

STATE OF WORKING WEST VIRGINIA 2020

THE STATE OF RACIAL INEQUALITY





The State of Racial Inequality

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Foreword

Sean O’Leary

In 1967, Black Americans marched, protested, and even rioted as decades of systemic racism and oppression came to a head. In response, President Lyndon Johnson established the Kerner Commission, which spent the next year researching, holding hearings, and visiting communities to examine racial inequity in the country. In 1968, the Commission issued its report, with one over-arching conclusion: “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal... Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood — but what the Negro can never forget — is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.”¹

Fifty years later, Americans are again marching in protest of systemic inequities that continue to plague our society.

This report, the thirteenth edition of the State of Working West Virginia, comes at a time when national attention has once again been drawn to the issue of racism and racial inequality. It is also the 10-year anniversary of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy’s report “Legacy of Inequality,” which chronicled the experiences and history of Black West Virginians, and analyzed the data showing the inequities that have always been and continue to be central to that experience.

And while there has been progress, the inequities that existed in 2010 — and have existed throughout the nation’s history — still persist in 2020, and West Virginia is not immune to them. Even before the pandemic and subsequent economic collapse, which has disproportionately hurt the Black community, Black West Virginians were almost twice as likely to be living in poverty. Black households have only 70 percent of the income of white households. Black men and women face higher unemployment rates and lower wages. Disparities persist in education, wages, health, and throughout the criminal legal system.

Both the annual State of Working West Virginia reports and the Legacy of Inequality report are typically collaborative efforts, with different organizations and advocates making contributions each year. This year, the pandemic presented challenges to bringing people together to work on a single report, which is why this report will be organized a bit differently. While it will still include the usual data analysis section, in lieu of traditional policy recommendations as we have historically provided, this report will include a series of essays from advocates for and practitioners of racial justice in West Virginia, who will speak in their own voices to share their stories, experiences, and policy ideas for addressing racial inequality.

Fifty years ago, the Kerner Commission came to the conclusion that systemic racism was barring Black Americans from access to equal opportunity nationwide. 10 years ago, the Legacy of Inequality report showed that systemic racism had led to persistent racial inequality here in West Virginia. And now, this report will display that the effects of systemic racism continue to harm our Black communities today.

1 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, February 29, 1968. Accessed from <http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/docs/kerner.pdf>.

The State of Racial Inequality

Introduction: Beyond the Wages of Whiteness

Rick Wilson

In our time, race is widely recognized as a socially constructed means of classifying people, generally to justify unequal treatment. Dr. Camara Jones, a physician and epidemiologist specializing in the social determinants of health, has described race as “the social classification of people based on phenotype. That is, ‘race’ is the societal box into which others put you based on your physical features. As such, it is distinct from genetic endowment or cultural heritage...”²

More recently, Dr. Ibram Kendi, author of *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* and *How to Be an Antiracist*, has defined it as “a power construct of collected or merged difference that lives socially.”³

Racism has often been described in brief as “prejudice plus power.” Jones describes it thus: “First of all, racism is a system. It is not an individual character flaw, nor a personal moral failing, nor a psychiatric illness. It is a system (consisting of structures, policies, practices, and norms) that structures opportunity and assigns value based on phenotype, or the way people look.”⁴

Similarly, for Kendi, “Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.”⁵

*The past has been a mint
Of blood and sorrow.
That must not be
True of tomorrow.*

—Langston Hughes

Origins

The origins of racism are hotly debated, as is its connection to slavery and early mercantile capitalism. Undoubtedly humans are disposed to us vs. them in-group/out-group thinking and what can be called Othering, although the description of who or what constitutes either group or the Other is very flexible.

Most societies are disposed to ethnocentrism, often overlaid with religious or other biases, although there are notable exceptions. I find it interesting that in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, composed in the ancient Greek world around 850 BCE, the Ethiopians are the only humans who were worthy of the direct fellowship of the gods — and this from a people who considered any people whose native language wasn’t Greek to be barbarians.

2 Camara Jones, “Confronting Institutionalized Racism,” *Phylon* 50 (2003), 11, 12.

3 Kendi, Ibram X., *How to Be an Antiracist*, Random House, 2019, p. 35.

4 Jones, p. 10,11.

5 Kendi, p. 17, 18.

Slavery and other forms of involuntary labor are as old as class-based societies and frequently ensnared conquered peoples, debtors, and those punished for crimes. However, ancient and medieval slavery was not exclusively race-based and certainly did not specifically involve the targeting of people of African origin by Europeans. Indeed, the English word “slave” comes from “Slav,” as people of this eastern European ethnic group were often bought and sold in the Ottoman Empire.

A global economy based on racialized slavery was a novelty of the nascent capitalism that “discovered,” plundered, and committed genocide in the New World, eventually colonized much of the rest of it, and had a desperate profit-driven need to lock down an ever-growing supply of unfree labor in the most inhospitable of places, preferably using people who were easily identified. Kendi aptly refers to capitalism and racism as “conjoined twins.”⁶ At the same time, the new economic system drove European peasants from the land and into the factories that the English poet William Blake called “dark Satanic Mills.”⁷

Slavery’s influence was not limited to “primitive” mercantile capitalism. Rather, it was integral to the industrial revolution and associated with complex and modern-sounding economic practices involving banking, credit, insurance, complicated financial instruments, and commodity futures speculation, all of which survive today.⁸

In early America, for example, the profits from slavery were not limited to plantation-based forced labor camps in the South, but also enriched banks, shippers, merchants, and manufacturers in the North and across the Atlantic. And even when US chattel slavery ended in the wake of the Civil War, the racism that justified slavery and was its creature continued to be a powerful way of distributing wealth and the products of labor into the hands of an affluent few.

An investigation of history suggests that systemic racism is not an eternal law of human nature or a biological or essential attribute of some inherently predatory groups of people. Rather, it is a system that emerged under certain historical conditions in the interests of people occupying certain economic positions. It has proved to be remarkably adaptive to changing conditions in the legal status of its primary targets and the overall economic system.

It is a prop — created consciously or otherwise — by the wealthy and powerful to divide people and create, sustain, and justify systemic inequality, poverty, and the reduced life chances of people of all “races.”

But a system made by humans can be changed by them.

Collateral Damage

Racism obviously exacts the highest cost on Black Americans and other people of color in many ways, from poverty to unemployment to insurance status to infant mortality to longevity and more. But it could be argued that it also harms “white” people, particularly those with low and moderate incomes. This group—far larger in West Virginia and the United States than the Black and Latino population—can be viewed as racism’s collateral damage.

Many observers have noted that the capitalist economies of Western Europe tend to spend more public resources than the United States on social programs such as old age, disability, and survivor’s pensions, family and child benefits, debt-free higher education, and unemployment and labor market programs. These nations also have some form of universal health care, although they spend less of their gross domestic product (GDP) on this benefit than the United States.

6 Kendi, p. 156.

7 Blake, William, “Jerusalem,” 1810, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54684/jerusalem-and-did-those-feet-in-ancient-time>.

8 See *Slavery’s Capitalism* by Sven Beckert, Seth Rockman, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

Bruce Sacerdote of Dartmouth College and Harvard economists Alberto Alesina and Edward Glaeser investigated the issue and published their findings in a 2001 paper titled “Why Doesn’t the United States Have a European-Style Welfare State?” (Note: the term “welfare state” as used here doesn’t refer simply to programs aimed at the poorest families, but rather a range of programs and benefits across the population, such as universal health care, debt free higher education, family supports, paid leave and sick days, etc.).

They found many things influenced differences between the US and European welfare states, such as different attitudes about inequality, different histories, and economic and constitutional factors. But one of the biggest factors was race. As they put it, “Racial discord plays a critical role in determining beliefs about the poor.”⁹

Since Black Americans, Indigenous people, and other people of color are often seen as more likely to be poor, public policies that would reduce poverty are seen as primarily benefitting those groups. However, this is not in fact the case. While a higher percentage of Black, Latino, and Indigenous Americans are likely to be poor, by far the greatest number of poor Americans are white.

Dog Whistles and Sirens

The researchers note that foes of egalitarian and redistributive policies often use “race-based rhetoric” to oppose them. “Across countries, racial fragmentation is a powerful predictor of redistribution. Within the United States, race is the single most important predictor of support for welfare. America’s troubled race relations are clearly a major reason for the absence of an American welfare state.”¹⁰

American politicians have long fed this dynamic by means of “dog whistle politics,” which involve more or less subtly coded messages that play on racial biases. Former president Ronald Reagan provided classic examples of this with stories of “welfare queens” and a “strapping young buck” buying steak with food stamps.¹¹ This use of strategic racism has consistently opened the way for more policies that promote inequality across the board.

In more recent times, the dog whistle has become more like a siren—and it might be wise to remember that in the Greek myths, the songs of sirens lured unwary sailors to their doom.

In the words of Dr. Kendi, “Of course, ordinary White people benefit from racist policies, though not nearly as much as racist power and not nearly as much as they could from a more equitable society, one where the average White voter could have as much power as superrich White men to decide elections and shape policy.”¹²

Rev. William Barber, a leader of the contemporary Poor Peoples Campaign: A National Call For Moral Revival, which attempts to build on the 1960s legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s final campaign, puts it succinctly: “White supremacy is as poisonous to white people as it is to people of color...”¹³

9 Alberto Alesina, Edward Glaeser, and Bruce Sacerdote, “Why Doesn’t the United States Have a European-Style Welfare State?,” Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, 2001, 3.

10 Ibid.

11 Haney-Lopez, Ian, Salon.com, “The Racism at the Heart of the Reagan Presidency,” https://www.salon.com/2014/01/11/the_racism_at_the_heart_of_the_reagan_presidency/.

12 Kendi, p. 129.

13 Barber, Rev. William, “A Third Reconstruction for Our Common Home,” Repairers of the Breach, <https://www.breachrepairers.org/blogs/a-third-reconstruction-for-our-common-home>.

