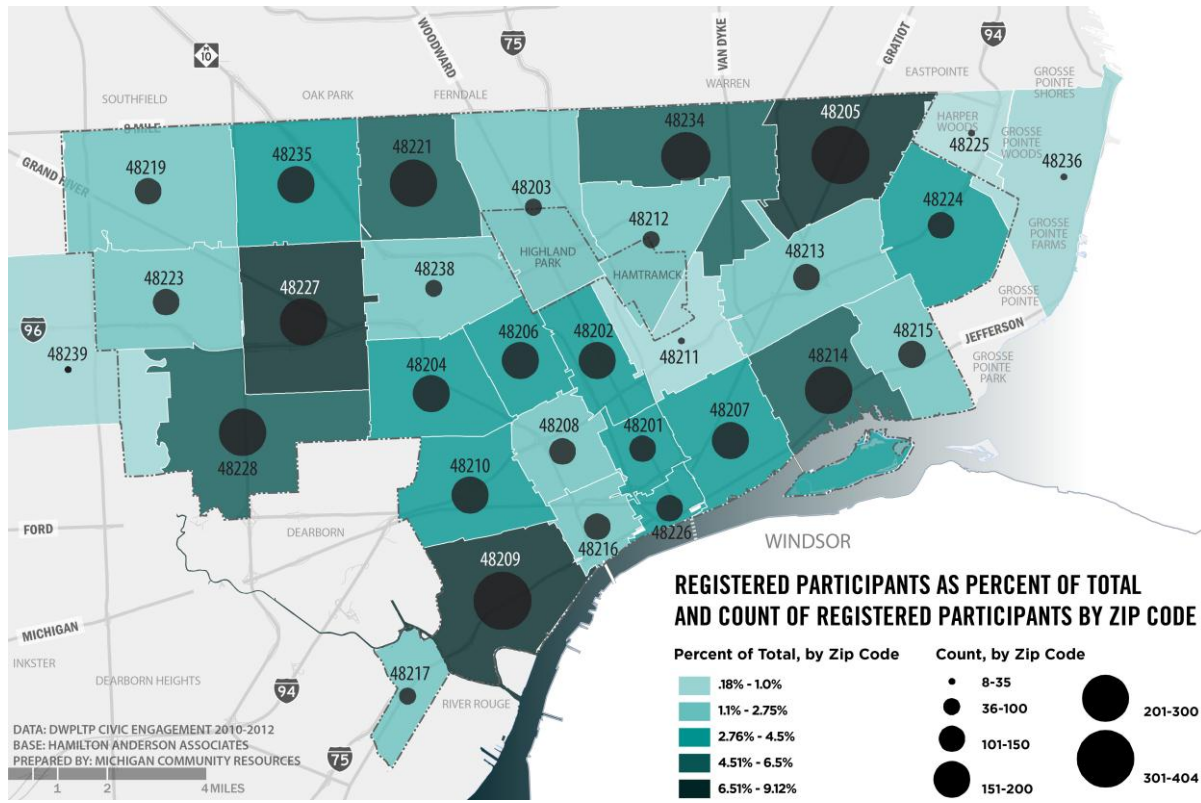
In addition to the more typical meeting-style formats of focus groups, charettes, and town hall forums, the following four innovative tactics are worth highlighting here:

- One of the tactics that helped to facilitate two-way conversation and learning was the "Roaming Table", a small travelling conversation booth that was staffed and stationed at various community locations. Tabling at events and meetings is a common engagement tactic for many efforts. However, the Roaming Table was unique because it could be set up anywhere rather than reaching only event attendees. And rather than being staffed by a project volunteer sitting passively behind a table full of flyers and materials it was designed to be approachable and interactive. The booth was designed inexpensively and could be collapsed to fit into the trunk of a car, so that organizers could transport it easily from place to place. The Roaming Table was ideal for engaging people in brief, one-on-one interactions about DWPLTP as they walked by, both to expose new people to the project as well as to solicit input on a specific planning question. This tactic facilitated more than 600 one-on-one conversations about the project (See Figure 5);

- The project also hosted a series of hour-long telephone town hall events, which reached more than 6000 people and engaged approximately 1300 participants. These were distinct from the five town hall meetings held at the beginning of the project, which were face-to-face facilitated exchanges between technical experts and a larger than expected crowd of participants. A telephone town hall, by contrast, is a virtual meeting that takes place via phone and can be joined from any telephone, such as from the convenience of a person's home. It is a cost-effective

and accessible technique for those for whom face-to-face meetings are challenging or unappealing. The technology uses an auto-dialer to call a specified list of phone numbers, offering a way to reach a large group of people instantly. People can listen to a speaker or a panel, ask questions in real time, or record messages expressing their perspectives on an issue. The telephone town halls promoted the two-way conversation between the speakers and the callers. These virtual town hall meetings allowed callers to hear project updates from Detroit community leaders, and to join the conversation live by posing their questions and comments. This tactic was particularly effective in engaging those who did not have the interest or ability to attend an in-person meeting, such as those with limited accessibility or who worked at times when community meetings took place. Many seniors participated in the telephone town halls.

Figure 5. The project's collapsible "roaming table" allowed the outreach team to engage over 6000 residents at transit stops, grocery stores, and community events throughout Detroit. (Photo credit: Detroit Collaborative Design Center).

A third tactic that attracted a good diversity of participants, particularly youth, was an online planning game called Detroit 24/7 [34]. The game was intended to gather input about elements of the strategic framework using a fun and interactive game platform. The idea to use game design was rooted in the theory that online social games can promote an environment for civic learning where engagement is combined with active participation and reflection [35]. More specifically, the tactic offered a new and innovative venue for trust building within and across the communities, as well as fostering recognition of alternative perspectives and ideas through reflection and discussion [35]. The platform for DWPLTP was designed as part of a Knight Foundation grant to Community PlanIt, a project of the Engagement Game Lab of Emerson College. The engagement and technical teams worked closely with Community PlanIt to determine the platform's content, approach, and language. The game featured challenges, a point system and leaderboard, prizes, and awards—all of which encouraged friendly competition and active game play. The game was open to people of all ages, but over the course of three weeks, DWPLTP partnered with Detroit Public Schools and youth

organizations, setting up computer kiosks in schools and libraries to allow easy access to the game to ensure young people had a voice in the process (see Figure 6). Partner outreach was a key facet of this engagement tactic, as it allowed the project to achieve scale. Detroit 24/7 [36] succeeded in helping to engage young people in the planning process, with 8400 comments being submitted to inform the strategic framework. The game culminated in a face-to-face event, yet another opportunity to foster two-way conversation between participants and members of the project team.

Figure 6. A high percentage of young people between the ages of 10 to 24 participated in the project's online planning game "Detroit 24/7". (Photo credit: Detroit Collaborative Design Center).

One participant, George, wrote "*I think it's great when artists are able to harness their visions and engage community in meaningful ways.*" And this translated into several quality of life recommendations within the new neighborhood designs for the "live + make" neighborhoods featured in the strategic framework. Another game participant suggested, "*Projects like the Riverwalk's wetlands filter clean the water and bring back animals.*" This suggestion and several like it influenced the team's approach to blue and green landscape infrastructure strategies, which can be found in the land use and city systems chapters of the Framework.

Lastly, an oral history project called Detroit Stories [36] aimed to solicit, video record, and share everyday stories of Detroiters. This tactic was an example of an effective way to increase awareness and enthusiasm about the project and celebrate people as one of Detroit's greatest assets. Through Detroit Stories, dozens of these video stories were gathered to learn about the personal perspectives of Detroiters and the things that mattered most in their lives. Since real Detroiters shared stories in their own words, the oral history project offered a highly engaging way to highlight conversation and stories and to inspire further reflections and input from participants following the video viewings. Watched by hundreds of people throughout the process, the Detroit Stories videos also provided an archive of rich, personal stories that could be preserved and shared even beyond the scope of the project.

Each of these tactics was designed to enable ongoing, two-way conversations among participants and project team members. These methods successfully engaged a combination of different demographics, sectors, constituencies, and geographic areas throughout the city. Some of the tactics allowed for more in-depth conversation and input, while others allowed wider reach and raised broad awareness of the project. By contrast, other tactics were designed to inform more directly the technical aspects of the strategic framework. While the tactics varied in terms of the depth of input and feedback received, together they advanced the three objectives of building enthusiasm and trust, building engagement capacity, and fostering community learning and dialogue. In short, the engagement tactics enabled the planning conversation amongst Detroiters to extend beyond the start and end of a meeting.

However, executing such a diverse menu of ways to engage the community also required investing time, money, and attention to advance planning. Careful thought to logistics and event details was vital. On the front end, project leaders had to reimagine the purpose and structure of each meeting and how the series of meetings and events fit together. The deliberate planning also included identifying the target participants for a particular meeting as well as promotion and outreach to ensure robust attendance. Attention was given to designing the agenda and flow of a meeting, securing skilled and trusted facilitators, and identifying the format and key discussion questions. In addition, project organizers devoted significant time to important details such as optimal timing, venue, accessibility, childcare, language translation, creating a welcoming atmosphere, capturing ideas and input accurately, and other factors to maximize inclusivity and participation. These are considered some of the most effective and necessary practices for inclusive and participatory engagement [37]. Finally, organizers debriefed after the meetings and followed up to thank and update participants—a step commonly forgotten in event planning. All of these steps made project events and meetings more effective and successful.

