

## Racial Equity Learning Series Compilation

*Carpenter's Shelter is striving for racial equity, meaning that everyone is given the help they need to have the same opportunities regardless of skin color. We are in our first year of looking expressly at the link between racial equity and homelessness. That process begins by recognizing our history and long standing inequities so that we are better equipped to address them. Our data shows that people of color are disproportionately over represented within our shelter population even though they make up a noticeably smaller percentage of the City of Alexandria's population.*

*You are a committed volunteer and you contribute to our success just like our staff and Board. We want to share information and ideas with you. This is your introduction to our Racial Equity Learning Series. Each month the Volunteer Vine will feature an informative piece relevant to the topic of racial equity. We invite you to learn and grow alongside us on this issue.*

## **October 2019: The Pervasive Effects of Redlining in 2019**

Redlining was the practice of marking specific neighborhoods, comprised of people of color, as "hazardous" by lending institutions like the Federal Home Owner's Loan Corp. in the 1930's. Physical maps were marked with red lines to separate these neighborhoods from "desirable" ones. Those inhabiting "hazardous areas" were unable to access loans to improve their housing. Such discriminatory practices by the Federal Government have led to systemic racism and individuals are still facing the consequences of these practices today. Redlining has led to a continuation of segregation and poverty among communities of color.

Although redlining became illegal in 1968, the National Community Reinvestment Coalition found that the majority of redlined neighborhoods are still struggling economically. This cycle of poverty has isolated many people of color, prevented economic growth, and led to network impoverishment within these communities. However, the effects of redlining are felt everywhere. The majority of those entering shelter do so because of a lack of affordable housing. Redlining is only one of the ways systemic racism is seen throughout the country and here at home in Alexandria.

Interested in hearing a first hand account of redlining? Check out this short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmMs8eQP4T0>

## **November 2019: The War on Drugs**

The war on drugs was a federal campaign, instituted by President Nixon in 1971, to reduce the drug trade in the United States. Several laws enacted under this campaign targeted minorities and populations living in poverty. In 1986, the sentencing disparity for those in possession of crack, which was found almost entirely in communities of color, to those found in possession of cocaine was 100 to 1. The laws sought to criminalize and take punitive action for the crack epidemic which, if viewed with the same lens as the current opioid epidemic, would have and should have been characterized and responded to as a public health crisis. The impact of those policies in conjunction with the rise of for profit prisons has led to the prison industrial complex system that currently incarcerates more black people than were enslaved during Slavery.

According to the Drug Policy Alliance, nearly 80% of people in federal prison and 60% of those in state prison for drug offenses are Black or Latinx. An individual's housing stability is greatly affected by their criminal background as many housing applications require individuals to disclose whether or not they have a felony conviction. Imprisonment for minor drug offenses can deeply affect and change the course of a person's life. These discriminatory laws, while many have been reduced to lesser sentences, still disproportionately negatively affect people of color to this day.

For more information on Drug Policy and Racism click the following:

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/issues/drug-policy/>

<https://www.drugpolicy.org/issues/race-and-drug-war>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn5YyGzQ7SU>

## **December 2019: Race and Healthcare**

Access to health care is a direct determinate of length and quality of life. Through slavery, reconstruction, the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights Movement, and even through today, there have been consistent racial health disparities. Access to doctors and hospitals were limited for black Americans. Initially blacks were barred from hospitals and the majority of doctors operated under incorrect information about biological differences between blacks and whites. Even now black and low income communities have less access to health care due to proximity of services and segregation of funds for hospitals in white upper class communities. In 1945, President Truman attempted to expand our health care system to reach vulnerable and rural communities; these funds for health care and hospitals were heavily segregated, which only became illegal after the Civil Rights act of 1964. Medicare and Medicaid were also brought forth to expand access, but had limitations based on age, employment and income. The Affordable Care Act in 2010 expanded health insurance to 20 million uninsured adults, aiding in the decline in racial health disparities. But even under the ACA, many states opted out of Medicaid expansion -- which means there are still work requirements that leave millions uninsured.

Limiting access to health care impacts the most vulnerable populations including those we serve here at Carpenter's Shelter. Our case management team works tirelessly to help individuals gain health insurance, and our volunteers provide medical assistance to those uninsured staying with us. While Medicare, Medicaid, and the ACA all have expanded insurance to help shrink racial disparities--no policy has created racial health equity. In next month's article, we will continue the look at race and health care by examining both food deserts and access to mental health care.