Strategic Racism

Racial bias has played out in our policy arena to the detriment of most Americans. For example, when President Truman proposed national health insurance in the late 1940s, he was opposed by powerful southern politicians and others who feared this might lead to hospital desegregation.¹⁴

A case could be made that one reason for the hostility many white Americans have shown for the Affordable Care Act or “Obamacare” is that it can be associated with the nation’s first Black president.

Even today, eight of the twelve states that have refused to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act were among those which seceded from the Union and rose up in arms in support of slavery. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, people of color have experienced large coverage gains since the implementation of the ACA¹⁵...which may explain the desire of many white politicians to overturn the law.

Similar patterns can be seen with labor law. Employers have long used racial and ethnic divisions to divide workers, particularly but not exclusively in the American South. In 1946, the Congress of Industrial Organizations planned “Operation Dixie,” a massive effort intended to organize multiracial labor unions in the South. Had this effort succeeded, inequality across class, race, and even gender lines could have been much reduced.

That didn’t happen.

The following year, Congress passed, over Truman’s veto, the Taft-Hartley Act, which weakened the right to organize and ultimately defeated the campaign. Taft-Hartley in turn opened the door to so-called “right to work” (RTW) legislation, which might more accurately be called “right to work for less.”

The person who came up with the name and launched the movement to enact it as law was a Texas businessman and politico named Vance Muse, who lived from 1890 to 1950. An unabashed racist and anti-Semite, he bitterly opposed the labor law reforms of the New Deal, which he sometimes referred to as “the Jew Deal.”¹⁶

Vance and his allies in the Christian American Association, an organization he founded to promote RTW, were opposed to unions not only for their promotion of better wages and conditions but also for their potential threat to the system of racial segregation. They soon gained powerful supporters beyond the South and began to win major victories.

Muse was able to play on racial biases to promote RTW with considerable success — but not a lot of subtlety. At one point he warned that without such laws, “From now on, white women and white men will be forced into organizations with black African apes whom they will have to call ‘brother’ or lose their jobs.” On another occasion, he told supporters that anti-labor organizing would “keep the color line drawn in our social affairs.”¹⁷

The decades long anti-union drive has deep roots in strategic racism, but it has wound up exacerbating inequality across the board.

Years ago, the great African American leader W.E.B DuBois observed that “the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage.”¹⁸ That psychological wage is a false promise compared to the real gains we could all make if solidarity overcomes the legacy of racism.

14 Schremmer, Robert D, MD, and Jane F. Knapp, MD, “Harry Truman and Health Care Reform: The Debate Started Here,” *Pediatrics* Vol. 127, Issue 3 (2011) <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/127/3/399.full.pdf>.

15 Artiga, Samantha, Kendal Orgera and Anthony Damico, Samantha Artiga, Kendal Orgera, and Anthony Damico, “Changes in Health Coverage by Race and Ethnicity since the ACA, 2010-2018,” Kaiser Family Foundation, <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/changes-in-health-coverage-by-race-and-ethnicity-since-the-aca-2010-2018/>.

16 Pearce, Michael, “The Origins of Right-to-Work: Vance Muse, Anti-Semitism, and the Maintenance of Jim Crow Labor Relations,” *Labor Online*, The Labor and Working Class History Association, Jan. 12, 2017, <https://www.lawcha.org/2017/01/12/origins-right-work-vance-muse-anti-semitism-maintenance-jim-crow-labor-relations/>.

17 Ibid.

18 Du Bois, W. E. B., *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Free Press, 1995 reissue of 1935 original), pp. 700–701.

So What are the Takeaways?

From the days of pre-Civil War abolitionism to the present, it has been something of a dogma that those who oppose racism must first effect a transformation in the dominant consciousness of the larger society, then move on to challenging unjust policies. William Lloyd Garrison referred to this as “moral suasion.” The guiding idea seems to be that people first dehumanize certain groups or classes, then devise ways of exploiting and oppressing them.

While transforming the consciences of individuals is an admirable goal, I’m convinced that the historical evidence suggests that more often it actually works the other way around: people in power develop and/or impose unjust systems on others in their own interests, then create and encourage the creation of ideologies that support those unjust systems. In this context, the idea of racism was created to justify the facts of slavery, which profited some social groups, rather than pre-existing racism creating slavery when the opportunity arose.

It may be a longstanding habit of human nature to act first, then justify. Perhaps the German polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was correct in saying, “In the beginning was the deed.”¹⁹

Returning to the words of Dr. Kendi: “The history of racist ideas is the history of powerful policy-makers erecting racist policies out of self-interest, then producing racist ideas to defend and rationalize the inequitable effects of these policies, while everyday people consume those racist ideas, which in turn sparks ignorance and hate.”²⁰

While not disparaging efforts to transform consciousness on these issues, perhaps the best way to transform the consciousness of ourselves and others is to engage collectively in challenging and changing unjust policies that support and sustain racism, class rule, sexism, and other forms of inequality—for the benefit of the vast majority of Americans of any heritage.

19 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust Part One*, Dover Publications Inc., 1994, p. 39.

20 Kendi, p. 230.

Measuring Racial Inequality in West Virginia

Sean O'Leary

In the 10 years that have passed since the original Legacy of Inequality report was published, the nation experienced its longest economic expansion in history, growing for a record 128 straight months coming out of the Great Recession. While the expansion was long, both the economy's average annual growth rate and the typical worker's earnings gains were relatively modest compared to past periods of growth.

Economic growth was uneven in West Virginia over the past decade, with the decline of coal creating a drag on the economy at the same time that a boom in natural gas production provided a boost. But overall, the state's economy saw modest growth over the past decade. Real gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 6.8 percent from 2009 to 2019, while real personal income grew by 10.3 percent.²¹ The state also added 11,000 jobs between 2009 and 2018, before losing ground in 2019.²²

Despite this growth, deep economic and social inequities have persisted for Black West Virginians across a broad range of variables, including income, poverty, education, health, and incarceration. These disparities are the result of centuries of systemic racism and oppression in US society that has unjustly disadvantaged Black Americans throughout the country's history.

And while this report covers the state of Black West Virginians before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the state, we know those disparities have only worsened during the crisis.

The analysis in this section was based on data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 5-year American Community Survey and other sources. Racial comparisons are graphed using the Census Bureau categories of "White" and "Black/African American."

Wages, Income, and Work

Working Black West Virginians, on average, are much less economically secure than white West Virginians, with deep and persistent disparities across a number of economic measures. These disparities start with where people work. Black West Virginians disproportionately work in lower-wage occupations. Nearly one-third of Black West Virginians work in service occupations, compared to under 20 percent of white West Virginians. In addition, Black West Virginians are less likely to be employed in higher-wage occupations such as management and finance, construction and extraction, and health care (**Figure 1**).

That Black West Virginians are disproportionately employed in low-wage occupations is evident in their income and wages. The median wage for a full time, year-round Black worker in West Virginia is 18.3 percent lower than that for white workers (**Figure 2**). The gap is even larger for men, with Black men earning a median wage 19.9 percent lower than white men (**Figure 3**).

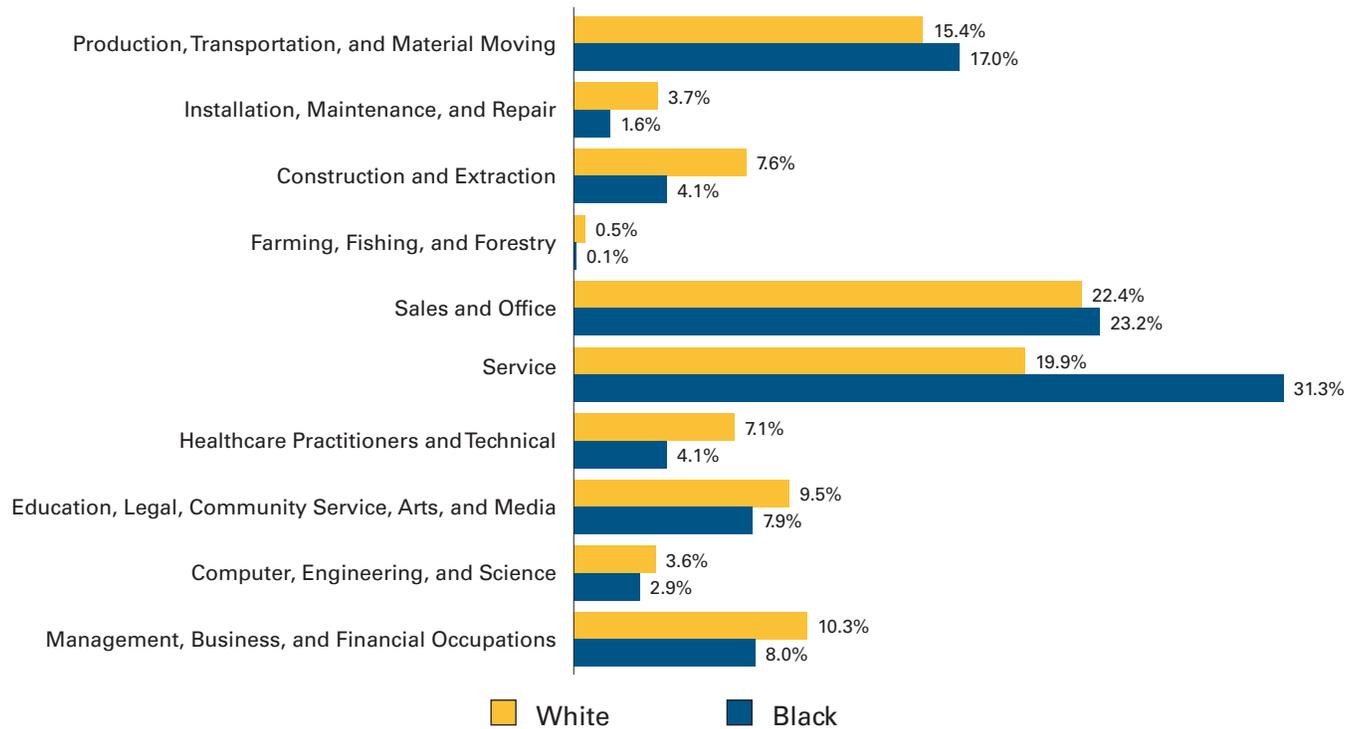
21 WVCBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis data.

