



**California Task Force to Study and Develop
Reparation Proposals for African Americans**

INTERIM REPORT

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GRAPHIC CONTENT WARNING

This report contains discussions of racial discrimination, sexual assault, torture, lynching and other forms of extreme violence. The report contains unedited historical quotations and photographs of white supremacist hatred, torture, lynching, autopsy, and other forms of graphic violence.

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I. Introduction

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, and, in 1865, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution commanded that “[n]either slavery nor involuntary servitude ... shall exist within the United States.”¹ In supporting the passage of the 13th Amendment, its co-author Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois said that “it is perhaps difficult to draw the precise line, to say where freedom ceases and slavery begins...”² In 1883, the Supreme Court interpreted the 13th Amendment as empowering Congress “to pass all laws necessary and proper for abolishing all badges and incidents of slavery in the United States.”³

However, throughout the rest of American history, instead of abolishing the “badges and incidents of slavery,” the United States federal, state and local governments, including California, perpetuated and created new iterations of these “badges and incidents.” The resulting harms have been innumerable and have snowballed over generations.

This interim report is a general survey of these harms, as part of the broader efforts of California’s Task Force to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans (Reparations Task Force). The Reparations Task Force was established under Assembly Bill 3121 (S.

Weber) in 2020 and a report of the Task Force is due to the Legislature by June 1, 2022. A final report will be issued before July 1, 2023. The law charges the Reparations Task Force with studying the institution of slavery and its lingering negative effects on society and living African Americans. The law requires the Reparations Task Force to recommend appropriate remedies of compensation, rehabilitation, and restitution for African Americans with a special consideration for descendants of persons enslaved in the United States. This executive summary synthesizes many of the preliminary findings and recommendations of the Reparations Task Force.

So thoroughly have the effects of slavery infected every aspect of American society over the last 400 years, that it is nearly impossible to identify every “badge and incident of slavery,” to include every piece of evidence, or describe every harm done to African Americans. In order to address this practical reality, this interim report of the Reparations Task Force describes a sample of government actions and the compounding harms that have resulted, organized into 12 specific areas of systemic discrimination.

In order to maintain slavery, government actors adopted white supremacist beliefs and passed laws to create a racial hierarchy and to control both enslaved and free African Americans.⁴ Although the U.S. constitution recognized African Americans as citizens on paper, the government failed to give them the full rights of citizenship,⁵ and failed to protect—and often sanctioned or directly participated—African Americans from widespread terror and violence.⁶ Along with a dereliction of its duty to protect its Black citizens, direct federal, state and local government actions continued to enforce the racist lies created to justify slavery. These laws and government supported cultural beliefs have since formed the foundation of innumerable modern laws, policies, and practices across the nation.⁷

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More Than 50 percent of U.S. Presidents from 1789 to 1885 enslaved African Americans



The first twenty-one Presidents seated together in The White House. The enslavers are shaded in red.

Today, 160 years after the abolition of slavery, its badges and incidents remain embedded in the political, legal, health, financial, educational, cultural, environmental, social, and economic systems of the United States of America.⁸ Racist, false, and harmful stereotypes created to support slavery continue to physically and mentally

harm African Americans today.⁹ Without a remedy specifically targeted to dismantle our country's racist foundations and heal the injuries inflicted by colonial and American governments, the "badges and incidents of slavery" will continue to harm African Americans in almost all aspects of life.

II. Enslavement

Nationally

The foundation of America's wealth was built upon trafficked African peoples and their descendants—built by their forced labor and their bodies as they were bought and sold as commodities.¹⁰ American government at all levels allowed or participated in exploiting, abusing, terrorizing, and murdering people of African descent so that mostly white Americans could profit from their enslavement.¹¹

After the War of Independence, the United States built one of the largest and most profitable enslaved labor economies in the world.¹²

The federal government politically and financially supported enslavement.¹³ The United States adopted a national constitution that protected slavery and gave pro-slavery white Americans outsized political power in the federal government.¹⁴ Half of the nation's pre-Civil War presidents enslaved African Americans while in office,¹⁵ and throughout American history, more than 1,700 Congressmen from 37 states, once enslaved Black people.¹⁶ By 1861, almost two percent of the entire budget of the United States went to pay for expenses related to enslavement,¹⁷ such as enforcing fugitive slave laws.¹⁸

Enslavers made more than \$159 million between 1820 and 1860 by trafficking African Americans within the U.S.¹⁹ Charles Ball, an enslaved man who was bought by slave traffickers in Maryland and forced to march to South Carolina, later remembered: "I seriously meditated on self-destruction, and had I been at liberty to get a rope, I believe I should have hanged myself at Lancaster... I had now no hope of ever again seeing my wife and children, or of revisiting the scenes of my youth."²⁰

Historians have argued that many of today's financial accounting and management practices began among enslavers in the U.S. South and the Caribbean.²¹ In order to continually increase production and profits, enslavers regularly staged public beatings and other violent acts and provided deplorable living conditions.²²

Historians have also found evidence that enslavers raped and impregnated enslaved women and girls, and profited from this sexual violence by owning and selling their own children.²³ President Thomas Jefferson, who enslaved four of his own children, wrote that the "labor of a breeding [enslaved] woman" who births a child every two years is as profitable as the best enslaved worker on the farm.²⁴

In the census of 1860, the last census taken before the Civil War, of the about 12 million people living in the 15 slave-holding states, almost four million were enslaved.²⁵ In order to terrorize and force this enormous population to work without pay, the colonial and American governments created a different type of slavery.

Unlike in what historians call the pre-modern era, slavery in America was based on the idea that race was the sole basis for life-long enslavement, that children were

The American colonial Slave Codes created a new type of slavery that was different than the slavery which existed in pre-modern times.

- Babies were enslaved at birth, for their entire lives, and for the entire lives of their children, and their children's children.
- These laws denied political, legal and social rights to free and enslaved Black people alike in order to more easily control enslaved people.
- These laws divided white people from Black people by making interracial marriage a crime.