For more information on Race and Health Care:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/universal-health-care-racism.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVZKZNXyBA>

## January 2020: Food Apartheid

The effects of redlining, segregation, and systematic racism are seen in all aspects of American life. When looking at physical health, there are disparities caused by access to healthy, fresh, affordable food. According to the CDC, 46.8% of all non-Hispanic Black persons' experience obesity and 47% of Hispanic persons' experience obesity. Non-Hispanic Black adults are most likely to die by heart disease and are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanic Asian or Pacific Islander persons to die of heart disease. These health trends can be causally linked to a lack of access to healthy food.

The US Dept of Agriculture describes the concept of "Food Deserts" as places where people have limited access to a variety of healthy and affordable food. Instead of accessible grocery stores and supermarkets there are often gas stations, fast food restaurants, and corner stores that primarily serve sugary, fatty foods. The term "food desert" is being replaced with "food apartheid" by nutrition and food activists like Karen Washington. Food apartheid is used to recognize the corporate decisions and systemic and structural issues, such as urban planning and redlining, that cause this phenomenon.

Occurrences of food apartheid can be found all over the country. The neighborhood of Deanwood in Washington, D.C. lacks any grocery store. There are 5,000 residents who have access only to corner stores that sell beer and pre-made food with no supply of fruit, vegetables, or meat. The residents of Deanwood and their health are impacted by corporations not wanting to place their grocery stores in predominantly black and low-income areas. However, just placing a nice grocery store nearby is not the only thing needed to combat this health disparity. A myriad of changes, including raising the minimum wage, increasing access to affordable housing, and funding for education, in conjunction with grocery stores will help these communities.

Here at Carpenter's Shelter, we are lucky enough to have volunteers provide and serve all meals for our residents. It is important that all people have access to healthy meals to maintain a healthy lifestyle- especially our clients, who are already in a vulnerable position.

To learn more:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEAHU56Q3wo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjDdYeSaEog>

## **February 2020: 21 Day Racial Equity Challenge**

Through this Racial Equity Learning Series and our internal Racial Equity Task Force, we are striving to be anti-racist advocates in the community. In our last article, we discussed food apartheid and health disparities between black and white Americans. As we continue this dialogue, we are asking you to join our staff in participating in a 21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge through Food Solutions.

This challenge, which starts on March 30th and ends on April 19th, focuses on Racial Equity and Food justice. If you opt to participate, each morning you will receive an article, audio file, or video that explores the impact of race on the food system. We encourage participants to engage with staff through social media and discussion boards to further explore this topic as part of the challenge. By clicking [here](#) to pre-register you will join us in making a concerted effort to educate ourselves and our community on Racial Equity.

## March 2020: School to Prison Pipeline

As discussed in previous articles, structural racism effects every aspect of our lives. Living in a country that was founded on the ideals of racism and white supremacy limits access to resources and overall opportunity for people of color. This lack of opportunity is plainly seen through educational resources, quality of schools, and an increase of black children and children of color leaving schools and entering juvenile detention centers.

Historically, schools for black children or in predominately black neighborhoods were under-funded and under-staffed. Now, failing public schools are seen throughout the country, especially in rural, inner-city, and all low-income communities. There are private and charter school options for those with the means to send their children to these schools. However, those who cannot afford that are stuck with second-rate public schools. With overcrowded classrooms, under-qualified teachers, and lack of educational resources like textbooks and computers, the students that attend these schools are already a step behind of those with more resources at better schools. As we have learned with redlining, those who have had a low socioeconomic status historically are often still impoverished and those in their network are also impoverished. Black Americans who are already a step behind their white counterparts are less likely to be able to send their children out of the way to private and charter schools and will be stuck at second class schools.

In recent years, there has been an increase in zero tolerance policies in public schools. These policies mean that schools have zero tolerance for any sort of misbehavior or violation of school rules. Many schools use suspension and expulsion as a means to punish students for these actions. According to the ACLU, students who experience suspension or expulsion are less likely to finish school and more likely to be arrested or involved in the criminal justice system. This pipeline to prison is facilitated by a heavy police presence on school campuses. While this presence is intended to ensure safety, police often escalate minor infractions to violent, criminal incidents. Having this presence increases the likelihood of criminal charges against students.

These policies lead to lower graduation rates for students of color and more students of color entering juvenile detention centers or adult prisons and jails. The combination of failing schools, zero tolerance policies, and police presence on campus create a push from school to prison.

To learn more:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04pcSyzwoTg>

## April 2020: Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected almost every person on earth. The United States has an alarmingly high number of cases. The toll of these cases and the impacts of social distancing and the closing of non-essential businesses are being felt throughout our country and throughout our community. But why are People of Color (POC) more likely to die from the virus than white Americans?