22 Ibid.

Figure 1

Black Workers in West Virginia More Likely to be Working in Low Wage Occupations

Share of workers by occupation, West Virginia, 2018



Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Figure 2

Median Wages are 18% Lower for Black West Virginians

Median wage by race, West Virginia, 2018



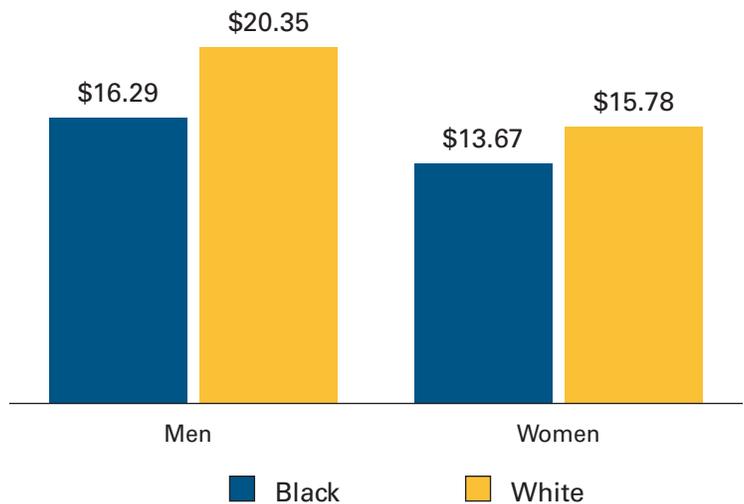
Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Note: Data is for full-time, year-round workers

Figure 3

Racial Wage Gap Greatest for Black Men

Median wages by race and sex, West Virginia, 2018

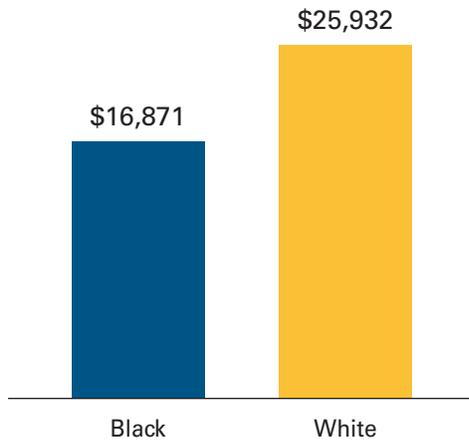


Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Note: Data is for full-time, year-round workers

Figure 4

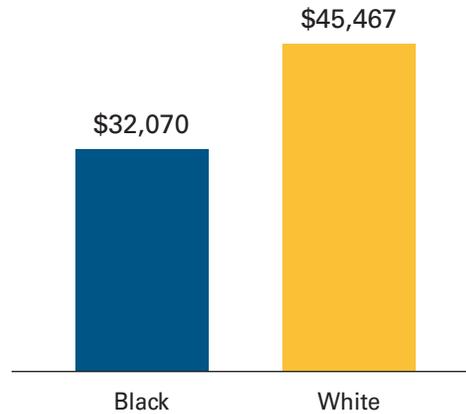
Average Black Income 27% Lower than White Income in West Virginia
Per capita income by race, West Virginia, 2018



Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Figure 5

Black Households have \$13,000 Less Income than White Households in West Virginia
Median household income by race, West Virginia, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-year American Community Survey

Lower wages mean lower incomes for individuals, families, and households. Per capita income for Black West Virginians is just under \$19,000 per year, 27 percent less than for white West Virginians. That means, on an individual level, Black West Virginians have an average of \$7,151 less in annual income than white West Virginians (**Figure 4**).

At the household level the difference is even greater. Median household income measures the income of the typical household — or the household in the middle of the income distribution — and serves as a good indicator for how the middle class is faring. The median household income of Black households in West Virginia is \$32,070 per year, nearly 30 percent lower than that of white households (**Figure 5**).

If Black households had the same median income as white households in West Virginia, it would increase Black household income by a total of \$430 million per year.

Unemployment and Labor Force Participation

There are just under 30,000 Black workers in West Virginia, accounting for 3.7 percent of the state’s labor force, which includes both employed workers and unemployed workers actively looking for work.

One of the key indicators of long-term economic growth and productivity is a high labor force participation rate. The labor force participation rate is the percentage of working age persons in the state who are employed or looking for jobs. West Virginia has historically had the lowest labor force participation rate in the country, across demographic groups.

In the past, West Virginia’s labor force participation rate for Black workers has been lower than for white workers. Over the past decade, that gap has closed, but this has largely been due to declines in the white labor force participation rate, rather than increases in the Black labor force participation rate. In 2018 both the white and Black labor force participation rates were just over 53 percent (**Figure 6**).

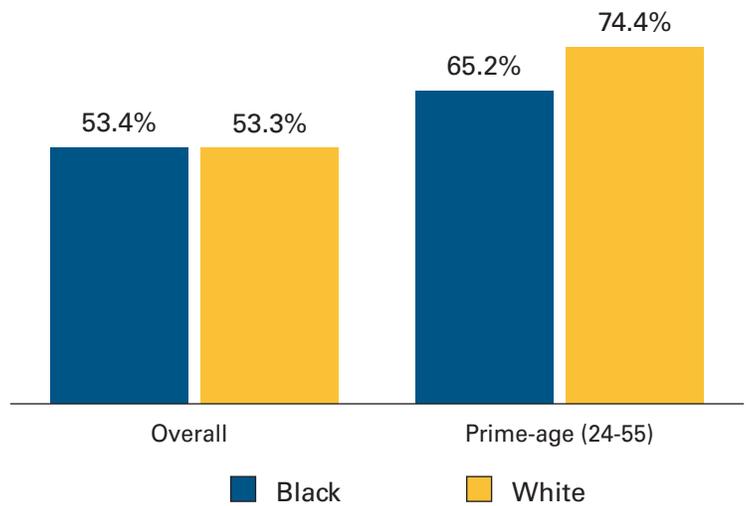
Age is a significant factor in labor force participation rates. Older and younger workers typically have lower labor force participation rates, and those found in the “prime-age” group — workers between the ages of 25 to 54 — have higher participation rates. There is a significant racial gap in labor force participation rates in the prime-age group. The prime-age labor force participation rate in West Virginia is 65.2 percent for Black workers, compared to 74.4 percent for white workers (Figure 6). On average, West Virginia’s white population is older than its Black population, which may help explain why the racial gap in prime-age labor force participation persists.

In West Virginia, Black workers who are in the labor force are significantly more likely to be unemployed than white workers. The three-year average unemployment rate is 4.4 percentage points higher for Black workers than for white workers, at 11.0 percent compared to 6.6 percent. The gap is even greater for men, with the unemployment rate for Black men 5.1 percentage points higher than for white men. The unemployment rate for Black women is 3.6 percentage points higher than for white women in West Virginia (Figure 7).

Figure 6

Racial Gap in Labor Force Participation Rates Persists for Prime-age Workers

Labor force participation rates by race, West Virginia, 2018

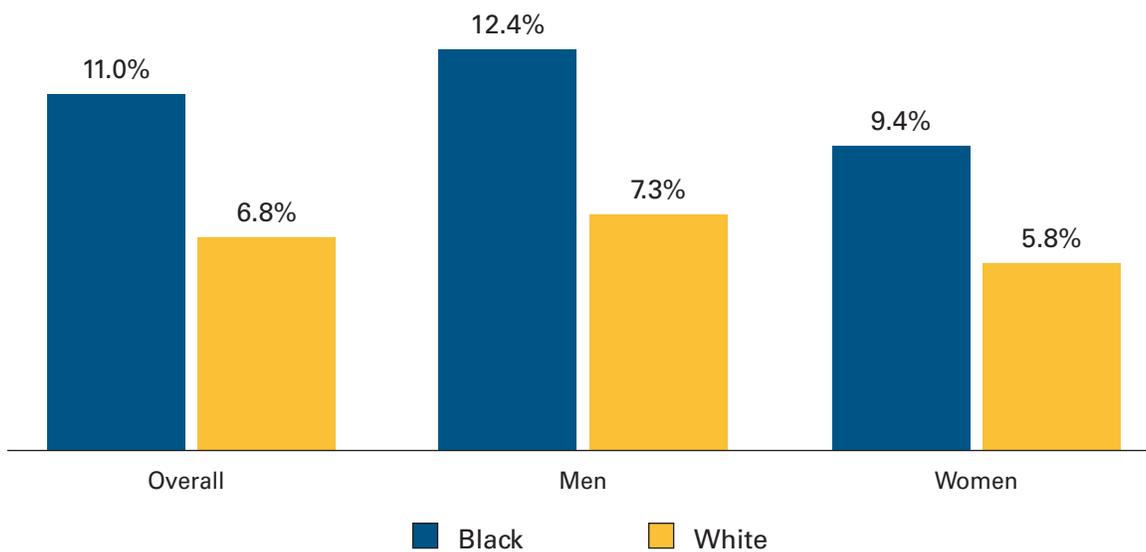


Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Figure 7

Unemployment Rates Higher for Black Men and Women

Unemployment rates by race and sex, West Virginia, 2018



Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Poverty

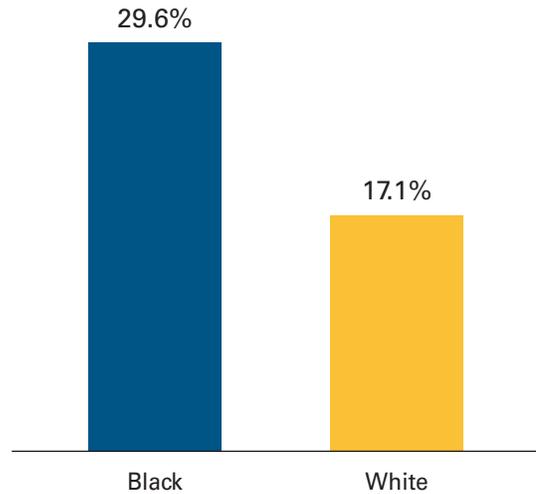
West Virginia has historically had one of the highest poverty rates in the nation. In 2018, over 312,000 West Virginians were living in poverty, creating a poverty rate of 17.8 percent, the 4th highest rate among the 50 states. But with deep racial disparities in wages and incomes, it is no surprise that Black West Virginians experience much higher levels of poverty than white West Virginians.

