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Two Americas

A look at racial inequality in five key areas of American life p. 8



A civil rights protest in Washington, D.C., in June

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TWO AMERICAS

The kind of world you grow up and live in is still too often determined by your race. A look at inequality in five key areas of American life. BY JOE BUBAR



Protesters in Chicago rally against police violence and racism in June.

RACE in AMERICA

This year, *Upfront* is publishing a series of articles highlighting racism in the U.S. and efforts to combat it.

Recent events have shone a spotlight on racial inequality in American society. The protests following the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans, have highlighted the racial discrimination that persists in policing and the criminal justice system. And the Covid-19 pandemic has called

attention to enormous racial disparities in wealth and access to quality health care.

Together, these historic events have sparked national discussions about the ways in which many Black and white Americans continue to live in two different—and very unequal—worlds.

“Every one of our systems in America has been impacted—infected, in fact—in some significant way by these racial disparities and these racial inequalities,” says Yohuru Williams, a civil rights scholar at the University of

St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Many experts point out that these inequalities are rooted in systemic racism. Systemic racism refers to laws, customs, and practices built into society over time that have disadvantaged people of color. Even though many of these laws have changed, their effects can still be felt.

Here’s a look at five ways that racial inequality persists in American life—and how Black Americans have persevered in the face of this inequality for centuries.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

As highlighted by the protests this summer, there are longstanding inequalities in policing. Federal statistics show that, nationwide, Black drivers are 31 percent more likely to be pulled over than white drivers for minor infractions, such as speeding. And a recent study by researchers at Northeastern University and Harvard University found that Black people

Black people are locked up at more than five times the rate of white people.

are three times as likely as white people to be shot and killed by the police during interactions where the victim appears to pose little or no threat to officers.

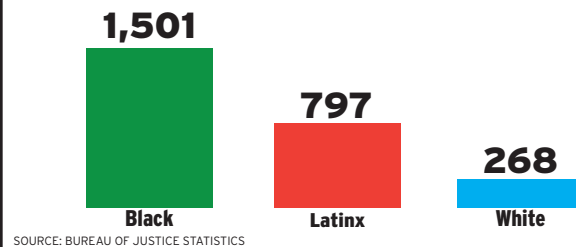
Research also shows that Black and Latinx people are more likely than white people to be arrested, convicted, and given longer sentences for similar

offenses. Experts say that's a big reason why Black and Latinx Americans are imprisoned at disproportionate rates. They make up 56 percent of the incarcerated population, despite accounting for only 32 percent of the U.S. population.

Racist sentencing policies have also contributed to high numbers of Black and Latinx people in prison. For example, the U.S. prison population exploded in the 1980s, when President Ronald Reagan declared a "war on drugs." He signed laws requiring lengthy prison terms for drug offenses. Those laws, supported by many Republicans and Democrats,

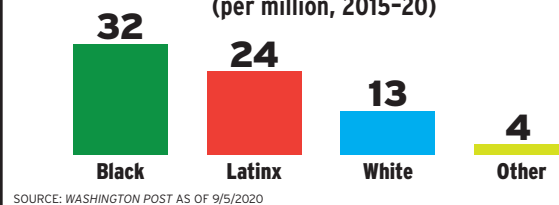
Imprisonment Rates by Race and Ethnicity

(Prisoners per 100,000 adults, 2018)



Rate of Police Killings

(per million, 2015-20)



disproportionately affected Black and Latinx communities by requiring much longer sentences for offenses involving crack cocaine—which was more common in Black and Latinx neighborhoods—than for cocaine—which was more common in white areas. Today, nearly 80 percent of people in federal prison for drug offenses are Black or Latinx even though studies show that people of all races use and sell drugs at similar rates.

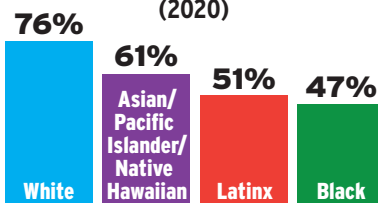
HOUSING

To understand why America is so unequal, experts say it's helpful to look at housing.

"Housing is the key to determining people's life outcomes to such a large degree," says Hasan Kwame Jeffries, a history professor at The Ohio State University. "Neighborhoods determine access to opportunity, access to quality health care, decent schools, quality playgrounds, and all these other things."

