

STRUCTURAL RACISM

*The information below is a brief, incomplete overview of slavery in US history.

DEFINITION

A system in which public policies, institutional practices (including medicine), cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequities. It is woven into the fabric of social, economic, political and healthcare systems in which we all exist.

1619-1862: Slavery

A legal institution of enslaving human beings, mainly Africans and African Americans, who were forced to do hideous unpaid work and deprived of any rights of free people.

1865-1877: Reconstruction

An attempt to redress the inequities of slavery (e.g. black male suffrage).

1900s: The Great Migration

Harsh penalties including lynchings, unequal judicial rights, and disenfranchisement from the dominant white socioeconomic system resulted in many Black people fleeing to northern/western states.

1960s: Civil Rights Era

A decades long campaign by Black people and allies to end racial discrimination by peaceful protest. Jim Crow Laws overturned by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Other negative downstream consequences for Black Americans:

- Higher charges in criminal justice for same crimes as whites
- War on Drugs targeted and criminalized drug use among Blacks with equal use in whites
- Schools with fewer resources
- Inter-generational trauma
- Higher risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Structural racism predominately negatively impacts Black people, however, Indigenous and other persons of color also suffer from policies and practices that promote white supremacy.

1862: Emancipation

Slaves freed post Civil War, yet slavery evolved and the narrative of racial inferiority continued to limit Black people's opportunity in the US.

Late 1800s: Jim Crow Laws

Laws enacted in the late 19th century by white Southern state legislatures to remove political gains made by Black people during Reconstruction. Mandated racial segregation in all public facilities including schools, transportation, restaurants, restrooms, etc.

1900s: Disparities in Wealth Acquisition

Discriminatory policies and practices (e.g. redlining) systematically excluded Black Americans from the home mortgage market and restricted them to segregated communities with limited resources and depressed property values. Black homeowners inherited less wealth. Public schools rely on property tax for funding; lower property taxes resulted in poorly funded Black schools.

Today

The juvenile justice system confines black youths at 4x the rate of white youth for the same offenses. Black men are 2x as likely to face homelessness, poverty and unemployment post release from jail vs white men.

Sources: Aspen Institute, Equal Justice Initiative

HEALTH DISPARITIES

Land Acknowledgment:
RUMC is located on
Indigenous land.

EXPLICIT BIAS

conscious attitudes toward certain groups that when negative are usually triggered by perceived loss of power and sense of devaluation

IMPLICIT BIAS

attitudes toward people or groups without our conscious knowledge - we all have them

THE DEATH GAP

In Chicago:
2 miles, 16-year gap in life expectancy



ANCESTRY & DNA

- In 2003, The Human Genome Project confirmed **humans share 99.9% of our DNA**.
- **Alleles**, or the “flavor” of a gene are **shared over multiple regions** and have **no consistent relationship to socially defined racial groups**. There are more intra-racial variations vs interracial variations. (eg. all humans have the same gene that codes for hair, different alleles result in hair of different colors/textures)
- **Ancestry**: the geographical origins of one’s ancestors - **it is distinct from race**
- Many **clinical decision tools perpetuated across generations use race as a variable**, resulting in **worse medical outcomes for Black and brown patients**. (Eg. eGFR, and the heart failure drug, BiDiL, suggested for use among Black patients.)
- **Race is a social construct** that lacks genetic definition

Race, not racism, causes health disparities

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Sources: CDC, KFF

- **Educate yourself!** You can learn the history that was not taught, there are many resources.
- **Do not expect or anticipate individuals from minority groups to educate you** or others on their experiences with discrimination. For some individuals, you ask them to relive their **trauma**.

- Find out **how to be an ally**, ask someone how to support them.
- It’s okay to say that you are still learning. **Be open to feedback** so that you can continue to grow.
- Think about the ways in which structural racism is **impacting your patients and their health - be an advocate for change!**