Overall, the poverty rate for Black West Virginians is nearly twice the rate for white West Virginians. In 2018, 29.6 percent of Black West Virginians were living in poverty, compared to 17.1 percent of white West Virginians (Figure 8). This disparity persists across age groups. Black children under the age of five are more than one-and-a-half times as likely to be living in poverty than white children under the age of five, with 47.2 percent of Black children below the poverty threshold. Black adults and seniors also experience significantly higher rates of poverty than their white counterparts (Figure 9).

Figure 8

Poverty Rate for Black West Virginians is Nearly Twice as High as for White West Virginians

Poverty rate by race, West Virginia 2018

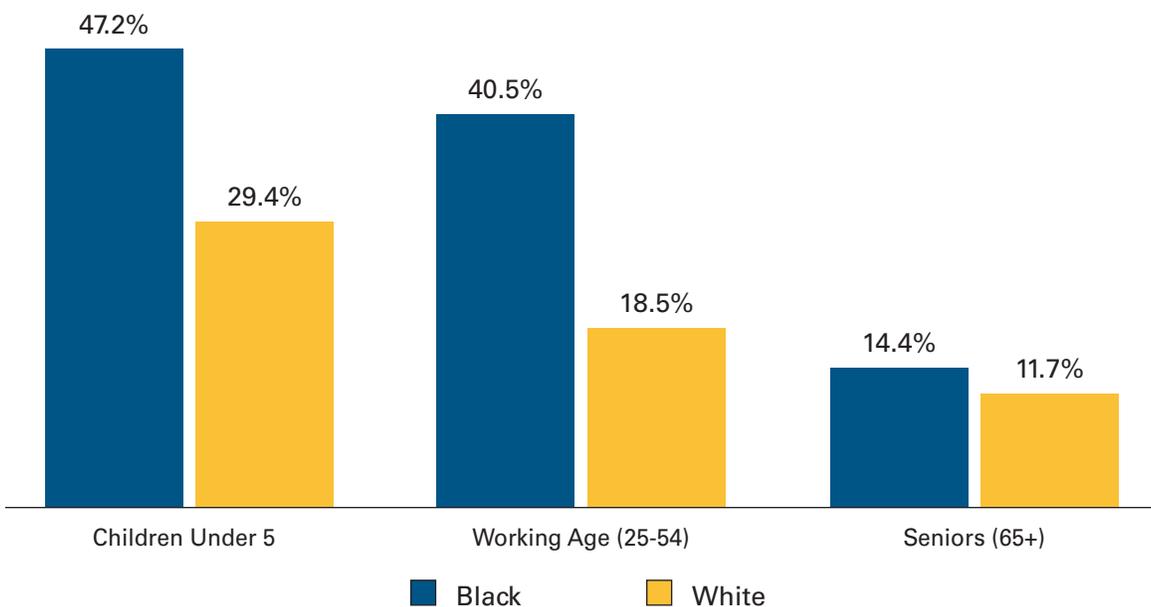


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-year American Community Survey

Figure 9

Higher Poverty Rates for Black West Virginians Persist Across Age Groups

Poverty rates by race and age, West Virginia, 2018



Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Education

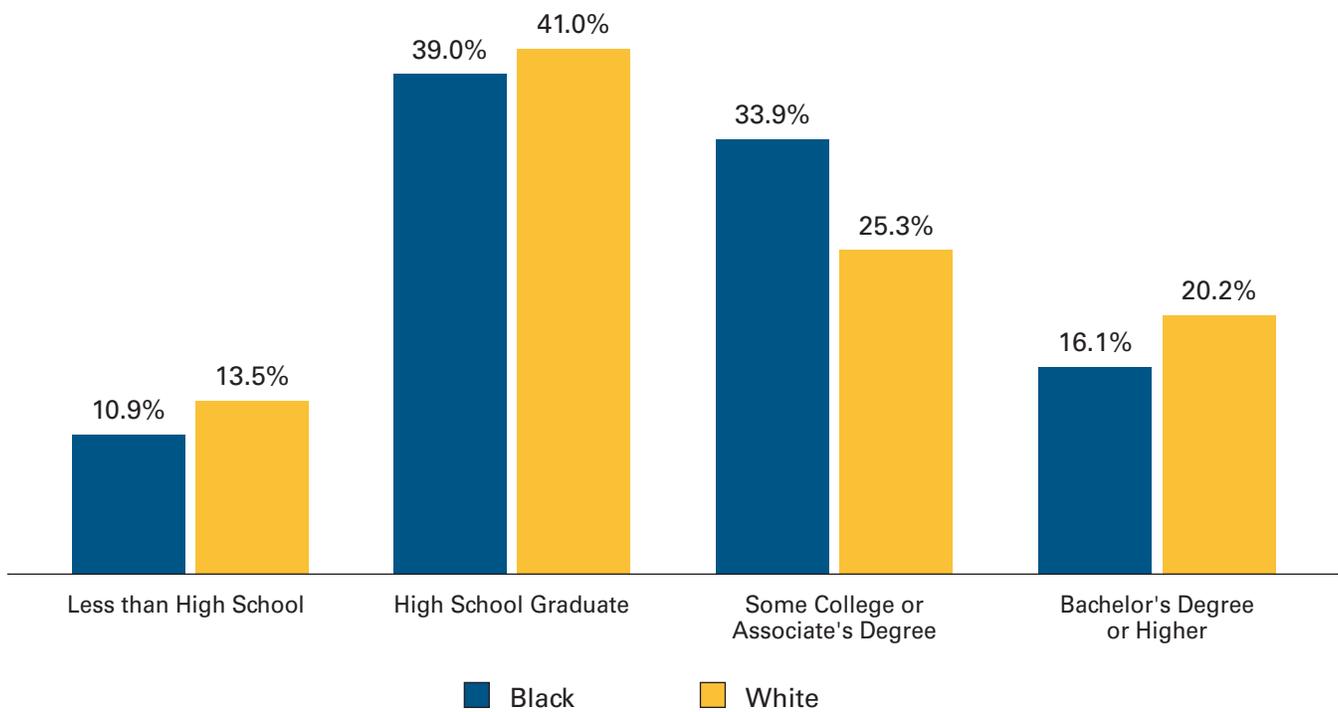
Educational attainment plays a key role in influencing many other social and economic indicators. Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with higher levels of labor force participation, higher wages, lower poverty levels, and lower unemployment levels. West Virginia's racial disparities in educational attainment are not as stark as those in other indicators, but are more prominent at higher levels of educational attainment.

The percentages of adults in West Virginia who are high school graduates are roughly the same for Black and white West Virginians, at 39 percent and 41 percent respectively. A greater share of Black West Virginians, 33.9 percent, have some college experience or an associate's degree, compared to 25.3 percent of white West Virginians. However, only 16.1 percent of Black West Virginians have a bachelor's degree or higher, 4.1 percentage points lower than the rate for white West Virginians (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10

Fewer Black West Virginians Have 4-Year College Degrees

Educational attainment rates by race, West Virginia, 2018



Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

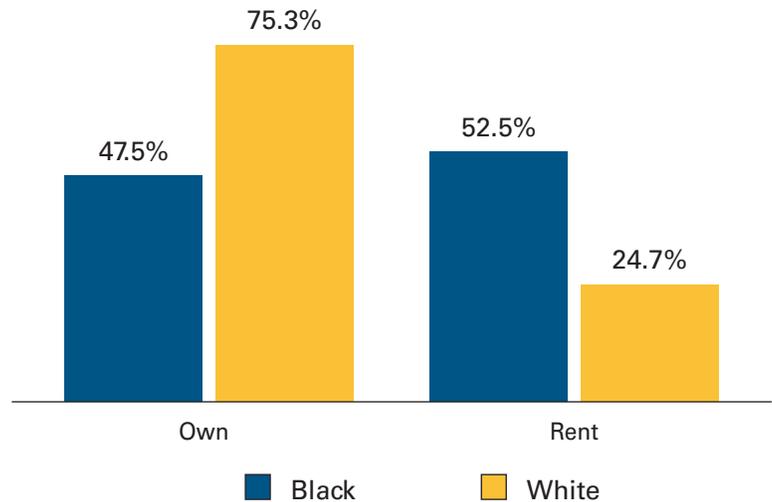
Homeownership

Like median household income, homeownership rates are often used as an indicator of middle-class standing. And, like other measures, West Virginia's homeownership rates reflect the state's racial inequities. Less than half of Black West Virginians own their own homes, compared to over 75 percent of white West Virginians. Black West Virginians are also more than twice as likely to be renters (Figure 11).

Figure 11

Homeownership Rates Reflect West Virginia's Racial Inequities

Homeownership and renting rates by race, West Virginia, 2018



Source: WVCBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Health and Health Care Coverage

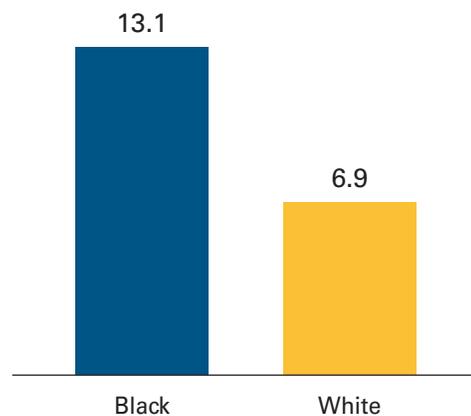
Both historically and most recently, some of the deepest inequities between white and Black West Virginians are in health outcomes. The legacy of segregation leading to limited access to resources and medical care, combined with the racial myths and implicit biases from health care providers that persist today, collectively lead to inadequate care and poorer health outcomes for Black West Virginians.