4. Conclusions

The DWPLTP planning process culminated in January 2013, as *Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan* was released to significant acclaim across sectors. After nearly three years of dialogue, analysis, planning, and collaborative work by a variety of community sectors, consultants, and civic leaders, this comprehensive strategic framework represented a shared vision for the future of the city's economic health, land use reform, neighborhood revitalization, public service delivery, management of abandoned lands, and elevation of civic capacity to implement and sustain change.

All in all, the scope and scale of civic participation in the Detroit Works Project: Long-Term Planning process was unprecedented in Detroit. The project conducted hundreds of meetings, had 30,000 conversations, connected with people over 163,000 times, and incorporated more than 70,000 surveyed responses and comments from participants [38]. Relationships, trust, buy-in, and momentum were invested in and built. The participation was inclusive in terms of race, age, gender, and neighborhood/geographic area, as shown in Figures 7–10.

Figure 7. Map of all registered participants of DWPLTP within Detroit who provided race and ethnicity. (Image credit: Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan).
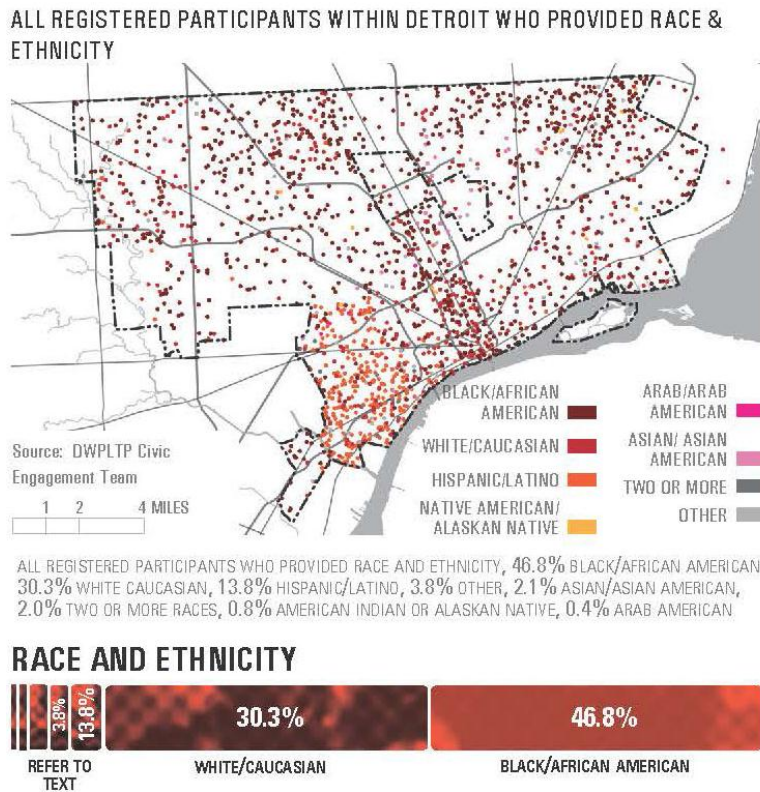

Figure 8. Map of all registered participants of DWPLTP within Detroit who provided gender. (Image credit: Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan).
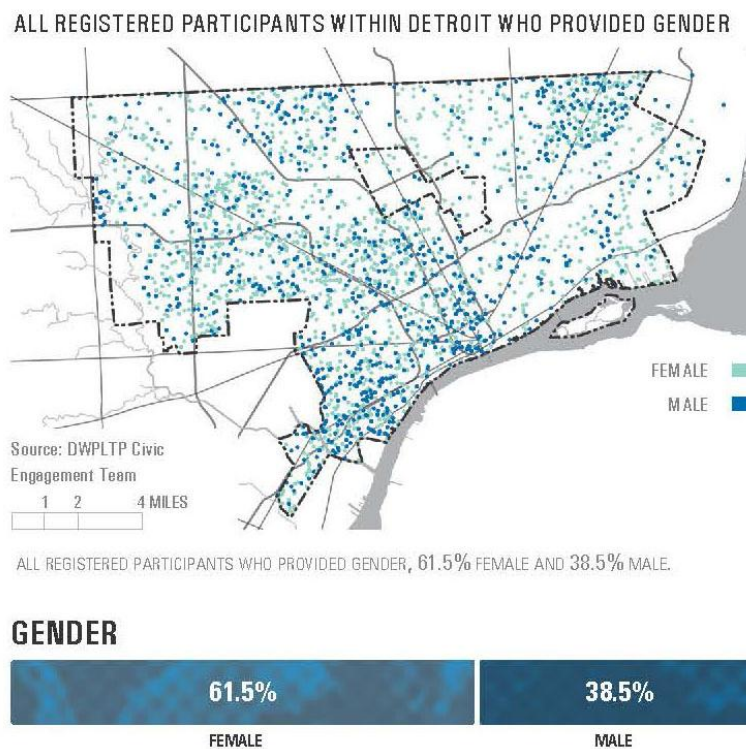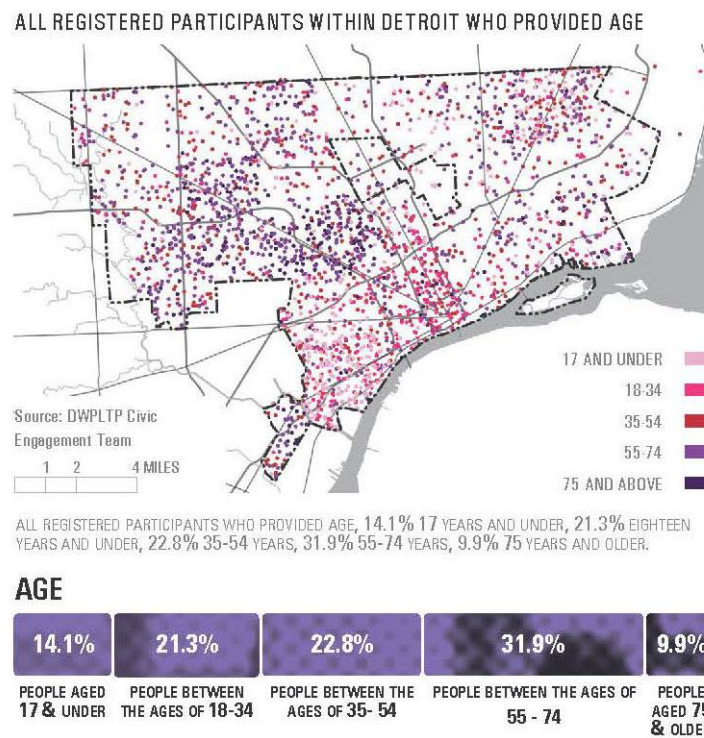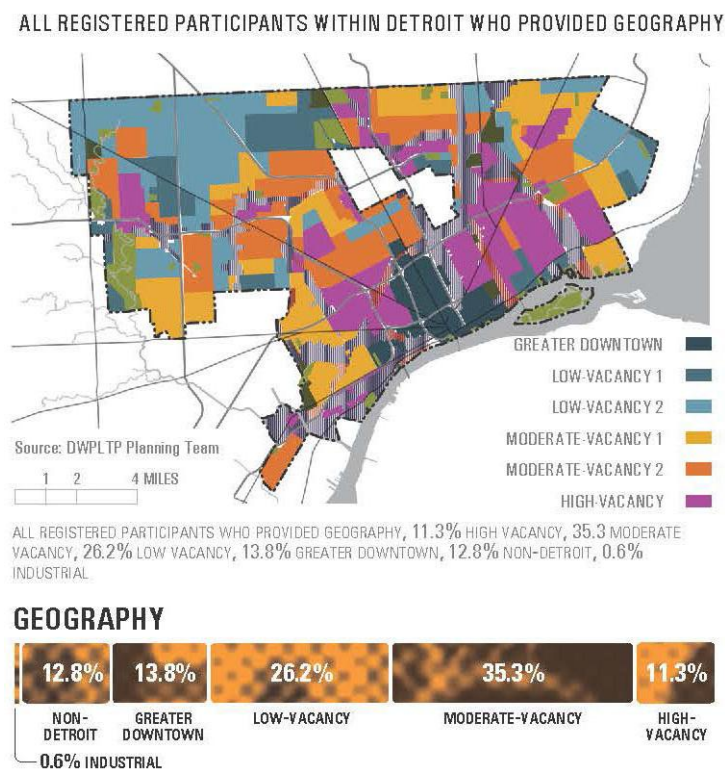
Figure 9. Map of all registered participants of DWPLTP within Detroit who provided age. (Image credit: Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan).

Figure 10. Map of all registered participants of DWPLTP within Detroit who provided geography. (Image credit: Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan).

Perhaps most notably, most of the Process Leaders who were involved deeply in the civic engagement process have continued meeting regularly on a voluntary basis, sharing learning,

collaborating, and continuing to champion the strategic framework within their own networks. Each Process Leader helps raise the visibility of different aspects of the strategic framework. For instance, one member of the group highlights the need to "*repurpose land to provide one of our most basic needs—healthy food*" [39], while others champion aspects such as community development, blight removal, the activation of block clubs, and small business incubation. These community leaders continue to shine a light on the need for civic engagement as Detroit Future City begins to be implemented across the city, and they raise both critiques and ideas in order for the project to remain accountable to all segments of community.