There are no biological differences between races. Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Michael Adams has recommended that black Americans quit smoking, drinking, and doing drugs to reduce and prevent the abundance of cases in the black community. Dr. Adams' inferences notwithstanding, medical predispositions associated with a particular race, especially in this case, can be linked to a history of discrimination and racism. In the black community, these include:

- the prevalence of diabetes and obesity caused by food apartheid, less access to affordable health care, and medical discrimination
- a prevalence of homelessness caused by redlining and segregation
- high addiction rates caused by the war on drugs, marketing from corporations, and less access to mental health care
- high incarceration rates caused by black Americans being targeted by a criminal justice system that targets and punishes black Americans more aggressively than white Americans.

Throughout the country, 29 states have reported racial disparities among those infected by COVID-19. According to The Atlantic, over 70% of those who have died in Louisiana were black Americans, although black Americans make up only 32% of the state's population. In New York, black Americans are only 9% of the state population, yet they account for 17% of the COVID-19 deaths.

Systemic and institutional racism in the U.S. has led to higher numbers of POC working in positions that cannot be performed from home (via telework), thus resulting in higher layoff rates. At the same time, there are higher numbers of POC in positions that, while low-paying, are deemed to be essential resulting in these individuals having higher exposure rates as they continue to work to pay bills and remain housed.

These disparities highlight the interconnection of all aspects of discrimination and the need for racial equity. It is why we here at the Shelter have spent more than a year now exploring the links between racial equity and homelessness. You've seen articles in past Volunteer Vine issues, and you will see more in the future. Our hope is that you will come along with us on this learning journey and ultimately take action to address the inequity. The problem is pervasive, and it is here in our community, as well as all across the country.

To learn more:

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/114889>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/race-and-blame/609946/>

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/14/opinions/surgeon-general-comments-covid-19-black-communities-sellers/index.html>

<https://covidtracking.com/data> <https://antiracismcenter.com/>



## May 2020: Police Brutality in the age of COVID-19

Police brutality is one of the most glaring observations of racial disparity within the United States. 1 in every 1,000 black men in the United States are killed by police officers over the course of a lifetime according to an article by Edwards, Lee, and Esposito. They are 2.5x more likely to be killed by police than any white person. The institution of the police force can be linked back to the need for night watches in the colonies. However, the economic forces of slavery called for a more secure group to enforce slave patrols. While individuals are not inherently racist, the entire institution calls for the inhumane treatment of black and brown folk. As discussed in previous articles, non-white individuals are targeted by the police and much more likely to be incarcerated or killed.

One very notable example of the disparity in treatment by the police is Michael Bloomberg's stop-and-frisk policy in New York City. Stop-and-frisk is a crime prevention policy that Bloomberg expanded in his time as Mayor in an attempt to reduce gun violence. According to the New York Times, there were over 5 million recorded police stops during Bloomberg's term. However, black and Hispanic individuals were 9 times more likely to be stopped but 2 times less likely to have a gun than white individuals. This policy had been criticized for being racist and was found illegal by a judge in 2013 who ruled it was racial profiling.

New York City has some of the highest concentrations of positive COVID-19 cases in the world. During the pandemic, the police force has been tasked with enforcing social distancing. A heart-warming story about officers distributing masks to white people enjoying a park in the West Village has been trending around news networks. The video shows a crowded park of white individuals laying on picnic blankets with their friends, many not sitting 6 feet apart or wearing masks, enjoying the nice weather. Several police officers walked around handing masks to those without them. Over in the East Village, another video went viral of a plain-clothes officer assaulting a black man for not social distancing. This officer was also not wearing a protective face mask. He arrested this man and his girlfriend, along with two other people in the same area—directly across the street from a public housing complex. The disparity in the enforcement of social distancing is a clear example of the different ways police interact with various races.

Citations:

<https://twitter.com/rafaelshimunov/status/1257199051180773379>

Edwards, Frank, et al. "Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race—Ethnicity, and Sex." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 116, no. 34, May 2019, pp. 16793–16798., doi:10.1073/pnas.1821204116.

Southall, Ashley, and Michael Gold. "Why 'Stop-and-Frisk' Inflamed Black and Hispanic Neighborhoods." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 17 Nov. 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/11/17/nyregion/bloomberg-stop-and-frisk-new-york.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/17/nyregion/bloomberg-stop-and-frisk-new-york.html).

Wabc. "Coronavirus News: Video of NYPD Arrest during Social Distancing Enforcement Sparks Outcry." *ABC7 New York*, 4 May 2020, [abc7ny.com/nypd-violent-arrest-east-village-caught-on-camera-legal-aid/6147631/](http://abc7ny.com/nypd-violent-arrest-east-village-caught-on-camera-legal-aid/6147631/).

Waxman, Olivia B. "The History of Police in America and the First Force." Time, Time, 6 Mar. 2019, [time.com/4779112/police-history-origins/](https://time.com/4779112/police-history-origins/).