Some of these laws survived well into the 20th century. The Supreme Court only declared that outlawing interracial marriage was unconstitutional in 1967.

enslaved from birth, and that people of African descent were naturally destined to be enslaved.²⁶ Colonists in North America claimed and passed laws²⁷ to maintain a false racial hierarchy where white people were naturally superior.²⁸ Colonial laws effectively made it legal for enslavers to kill the people they enslaved.²⁹ In some states, free nor enslaved African Americans could not vote or hold public office.³⁰ Enslaved people could not resist a white person, leave a plantation without permission, or gather in large groups away from plantations.³¹

After the War of Independence, the American government continued to pass laws to maintain this false racial hierarchy which treated all Black people as less than human.³² After the Civil War, the federal government failed to meaningfully protect the rights and lives of African Americans.³³ When Andrew Johnson became president after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, he proclaimed in 1866, “[t]his is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be a government for white men[.]”³⁴

The Slave Codes were reborn as the Black Codes, and then as the Jim Crow laws segregating Black and white Americans in every aspect of life.³⁵ Although many of these laws were most prominent in the South, they reflected a national desire to reinforce a racial hierarchy based in white supremacy.

California

Despite California entering the Union in 1850 as a free state, its early state government supported slavery.³⁶ Proslavery white southerners held a great deal of power in the state legislature, the court system, and among California’s representatives in the U.S. Congress.³⁷

III. Racial Terror

Nationally

After slavery, white Americans, frequently aided by the government, maintained the badges of slavery by carrying out violence and intimidation against African Americans for decades.⁴⁵ Racial terror pervaded every aspect of post-slavery Black life and prevented African Americans from building the same wealth and political influence as white Americans.⁴⁶

African Americans faced threats of violence when they tried to vote, when they tried to buy homes in white neighborhoods, when they tried to swim in public pools, and when they tried to assert equal rights through the

Some scholars estimate that up to 1,500 enslaved African Americans lived in California in 1852.³⁸ Enslaved people trafficked to California often worked under dangerous conditions,³⁹ lived in unclean environments,⁴⁰ and faced brutal violence.⁴¹

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“Hampton, Virginia. Slab-town” After the Civil War, African Americans lived in large, segregated refugee camps like Slabtown because there was nowhere else for them to go. Hospitals, dispensaries, and military camps were unable to serve the masses of enslaved people, Black soldiers, and other refugees who entered the North due to the Civil War. Escaped and abandoned formerly enslaved people settled near or within the Union Army’s military camps and battle lines. The camps did not have adequate sanitation, nutrition, or medical care. One out of every four African American who lived in the camps died. (1864)

In 1852, California passed and enforced a fugitive slave law that was harsher than the federal fugitive slave law, and this made California a more proslavery state than most other free states.⁴² California also outlawed non-white people from testifying in any court case involving white people.⁴³

California did not ratify the Fourteenth Amendment until 1959, which protected the equal rights of all citizens, and the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibited states from denying a person’s right to vote on the basis of race, until 1962.⁴⁴

courts or in legislation.⁴⁷ White mobs bombed, murdered, and destroyed entire towns.⁴⁸ Federal, state, and local governments ignored the violence, failed to or refused to prosecute offenders, or participated in the violence themselves.⁴⁹

Racial terror takes direct forms, such as physical assault, threats of injury, and destruction of property. It also inflicts psychological trauma on those who witness the harm and injury.⁵⁰ Many African Americans were traumatized from surviving mass violence and by the constant terror of living in the South.⁵¹ Lynchings in the American South were not isolated hate crimes

Executive Summary

committed by rogue vigilantes, but part of a systematic campaign of terror to enforce the racial hierarchy.⁵² Racial terror targeted at successful African Americans has contributed to the present wealth gap between Black and white Americans.⁵³

While lynching and mob murders are no longer the social norm, scholars have argued that its modern equivalent continues to haunt African Americans today as extrajudicial killings by the law enforcement and civilian vigilantes.⁵⁴ Racial terror remains a tool for other forms of discrimination and control of African Americans from redlining and segregated schools to disparate healthcare and denial of bank loans.

California

Supported by their government, ordinary citizens also terrorized and murdered Black Californians.⁵⁵ The Ku

Klux Klan (KKK) established local chapters all over the state in the 1920s.⁵⁶ During that time, California sometimes even held more KKK events than Mississippi or Louisiana.⁵⁷ Many of California's KKK members were prominent individuals who held positions in civil leadership and police departments.⁵⁸

For example, in 1920s Los Angeles, prominent and numerous city government officials were KKK members or had KKK ties, including the mayor, district attorneys, and police officers.⁵⁹ Violence against African Americans peaked in the 1940s, as more Black Californians tried to buy homes in white neighborhoods.⁶⁰

Today, police violence against and extrajudicial killings of African Americans occur in California in the same manner as they do in the rest of the country.⁶¹

IV. Political Disenfranchisement

Nationally

African Americans have pursued equal political participation since before the Civil War, but the federal, state, and local governments of the United States have suppressed and continue to suppress Black votes and Black political power.⁶² After the Civil War, the United States protected the voting rights of African Americans on paper, but not in reality.⁶³ During the 12-year period after the Civil War called Reconstruction, the federal government tried to give newly freed African Americans access to basic civil rights⁶⁴ and, by 1868, more than 700,000 Black men were registered to vote in the South.⁶⁵ During Reconstruction, over 1,400 African Americans held federal, state, or local office, and more than 600 served in state assemblies.⁶⁶

However, that progress was short lived.

During the contested presidential election of 1876, Republicans and Democrats agreed to withdraw federal troops from key locations in the South, effectively ending Reconstruction.⁶⁷ Southern states then willfully ignored the voting protections in the U.S. Constitution, and passed literacy tests, poll taxes, challenger laws, grandfather clauses, and other devices to prevent African Americans from voting.⁶⁸ States also barred African Americans from serving on juries.⁶⁹

This targeted government action was extremely effective in stripping African Americans of what little political power gained during the Reconstruction era.