The success of the strategic framework plan can be measured in at least four distinct ways. First, the extraordinary amount of multi-sector involvement in the planning process was unprecedented. Over 200 local business, nonprofit, faith-based, institutional and grassroots organizations, together with governmental working groups, a Mayor's Advisory Task Force participated actively in the creation of the Framework. Second, government, private, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations have adopted all or parts of the Framework into their strategic investment plans for Detroit. Third, the strategic framework and the civic engagement process received over one million largely positive media impressions within the first month of its release and three professional recognitions including the American Planning Association's Daniel Burnham Award for a Comprehensive Plan, the Michigan Association of Planning's Planning Excellence Award, and the Michigan Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects' Honor Award for Landscape Planning and Analysis. The Detroit Collaborative Design Center was also given a SEED Award for Excellence in Community Interest Design in 2014, by Design Corps and the Social Economic Environmental Design® (SEED) Network, for several of its engagement approaches and materials.

The fourth, and perhaps most important, measurement of success is the ongoing commitment of Detroiters and the enhanced civic capacity across sectors to implement change through collaboration, partnerships and strategic coordination. Because the civic engagement process was designed around four key principles—overcoming cultural and racial dynamics, elevating local knowledge, blending community and technical expertise, and providing a wide range of opportunities to engage in two-way conversation—the strategic framework was solidified as the definitive way forward for reinventing the city's future [40]. The investment in building trust, fostering community learning, and strengthening local engagement capacity paid off in the end, as community members were able to see themselves reflected in the resulting strategic framework. Though the process was far from perfect, the willingness of project leaders to be responsive and make adjustments along the way was critical to the largely successful outcome.

To be sure, significant concern remains about whether this enhanced community capacity will continue to be meaningfully included in the process of implementation. The composition of newly elected and first-time city government officials and the uncertainty of the emergency manager and bankruptcy resolution at the time this article was completed leave many unsure about how well local government will partner with all community sectors going forward. In fact, the media often criticizes Detroit Future City for not being able to confirm the roles of community members in implementation, citing "*we engage our citizens for feedback but leave them on the sidelines when it comes time for deployment*" [41].

Some of the enduring capacity that was developed through the process included exposure to new engagement tools and tactics, the expansion of local leadership capability, and an increased ability to communicate and collaborate across siloes. Examples of this sustained capacity include the creation and funding of the Detroit Future City Project Implementation Office, which is staffed by a diverse group of multi-generational Detroit leaders; the participation of several young planning activists who ran for city council seats in the 2013 elections, all of whom were new to politics; and the incorporation of Detroit Future City's goals and strategies into the implementation agendas of several public and philanthropic sector organizations, including the Kresge Foundation and the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation. Over the last eighteen months since the plan's release, Detroit Future City has become a relevant framework for guiding collaboration, investment, and action, as Detroiters across all community sectors, including new government leadership at the state and local levels, continue to access, learn about, and integrate the framework into their efforts on the ground.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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![Planetizen]

Reparative Planning as Movement Building

The "Metro as Sanctuary" campaign provides an example of movement-based planning. This kind of planning is relational and solidaristic, with an emphasis on collective decision-making, complementary divisions of labor, and mutual learning.

7 Minute Read

August 25, 2021, 7:00 AM PDT

By [Lily Song](#)

Ghawam Kouchaki / [Shutterstock](#)

The subject of reparation has gained greater salience and traction in popular and planning discourse. A [recent episode](#) of *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* culminated with a discussion of reparations. Examining the history of racially discriminatory housing policies and industry practices in the United States, the comedian and late-night news commentator concluded, "The only really strange thing about paying reparations to Black people is that we haven't done it."He elaborated: "The right thing to do couldn't be clearer. When you deprive somebody of something, you make it right by paying what you owe."

At the national level, Ta-nehisi Coates' "The Case for Reparations" prominently implicated modern planning apparatuses in the country's history of racial violence and dispossession. As examined by Joan Fitzgerald in a recent Planetizen article, "The Beginning of Housing Reparations," local and state governments are beginning to address the racial wealth gap by passing reparations resolutions, making funding appropriations, and enacting other measures that seek to repair histories of harm—encompassing enslavement, discriminatory housing and lending policies, destructive highway and infrastructure projects, and more. Reparative planning has become a key topical area among planning researchers and scholars as well, gaining overdue consideration and treatment as part of a special issue of the *Journal of American Planning Association* focused on "Anti-Racist Futures."

The fight for reparation encompasses a long history of activism and movement building as recounted in the article "Reparations— Has the Time Finally Come?" written by Nkechi Taifa. As early as 1783, Belinda Royall petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for remuneration of her uncompensated labor. Subsequent milestones include the 1898 founding of the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief Bounty and Pension Association, which sought compensation for slavery from federal agencies; the Universal Negro Improvement Association's transatlantic reparation and repatriation schemes in the 1920s; the adoption of the "Black Manifesto" at the 1969 National Black Economic Development Conference demanding reparations from white churches to Black Americans; and the founding of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (NCOBRA) in 1987. Reparations measures, beginning with HR40 - Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act (1988), were only made possible by the tireless organizing and advocacy of formerly enslaved people, their descendants, and accomplices.

If reparation is "abolition in action," as stated by Patrisse Cullors, cofounder of Black Lives Matter, it seems appropriate to consider reparative planning in light of abolitionist planning debates. In 2017, a group of graduate students at UCLA co-facilitated a course, "Abolitionist Planning in Today's Political Conjuncture," and published an abolitionist planning guide for urban planners. Deshonay Dozier's "A Response to Abolitionist Planning" (2018) raised the intractable question of whether professional planning could actually contribute to abolition, conceived as a movement and verb (continuing actions) seeking to end prisons, policing, and border walls, given the field's complacency in the reproduction of institutional violence. Warning against token inclusivity and participation that dissipate popular resistance and co-opt abolitionist, Black, Brown, and Indigenous knowledge, Dozier invites planners to actively subvert planning education and practices while building liberatory movements and advancing non-reformist reforms.

Indeed, planners have not been at the forefront of abolitionist, reparative, and otherwise anti-racist movements, but they have not lacked for planning. Robin D.G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams* (2003) offers fascinating insight into the transformative values,

bold imaginaries, and affirmative principles animating the four-centuries long dream of reparations for slavery and Jim Crow. Nor is movement-based planning a thing of the past. In the Bronx, where residents have organized for decades— across neighborhoods, generations, lines of race, gender, class, ethnicity, immigration status, and faith—a borough-wide coalition recently engaged thousands of Bronxites in a year-long community-driven planning process to create the [Bronx People's Platform](). This collective vision of systemic solutions to inequality grounded in an economic democracy framework is intended to inform organizing efforts across the borough for equitable, sustainable, and just development; hold elected officials accountable; and direct policy and investment in the borough toward the long-term shared ownership and collective governance of Bronx-based assets.

The [Alliance for Community Transit - Los Angeles (ACT-LA)]() offers another instructive example of movement-based planning for non-reformist reforms—with significant outcomes achieved over its ten-year trajectory. With origins in the L.A.-based movement for community benefits, the regional coalition of 41 community-based organizations combines grassroots organizing, coalition building, and direct-action campaigns to make L.A. accessible and affordable to all—especially low-income communities and communities of color. Its past successes include the passage of [Measure JJJ- Build Better LA]() (2016), which established the landmark Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC) policy for the city of [Los Angeles]() that has enabled 32,000 units of housing proposed near transit, nearly 7,100 of which are affordable, with a portion geared to extremely low-income families. Among ACT-LA's ongoing campaigns, "[Metro as Sanctuary]()" aims to shift funding from the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (Metro) multi-agency law enforcement contract to instead fund critical investments in job creation, inclusive safety services, and rider-friendly active spaces that promote holistic safety for all L.A. County residents.

At the invitation of ACT-LA's director, Laura Raymond, three graduate-level [urban planning]() and architecture students and I joined the "Metro as Sanctuary" campaign alongside other university-based allies such as the Veterans Legal Clinic at UCLA School of Law and the Movement Lawyering Clinic at Howard University School of Law. Through summer and fall 2020—in the midst of the pandemic—ACT-LA organizers, coalition members, and allies held virtual teach-ins, workshops, and meetings, in part to co-create the "Metro as Sanctuary" policy proposal and advocacy campaign. My team of planners and designers—including Anne Lin (MUP, MPH 2021), Elifmina Mizrahi (MUP 2021), and Fiona Riley (MArch 2022)— was tasked with developing the environmental design component of the policy proposal to promote safety on public transit beyond the punitive, police-first model. The experience destabilized and informed our understanding of reparative planning in ways that decentered planning as a profession but not as a creative, invocative endeavor.