One of the most widely-used indicators of the health status of a population is the infant mortality rate, or the number of children per thousand who die before their first birthday. Infant mortality is strongly associated with the availability of health services, education, and economic development. In West Virginia, the infant mortality rate for Black children is nearly double that for white children (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Infant Mortality Rate Nearly Twice as High for Black Children in West Virginia

Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births) by race, West Virginia, 2015-2017

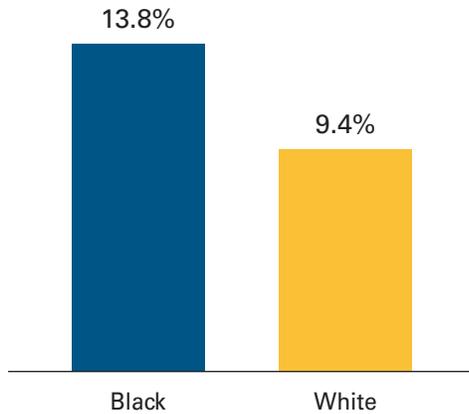


Source: National Center for Health Statistics, period linked birth/infant death data

Figure 13

Black Babies are More Likely to be Born with Low Birthweights

Low birthweight rate by race, West Virginia, 2017

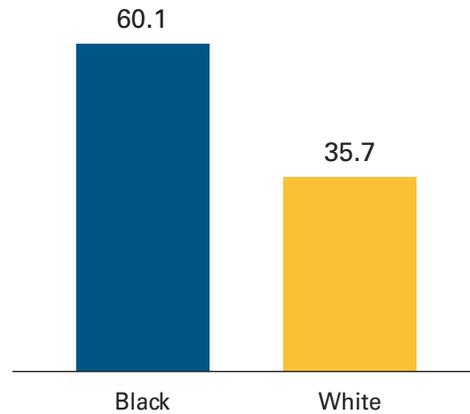


Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Vital Statistics Reports

Figure 14

Diabetes Death Rate is Nearly Twice as High for Black West Virginians

Diabetes death rate (per 100,000 population) by race, West Virginia, 2018



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Infant mortality is strongly associated with low birthweights. In addition to a greater risk of infant mortality, low birthweight babies (those with birth weights below five pounds, eight ounces) also incur larger medical costs and are more susceptible to disease and other health complications. In West Virginia, 13.8 percent of Black babies are born with low birthweight, compared to 9.4 percent of white babies (**Figure 13**).

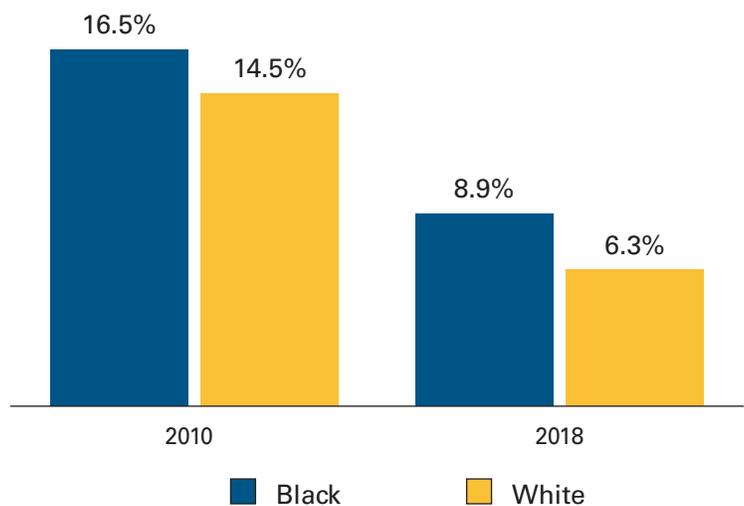
Another health consideration that disproportionately affects Black West Virginians and that is associated with other health issues is diabetes. The diabetes death rate for Black West Virginians is nearly twice that for white West Virginians (**Figure 14**).

While Black West Virginians are more likely to face a number of health issues, they are less likely to have health insurance coverage. In recent years, West Virginia has made great progress in reducing the number of uninsured people in the state, particularly under the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion. Overall, the uninsured rate in West Virginia dropped from a high of 14.9 percent in 2014 to 5.3 percent in 2016, before rising again to 6.7 percent in 2019.²³ While the percent of uninsured Black West Virginians declined during this time, they are still more likely to be uninsured than white West Virginians (**Figure 15**).

Figure 15

Uninsured Rates Declining but Racial Gap Remains

Percentages with no health insurance coverage by race, West Virginia, 2010 and 2018



Source: WVCPB analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 and 2018 American Community Survey

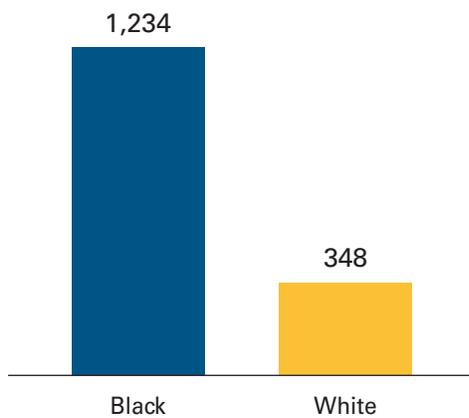
23 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

Incarceration

One of the starkest examples of racial inequality in West Virginia comes from incarceration. Black West Virginians are incarcerated at an alarmingly high rate compared to white West Virginians. In 2014, the incarceration rate for Black West Virginians was 1,234 per 100,000 residents — or 1.2 percent — compared to only 348 per 100,000 — or .3 percent — for white West Virginians (**Figure 16**). Black children are also overrepresented in West Virginia’s juvenile justice system. In 2015, West Virginia’s Black juvenile custody rate was 566 per 100,000, compared to 301 per 100,000 for white children (**Figure 17**).

Figure 16
Black West Virginians More Than Three Times as Likely to be Incarcerated

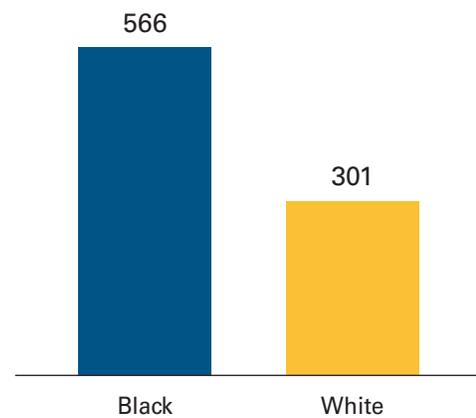
Incarceration rate per 100,000 by race, West Virginia, 2014



Source: *The Sentencing Project*

Figure 17
Black Children More Likely to be Held in Juvenile Custody

Juvenile custody rate per 100,000 by race, West Virginia, 2015

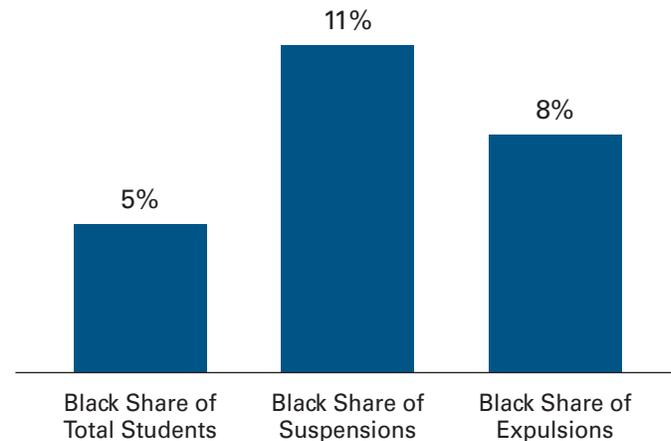


Source: *The Sentencing Project*

Black students are also disproportionately suspended, expelled, and referred to the criminal justice system by their schools. In West Virginia, Black students make up five percent of the state’s student population, but made up 11 percent of suspensions and eight percent of expulsions during the 2012 academic year (**Figure 18**). Research clearly displays that expulsions and out-of-school suspensions are strongly associated with subsequent participation in juvenile and criminal justice systems, as well as higher delinquency and high school dropout rates.²⁴

Figure 18
Black Students Disproportionately Expelled and Suspended from School

Black student suspension and expulsion rates, West Virginia, 2012



Source: *Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education*

24 Edward J. Smith and Shaun R. Harper, “Disproportionate Impact of K-12 School Suspension and Expulsion on Black Students in Southern States” (Penn Graduate School of Education, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2015).

PART 2

Reflections on Race, Policy, and West Virginia

The Appalachian Narrative and Black Infant Deaths in West Virginia

Dr. Lauri Andress

Policy Suggestions:

Creation of a legislative task force on infant and maternal health disparities based on race that will normalize the notion of race-based inequities in West Virginia through:

- Exploration of the historical trajectory of this issue in the United States;
- Examination of the data in West Virginia to determine how to quantify the problem; and
- Standardization of the state statute and regulations²⁵ on infant and maternal death record review practices to be consistent with national best practices meant to provide a more robust examination of and response to differences in the lived experiences and life course of Black and white mothers that impact the ability of their infants to thrive.²⁶

This essay would not exist in many spaces — I am aware that its content... its very presence assaults the senses, provokes and shatters any sense of neutrality that I am supposed to have given my training. The essay speaks about life... life on a daily basis, lives yet to come and past lives that never came to fruition. It is a subjective portrait of social processes in West Virginia supported by references from a great observer of race and racism in the United States, Toni Morrison.

At the outset I want to say that in West Virginia, it's not as if races don't exist. They do exist — they just don't seem to count literally and figuratively.