For example, in 1867 Black turnout in Virginia was 90 percent.⁷⁰ After Virginia's voter suppression laws took effect, the number of Black voters dropped from 147,000 to 21,000.⁷¹ During Reconstruction, 16 Black men held seats in Congress.⁷² From 1901 until the 1970s, not a single African American served in Congress.⁷³

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Rayfield Lundy, Republican candidate for the California 55th Assembly District inspects a burnt cross at 1816 East 122nd Street, Los Angeles, California. (1952)

These government actions returned white supremacists to power in local, state, and federal government.⁷⁴ Historians have argued that racist lawmakers elected from the Southern states blocked hundreds of federal civil rights laws⁷⁵ and rewrote many of the country's most important pieces of legislation to exclude or discriminate against African Americans.⁷⁶

For example the New Deal, a series of federal laws and policies designed to pull America out of the Great Depression, created the modern white middle class and many of the programs that Americans depend upon today, such as Social Security.⁷⁷ But the New Deal excluded African Americans from many of its benefits.⁷⁸

Historians have argued that southern lawmakers ensured that the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly known as the G.I. Bill) was administered by states instead of the federal government to guarantee that states could direct its funds to white veterans.⁷⁹ Similarly, in order to secure the support of white southern lawmakers, Congress included segregation clauses or rejected anti-discrimination clauses in the Hospital Survey and Reconstruction Act of 1946 (commonly known as the Hill Burton Act), which paid for our modern healthcare infrastructure. The same tactics were applied to the American Housing Act of 1949, which helped white Americans buy single family homes.⁸⁰ These federal legislative decisions enshrined the government sanctioned discrimination of African

Americans for decades to come and perpetuates the racial hierarchy today.

California

California also passed and enforced laws to prevent Black Californians from accumulating political power.⁸¹

California passed a law prohibiting non-white witnesses from testifying against white Californians.⁸² This law shielded white defendants from justice.⁸³ The California Supreme Court explained that any non-white person to testify "would admit them to all the equal rights of citizenship, and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls," a prospect that the court viewed as an "actual and present danger."⁸⁴

California did not allow Black men to vote until 1879.⁸⁵ The state also passed many of the voter suppression laws that were used in the South. California prohibited individuals convicted of felonies from voting,⁸⁶ added a poll tax,⁸⁷ and put in place a literacy test.⁸⁸

V. Housing Segregation

Nationally

America's racial hierarchy was the foundation for a system of segregation in the United States after the Civil War.⁸⁹ The aim of segregation was not only to separate, but also to force African Americans to live in worse conditions in nearly every aspect of life.⁹⁰

Government actors, working with private individuals, actively segregated America into Black and white neighborhoods.⁹¹ Although this system of segregation was called Jim Crow in the South, it existed by less obvious, but effective means throughout the entire country, including in California.⁹²

During enslavement, about 90 percent of African Americans were forced to live in the South.⁹³ Immediately after the Civil War, the country was racially and geographically configured in ways that were different from the way it is segregated today.⁹⁴ Throughout the 20th century, American federal, state, and local municipal governments expanded and solidified segregation efforts through zoning ordinances, slum clearance policies, construction of parks and freeways through Black neighborhoods, and public housing siting decisions.⁹⁵ Courts enforced racial covenants that prevented homes from being sold to African Americans well into late 1940s.⁹⁶

The federal government used redlining to deny African Americans equal access to the capital needed to buy a single-family home while at the same time subsidizing white Americans' efforts to own the same type of home.⁹⁷ As President Herbert Hoover stated in 1931, single-family homes were "expressions of racial longing" and "[t]hat our people should live in their own homes is a sentiment deep in the heart of our race."⁹⁸

The passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968 outlawed housing discrimination, but did not fix the structures put in place by 100 years of discriminatory government policies, and residential segregation continues today.⁹⁹

The average urban Black person in 1890 lived in a neighborhood that was only 27 percent Black.¹⁰⁰ In 2019, America is as segregated as it was in the 1940s, with the average urban Black person living in a neighborhood that is 44 percent Black.¹⁰¹ Better jobs, tax dollars, municipal services, healthy environments, good schools, access to health care, and grocery stores have followed white residents to the suburbs, leaving concentrated poverty, underfunded schools, collapsing infrastructure, polluted water and air, crime, and food deserts in segregated inner city neighborhoods.¹⁰²

California

In California, the federal, state, and local government created segregation through redlining, zoning ordinances, decisions on where to build schools and highways and discriminatory federal mortgage policies.¹⁰³ California “sundown towns,” (a term derived from municipal signs announcing that African Americans must leave by dusk) like most of the suburbs of Los Angeles and San Francisco, prohibited African Americans from living in entire cities throughout the state.¹⁰⁴

The federal government financed many whites only neighborhoods throughout the state.¹⁰⁵ The federal Home Owners’ Loan Corporation maps used in redlining described many Californian neighborhoods in racially discriminatory terms.¹⁰⁶ For example, in San Diego there were “servant’s areas” of La Jolla and several areas “restricted to the Caucasian race.”¹⁰⁷