A distinct attribute of the Metro as Sanctuary campaign work was that it was relational and solidaristic. Compared to mainstream planning organizations and venues, we noticed an emphasis on collective decision-making, complementary divisions of labor, and mutual learning and deep emphasis on individual leadership and authorship. Notwithstanding the impressive professional credentials of coalition members and allies, they appeared secondary to shared goals and priorities emanating from the lived experiences of L.A.'s low-income communities and communities of color. The mutual input and feedback helped mitigate personal biases and blindspots, which have otherwise pervaded planning policies and histories of harm. It also better aligned the policy proposal and campaign strategies with the goals and moral grounding of other local and regional movement-based initiatives that also center working-class communities of color such as [Alternatives to Incarceration Initiative](#) and [Healthy LA](#).

Throughout the campaign, we noticed careful attention paid to power. Beyond the spatialization of white supremacy and intersecting oppressions through the urban built environment, infrastructure investments, and [redevelopment](#) projects, ACT-LA members and organizers often referenced past and ongoing community-led struggles and political formations for equitable development. It was clear that the member organizations brought diverse specializations that were complementary in building collective power across sectors and scales, and ACT-LA convened a counter space in which to unlearn, organize, and co-create in autonomous terms separate from public meetings and other existing spaces held by planning authorities. In contrast to prevalent assumptions among planners that politics make only incremental reforms possible, we witnessed a more flexible understanding of politics. The coalition combined a keen awareness of regional political dynamics with an understanding of pressure points or points of entry for progressive action and the existing relationships and influence to [effectively reimagine and reiterate transit safety beyond policing.](#)

Where some of the allied lawyers identified as movement lawyers, we didn't have a pre-existing category to name the work we were doing but came to identify similarly—as movement-based planners. Our entry into the Metro as Sanctuary campaign came at a time when we were growing tired of anti-racist statements, displays of symbolic solidarity, and reading lists and roundtables otherwise dominating the field and profession in the wake of uneven pandemic effects and mass protests in defense of Black lives. We found relief and renewal in simply showing up, listening out, and contributing to the campaign as needed—with research, planning and design provocations, communication materials, or simply taking minutes—and knowing that our work was a small part of a much larger formation. The present reparation measures led by government agencies and officials are necessary but insufficient; history reminds us that reparation, or abolition in action, is built on social movements, which call us to action.

Lily Song is an assistant professor of Race and Social Justice in the Built Environment at Northeastern University. She was formerly lecturer in Urban Planning and Design and founding coordinator of CoDesign at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

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Using Our Words: The Language of Design for Equity

Public interest design. Social impact design. Community based design. These are labels that many of us use regularly to define the work we do… but what do these words actually mean? As Barbara Brown Wilson and Katie Swenson acknowledged in the introduction to this series, we are at a time when our movement is blossoming. Yet, as the numbers in this field increase, it has become clear that there is not only a broad range of labels, but also a broad range of definitions for what constitutes good work. Many believe that developing common metrics is the answer to this challenge, but we can't agree on metrics until we first agree on the words we use to discuss the work and its impacts.

CHRISTINE GASPAR & **LIZ OGBU** JULY 6, 2015

Public interest design. Social impact design. Community based design. These are labels that many of us use regularly to describe the work we do… but what do these words actually mean? As Barbara Brown Wilson and Katie Swenson acknowledged in the introduction to this series, we are at a time when our movement is blossoming. Yet, as the numbers in this field increase, it has become clear that there is not only a broad range of labels, but also a broad range of definitions for what constitutes good work. Many believe that developing common metrics is the

answer to this challenge, but we can't agree on metrics until we first agree on the words we use to discuss the work and its impacts.

You say tomayto. I say tomahto.

We all say things like we want our project to "benefit the community," we are "interested in diversity," or we have an "engagement process." But a little poking reveals that we often have different definitions for seemingly simple words like "community," "diversity," and "engagement."

For example, Liz Ogbu is currently working on a project in the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood of San Francisco to convert a former power plant site into a neighborhood-serving hub. The neighborhood is one of the poorest in the city, but is now experiencing significant gentrification. Liz and her team describe this as a "community-based" project, but who is the "community?" Is it specifically the African-American residents who have been the historic base of this neighborhood? Or is it all low-income residents in the neighborhood, regardless of color? Or is it all residents of the neighborhood regardless of color or income? Although it is easy to align "community" solely with underserved populations, designing for equity here means addressing the complexity of the broader community. How that community is defined significantly impacts the outcomes of the project, and could mean the difference between a project that supports existing power dynamics and one that dismantles them. A common language is critical if we are to achieve equity and enable accountability for how we practice and what we create.

Where do we begin?

We recognize that there have been other attempts to define terms in this field. However, there are a number of important words that remain either under-addressed or undefined, so we began exploring our own list of terms.

With input from a varied group of about 30 practitioners — from different sectors (academia, nonprofits, private sector) and fields of design (urban planning, architecture, graphic design, service design) — we've put together a hefty list of terms we hope to tackle over the next several months. In the meantime, we've started with a few terms that are highly critical to — yet notably absent from — discussions in the design fields

We have attempted to provide initial definitions of these terms, along with some thoughts on why they are critical to the field, especially at this moment in time. Throughout this series of posts, our collaborators will share projects and practices that further illustrate what these terms mean in the context of design.

Diversity.

"The condition of having or being composed of differing elements: especially: the inclusion of different types of people (such as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization."

Diversity means having representation of all groups. And one of the themes in this series is the call for more diversity in the field: based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, field of study, type of expertise, and other factors. This call for diversity is based on the belief that there are real barriers keeping talented people out of the field, and that we must work to reduce and eliminate those barriers. We have also come to believe that it is critical that our organizations should ultimately look more like the communities we serve, and be working to build capacity and leadership in those communities.

We start with diversity because it's fairly easy to understand. But, perhaps because of that, we often end there as well. While diversity is important, it's only a step on the way to a larger, more critical goal of achieving social equity. Achieving equity isn't just about representation (making sure the field looks like the communities it serves); it is about significant action to transform the environments we engage in a meaningful and sustained way. That is why our focus here goes far beyond increasing diversity in the field and instead calling for a focus on equity as the end goal that all of our work should build towards.

Equality.

"The quality or state of being equal, of having the same rights, etc." [ii]

Before we talk about equity, let's talk about equality. They are often used interchangeably but are fundamentally different. Equality is defined by access to opportunity. When we cut up a pie among eight people and each pie slice is the same size, we have equality. It sounds great, but equality only works if everyone starts from the same place. In reality, we know that we do not all stand on a level

playing field, especially in the communities in which our work is often located.

Equity.

"Equity means fairness. Equity...means that peoples' needs guide the distribution of opportunities for well-being. Equity...is not the same as equality... Inequities occur as a consequence of differences in opportunity, which result, for example in unequal access to health services, nutritious food or adequate housing. In such cases, inequalities...arise as a consequence of inequities in opportunities in life."[iii]

So what is equity, then? Equity, is concerned not just with opportunity, but also with the barriers that make those opportunities unequal. Whereas equality would demand eight equal pie slices and diversity would require that the pie slices be distributed to a broad range of people, equity would lead us to ask, "How much pie does each individual need? Have some individuals eaten already? Are others particularly hungry? Are some allergic to this flavor of pie?" An equitable slicing of the pie might lead to slices of different sizes.

Equity is particularly important when we recognize that equality is often an illusion because some populations face substantial barriers to accessing their "equal" rights. For example, distributing school funding based on equality would mean grants are available to any school that applies, and the school with the strongest application will be awarded the funds. An equity lens would recognize that some schools are more in need of the grants, and that those same schools are less likely to score high in their application due to lack of resources. It is critical to recognize that in cases like this, an equality model would, in fact, perpetuate the disparities that keep poorer schools behind.

The focus on equity makes clear that our projects are not "good" just because we are bringing design to communities that have not had access to it. Our work should also strive to create greater equity in society and to eradicate the barriers that prevent some from accessing resources. It means that how we do the project and the result of the project really matters. This has implications for a broad range of factors, including how we engage with communities we are not a part of, how we treat our own employees, how we share credit for our work, and how we measure impact.

On some level, everyone in this field understands that, which is why we're all bringing resources into communities that are not able to access those resources already. But focusing the larger frame of our work on equity means that we are working towards alleviating the access discrepancies in the first place, as well as the policies, biases, and institutional barriers that create those discrepancies.

Privilege.

"A right or benefit that is given to some people and not to others."[iv]

"Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because of their race, class, socio-economic status, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or other characteristic they largely do not control. Generally people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it, and often don't witness the experience of those who lack privilege."[v]

Privilege is an intense word, but it underlies everything we do in this field. The act of bringing a resource into a community that has not had access to that resource is entirely predicated on one group of people being privileged enough to offer that resource. Privilege is a word people use for name-calling, which makes us shy away from understanding it and talking about it. However, as a field, that means that we are not training ourselves to responsibly and humbly enter a community with a frank discussion of privilege. Our actions are informed by our privilege, which may stem from our race or ethnicity, our socio-economic status, our class, our family history, our gender, our schooling, our social connections, or our access to power.