But today, neighborhoods across the country are heavily divided by race—and unequal. Experts say that's not a coincidence. For example, beginning in the 1930s, the federal government used a process called redlining to rate urban areas across the U.S. for investment. Neighborhoods where people of

Homeownership Rate (2020)



'Housing is the key to determining people's life outcomes.'

color lived were marked red on maps and deemed unsuitable for financial investment. Banks used the maps to deny loans to Black Americans looking to buy homes. Few businesses invested in redlined areas, leading to decay and a scarcity of job opportunities. And many middle-class white families fled to the

suburbs, which often had rules barring Black people from living there.

Although housing discrimination, including redlining, was outlawed in 1968, its effects remain. Only 47 percent of Black people own a home today, compared with 76 percent of white people. And Black Americans are five times as likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods as white Americans.

"When you look at how we have segregated our neighborhoods and that this was done purposefully," says Jeffries, "you see why neighborhoods are the way they are, why poverty is concentrated in certain neighborhoods."

Many experts say discrimination in housing hasn't gone away either. Black Americans are still more than twice as likely as white Americans to be denied home loans, according to a federal report. ▶

NAM Y. HUI/AP IMAGES (DEMONSTRATION)

Graduation at Ballou High School in Washington, D.C., 2018



EDUCATION

Most students attend the public schools in their neighborhoods. But because neighborhoods are segregated, schools also remain divided by race—more than 65 years after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated public schools are unconstitutional.

Today, about three-quarters of Black and Latinx students nationwide go to schools where most of their peers are students of color, according to a study by the University of California, Los Angeles.

School districts that serve mostly kids of color receive \$23 billion less in state and local funding than mostly white districts, according to a report by EdBuild, which studies school funding in the U.S. That's because school funding is

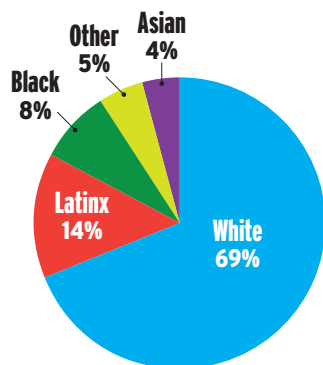
tied to how much the residents in a school district pay in state and local taxes. And since, on average, Black Americans have less wealth and a lower income than white Americans (see the section on wealth, facing page), they tend to pay less in taxes. So, their schools often receive less funding.

That means that while Black students often have excellent and dedicated teachers, they typically have less access to new textbooks, school laptops, and classes like music and art.

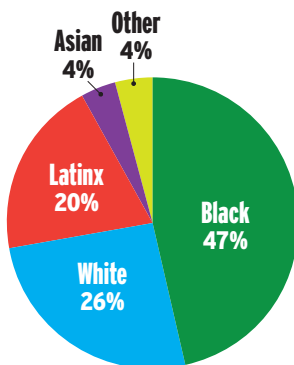
The lack of resources available to them in high school often makes it a much steeper climb for Black students to get into college. Though some Black students go on to attend top universities, on average they're less likely than white students to attend and finish college. And as a result, Black Americans are more likely to be limited to low-paying jobs.

Schools in the U.S. are still heavily segregated.

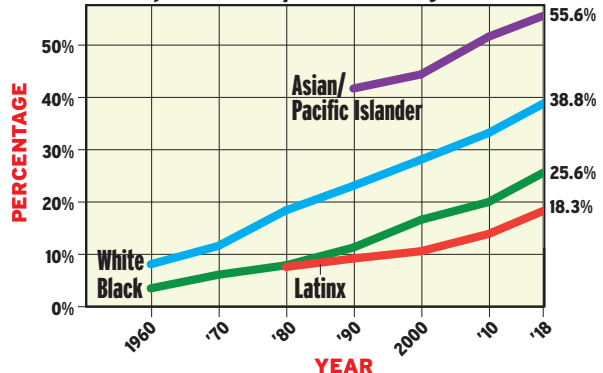
Racial makeup of a typical WHITE student's school



Racial makeup of a typical BLACK student's school



Percentage of people 25 to 29 years old who completed four years of college or more



SOURCE: UCLA CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT; NOTE: NUMBERS MAY NOT ADD UP TO 100% BECAUSE OF ROUNDING.

SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (DATA FOR ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER IS UNAVAILABLE BEFORE 1990; DATA FOR LATINX IS UNAVAILABLE BEFORE 1980.)

WEALTH

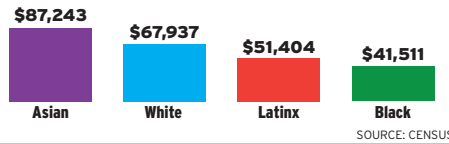
There's a huge wealth gap in America. For every \$100 in wealth accumulated by an average white family, a Black family holds just \$5.04. Wealth is more than just income. It's all assets—such as homes—and investments minus debt, such as student loans.