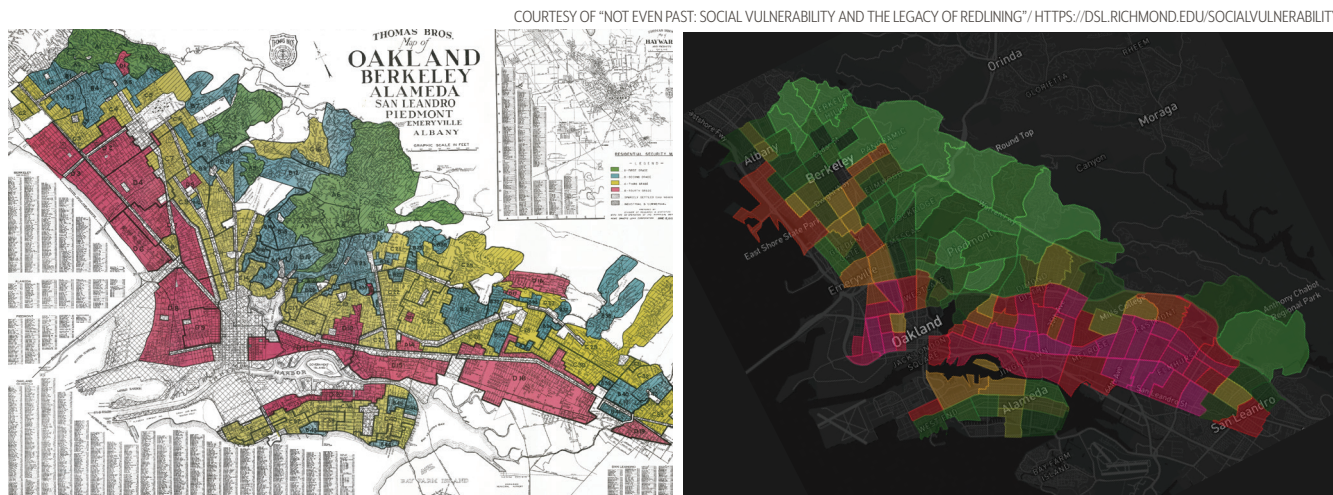
During World War II, the federal government paid to build segregated housing for defense workers in Northern California.¹⁰⁸ Housing for white workers generally better constructed and permanent.¹⁰⁹ While white workers lived in rooms paid for by the federal government, Black wartime workers lived in cardboard shacks, barns, tents, or open fields.¹¹⁰

Racially-restrictive covenants, which were clauses in property deeds that usually allowed only white residents to live on the property described in the deed, were commonplace and California courts enforced them well into the 1940s.¹¹¹

Numerous neighborhoods around the state rezoned Black neighborhoods for industrial use to steer white residents towards better neighborhoods¹¹² or adopted zoning ordinances to ban apartment buildings to try and keep out prospective Black residents.¹¹³

State agencies demolished thriving Black neighborhoods in the name of urban renewal and park construction.¹¹⁴ Operating under state law for urban redevelopment, the City of San Francisco declared the Western Addition blighted, and destroyed the Fillmore, San Francisco’s most prominent Black neighborhood and business district.¹¹⁵ In doing so, the City of San Francisco closed 883 businesses, displaced 4,729 households, destroyed 2,500 Victorian homes,¹¹⁶ and damaged the lives of nearly 20,000 people.¹¹⁷

The city then left the land empty for many years.¹¹⁸



The image on the left shows a redlining map of Oakland, CA made by the Home Owners Loan Corporation during the 1930s. The red portions are non-white neighborhoods deemed by the federal agency to be a credit risk. The map on the right shows the Center for Disease Control’s Social Vulnerability Index scores for census tracts today. The Social Vulnerability Index is widely used to assess a community’s capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from human and natural disasters. The red portion indicates the highest level of vulnerability to disasters.

VI. Separate and Unequal Education

Nationally

Through much of American history, enslavers and the white political ruling class in America falsely believed it was in their best interest to deny education to African Americans in order to dominate and control them. Slave states denied education to nearly all enslaved people,

while the North and Midwest segregated their schools and limited or denied access to freed Black people.¹¹⁹

After slavery, southern states maintained the racial hierarchy by legally segregating Black and white children, and white-controlled legislatures funded Black public

schools far less than white public schools.¹²⁰ An Alabama state legislator stated in 1889, “[e]ducation would spoil a good plow hand.”¹²¹ Black teachers received lower wages, and Black children received fewer months of schooling per year and fewer years of schooling per lifetime than white children.¹²²

Contrary to what Americans are taught, the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which established that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional, did not mark the end of segregation.¹²³

Nationally, nonwhite school districts get

\$23 Billion LESS
than predominantly white districts

After *Brown v. Board*, many white people and white-dominated school boards throughout the country actively resisted integration.¹²⁴ In the South, segregation was still in place through the early 1970s due to massive resistance by white communities.¹²⁵ In the rest of the country, including California, education segregation occurred when government sanctioned housing segregation combined with school assignment and siting policies.¹²⁶ Because children attended the schools in their neighborhood and school financing was tied to property taxes, most Black children attended segregated schools with less funding and resources than schools attended by white children.¹²⁷

In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court allowed this type of school segregation to continue in schools if it reflected

residential segregation patterns between the cities and suburbs.¹²⁸ In part, as result of this and other U.S. Supreme Court decisions that followed to further undermine desegregation efforts, many public schools in the United States were integrated and then resegregated, or never integrated in the first place.

California

In 1874, the California Supreme Court ruled segregation in the state’s public schools was legal,¹²⁹ a decision that predated the U.S. Supreme Court’s infamous “separate but equal” 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* by 22 years.¹³⁰

In 1966, as the South was in the process of desegregating, 85 percent of Black Californians attended predominantly minority schools, and only 12 percent of Black students and 39 percent of white students attended racially balanced schools.¹³¹ Like in the South, white Californians fought desegregation and, in a number of school districts, courts had to order districts to desegregate.¹³² Any progress attained through court-enforced desegregation was short-lived. Throughout the mid- to late-1970s, courts overturned, limited, or ignored desegregation orders in many California districts, as the Supreme Court and Congress limited methods to integrate schools.¹³³ In 1979, California passed Proposition 1, which further limited desegregation efforts tied to busing.¹³⁴

In the vast majority of California school districts, schools either re-segregated or were never integrated, and thus segregated schools persists today. California remains the sixth most segregated state in the country for Black students.¹³⁵ In California’s highly segregated schools, schools mostly attended by white and Asian children receive more funding and resources than schools with predominately Black and Latino children.¹³⁶

VII. Racism in Environment and Infrastructure

Nationally

Due to residential segregation, African Americans have lived in poor-quality housing throughout American history, exposing them to disproportionate amounts of lead poisoning and increasing risk of infectious disease.¹³⁷ Segregated Black neighborhoods have more exposure to hazardous waste, oil and gas production, automobile and diesel fumes, and are more likely to have inadequate public services like sewage lines and drinking water pipes.¹³⁸ African Americans are more vulnerable than white Americans to the dangerous effects of extreme weather patterns such as heat waves, made

worse by the effects of human consumption and industrial degradation of the environment.¹³⁹