Whether or not we seek privilege or power, we have it, and we have to address it. We can use it for good, we can give it up, we can put it on the table when we talk with or about the people who don't have it, and we can put it in the hands of others. Arguably, the latter is an intention many of us have when we enter this field, but intention is not the same as action. Acting on privilege means tangibly acknowledging that the pie can't be cut equally to be equitable, and doing something about it. It means recognizing that we are often in situations where a community isn't in a position of power to push back at us when our design doesn't reflect their input. It means acknowledging that the person funding our work can instill us with more power than the community members we're hoping to serve. It means helping the community members who lack connections and access to have just as much of a voice and power as those who do. It is about understanding that achieving equity requires us to create an environment where everyone regardless of status or background can

articulate their needs and the differing power dynamics.

The field of community organizing, where an active effort to take on issues of privilege is common, has helped our group find a way to productively talk about privilege. In particular, we have found that a guided activity that allows a group to explore and visualize their own privileges can be an eye-opening experience that creates space for this kind of conversation in our work.

Power.

"The ability or right to control people or things."[vi]

"The ability to coerce others' behavior. Power also includes access to social, political, and economic resources."[vii]

Understanding privilege means also understanding power, as they often go hand in hand. Privilege gives many of us an invisible, yet highly influential, level of power— the power to determine how the pie is cut. By not acknowledging privilege or power, we often fail to acknowledge (or properly leverage) the scale of our influence on projects. This can lead to stand-alone projects that are conceptually interesting but limited in terms of deep and sustained impact.

We must remind ourselves that design itself is a tool of power — it is a specialized skill that not everyone has access to. As someone who has that skill, each one of us makes decisions about in whose hands we will place that power. For example, as an intermediary in a community, we might have power to push policymakers on their own thinking about the community. Christine Gaspar saw this happen many times in her work in Mississippi at the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio. As a white, educated person with significant credentials, she was often privy to conversations about low-income communities of color in which significant decisions were made, while those communities had no place at the table. While she was not in any way elected to represent those communities, she felt that it was her duty, as a person with the privilege of being in that room, to use any power she had to advocate on their behalf – at least until such a time when those people could be in the room themselves (ideally as the decision-makers).

Many of us are drawn to this work because we instinctively understand that and are intentionally making choices about where we place power. But few of us have had the opportunity to discuss what that power even means and to learn how to simultaneously diffuse the power dynamic when working with communities, while wielding our power to bring about greater equity.

Help us create a shared language.

This essay is a starting point. We hope we have opened up some space to talk about thorny issues like equity, privilege, and power. But this is a work in progress and part of a larger iterative process. We hope you'll help add to this list. If you have words to share, add them as a comment to this article or email them to us. We also invite you to visit the Design for Equity website. In the coming months, we'll be using that platform to add new words and definitions related to design for equity, share more information about the overall effort, and identify more opportunities to advance this conversation. We hope you'll join us.

Merriam-Webster online at: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diversity retrieved on 2/15/15

[ii] Merriam-Webster online at: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equality retrieved on 2/15/15

[iii] "Glossary of Terms," from the Public Health Agency of Canada, retrieved from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/php-psp/ccph-cesp/glos-eng.php. The glossary was compiled by Dr. John M. Last in October 2006 and revised and edited by Peggy Edwards in August 2007. This quote has been edited to remove references to public health, since we believe the same notion applies to the design field and to society more broadly.

[iv] Merriam-Webster online at: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/privilege retrieved on 2/15/15

[v] From: "Racial Equity Resource Guide," produced by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's "America's Healing" initiative, retrieved from http://www.racialequityresourceguide.org/about/glossary on 2/15/15 The site identifies the following source: Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women Studies." The quote here has been modified to remove references to white privilege, and to more broadly address a range of privileges.

[vi] Merriam-Webster online at: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/power retrieved on 2/15/15

[vii] Shaw, Dr. Susan, "Difference, Power, and Privilege" presentation retrieved from http://www.consumerstar.org/resources/pdf/shaw.pdf on 2/15/15

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JUSTICE FOR WHO

Our second discussion aimed to determine if our definition and pursuit of justice must be tied to any particular demographic, geography or moment in time. We also hoped to surface the ways in which we isolate ourselves into singular identities that can often set up a narrative of "winners and losers," and, therefore, stall the work of change.

De Nichols is a design activist, social worker, and global lecturer who mobilizes creative changemakers to address issues within the built environment through the production of interactive experiences, digital media and social initiatives. She serves as the Principal of Design and Social Impact at the Civic Creatives consultancy in St. Louis, MO, and she is a co-organizer of the national Design As Protest initiative.
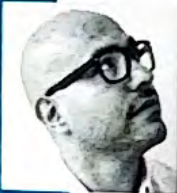
Quilian Riano is the Associate Director of Kent State University's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC), where he provides strategy and design coordination for the CUDC's urban design, applied research, engagement, publication and academic activities. He is also the founder and lead designer of DSGN AGNC, a design studio exploring new forms of political engagement and co-creation.

STORYTELLING & RECENTERING

ESSAY

De Nichols

Storytelling will forever be one of the most catalytic tools for building community and mobilizing change. For, as we engage the stories that are authentic and honest about ourselves, we unlock our ability to see connections between our experiences and those of individuals and groups around us, which can have a profound impact on our work as designers and planners.

During the Just City Assembly, stories grounded our plenary discussion, "Justice for Who," as we discussed and amplified the people and communities for whom we seek justice through the projects we design.

In my own design endeavors, as well as my activism, storytelling is an innate part of my process. From project conception to community trust-building, partnership development, qualitative research, ideation, prototyping, and even evaluation, stories serve as a lifeblood for each step of both the design process and its ultimate outputs.

The "for who" question becomes essential to story-driven design processes as we consider the people across communities we work who have been systemically and socially marginalized and de-centered from the legacies of wealth-building, wellbeing, safety and protection that have been afforded to others. As it is essential that such voices, stories and community members are intentionally and directly acknowledged, valued and recentered, I believe our design and planning processes offer the opportunities for this to occur through the provisions of both contribution and authorship

in our address of the cultural issues that arise in public space and in the built environment.

However, the work of recentering is not meant to be performed in a vacuum or as a transactional part of a project. It should function to serve people and build community power beyond our work, which makes the connective power of stories essential to the process. Embedded within those stories are the insights that can help us yield more informed and long-lasting equitable design decisions.

During the "Justice for Who" discussion, the process of sharing our individual, family, professional and personal stories as practitioners reminded me how our experiences inform our design and planning perspectives. I remembered how one's own background—from our encounters with injustice to our successes and struggles—can be an asset that strengthens each planner and designer across the room. I left the discussion feeling affirmed in the power of those intersections and connections to change how we will think about the design of cities in the future.

Ultimately, in our effort to explore the human side of planning and design, we began to realize new ways that we could not only focus on the necessary policies, logistics and technical elements, but also be in tune with our greater goal: designing and planning for collective wellbeing in space. Getting to a point of justice is a long road, but the conversations from the Assembly filled me with a sense of urgency and the understanding of the roles we each fulfill.

DESIGNING FOR MULTIPLE SUBJECTIVITIES

ESSAY

Quilian Riano

Conflict and negotiation are the cornerstones of a functioning democracy. It's the same in a productive design process. For a contemporary democracy to work effectively it must be able to take on multiple subjectivities at the same time, and yet, in the United States, most of our institutions have been created around a single subjectivity—a male, white, land-ownership subjectivity. It's a subjectivity created to concentrate privilege and political power that creates a false sense that everyone that matters is basically the same.

At this moment, we, as designers, must reimagine the democratic goal by emphasizing the immense value of the diverse subjectivities our society holds. Otherwise, our democracy will become marred by sameness and the lack of negotiation.

As we work to create new built environments that participate in a system of restorative justice, we need to embrace conflict. In fact, conflict is a basic cornerstone of a democratic society, with the understanding that we aren't always going to agree, and that in a democratic society, we don't always get exactly what we want. It's also necessary to create a fair and structured system for addressing those conflicts, making negotiation an essential part of a successful design process.

Conflict and negotiation were at the center of the discussion "Justice For Who" that De Nichols and I facilitated. As a group, we addressed who we seek to empower with the work we do in communities, and also examined the ways that the identities we embody inform what we create. We identified our own multiple subjectivities, and the needs, wants and desires that go with those different identities, and acknowledged how those identities can not only co-inhabit, but also thrive, and create community and solidarity.

The discussion reminded me about design project processes I have worked on in which I have turned the design process into a performance or game—with no clear winners or losers. By the act of engaging, or playing, each person is actively participating in a democratic process and negotiating.

In thinking about for whom I seek justice, I realized that I am definitely on the side of working with a Theatre of the Oppressed model. A model that sees justice as something that we constantly have to seek, and that we must continually negotiate. Justice is not a fixed endpoint, but an ongoing set of conversations about who benefits from different decisions, who doesn't, who's being left out and who needs justice now.

In many ways, the discussion of "Justice for Who" in 2019 was ahead of its time. After the murder by state violence of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, we have seen similar conversations about injustice led by BIPOC designers, and some allies, taking the front stage. Now, we have seen institutions take on some of these same questions. As a result, we have the unique and timely opportunity to address deep-rooted historical injustices and begin to negotiate a new way forward for our democracy.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)

JUSTICE FOR WHO DISCUSSION

The discussion opened with Quilian Riano and De Nichols sharing their personal and professional stories. Throughout the session, several participants shared their own stories about the communities for whom they seek justice.