I feel that it is important to say that before my arrival in West Virginia in 2013 I lived in spaces with an abundance of African American civic, social, and economic vitality. I took this activity for granted. It was a traumatic experience with race and racism in West Virginia that brought me face-to-face for the first time in my life with a sense of aloneness and invisibility reinforced by living in an all-white space.

Shortly after this traumatic experience, four years after my arrival in West Virginia, I started to inquire about the gap in the infant death rate between white and Black women. My question, based on unacknowledged government reports, was why the gap in the Black-white infant death rate was not — like in almost every place in the U.S. — a topic of inquiry, a public health campaign, or part of the research agenda in West Virginia.

25 April 2013, Senate Bill 108 passed establishing Chapter 61 of the criminal code -Article 12A; February 2015 Rule 29 : Established procedures for the formation of the Fatality and Mortality Review Team FMRT Created under the WV Bureau for Public Health.

26 National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention, Fetal & Infant Mortality Review <https://www.ncfrp.org/fimr/> Best Practices enable a multidisciplinary community team to examine confidential, de-identified cases of fetal and infant deaths to understand families' lived experiences including racism through an interview process that examines how those experiences may have impacted maternal and child outcomes. West Virginia regulations do not allow for family interviews to collect and study these findings.

Inquiries were met with looks of incredulity as if the very sentence itself was nonsensical. Brief explanations about high rates of poverty always gave way to silence and an averted gaze. In my quest for solace, I started reading Toni Morrison's novel *The Origin of Others* in the fall of 2017. Published in *The Guardian*, a British daily newspaper characterized as left leaning, I began with Lidija Haas' book review of Morrison's short novel.

Explaining the process of racism, Haas laid out a simple three-step formula in describing Morrison's message in *The Origin of Others* that stayed with me — made up my "aha" moment.

In the first part of the process to create race and racism, human beings invent and reinforce dehumanizing categories of otherness in order to justify economic exploitation, and/or shore up a sense of security, superiority, and belonging. Haas quite bluntly says that this process of self-justification requires and encourages an extraordinary level of sadism.

The second step in constructing racism involves the creation of a coherent single humanity, which in the U.S. takes the form of the assimilation of a wide variety of peoples (immigrants) into a wholly illusory whiteness.

The last step in the process of constructing racism is an assertion of whiteness as a symbol or construct of superiority or status that becomes a convenient way to give poor, working-class Americans "the illusion of power" — a shared racism that can seem to align their interests with those of the rich and dominant, offering them a false sense of social status and a safe set of scapegoats for their grievances.

Most recently I encountered these ideas listening to a podcast featuring Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility* and an expert on racialized trauma. In this interview, DiAngelo explains that while she was poor, shamed, and ashamed starting in childhood, she also knew and had it enforced by her mother and the world around her that she was white and therefore still superior to Blacks.²⁷

In this three-step formula from Haas I see the desire of white Appalachians to fit in, to scrub out the hillbilly myth that undermines a sense of equality with the construct of whiteness that is America. To accomplish this requires West Virginians to construct and maintain a pure level of "whiteness." This construction of who they are in order to deconstruct the image of ignorance and laziness means that Appalachians must adhere to the scapegoating mythologies of African Americans as the "Other."

I subsequently read Toni Morrison's book based on these ideas. My conclusion was that in order to fit in and achieve whiteness, the long-standing Appalachian narrative dismisses from consideration and discourse the existence of African Americans.

The definition of America is color — whiteness — and to ensure unity, every group must melt in and become American — white. Another aspect of becoming American according to Toni Morrison, is that everyone — every group — must join in identifying the Stranger or the Other. The Other in America is nonwhite — as in one that can never be white — because the Other is defined as those who have the skin color that is associated with the negative characterizations used to define African Americans.

To be Appalachian means being acutely aware that you don't quite pass the test of being white in America because of labels that characterize you as poor, uneducated, or even unclean. And so to join America, the one characteristic that Appalachia has — whiteness — must be exploited along with engagement in the collective white American goal of identifying, distinguishing, and stigmatizing the Stranger, the Other — African Americans. To join white America, Appalachia must not acknowledge similarities to, comradery with, or the existence of African Americans.

27 Podcast *On Being*, July 9, 2020 <https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-diangelo-and-resmaa-menakem-in-conversation/?fbclid=IwAR1akFLJ-ineE4kXfNQMFfthLrkUwqzmKDtVS7iji6Tuk4wsKSlpA1JV4HE>.

Appalachia, in joining white America in identifying the Other, becomes part of white America and, more importantly, achieves the ability to shrug off the denigrations associated with the hillbilly image of Appalachia. Thus, the benefit of identifying or rendering invisible the Other is entry — but only partially — into America’s whiteness which again, for Appalachians, can never fully be achieved due to their stigmatization.

“Otherness,” according to Morrison, is the construction of a stigmatized category into which one places people that lie outside and apart from the group that has defined itself as humanity. Otherness is then used to justify inhumane treatment that lies along a continuum from mistreatment to — one could argue — invisibility.

The Appalachian narrative elevates, distinguishes, and insulates its members from Others who they might be mistaken for in their poverty, lack of education, and cultural displacement in America, i.e., we are poor and disenfranchised like African Americans but if we treat them as invisible, then we are different from them and more like white America.

To succeed, the Appalachian narrative reifies the Otherness of African Americans which, in this case, reflects white America’s portrayal again and again of Blacks as less than human. This dehumanization makes it okay to degrade or otherwise ignore something, because it is non-human.

To make sense of the universe in which I found myself and had experienced racism, I concluded that the act of not studying the problem of Black infant deaths and the act of Othering African Americans reinforce one another. Perhaps under these circumstances, ignoring Black infant deaths becomes understandable.

The Unequal State of Education

Katherine L. “Kitty” Dooley

In the state of West Virginia, education is a fundamental right. In fact, it is so fundamental that the West Virginia Constitution in Article XII, 12-1 dictates that the Legislature “shall provide... for a thorough and efficient system of free schools.” Examining that language with the mandates of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution necessarily demands equal access, participation, inclusion, and fairness in the delivery of the constitutionally mandated right.

Yet, in a ProPublica study analyzing school discipline patterns and representation in gifted and advanced placement (AP) courses, data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights found that West Virginia’s Black and multi-racial children were overrepresented in discipline and underrepresented in gifted and advanced placement courses in the 2015-2016 school year.²⁸

The study found overall that Black students are 2.5 times as likely to be suspended as white students, and multi-racial students are 1.4 times as likely to be suspended as their white classmates. The same study found that white students are 2.4 times as likely as multi-racial students and 1.1 times as likely as Black students to be enrolled in at least one AP class.

Moreover, in every West Virginia County where the data was available, Black students were subjected to discipline at a rate disproportionate to their representation in the district. For instance, in Pleasants County Schools, while only four percent of students identified as non-white, these students were 6.5 times more likely than their white counterparts to be suspended. This represents the highest disparity in the state.

In the counties with the largest percentage of non-white students — Berkeley (23 percent), Jefferson (22 percent), Kanawha (17 percent), Cabell (15 percent), and Mercer (15 percent) — these students are 2.4 to 2.6 times more likely to be suspended than their white peers.

The study concluded that 10 percent of all suspensions were Black students, two percent were Hispanic students, and three percent were multi-racial students. Regarding expulsions, Black students made up 11 percent, Hispanic students made up one percent, and multi-racial students made up four percent.

Of note, the study considers students in Institutional Educational Programs (detention or alternative placement of juveniles or young adults) as part of a separate district. Students of color made up a total of 20 percent of this population, despite representing only nine percent of the state’s population.

Further, a study published in 2015 by Edward Smith of the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education concluded that while Black students represented only five percent of students in West Virginia K-12 public schools in the 2011-2012 academic year, 11 percent of students who received out-of-school suspension and eight percent of those expelled were Black.²⁹

The study found that 39 of the state’s 55 counties had racial disparities in discipline based on data reported to the U.S. Department of Education.

Both studies fail to provide the percentage of Black students and other students of color who have been relegated to alternative placement in their county school systems.

Despite these stark disparities, the West Virginia State Board of Education in 2019 chose to address this troubling issue by giving county boards of education — and even individual school principals, depending on

28 Lena V. Groeger, Annie Waldman and David Eads, “Miseducation: Is There Racial Inequality at Your School?” (ProPublica, October 16, 2018).

29 Edward J. Smith and Shaun R. Harper, “Disproportionate Impact of K-12 School Suspension and Expulsion on Black Students in Southern States,” (University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2015).

the direction from their board — freedom to label as more serious student offenses previously considered to be less serious. This decision allowed greater flexibility to subject students to out-of-school suspensions without accounting for this discipline in the Board’s school ratings system.

When viewing the infractions for which students may be suspended or expelled under West Virginia State Board Policy 4373, the disciplinary action appears to be innocuous enough. However, the application of the policy and the discretion given to administrators and faculty clearly results in disparate treatment of and impact on Black students and other students of color.

One explanation for this disparity is implicit bias. Implicit bias is defined by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity as “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. The implicit associations we harbor in our subconscious causes us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance. These associations develop over the course of a lifetime...”

Of course, another explanation is explicit bias, which is conscious and manifests itself as prejudices and biases toward certain groups based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Stereotypes of Black children as “bad,” “aggressive,” “unruly,” or “threatening” are fallacious and unacceptable. There is no credible evidence to suggest that the color of a student’s skin predisposes them to act a certain way. As such, targeting and labeling Black children, or any child, is inadmissible. Rather, we should show compassion to all children.

The system of education, in order to be thorough and efficient, must root out implicit biases of school board members, superintendents, administrators, principals, aides, teachers, counselors, bus drivers, school resource officers, and all others involved in our children’s education. There should be zero tolerance for any of these individuals displaying biases just as there is zero tolerance for violations of the Safe Schools Act. This would reduce instances of disparate treatment, disparate impact, and outright intentional discrimination against Black and multi-racial children in the application of school disciplinary policies.