California

National patterns are replicated in California. Black Californians are more likely than white Californians to live in overcrowded housing, and near hazardous waste.¹⁴⁰ Black neighborhoods are more likely to lack tree canopy¹⁴¹ and suffer from the consequences of water¹⁴² and air pollution.¹⁴³ For instance, Black Californians in the San Joaquin Valley were excluded

from most urban areas with access to clean water as a result of redlining policies, racial covenants, and racially-motivated violence.¹⁴⁴

In Tulare county, the largely Black community of Teviston had no access to sewer and water infrastructure, while the adjacent white community of Pixley did.¹⁴⁵ This discrimination continued until recently: the town of Lanare, formed by Black families fleeing the Dust Bowl, had no running water at all until the 1970s, and was

In the 1950s, a developer in Milpitas, CA tried to build a housing development for both white and Black homebuyers. In response, the Milpitas City Council increased the sewer connection fee more than tenfold to thwart the development.

subjected to dangerous levels of arsenic in the water even after wells and pipes were drilled.¹⁴⁶ The town's residents did not get access to clean drinking until 2019.¹⁴⁷

VIII. Pathologizing the Black Family

Nationally

Government policies and practices—at all levels—have destroyed Black families throughout American history. After the Civil War, southern state governments re-enslaved children by making them “apprentices” and

children.¹⁵³ As of 2019, Black children make up only 14 percent of American children, and yet 23 percent of children in foster care.¹⁵⁴ Studies have shown that this is likely not because Black parents mistreat their children more often, but rather due to racist systems and poverty.¹⁵⁵



forcing them to labor for white Americans, who were sometimes their former enslavers.¹⁴⁸ In the past century, state and federal government financial assistance and child welfare systems have based decisions on racist beliefs created to maintain slavery and which continue to operate today as badges of slavery.¹⁴⁹

Government issued financial assistance has excluded African Americans from receiving benefits. In the early 1900s, state governments made support payments every month to low income single mothers to assist them with the expenses incurred while raising children.¹⁵⁰ Black families were generally excluded, despite their greater need.¹⁵¹

Scholars have found that racial discrimination exists at every stage of the child welfare process.¹⁵² The data show that when equally poor Black and white families are compared, even where both families are considered to be at equal risk for future abuse, state agencies are more likely to remove Black children from their families than white

In the 2015-16 school year, Black students were arrested at three times the rate of white students, while only comprising 15 percent of the population in schools.¹⁵⁶ This disparity widens for Black girls, who make up 17 percent of the school population, but are arrested at 3.3 times the rate of white girls.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the criminal and juvenile justice systems have intensified these harms to Black families by imprisoning large numbers of Black children, thereby separating Black families.¹⁵⁸

California

California trends in the child welfare, juvenile justice and disciplinary action in schools match those in the rest of the country. Recent California Attorney General investigations have found several school districts punish Black students at higher rates than students of other races.¹⁵⁹ Investigations at the Barstow Unified School District, the Oroville City Elementary School District, and the Oroville Union High School District showed that Black students were more likely to be punished and/or suspended, and were subjected to greater punishments, than similarly-situated peers of other races.¹⁶⁰

A 2015 study ranked California among the five worst states in foster care racial disparities.¹⁶¹ Black children in California make up approximately 22 percent of the

foster population, while only *six percent* of the general child population.¹⁶² far higher than the national percentages.¹⁶³ Some counties in California—both urban and rural—have much higher disparities compared to

the statewide average. In San Francisco County, which is largely urban and has nearly 900,000 residents, the percentage of Black children in foster care in 2018 was more than *25 times* the rate of white children.¹⁶⁴

IX. Control Over Creative Cultural and Intellectual Life

Nationally

During slavery, state governments controlled and dictated the forms and content of African American artistic and cultural production.¹⁶⁵ Advocates argue that this is still true today.¹⁶⁶ After the Civil War, governments and politicians embraced minstrelsy, which was the popular

There are estimates that racial violence accounts for 1,100 missing patents that should have been given to African Americans. Cyrus McCormick received a patent for the mechanical reaper, even though it was actually invented by Jo Anderson, a man who was enslaved by the McCormick family.

racist and stereotypical depiction of African Americans through song, dance, and film.¹⁶⁷ Federal and state governments failed to protect Black artists and creators from discrimination and simultaneously promoted discriminatory narratives.¹⁶⁸

Federal and state governments allowed white Americans to steal Black art and culture with impunity—depriving Black creators of valuable copyright and patent protections.¹⁶⁹ State governments denied Black entrepreneurs

and culture makers access to the leisure sites, business licenses, and funding for lifestyle activities that were offered to white people.¹⁷⁰ State governments built monuments to memorialize the Confederacy as just and heroic through monument building, while simultaneously suppressing the nation's history of racism, slavery and genocide.¹⁷¹ States censored cinematic depictions of discrimination while also censoring depictions of Black people integrating into white society.¹⁷²

California

In California, city governments decimated thriving Black neighborhoods with vibrant artistic communities, like the Fillmore in San Francisco.¹⁷³ Local governments in California have discriminated against, punished, and penalized Black students for their fashion, hairstyle, and appearance.¹⁷⁴ State-funded California museums have excluded Black art from their institutions.¹⁷⁵ California has criminalized Black rap artists, as California courts have allowed rap lyrics to be used as evidence related to street gang activity.¹⁷⁶ California has been home to numerous racist monuments and memorials for centuries.¹⁷⁷

X. Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity

Nationally

It is undeniable that the labor of enslaved Africans built the infrastructure of the nation, produced its main agricultural products for domestic consumption and export, and filled the nation's coffers.¹⁷⁸ Since then, federal, state, and local government actions directly segregated and discriminated against African Americans.¹⁷⁹ In 1913, President Woodrow Wilson officially segregated much of the federal workforce.¹⁸⁰ While African Americans have consistently served in the military since the very beginning of the country, the military has historically paid Black soldiers less than white soldiers and often

deemed African Americans unfit for service until the military needed them to fight.¹⁸¹

Federal laws have also protected white workers while denying the same protections to Black workers, empowering private discrimination.¹⁸² Approximately 85 percent of all Black workers in the United States at the time were excluded from the protections passed the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938—protections such as a federal minimum wage, the maximum number of working hours, required overtime pay, and limits on child labor.¹⁸³ The Act essentially outlawed child labor in

industrial settings—where most white children worked—and allowed child labor in agricultural and domestic work—where most Black children worked.¹⁸⁴

Although federal and state laws such as the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act of 1959 prohibit discrimination, enforcement is slow and spotty.¹⁸⁵ Federal and state policies

According to one meta-study, from 1989 to 2014, employment discrimination against African Americans had not decreased.

such as affirmative action produced mixed results or were short lived.¹⁸⁶ African Americans continue to face employment discrimination today.¹⁸⁷

XI. An Unjust Legal System

Nationally

American government at all levels criminalized African Americans for social control, and to maintain an economy based on exploited Black labor.¹⁹³

After the Civil War, and throughout segregation, states passed numerous laws that criminalized African Americans as they performed everyday tasks, like entering into the same waiting rooms as white Americans at bus stations or walking into a park for white people.¹⁹⁴ In the South, until the 1940s, Black men and boys were frequently arrested on vagrancy charges or minor violations, then fined, and forced to pay their fine in a new system of enslavement called convict leasing.¹⁹⁵ In the words of the Supreme Court of Virginia, they were “slaves of the state.”¹⁹⁶

During the tough on crime and War on Drugs era, politicians continued to criminalize African Americans to win elections. President Richard Nixon’s domestic policy advisor explained that by “getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, [the Nixon White House] could disrupt those communities... Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”¹⁹⁷

The criminalization of African Americans is an enduring badge of slavery and has contributed to over policing of Black neighborhoods, establishment of the school-to-prison pipeline, the mass incarceration of African Americans, and numerous other inequities reaching every corner of the American legal system.¹⁹⁸

California

Several California cities did not hire Black workers until the 1940s and certain public sectors continued to avoid hiring Black workers even in 1970.¹⁸⁸ The San Francisco Fire Department, for example, had no Black firefighters before 1955 and, by 1970 when Black residents made up 14 percent of the city’s population, only four of the Department’s 1,800 uniformed firefighters were Black.¹⁸⁹ During the New Deal, several California cities invoked city ordinances to prevent Black federal workers from working within their cities.¹⁹⁰ Labor unions excluded Black workers in California.¹⁹¹ Today, by some measures, California’s two major industries, Hollywood and Silicon Valley, disproportionately employ fewer African Americans.¹⁹²

It has also led to the retraumatization of African Americans when both the police and mainstream media refuse to accept African Americans as victims. Law enforcement poorly investigates or ignore crimes against African American women.¹⁹⁹ Violence against Black trans people are underreported, unresolved and under-investigated.²⁰⁰ Black children on average remain missing longer than non-Black children.²⁰¹

COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



The convict leasing system in the South re-enslaved thousands of Black men and boys by arresting and convicting them of trumped up charges. (1903)

The American criminal justice system overall physically harms, imprisons, and kills African Americans more than any other racial group relative to their percentage of the population.²⁰² While constitutional amendments²⁰³ and federal civil rights laws²⁰⁴ have tried to remedy these

injustices, academics, judges, legislators and advocates have argued that the U.S. criminal justice system is a new iteration of legal segregation.²⁰⁵

California

Like the rest of the country, California stops, shoots, kills and imprisons more African Americans than their share of the population.²⁰⁶ Data show that law

enforcement most frequently reported taking no further action during a stop with a person they perceived to be Black, suggesting there may have been no legal basis for the stop.²⁰⁷ A 2020 study showed that racial discrimination is an “ever-present” feature of jury selection in California.²⁰⁸ The lingering effects of California’s punitive criminal justice policies, such as the state’s three-strikes law, have resulted in large numbers of African Americans in jails and prisons.²⁰⁹

XII. Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect

Nationally

The government actions described in this report have had a devastating effect on the health of African Americans. Compared to white Americans, African Americans live shorter lives and are more likely to suffer and die from nearly all known diseases and medical conditions compared to white Americans.²¹⁰ When African Americans are hospitalized, Black patients with heart disease receive older, cheaper, and more conservative treatments than their white counterparts.²¹¹

Researchers have found that by some measures, this health gap has grown and cannot be explained by poverty alone,²¹² as middle- and upper-class African Americans also manifest high rates of chronic illness and disability.²¹³ Researchers have linked these health outcomes in part to African Americans’ unrelenting experience of racism in our society.²¹⁴ Research suggests that race-related stress may have a greater impact on health among African Americans than diet, exercise, smoking, or low socioeconomic status.²¹⁵

In addition to physical harm, African Americans experience anger, anxiety, paranoia, helplessness, hopelessness, frustration, resentment, fear, lowered self-esteem, and lower levels of psychological functioning as a result of racism.²¹⁶ These feelings can profoundly undermine Black children’s emotional and physical well-being and their academic success.²¹⁷

XIII. The Wealth Gap

Nationally

As described in further detail throughout this report, government policies perpetuating badges of slavery have helped white Americans accumulate wealth, while overwhelmingly erecting barriers which prevent African Americans from doing the same.