JUSTICE FOR ALL SHARING STORIES

My first moment of identity is from the ages of 0 to 12, I lived in Bogotá, Colombia. In the Colombian context, I am white. I grew up as a white Colombian, but, honestly, that wasn't even ever a thought (as whiteness often is not). I was just a Colombian.

Then, at 12, we moved to Miami. In Miami, all of sudden, new identities got placed on me by the dominant population. All of a sudden, we weren't even low income, because that requires income, and we weren't always having that. We became Latinos. That's a word I hadn't really ever thought of myself as. I also began to understand myself as a Latino in relationship to others.

After thinking about this, I realized that both of my ideas of identity from before were wrong. For example, not questioning my Colombian identity as a white Colombian, because there are plenty of the same issues that the U.S. faces in all of Latin America, from Canada to Chile.

Then my complicated relationship with the word "Latino" was also wrong, because it was important for solidarity with other groups of people born or related to Latin America. This is where I am now. I'm at a place where I look at subjectivities and identities as a way to create solidarity with others. There are some that get placed on me, and I have to sometimes accept them, because they get placed on me, whether I want it or not. Also, in the positive, they create relationships with other people.

Political subjectivity is the idea that all the things are designed for a specific white, male, land-owning group of people. A lot of the injustices today come from that political subjectivity. I want to mention Chantal Mouffe, a political theorist whose call to arms has been, for many years, that the Western democracies need to reimagine their democracies, that there needs to be a radical democracy that begins to open up, and we begin to have to realize that all of our bodies have multiple subjectivities and that we can create the solidarities and create different political bodies, negotiate, work with, and at times, disagree with each other, and that all these things become normal.

Quilian Riano

Next, De Nichols shared her story of for whom she seeks justice. Read her story on page 70, and Andre Perry's story about seeking justice for devalued neighborhoods on page 74.

Don Edwards

I guess growing up the way I grew up [in South Carolina in the 1950s], I also want to see justice for poor whites and whites who have been miseducated, because I think there is a natural alliance. That gets to the question of, are we outnumbered? I don't believe we're outnumbered. I believe we are out-organized. I believe we are out okey-doked on the question of who our allies are and who our enemies are.

I believe that poor whites, and poor blacks, and browns, and all of that, have the same enemy, more or less. The white men who have okey-doked us on the message of our worth. They gave a different message to the poor whites about their worth. They gave a different message to the people of color about their worth, but basically said that none of y'all ain't worth nothing. This is a justice issue that's got to be resolved because we do not get anywhere unless we have the same finish line that we're working towards. The finish line I'm working towards is justice for all, a de-racialized society, and one that has economic justice in all of them other things.

Now, that is the hard work for me, because I feel all the anger and frustration, too, and I'm tired of the diversity conversations,

but I don't know how to make any progress if you don't participate in the conversations. Who's going to lead them except the people who have some understanding of what the problems and solutions are? You will be more effective if you have an empathetic connection to the people that you feel that you are working for and with. That kind of personal connection has to happen for sustainability, for implementation, for justice, for a de-racialized society.

Marc Norman

I would say, 90% of my interactions, I might be the only black person in the room. It's kind of amazing, the positions of relative power people in this room have. I think when we go back to our lives, we go back to pretty segregated places where we might be tokens. It makes me happy to be in this room having this conversation. I think there are takeaways, no matter what we go back to, that we translate. The hard part might be translating, but I think the conversations are going to be relevant.

Toni L. Griffin

Where I struggle in my professional work, while I intellectually understand the aspiration and ultimate outcome of justice for all, in my work, I find when I lead with that, some people see that as, everybody gets everything. It doesn't get us to the recognition that somebody is in the hole, and I've got to get somebody out of the hole before I get to the all.

There's this incrementalism, and this conversation has helped me realize that I'm looking for that intermediate ultimate outcome. The other thing is, this conversation right now is focused on the beneficiary of a certain set of outcomes. It is not as focused on those who have been given the privilege to dole out the [solutions]. There's also this [question of], who is determining justice? We've been talking about power.

Justice has to situate itself in who is giving up some of their power and who needs to have more power in order to get to even an intermediate outcome and then an ultimate outcome. Until that happens, I feel like I'm spinning my wheels.

Kimberly Dowdell

National Organization of Minority Architects highlights the contributions of minority architects and projects which promote justice and equity in communities of color

Thank you for bringing up the "for all" notion. Our platform at NOMA [National Organization of Minority Architects] is "ALL in for NOMA." It has a double meaning, in that all people are welcome to join, but also, [ALL] is an acronym for access, leadership and legacy. To give more access to the profession for particularly minorities; getting more people of color in leadership; and legacy— helping those people give back to future generations.

Part of the reason why I wasn't here yesterday is I was in Dallas, TX, for the AIA large firm roundtable. The large firm roundtable basically represents the CEOs of the top 50 architecture firms in the country. So, pretty powerful, mostly white men. I think there were three women and one African-American man in that room of 50.

JUSTICE FOR BLACK PEOPLE SHARING STORIES

My story, my background is a little bit different. I grew up in rural Mississippi, in a small town called Cleveland. I lived on the black side of town. I went to my [neighborhood] school, but as someone who tested into the gifted program, I was bussed over to the other side of town to learn with classmates who were primarily white.

I took pride in my education, and my family took a lot of pride in the notion that for whom much is given, much is required. My stance, when being in that type of predicament, really meant that as I was learning so much from my white peers and my white teachers, I had to come back to my school and tutor and share and engage.

I shared that bit of my journey as it relates to some of the current context of where I am, which is St. Louis, Missouri, and some of the work and projects that we're working on. This year marks the fifth year since the uprising in Ferguson. Obviously, a lot of us will be coming back together to really reflect on what compelled us to get to this point of centering racial equity more boldly, more radically, in our contexts.

In the midst of this work, I'm also on a design team that Toni is actually a part of, as well, which is called the Chouteau Greenway. I bring up both of these because that notion of to whom much is given, much is required comes into play in both contexts.

The Chouteau Greenway started as a competition to design this system of landscapes and parks and bikeways and trails that would stretch east to west from the St. Louis Arch to Forest Park. Part of how we earned and won this competition was by bucking that system, breaking and disrupting that expectation to only think [east] and west, because St. Louis is a city that is segregated and fragmented by design.

The people who live in the northern parts of our city are the ones who have the most disinvestment, who have been targeted the most by our law officials, and who have not had as much access and privilege to engage in a lot of these amazing innovations and beautiful spaces that are being created across the region and in the city itself.

Part of that notion of thinking about to whom much is given, much is required, requires us to not just be like, "Oh, we have black designers on our team, and now we have local people on our team," but to really think about ownership. Who owns the process? Who owns the space? Who feels welcomed? Who feels safe, is safe, meaning safe for whom? Who feels targeted? Who can exist in their fullest, most authentic self without shame, without being ostracized? All of these types of notions come into play with [the Chouteau Greenway project].

As it reflects back to the uprising in Ferguson and all of the work we've been doing, this also means that a sense of ownership of space has shifted like when we marched in our streets and said, "Whose streets?" As we design things now, it can't be the same.

We have to think differently because the context, the actions, the precedents that have been set from protests, from activism, from marching, have dictated that land should be reconsidered. We really see that this Greenway can be a tool by which another person like a Michael Brown doesn't necessarily have to fear that by walking down the street, across this path, that they will be shot in daylight by a police officer who has committed to serve and protect every single citizen in the city.

When I think about the complexity of my own identity and upbringing, these are some of the things that I bring into the space. When I think about the question of justice for whom, it is very, very specific. It is specific about young people, which we haven't brought up in this conversation as much today.

It also gets very specific about black people and poor people because our context requires us to think about how over, I think 52% of the city is black, but the resources in this city do not trickle down in an equitable way. When we think about, in my context, funding in the arts, that there is not yet a single black arts and cultural institution [in St. Louis] that has sustained a budget over $500,000 a year; however, there are the multiple institutions that receive, from our taxes, millions in funding each year. These types of things affect how we navigate, how we understand each other, how we wrestle with our histories. All of this comes into play when we talk about justice for whom and breaking down the injustices that exist.

De Nichols

We had a very honest conversation about race and about why there aren't more black people, in particular, in the profession.

NOMA has a new 2030 challenge. Right now, there are [roughly] 2,272 African-American licensed architects [in the U.S.]. Our goal is to get to 5,000 by 2030. And how do we do that? I don't know, because that's a really, really difficult thing to do given that it's been 2% since we [started] tracking it [in the early 1990s].

It's going to take a lot of money. The conversation was about, how much money can each of these 50 firms offer to NOMA so that we can put in place structures to provide that access to kids from kindergarten through 12th grade, to make sure they have the resources in college, and make sure they get to licensure, which is where we lose a lot of people—in between [graduation] and licensure. Beyond that, how do we start to create more opportunities for people of color so that more people can help shape the future?

Liz Ogbu

System Reform or Disruption
Participants addressed whether justice could be achieved best by reforming existing systems or through the disruption or destruction of those systems.

The system that exists was never made for the vast majority of us. Every time we talk about redistributing power or licensure or making more people owners, it's all within this system that exists. We're never, ever talking about, how are we building a new system, because, until then, it's just patching.