Upon obtaining statewide disciplinary information, West Virginia Department of Education and each county school system must disaggregate suspension and expulsion data to the building level. From this point, analysis can be made at the classroom level by principals to determine whether troubling patterns emerge regarding the treatment of Black children. Likewise, county superintendents should analyze data at the building level and determine whether problematic patterns emerge at the school level. This information must be reported to the County Boards of Education and to the State Superintendent of Schools and the State Board of Education, where a comprehensive plan should be outlined to correct the issue. Additionally, a full report of this analysis should be made available to the State Legislature, which should be encouraged to pass legislation to address these disparities.

The information is available. It is troubling that academics and researchers outside of West Virginia can review state data and identify problems in the implementation of our disciplinary policies, yet little to no action is taken within our state to understand and address the reasons for these disparities.

The evidence provided here begs the question of whether a two- or three-tiered public education system now exists. If so, who is entitled to the first, second, or third tier of education and do those systems conform to the constitutional mandate?

In Fiscal Year 2018, West Virginia’s counties spent, including state funds, \$3.1 billion on public K-12 education.³⁰ It should be asked, of the \$3.1 billion being spent on public K-12 education in this state, how much is being spent to ensure that West Virginia’s Black and multi-racial children get the education that the constitution mandates?

30 West Virginia Department of Education, Office of School Finance, FY 2018 data.

Studies have found that as a student's records of suspension and expulsion increase, so does their likelihood for involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Moreover, time out of the classroom necessarily has a negative impact on learning. This cannot continue unchecked.

Nelson Mandela said, "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children." We are discussing children here. Societal and media depictions of some of our children are dehumanizing. It cannot be surprising that when the systems fail to see the humanity in a child, the child fails to see the humanity in those systems, whether they are educational, economic, judicial, or religious.

We have yet to achieve the desire for truth and reconciliation necessary as a state or nation to delve into the true history of this county and its historic legal mandates: first to deny education to Black people, then to facilitate separate and unequal education based on race, and now to have a so-called "color blind" education system which continues to deny Black children and other children of color equal access to education.

Maya Angelou said that when we know better, we are required to do better. West Virginia must do better.

Reducing Disparate Life Outcomes Requires Investments in Childhood

Quenton King

Child care has always been an underappreciated part of our economy—at least, for those of us who aren't parents. Whether it's early child care, before or after school programs, or preschool, access to non-parental child care is a boon for families and for the economy. In addition to benefiting people directly employed in early childhood development, free or affordable child care allows two parents to work, which is especially important for mothers, who tend to stay at home more often to provide child care labor. What's more, early childhood education leads to improved educational outcomes, better social and cognitive development, and reduced likelihood of criminal justice system involvement later in life.³¹

Unfortunately, in West Virginia, as in the rest of the country, families have unequal access to affordable child care, and our state is suffering as a result. A 2016 report ranked us as the state with the largest child care costs. The average cost of child care as a share of median household income was 45 percent in West Virginia, compared to the national average of 30.8 percent.³² The cost of child care is more burdensome for single parents, a disproportionate percentage of whom are Black or Hispanic women.³³ West Virginia consistently ranks at or near the bottom for women participating in the workforce; only 48.9 percent of women in the state were in the labor force according to the US Census Bureau.³⁴ Financial security and the cost of child care are two of the biggest reasons why couples aren't having as many children as they would like.³⁵ By putting high-quality child care out of reach, we are failing both parents and children.

I directly benefited from two categories of non-parental child care. My parents had me at a relatively young age and they couldn't afford a situation that allowed one parent to stay at home. Luckily, both sets of grandparents lived nearby and were able to take care of me as my parents worked. According to my parents, this was our routine until they enrolled me in preschool at the local elementary school at age four. Even then, my grandmother had to watch me before and after school, as preschool was, and still often is, only half day. It's impossible to isolate preschool's impact in my life, but it is there that I learned how to read and it prepared me for kindergarten. Further, it helped my family by reassuring them that they could work while I received a quality education.

To be clear, preschool access has come a long way in West Virginia since I participated in the 1990s. In 2002, legislation passed that mandated universal preschool space for all four-year-olds and three-year-olds with disabilities. We are now ranked 8th in access for four-year-olds and 15th for three-year-olds, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research.³⁶ 76 percent of four-year-olds participated in preschool in the 2018-2019 school year.³⁷ Only 6 percent of three-year-olds were enrolled as a result of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) requirement.³⁸

31 Jorge Luis Garcia, James J. Heckman, and Anna L. Ziff, "Early Childhood Education and Crime," *Infant Mental Health Journal* 40, no. 1 (2019), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6344026/>.

32 WV Public Broadcasting, "Parents Struggle to Find Affordable Childcare in W.Va.," (January 22, 2017), <https://www.wvpublic.org/news/2017-01-22/parents-struggle-to-find-affordable-childcare-in-w-va>.

33 Child Care Aware of America, "The US and the High Cost of Child Care," (2018), https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/costofcare2018.pdf?__hstc=&__hssc=&hsCtaTracking=b4367fa6-f3b9-4e6c-acf4-b5d01d0dc570%7C94d3f065-e4fc-4250-a163-bafc3defaf20.

34 US Census Bureau, QuickFacts Data Profile for West Virginia, 2019, available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/WV/LFE046218#LFE046218>.

35 Claire Cain Miller, "Americans Are Having Fewer Babies. They Told Us Why," *The New York Times*, (July 5, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/05/upshot/americans-are-having-fewer-babies-they-told-us-why.html>.

36 West Virginia Department of Education "2019 State of West Virginia Pre-K," (2019), <https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/WV-Universal-PreK-2019-Overview-final.pdf>.

37 Ibid.

38 National Institute for Early Education Research, "The State of Preschool 2019," (2020), http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/YB2019_Full_Report.pdf.

There are several strategies that West Virginia legislators and education officials can undertake to increase access to high quality child care and preschool, ensuring that children have a consistently safe space to play and learn while keeping parents from needing to worry about cutting hours or forgoing job opportunities. First, we should expand universal preschool access to all three-year-olds, not just those who have a learning or behavioral disability. Understandably, not every parent will want to take advantage of universal preschool for their three- or four-year-old, but the option should be on the table for all parents in the state. Universal preschool has documented benefits for children of all backgrounds, but in particular, it's an opportunity for low-income children to receive free, nutritious breakfast and lunch. Further, it will allow more parents from minority populations to get back into the workforce faster.

We also need to make sure preschool and child care match the reality of the workday. Two of my friends are married and both are teachers in West Virginia. Their son is almost three and they are already considering their options for preschool when he is four. There are barriers to enrolling him in the public preschool in their county. They both must report to school at 7 a.m., but preschool doesn't start until 9 a.m. It also ends at 1 p.m., before they finish their workday. It is concerning that even our state's educators have trouble accessing our public preschool system, but now imagine that problem extrapolated across the state, where so many of our neighbors work non-standard hours in the service, health, or even construction industries. West Virginia would do well to invest in more year-round before and after school programs.

Of course, universal preschool is only provided at no-cost to children who are three- or four-years-old. But there are mechanisms to vastly improve and increase private child care access, as well. Our federal legislators should advocate for additional funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to provide more subsidies to low-income families who need access to child care so that parents can work or pursue an education. West Virginia should allocate resources to child care deserts by building centers and expanding existing programs, while also increasing pay for employees in this critical industry.³⁹ Indeed, child care and preschool are so crucial that recent presidential candidates have made them an integral part of their campaign policy plans. No matter who wins the election, reducing child care costs with tax credits and subsidies so that struggling West Virginians pay no more than a set, small percentage of their income on care is a goal that we should all be fighting for.

I don't have children of my own, but like many childless workers in the age of Zoom and COVID-19, they have become a routine part of my week. I see or hear them in the background of meetings, and I empathize with my colleagues as they discuss the challenge of balancing work, child care, remote learning, and other responsibilities. Child care, preschool, and early childhood education were difficult for parents to navigate even before the pandemic, but we can invest in changes now that will ensure people don't have to choose between work or starting a family. Universal preschool and subsidized early child care will especially benefit minority and low-income families, and allow us to better tackle disparities in health, education, and labor participation.

39 Kelly Allen, "West Virginia's Already Limited Child Care Capacity is at Risk," West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, (June 4, 2020), <https://wvpolicy.org/west-virginias-already-limited-child-care-capacity-is-at-risk/>.

Addressing Racism Means More than Just Recognizing It

Dr. Melanie Page

On a high school Civil War history class fieldtrip to Gettysburg, the tour guide suggested we “pretend we are the Northern Virginia Army, march under their battle flag, and reenact Pickett’s charge” to a group that included several Black students. The same teacher who organized that fieldtrip said things in class like that the causes of the Civil War were complicated and if they ever had a son they would name him after Stonewall Jackson. There was a substitute teacher that same year that used a racial slur as part of an exclamation who was rightly not asked back.

Which teacher was more dangerous? Which one was more racist? The substitute teacher said a terrible thing and the students were exposed to him for one day; the history teacher said less obviously terrible things, but said them every single day for nine months to students (now multiply that by the years taught...). Because the people in the system “took care of” the obvious racist, they patted themselves on the back about how forward thinking they were — how equitable — while all the time celebrating the arguably bigger, more dangerous racist.

I tell this story not to condemn the school, but to illustrate how systemic racism permeates our lives. We understand that the person burning a cross on a Black person’s front lawn is a racist, but we fight to keep up Confederate statues or buildings named after KKK leaders. Because racism that does not come with obviously hateful speech or actions is harder for most people to see, it is allowed to not only go unchecked, but the people who perpetrate it are often celebrated (e.g., teachers, police, politicians).

Many white people are only comfortable confronting racism when we just have to perform diversity for white people — diversity at the very lowest level of discomfort for us. This level of performance includes such things as condemning the use of outright racist language, not supporting white supremacy hate groups, and saying Martin Luther King was a good guy. None of this is bad per se, but when it stops us from going deeper and understanding race more fully, it becomes harmful.