California

These national trends are similar in California. The life expectancy of an average Black Californian was 75.1 years, six years shorter than the state average.²¹⁸ Black babies are more likely to die in infancy and Black mothers giving birth die at a rate of almost four times higher than the average Californian mother.²¹⁹ Compared with white Californians, Black Californians are more likely to have diabetes, die from cancer, or be hospitalized for heart disease.²²⁰

Compared to white Californian men,
Black Californian men are

5x
MORE LIKELY to die from
prostate cancer

Black Californians suffer from high rates of serious psychological distress, depression, suicidal ideation, and other mental health issues.²²¹ Unmet mental health needs are higher among Black Californians, as compared with white Californians, including lack of access to mental healthcare and substance abuse services.²²² Black Californians have the highest rates of attempted suicide among all racial groups.²²³

Federal and California Homestead Acts essentially gave away hundreds of millions of acres of land almost for free mostly to white families.²²⁴ Today, as many as 46 million of their living descendants reap the wealth benefits, approximately one-quarter of the adult population of the United States.²²⁵ In the 1930s and 1940s,

the federal government created programs that subsidized low-cost loans, which allowed millions of average white Americans to own their homes for the first time.²²⁶ Of the \$120 billion worth of new housing subsidized between 1934 and 1962, less than two percent went to non-white families.²²⁷ Other bedrocks of the American middle class, like Social Security and the G.I. Bill, also mostly excluded African Americans.²²⁸ The federal tax structure has in the past, and continues today, to discriminate against African Americans.²²⁹

In 2019, white households owned

9x 
MORE

assets than Black households

These harms have compounded over generations, resulting in an enormous wealth gap that is the same today as it had been two years before the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964.²³⁰ In 2019, the median Black household

had a net worth of \$24,100, while white households have a net worth of \$188,200.²³¹ This wealth gap persists across all income levels, regardless of education level or family structure.²³²

California

The wealth gap exists in similar ways in California. A 2014 study of the Los Angeles metro area found that the median value of liquid assets for native born African American households was \$200, compared to \$110,000 for white households.²³³

California's homestead laws similarly excluded African Americans before 1900 because they required a homesteader to be a white citizen.²³⁴ Throughout the 20th century, federal, state and local governments in California erected barriers to Black homeownership and supported or directly prohibited African Americans from living in suburban neighborhoods.²³⁵ In 1996, California passed Proposition 209 in 1996, which prohibited the consideration of race in state contracting.²³⁶ One study has estimated that, as a result of Proposition 209, minority- and women-owned business enterprises lost about \$1 billion.²³⁷

XIV. Key Findings

- From colonial times forward, governments at all levels adopted and enshrined white supremacy beliefs and passed laws in order to maintain slavery, a system of dehumanization and exploitation that stole the life, labor, liberty, and intellect of people of African descent. This system was maintained by, and financially benefited, the entire United States of America and its territories.
 - This system of white supremacy is a persistent badge of slavery that continues to be embedded today in numerous American and Californian legal, economic, and social and political systems. Throughout American history and across the entire country, laws and policies, violence and terror have upheld white supremacy. All over the country, but particularly in the South during the era of legal segregation, federal state and local governments directly engaged in, supported, or failed to protect African Americans from the violence and terror aiming to subjugate African Americans.
 - Government actions and derelictions of duty have caused compounding physical and psychological injury for generations. In California, racial violence against African Americans began during slavery, continued through the 1920s, as groups like the Ku Klux Klan permeated local governments and police departments, and peaked after World War II, as African Americans attempted to move into white neighborhoods.
 - After the Civil War, African Americans briefly won political power during Reconstruction. Southern states responded by systematically stripping African Americans of their power to vote. Racist lawmakers elected from southern states blocked hundreds of federal civil rights laws and edited other important legislation to exclude or discriminate against African Americans. These coordinated efforts at the federal level harmed Black Californians, particularly when coupled with discrimination at the state and local levels.
 - Government actors, working with private individuals, actively segregated America into Black and white neighborhoods. In California, federal, state, and local governments created segregation through discriminatory federal housing policies, zoning ordinances, decisions on where to build schools, and discriminatory federal mortgage policies known as redlining.
- Funded by the federal government, the California state and local government also destroyed Black homes and communities through park and highway construction, urban renewal and by other means.
- Enslavers denied education to enslaved people in order to control them. Throughout American history, when allowed schooling at all, Black students across the country and in California have attended schools with less funding and resources than white students. After slavery, southern states passed laws to prevent Black and white students from attending the same schools. Throughout the country, even after the U.S. Supreme Court held “separate but equal” to be unconstitutional, children went to the school in their neighborhoods, so education segregation was further entrenched by residential segregation. Many public schools in the United States never integrated in the first place or were integrated and then re-segregated. Today, California is the sixth most segregated state in the country for Black students, who attend under-resourced schools.
 - Due to residential segregation and compared to white Americans, African Americans are more likely to live in worse quality housing and in neighborhoods that are polluted, with inadequate infrastructure. Black Californians face similar harms.
 - Government financial assistance programs and policies have historically excluded African Americans from receiving benefits.
 - The current child welfare system in the country and in California, operates on harmful and untrue racial stereotypes of African Americans. This has resulted in extremely high rates of removal of Black children from their families, even though Black parents do not generally mistreat their children at higher rates than white parents. Black children thus disproportionately suffer the loss of their families and the additional harms associated with being in the child welfare system.
 - Federal and state governments, including California, failed to protect Black artists, culture-makers, and media-makers from discrimination and simultaneously promoted discriminatory narratives. State governments memorialized the Confederacy as just and heroic through monument building, while suppressing the nation’s history of racism and slavery.

Executive Summary

- Federal, state, and local government actions, including in California, have directly segregated and discriminated against African Americans at work. Federal and state policies like affirmative action produced mixed results and were short lived. African Americans continue to face employment discrimination today in the country and in California.
- American government at all levels, including in California, has historically criminalized African Americans for the purposes of social control, and to maintain an economy based on exploited Black labor. This criminalization is an enduring badge of slavery and has contributed to the over-policing of Black neighborhoods, the school to prison pipeline, the mass incarceration of African Americans, a refusal to accept African Americans as victims, and other inequities in nearly every corner of the American and California legal systems. As a result, the American and California criminal justice system physically harms, imprisons, and kills African Americans more than other racial groups relative to their percentage of the population.
- The government actions described in this report have had a devastating effect on the health of African Americans in the country and in California. Compared to white Americans, African Americans live shorter lives and are more likely to suffer and die from almost all diseases and medical conditions than white Americans. Researchers have linked these health outcomes in part to African Americans' unrelenting experience of racism in our society. In addition to physical harm, African Americans experience psychological harm, which can profoundly undermine Black children's emotional and physical well-being and their academic success.
- Government laws and policies perpetuating badges of slavery have helped white Americans accumulate wealth, while erecting barriers that have prevented African Americans from doing the same. These harms compounded over generations, resulting in an enormous gap in wealth between white and African Americans today in the nation and in California.