The system is based on a hierarchy where each group is suppressing the one below, because that's where their well-being is centered. The person at the top never gets touched because everybody else is doing the dirty work for them. When we talk about redistricting power, it's never about collapsing the hierarchy. The system doesn't work without the hierarchy. We have to talk about, what's the new thing?

Daniel Hernandez

We all, as practitioners, have a certain scope within our everyday practice. Your scope of work becomes finite as you narrow down that scope of work and who you're working with and for, et cetera. I feel like I have a range of financial tools to try to level the playing field.

When I enter into a development project, I try to work through for whom, who's in the hole, who can I use on this project and possibly raise up a little bit? But I'm working within a bigger system. As I'm sitting in front of a big crowd of people and I'm representing a mayor or I'm representing my own development project, I'm always sitting there, like, we're all in this capitalist system together. I don't know how to change that.

Right now, I have this [project that will], hopefully, create some affordable housing over the next 10 years. I'm going to create affordable business space for the new incubators in town. But it's a very finite space, and it's frustrating, sometimes, because you're just listening, and it's like, God, that's a bigger system and I don't know how to change it right now.

Now, when you're sitting with Mexican Americans who have been here for generations and who have native blood in what is now the present day United States and you're talking to Native Americans, who see their relationship to land, it is a completely different conversation that we're having in the room.

The bigger point is that we're starting a movement here, and if this movement moves forward, we have to think, in the different regions of the country that we're working in [that it will be a different conversation].

Toni L. Griffin

I get it. Everyone can ask themselves, can they pull together a group that looks [this diverse], and [who is missing]? When we talk about the agency that we can have, going back to Liz's point, there's a structural set of challenges we have in trying to figure that out and there's an interpersonal one. Every day, because I'm aware of the intersectionality of my multiple identities, I go through calculations on a daily basis to make decisions about, who do I invite to a talk? Who do I invite to a jury? Who comes to the meeting? I run through that drill every goddamn day with everything I do.

Daniel Hernandez

It's exhausting!

Toni L. Griffin

It can be. I say that because that is an example of something you can start to do. When someone asks me to come to something, I look at who is and is not on the guest list and I make a decision about, do I want to try to get this person to diversify the group? Or I'm going to say, this person hasn't thought about it, and I'm going to decline. You can start to give up your power or demand something in order to start to break down certain types of structural injustices.

Deanna Van Buren

I would like to talk about the systems piece, because I think there are people working inside the system, doing some good work, and then there are people working outside of these systems. We've had to work outside of some of the systems, and we have a foot in both camps.

Restorative justice [is] a system we've started to advocate for. I do not think you can fix the criminal justice system. I don't think you can fix it. It's effed up. We've just focused on one specific population: formerly incarcerated, criminally incarcerated men and women. How do we really start to transform the system? Frankly, the best way we've found so far is really to support this other system that is emergent. Since I started this work, it has grown tremendously. It's really tied to the fact that we are biased. Justice is not something that is objective. It's not blind at all.
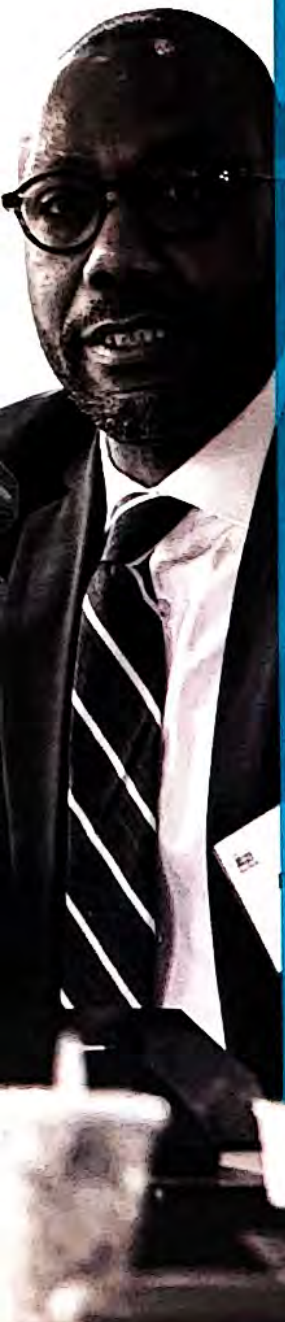
JUSTICE FOR DEVALUED NEIGHBORHOODS
SHARING STORIES

I was born in a place called Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As the story is told, when I was born, an old woman, about 63 years old, came to McGee's Women's Hospital to come get me. My mother was under duress. Miss Elsie Boyd took me back to her house.

Throughout my time there, she raised about 12 kids. I go to that place regularly as part of my research. The home that we were raised in is literally worth nothing. The reason why I had to be raised by this woman, I call her Mom, was my father was murdered in jail. He was addicted to drugs. He abused my mother. She was on the run. In Detroit, he was killed in Jackson Penitentiary.

A lot of my work looks at the devaluation of housing by the concentration of blackness. Wilkinsburg is 70% black and the homes are worth about 30% less than the equivalent homes in a white neighborhood, and this is true all across the country.

Homes and communities where the share of a black population is 50% or greater, their homes are worth 23% less—about $48,000 per home, about $156 billion in lost assets across the country. One-hundred-fifty-six billion would have replaced the pipes in Flint 3,000 times. It would have funded 8.8 million four-year degrees at a public institution. It would have funded 4.4 million black-owned businesses given the average of startup. I deeply believe that these are structural issues caused by years of segregation followed with a devaluation.

The reason why my new book is called *Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Prosperity in America's Black Cities* is because I want to give people the price so that they know their value and they can demand their worth, regardless of what people think of them.

Andre Perry

Andre Perry   People keep saying "systems." Criminal justice system predicated on black policy.

Deanna Van Buren   Yeah. And racism and slavery.

Stephen Gray   [Talking] about working within the system and the things that we can do, and your point— how do you work within and without? Is this taking it all down? Where do we stand? Because if we must have a destination, if we want to have a manifesto, we have to have a goal. I think it's not either or, but we need to look at both sides of that line.

If you look at Ferguson, if you look at Cincinnati, if you look at L.A., and then you watch Fox News and they sit there and say, "Why do people want to tear down and burn down their own neighborhood?" Because that's not their neighborhood. They don't have any stake in [it]. The only way to start over is to burn it down and start over. Now, that's a radical sort of thing, but I think we need to be talking about both sides of that line.

Next, Hazel Edwards shared her family story, about her grandfather who was the first black architect to be licensed in North Carolina. Read her story on page 77.

De Nichols   I had a little birdie in my ear who helped me recognize that—yeah, that birdie is Toni—so much of this conversation so far has been [through] the voices of people of color in this space. My ask to you, white people in this space, is to chime in, because this is a conversation about the who, for whom and the with whom, and that involves you, too. We want some insights. We want some opinion, some perspective to balance this out, because so often, the work of achieving justice falls on the backs of black people, and we don't want to model that in this conversation.

Ben Hecht   [About previous discussions about addressing policies] I actually think we spend a huge amount of time on policy and not the people who implement the policies. What we've really seen, and one of the changes that we've made, is that we actually realized that one of the best places we knew was Louisville, KY, where basically it was like, do they have all the right policies that will undo the structural racism in their policy?

[Living Cities] did a five-city thing just about looking across all government agencies and identifying where there's the structural institutional racism, and you can identify the policies. You can even identify the policies that [were designed to] undo them. Many of them actually had the policies that would undo them, they're just not implemented. Then when you get to systems—systems actually are just made up of people, and the people implement. If the people don't have the visibility into the problem and the history—so much

Living Cities brings together philanthropy, financial institutions and local governments to close racial income and wealth gaps in American cities

of it is based on an unlearning, as somebody said—I think Don said—you don't get there.

Claire Weisz

Justice for the Powerless
Participants addressed issues of power within institutions and the ways that they seek justice for those people who have been shut out of power.

The truth is that there are a lot of people with a lot of interest in people staying powerless. What do you do about it? What are our tools for that? The only tool that I've seen in work lately… is when you start getting something cultural that people want, whether it's in arts and culture and music, whether it's the kind of places, whatever, and people who hold the power, start recognizing that there is something they don't have. [This] is one of the only times I've seen a movement to get on board and find out what the hell is going on.

Ben Prosky

Well, I was very conscious of the fact that there are very few straight white males in this room. I'm a gay, white male in the room, and I have some colleagues here that I'm aware of, and so that was very interesting [what] my friend Marc, who is my dear friend, [said]. I am conscious of the fact [that he said] he is often the only black man in the room in our group of friends. That was something that's very awakening to me. That's just a reflection.

I also, and to relate to Jim, I grew up in complete privilege. I went to private school. I grew up in a fancy neighborhood. I went to institutions like this. Somehow, my parents, who are educators, always, always told me that serving yourself is not exactly the right thing to do. That you have to be aware of other people and what they need. I don't know why. They were activists in the 1960s, and they are privileged, but they said that. It is ingrained in me. I just try and practice that in what we do.

I'm within the system of the AIA, which is a system that people have a lot of feelings toward and represents a lot of power. It also is a system that has been a bit shaken. I think that when Kim talks to the large firm roundtables, some of those white men who are my board members, they come back to their local groups and they come back shaken. They come back knowing and hearing and asking what we can do, as organizations.