In level two diversity for white people, white people honestly want to understand the experience of people of color. They listen to the stories of how a Black colleague or student has experienced the world and they are angry about these injustices; however, when it comes down to making the changes necessary for an equitable society, they are only willing to change the fringes of the system. If someone wants to change the very core of the system — to burn it down either in reality or theory — they shut down that person. The person wanting the center change is viewed as radical, unrealistic, emotionally or mentally unstable. However, without center change, nothing will change. The police will continue to kill unarmed Black people, white people will continue to call the police when a Black person is trying to shop at a store, Black children will attend substandard schools, and Black people will receive substandard medical care, among many other injustices.

All of this is by design — those in power designed the criminal justice system to destroy Black families so they can then blame those families and neighborhoods for their plight. These same people in power perpetuate the “everyone can make it if they work hard enough” myth. These same people exploit our labor for their own gain and offer little to nothing in return — they encourage a race war to avoid a class war. People here will sign petitions that call for fringe change, but not those that call for real change. They will point out an injustice, but not sacrifice anything to fix it.

So how do we get to diversity level three — where we come after and change the center of systems? We get there by recognizing that our history has been and continues to be whitewashed and we get ready to pay a price for being an ally.

I am 51 years old and only recently learned about redlining and how white America kept Black Americans from owning homes, putting them in public housing instead.⁴⁰ Many people just learned about how a group of white people burned down Greenwood in Tulsa and murdered 300-400 people in 1921.⁴¹ Most people do not know that there were at least 4,500 Black people lynched in this country post-slavery.⁴² Many people want to believe simply because we had a Black president that things are good now – to ignore that every single economic indicator is far worse for Black families than for white. It is not an accident that we do not know these things. How do we go from caring deeply to acting deeply?

I have spent most of my adult life in stage two, thinking I was in stage three. I thought I was a good ally – I attended diversity trainings, I lifted up the voices of people of color at work, but I did not know the limitations of my understanding. I did not know – and am still just learning – the depth of racism in this country. I did not know about the histories of Black people and their lives and contributions. I had not read the work of Black scholars in any field – their work was not on the reading list and I did not know to seek it out. I do now and have begun to fill in the gaps in my education. I started with a webinar series by Academics for Black Survival and Wellness that taught white people how to teach other white people how to be antiracist. I have attended the WV Race Matters Summit, and I am working with groups on my own campus to change things. My brain is at stage three, but I fear my actions are mainly still at stage two. I want to be braver, to be better, and I hope we hold each other accountable for bold action.

In thinking about the policies that we need to enact to get to stage three, here are just a few ideas. In schools, we should review curriculum and ensure that a diversity of scholars is represented and read as a default professional expectation. In the justice system, we should end the War on Drugs, review sentencing, allow people formerly incarcerated for felonies to vote, and eliminate cash bail. In the economy, we should raise the minimum wage and enact new jobs programs. In policing, we should stop militarizing our forces, have stricter rules for conduct and the use of excessive force, enact community review boards, and increase funding to social, economic, and mental health supports and programming. In health care, we should pursue universal coverage, like Medicare for All, train medical personnel in the social determinants of health, and explore new ways to provide access to care, like through telemedicine and expanding Health Sciences and Technology Academies.

40 Andre M. Perry and David Harshbarger, “America’s formerly redlined neighborhoods have changed, and so must solutions to rectify them,” (Brookings Institute, October 2019).

41 Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, “Tulsa Race Riot,” (February 2001).

42 Equal Justice Initiative, “Lynching in America,” (2015).

Education Reform and Community and Population Health

Reverend Matthew J. Watts

Over the years, several different West Virginia Legislatures have passed numerous laws with the goal and hopes of improving the academic achievement and performance of West Virginia’s school-age children, including legislation aimed at closing the racial achievement gap. All of these well intended efforts have resulted in only a modest improvement in academic achievement among our state’s students. Most of these school reform and improvement initiatives have focused and concentrated on things like curriculum, instructional strategies, teacher and principal professional development, student nutrition, student health improvement, social services, facilities improvements, and other efforts that would take place at the school during the instructional day.

Perhaps the missing ingredient from past education reform efforts to increase student achievement has been a plan to improve the environments that influence and shape children that are outside of the school’s control – namely, the family and community environments in which the children of West Virginia live and play.

The reality is that from birth to age 19, children spend the vast majority of their time somewhere other than at school. Children move in and out of complex social systems and various environments including home, school, community, social peer groups, and more. They need positive supports in all of these environments to learn, grow, thrive, and flourish. There is need for a model that is designed to stabilize and strengthen families, as well as improve the environments where children and families live, work, and play. This model should provide comprehensive wrap-around services for families and children in the community where children spend most of their time.

Student success at school can be an accurate barometer of the health and well-being of communities and families. Healthy families and communities produce high achieving students. Unhealthy families and communities produce low performing students.

Impact of Poverty on Educational Outcomes

Research clearly shows that a child’s socioeconomic status, measured by family income, parent education levels and employment status, or even zip codes, is often the most accurate predictor of academic achievement levels.⁴³ Children and youth who are from low income families and grow up in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty face educational and life challenges above and beyond the challenges faced by children who are from low income families who grow up in neighborhoods without a high concentration of poverty.⁴⁴ For example, research has shown for children with similar levels of family income, growing up in a neighborhood where the number of families in poverty was between 20 and 30 percent increased the chance of downward economic mobility relative to their parents by more than 50 percent compared to children who grew up in neighborhoods with under 10 percent of families in poverty.⁴⁵ Furthermore, recent research suggests that trauma experienced by children resulting from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) can have a significant negative impact on a child’s cognitive development that may extend through adulthood. This research also suggests that children living in poor communities are more likely to experience ACES

43 Helen F. Ladd, “Education and Poverty: Confronting the Evidence,” (Duke Sanford School of Public Policy, 2011).

44 Westat and Policy Studies Associates. The Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance.

45 Sharkey, Patrick. “Neighborhoods and the Black-White Mobility Gap”

than children living in higher income communities.⁴⁶ This has a profound impact on Black children since a high percentage of West Virginia’s Black children live in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, high violent crime rates, and limited support services.

This would suggest that to improve educational outcomes, child and family poverty must be addressed and families must be stabilized and strengthened.

Community and Population Health, Education, and Poverty Nexus

Data compiled by the University of Wisconsin Public Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation show that community and population health outcomes can also be predicted by zip codes.⁴⁷ Communities with low education levels and high poverty rates will have poorer community and population health outcomes than communities with higher education levels and lower poverty rates. This research suggests that addressing and improving the social determinants of health — things like education, poverty, housing, economic opportunities, access to healthy foods, environmental degradation, etc. — is essential to improving community and population health outcomes. It also suggests that the social determinants of health must be addressed through a place-based, people-focused comprehensive community health improvement plan developed and driven by local community stakeholders to improve these outcomes.

The community and population health outcome data reveals that West Virginia follows the same harmful pattern found throughout the country. The poorest counties in the state also have the worst health outcomes and some of the poorest performing schools and lowest achieving students. One notable example in West Virginia that demonstrates the connection between poverty, low education levels, and poor community and population health is the West Side of Charleston. The West Side community is home to the state’s largest Black population. It has high poverty rates, poorly performing schools, high crime rates, and poor community outcomes.

There are lessons that can be gleaned from the latest research regarding strategies to improve community and population health outcomes that may be applicable to improving student educational outcomes, as well. The social determinants of health — poverty, access to healthy foods, housing, transportation, healthy environment, air and water quality — all have a great impact on community and population health outcomes and could also be the keys to improving student educational achievement.

In light of the aforementioned research and the connections between community health and education, HOPE Community Development Corporation (HOPE CDC), with support from the Tuesday Morning Group (TMG) and Charleston Branch NAACP (NAACP), has developed an education reform idea based on amending, expanding, and re-enacting The Community Development School Pilot Program (CDSPP).

The HOPE CDC’s Public Education Re-design Pilot Program has two main components: 1) To authorize the State School Superintendent to designate up to five public schools as CDSPP schools to be governed by local governing boards; and 2) To authorize the State School Superintendent to work collaboratively with other state agencies to create a pilot project to improve community and population health outcomes by addressing poverty, substance abuse, and social services coordination using the West Side Revive Movement Model. The HOPE CDSPP/West Side Revive Movement Model is designed based on the latest research funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and conducted by the University of Wisconsin Public Health Institute. This research suggests a direct correlation between community education levels, income levels, and community and population health outcomes.

46 Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “The Public Health Approach Model”.

47 University of Wisconsin Public Health Institute, “County Health Rankings Roadmap Report” <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>.

The CDSPP legislation was first enacted in 2010 under Senate Bill 2009 as an alternative to charter school legislation that had been proposed during the 2010 Extraordinary Special Legislative Session, and was later expanded in 2013 as a component of Governor Earl Ray Tomblin's omnibus education reform initiative. The purpose of the CDSPP legislation was to identify and implement best practices that would improve educational outcomes for low income, minority, and under-achieving students and to replicate those practices in other schools.

However, the CDSPP was never adequately funded, did not receive the required involvement and oversight from the State School Superintendent and state and local school boards, and did not receive appropriate oversight from the West Virginia Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability (LOCEA). As such, the CDSPP was never implemented or executed as intended.

By addressing the social determinants of health through comprehensive community development, we can improve community and population health outcomes while simultaneously improving educational outcomes.

Conclusion

The research cited above clearly suggests that increasing education levels and incomes is key to addressing poverty, crime, and other social determinants of health and to improving community and population health outcomes. Education is a key social determinant of health that is dependent upon other social determinants of health and should be addressed in concert with other social determinants of health and not independently. It is also reasonable to conclude that many of the racial disparities outlined in this report in the areas of early childhood development, education, income, housing, health, and juvenile and criminal justice should and can be addressed by addressing the social determinants of health.

The majority of West Virginia's Black Americans reside in high concentration in 15 distinctive communities where most of the children and most of the families are connected to the public schools. The public school system receives the largest public expenditure, and therefore is the natural institution to anchor education reform.



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