Wealth is passed on from generation to generation. So to understand today's wealth gap, experts say you have to start with slavery. Millions of Black people were forced to work for free for white enslavers, who built vast fortunes off their labor. After the 13th Amendment legally ended slavery in 1865, Black Americans were still prevented from gaining wealth, whether by government policies or racist individuals. They were kept out of many professions and prohibited from owning homes—a key way Americans build wealth.

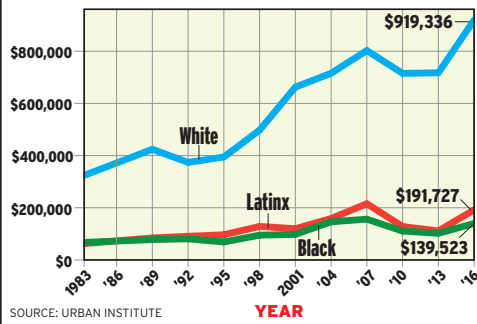
“One of the reasons why Black Americans have such lower wealth compared to whites is because their ancestors didn't have wealth,” says Calvin Schermerhorn, a history professor at Arizona State University. “Much of wealth is explained by what your parents and ancestors pass down to the next generation.”

Many Black Americans have overcome those challenges and gone on to thrive in

Median Household Income (2018)



Average Family Wealth



their professions or start their own successful businesses. However, Black Americans often face many challenges in the workplace that white Americans don't. For example, some studies have found that job applicants with Black-sounding names are less likely to receive callbacks than applicants with white-sounding names, even when they're equally qualified. Many experts say that may be one reason, along with educational inequality, why the Black unemployment rate has consistently remained about double the white unemployment rate over the past 60 years.

HEALTH

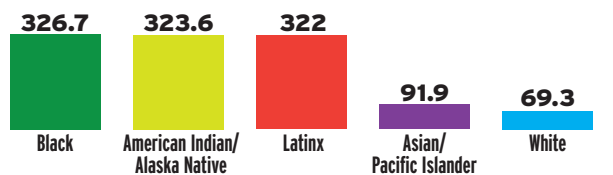
Covid-19 has affected everyone in some way,

but people of color have been hit especially hard. Black and Latinx Americans are nearly five times as likely to be hospitalized with the coronavirus as white Americans, according to data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through late August. Black people have also died from Covid-19 at more than three times the rate of white people.

Experts say one reason may be that Black and Latinx Americans are more likely than white Americans to have “essential jobs,” such as working in grocery stores, according to federal data. That has put them at a greater risk of contracting the coronavirus.

For many, the pandemic is yet another reminder of the stark racial inequalities that have long existed in health care. Partly because of the

Covid-19 Hospitalizations per 100,000 People



disparities in wealth, Black and Latinx people are far more likely than white people to lack health insurance, and the hospitals they go to tend to offer lower-quality care, according to a report by researchers at Johns Hopkins University.

Unfortunately, Black Americans can't escape discrimination even when receiving medical care. A 2017 report from the medical journal *BMC Medical Ethics* found that, just like everyone else, doctors have biases, which are likely to influence treatment.

“There has never been any period in American history where the health of Blacks was equal to that of whites,” says Evelyn Hammonds, a historian of science at Harvard. “Disparity is built into the system.”

SOURCE FOR GRAPH: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION; DATA IS FROM MARCH 1 TO AUGUST 22 AND ADJUSTED FOR AGE

Rising Above Racism

Despite the obstacles

Black Americans have faced for centuries, they have endured—and, in many cases, thrived.

Shut out of many neighborhoods, they've still built prosperous communities and successful businesses. In the face of racial discrimination in education and in the workplace, many have excelled in school and risen to the highest levels in their professional fields. And the work of Black artists, musicians, writers, professors, and athletes has consistently influenced American culture and society.

At the same time, Black Americans have continually fought back against discrimination, whether by marching during the civil rights movement or protesting against police violence and racism today. Those demonstrations, over time, have helped push the U.S. to be a more equitable nation, though much work remains.

“The reality is, the U.S. has never really lived up to the ideals expressed in its founding documents,” says Yohuru Williams, the civil rights scholar. “Yet,” he adds, “what we've seen in the African American community, from Frederick Douglass to Ida B. Wells to Martin Luther King, and many others you've never heard of, are people who were ordinary individuals who saw inequality and tried to make a difference.” ●