There's also often a moment when we're in a room and/or some of those guys are in a room, and they try and fumble, and then they're told it's just not enough. You're not doing good enough. You guys don't realize that it's not enough. And maybe it isn't, but back to the joy point, there also has to be some celebration of people's openness, ability, maybe a joy in a bit of an advancement in a certain area, because you can lose those people who start to open up by discouraging them and saying everything's insurmountable.

TIMELINE OF JUSTICE AND EQUITY SHARING STORIES

What's the timeline of justice and equity? My grandfather was born on April 12, 1875. He went on to study architecture, and he became the first Negro architect to be licensed in North Carolina, in 1950. He [was also] a president of a small college in North Carolina.

Then the Depression hit. He was going to go back to Durham, North Carolina, to practice architecture. He became a principal of an elementary school. He adapted. He died in 1943. At that time, there wasn't a second black person who had become a licensed architect. I think that second person wasn't licensed until close to 1970.

His story influenced, I believe, my pursuit of architecture. My father would say that white people would come to my grandfather and say, "We can't hire you, but the white architect that we did hire, there are problems in the building. Can you advise us?"

Fast forward to Monday. I'm talking to my cousin, who lives in the Cleveland, Ohio, area. She has an architecture degree but she went into project management, construction management and has a sustainability firm where she [helps] owners get different certifications. She said to me, she doesn't want to shut her firm down, but she's not getting work. She said one of her older white employees said, it's because you're black. You're a black woman, and all the white firms, they're not going to choose you. My cousin was very surprised to [hear] that perspective.

So again, the timeline: 1901 was when my grandfather graduated from college. [In 2019], how has this notion of justice changed over time? When we talk about the who, I think the when also has to come into [the conversation].

Hazel Edwards

"Justice is not something that is objective. It's not blind at all." — Deanna Van Buren

Bryan C. Lee

Every single movement has required us to consider the ways in which policies and procedures deal with acute conditions, and freedom movements and liberation movements seem to go around them. That's fine. That's actually something that we should lean into more and think about that as a system in which we should actually try to dismantle those systems.

We all know about redlining, but we think about the policy that shaped redline, which called black people undesirable, and the procedure that was executed actually called them black. The ways in which, again, human beings actually use the language in order to manifest that injustice is extremely important. We have to actually think about the ways that the power structures go from pedagogy to policy, policy to procedure, procedure to practice, projects and people. As designers we can impact along that entire spectrum. We have to consider the ways in which we are inside that system and outside it, too.

Eric Robertson

I come as an urban anthropologist, so I've been thinking about this conversation through that lens. One of the things that I learned was that culture eats strategy for lunch. That we can have the best policies in the world, but if we don't have the procedures and the processes that institutionalize the rituals or the traditions to really make the change, then that's when the system seems so big, because we thought we had the policy implemented, but we didn't delve deep enough into the day-to-day transactional culture procedures needed for the bureaucrats or the practitioner to really deliver on the policy within the system. If not, then the culture will always eat the strategy for lunch.

John Peterson

This is such hard work. I don't mean labor hard. I mean doing it well. I only say that because I think it's humbling work, as well. I'm in a leadership position of an institution that's important in this room, and the Loeb Fellowship, in many ways, is a reflection of this room, or the fellowship tries to reflect this room in both its strength and weakness.

We get pats on the back if we have a good showing of black people in a class of fellows. We don't really have to do much more than that to get big pats on the back here. We don't do well in other ways. One of my big frustrations is, getting poor people as fellows is really challenging. Even to get people to self-identify as poor people.

How do we even identify who those poor people are?

Something that rolls around in my head quite a bit is: perfect is the enemy of good. We cannot be perfect, but we can be humble. Sometimes I think that's a privileged word. I can be humble. I'm privileged. I'm newly disabled. That's an interesting insight into the world. I'm the only, probably, visibly disabled person here, but I'm not even that disabled, for God's sakes. Can I even represent the disabled people? It doesn't feel quite right, but it's true.

The dean referred to the fellowship as the consciousness of the GSD. That's a lovely thing. That's also a chilling thing. It's nice that we get honored that we're being thoughtful. That is what I show up every day to do: to be thoughtful and to try.

Stephen Gray

But John, how does the dean back that up? Like, you get the pat on the back. You brought a bunch of black folks in; they are the consciousness of the place—and then what?

John Peterson

No. Look, the dean would like us to be more present, but are we somehow given a leadership role in how these things are decided? I'm not even sure we deserve that leadership, honestly. We're not really positioned to do that. But, no, that's my point. To be labeled as the conscience of the GSD, and we're not in a position to act as the conscience of the GSD, we're not even in a position to be the thought leaders of that. And we shouldn't be.

Toni L. Griffin

And it's not only John's responsibility to make that happen within this building. Right?

Liz Ogbu

There's an ecosystem of change. I think there's a lot of things that we could talk about, but I think as you talk about things, can we just be more intentional about where we're situating ourselves within that ecosystem? Because I think it matters.

How do we build the ability for people to interrogate individual and collective power, pain and harm? Then, how do we create value? Well, first, how do we eradicate the motivation for keeping people powerless?

If our system is based [on keeping] people powerless, how do we eradicate that as a motivation? Because it seems like you can't get justice unless you do that. It's not just about eliminating, but also what are you creating? How are we creating value for sharing and giving power, and not creating harm?

Quilian Riano

In the [South, Central and North] American context one of the questions that we're constantly asking is, who belongs? We ask that at the level of us as practitioners, at the level of our institutions, at the level of the policymakers, and they get to implement the things that we are asked for. One of my fears is that as we ask that we

create community monoliths that are too large. As in my experience, the Latino community is not a community. It is multiple communities with many histories and contexts. As we seek justice we need to understand that dynamics can also exist within marginalized communities.

I found the question of time span really interesting, that the who, of who belongs, has a long memory and that new people can come into that who. That means that we need to be planning for who's next. Then, there is a scale issue. Our individual projects may not be perfect, but maybe as a network, our little good projects can begin to make a little bit more of that perfection.

Finally, the idea of contextualism. As I've been thinking about the reflections from this room, that it makes perfect sense for a northeastern institution, et cetera. That [if we had convened] in the southwest, or somewhere else, it would look very different. That is part of the incredibly contextual who.

De Nichols

My thoughts are primarily a statement of gratitude to each of you, especially those who felt that sense of bravery to step into the tension of some of this conversation and those of you who felt compelled to share some very vulnerable and hard truths with everyone in here. Thank you for the critiques, even of how we model this space and this conversation, because they're very real.

Like Quilian, I am also still stuck on this notion of when and a question of, who else? I have to keep reminding myself that white people, colonizers, those with privilege, those who have abused others have had a long start with creating a lot of these systems that we're striving to dismantle. Because of that, I always have to check in with myself to say, even in my sense of urgency, even in my impatience about getting to this beloved reality of existence, we're working against—at least for black folks—against almost exactly 400 years.

August [2019] marks 400 years since our ancestors were brought from Africa and enslaved here, on this land. And we're only, what, 50 or so years since the civil rights movement? In that sense of urgency, we also have to pay attention to that longer timeline, that, yes, there's a lot that we need to get done, and we need to make sure that we create systems that extend beyond our own contribution.

JUSTICE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE SHARING STORIES

I will preface by saying the short subtitle of what I'm about to say is, [I'm] a Canadian in a roomful of Americans providing reflections on The American Experience from a Canadian perspective.

Toni said earlier that justice has to serve multiple identities, but I think what I've heard missing from the conversation is that multiple identities also have to serve justice. That is the pain point that I've been experiencing in some of the conversations. I will tell you, as an indigenous woman from Canada, I find the erasure of the indigenous experience and truth here re-traumatizing. I'm white passing, and I can kind of just suck it up in rooms and appreciate that it's not a central discussion here, but it's challenging.

Why are indigenous people so much more visible in Canada? It is because we have put so much work into exposing people to the truth of the traumas that we've experienced, to the point where it becomes impossible for that truth not to be part of the discussion—unless people just don't want it to be, and then it's us against them. And that's OK. I don't have a problem with that. Once those lines are drawn, then it's a fight—but we have allies in the fight.

I would say geographies matter. The people on the west side of the continent are way more exposed to this discussion. People in other areas, I'm guessing in the South, the Latino discussion is higher. Age matters. The issues that were relevant at the time we were sort of becoming aware of these issues. Gender matters...I think the takeaway for me is, where are the spaces to share the truth? Even more importantly, how are we making space? We may have an identity that demands justice, but we also have an identity that demands participating in justice for others. How are we making space to hear that and act on that?

Andrea Reimer

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

In the city where you live and work, who do we need justice for and why?

2.

Who needs justice today and who will need justice tomorrow (in the future)?

3.

Describe the ways in which you hold the power to create more justice.

4.

Interrogate your work and describe three ways in which your current policies or practices may be harmful because they deepen or ignore injustice.

5.

If you were to give up or share your power, who would you cede it to, and what value might be created for whom, and for your organization?

6.

Do you believe racism is a behavior or a structure? Describe one behavior or structure your organization could address to dismantle racism.