XV. Preliminary Recommendations for Future Deliberation

Enslavement

- End legal slavery in California by doing the following:
 - » Deleting language from the California Constitution that permits involuntary servitude as punishment for crime by passing ACA 3 (Kamlager).
 - » Repealing Penal Code Section 2700, which states that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) “shall require of every able-bodied prisoner imprisoned in any state prison as many hours of faithful labor in each day and every day during his or her term of imprisonment as shall be prescribed by the rules and regulations of the director of Corrections.”
 - » Pass legislation that makes education, substance use and mental health treatment, and rehabilitative programs the first priority for incarcerated people. In addition, allow incarcerated people to make decisions regarding how they will spend their time and which programs and jobs they will do while incarcerated.
 - » Require that incarcerated people who are working in prison or jail be paid a fair market rate for their labor.
 - » Prohibit for-profit prison companies from operating within the system (i.e. companies that control phone calls, emails, and other communications).
 - » Require that any goods or services available for purchase by incarcerated people and their families be provided at the same cost as those goods and services outside of prison.
 - » Allow people who are incarcerated to continue to exercise their right to vote.
- Implement a comprehensive reparations scheme, as will be detailed in the Task Force’s Final Report.
- Transmit the Task Force’s Final Report and findings to the President and the Congress with a recommendation that the federal government create a Reparations Commission for African Americans/American Freedmen through statute or executive action.
- Request that the State of California and the U. S. federal government facilitate data disaggregation for Black/African racial groups.

Racial Terror

- Make it easier to hold law enforcement officers (including correctional officers) and their employing agencies accountable for unlawful harassment and violence, including 1) a provision overruling the extratextual “specific intent” requirement that California courts have read into the Bane Act; 2) a provision eliminating state law immunities that shield officer misconduct, and explicitly rejecting protections analogous to qualified immunity under federal law; and 3) a provision for additional special damages when the unlawful conduct is shown to be racially motivated.
- Create forms of expression, acknowledgment, and remembrance of the trauma of state-sanctioned white supremacist terror, possibly including memorials, and funding a long-term truth and reconciliation commission.
- Estimate the value of Black-owned businesses and property in California stolen or destroyed through acts of racial terror, distribute this amount back to Black Californians, and make housing grants, zero-interest business and housing loans and grants available to Black Californians.

Political Disenfranchisement

- Create forms of acknowledgment and apology for acts of political disenfranchisement.
- Pass legislation that is in alignment of the objectives stated in AB 2576 (Aguiar-Curry) and establish separate funding:
 - » for voter education and outreach
 - » to provide state funding and charge the Secretary of State office with making grants to county registrars for programs that integrate voter registration and preregistration with civic education for programs that increase voter registration within the county’s underrepresented communities and high school students.
- Consider legislation to prevent dilution of the Black vote through redistricting.
- Require legislative policy committees to conduct racial impact analyses of all proposed legislation and require the Administration to include a comprehensive

Executive Summary

racial impact analysis for all budget proposals and proposed regulations.

- Allow individuals with felony convictions to serve on juries and prohibit judges and attorneys from excluding jurors solely for having a criminal record.

Housing Segregation

- Identify and eliminate anti-Black housing discrimination policies practices.
- Compensate individuals forcibly removed from their homes due to state action, including but not limited to park construction, highway construction, and urban renewal.
- Prevent current banking and mortgage related discrimination, including but not limited to discriminatory actions as a result of artificial intelligence and automated data analytics.
- Repeal Article 34 of the California Constitution.
- Repeal or counteract the effects of crime-free housing policies that disproportionately limit Black residents' access to housing.
- Establish a state-subsidized mortgage system that guarantees low interest rates for qualified California Black mortgage applicants.
- Identify previous, and eliminate current, policies and practices that overwhelmingly contribute to the vast overrepresentation of African Americans among the unhoused population.
- Identify and eliminate any policies with blatant anti-black residency requirements or preferences; invalidate and deem unlawful, any contract with anti-Black racial covenants.
- Provide clean and secure public housing for vulnerable populations including those persons who are formerly incarcerated, in the foster care system, and unhoused individuals.
- Provide development incentives for businesses that provide healthy foods, specifically grocery stores, in predominantly-Black neighborhoods to address increasingly prevalent food swamps.

Separate and Unequal Education

- Add Black students to the existing three student groups listed in the Supplemental Grants provisions of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Methodically guide this funding to provide instructional supports, enrichment, and counseling to Black students.
- Identify and eliminate racial bias and discriminatory practices in standardized testing, inclusive of state-wide K-12 proficiency assessments, undergraduate and postgraduate eligibility assessments, and professional career exams (ex. STAR, ACT, SAT, LSAT, GRE, MCAT, State Bar Exam).
- Provide funding for free tuition to California colleges and universities.
- Provide funding for African American/American Freedmen owned and controlled K-12 schools, colleges and universities, trade and professional schools.
- Adopt mandatory curriculum for teacher credentialing that includes culturally responsive pedagogy, anti-bias training, and restorative practices and develop strategies to proactively recruit African American teachers to teach in K-12 public schools.
- Reduce arbitrary segregation within California public schools and the resulting harms to Black students at majority-nonwhite under-resourced schools, by creating porous school district boundaries that allow students from neighboring districts to attend.
- Increase the availability of inter-district transfers to increase the critical mass of diverse students at each school so that students are assigned, or able to attend, public schools based on factors independent of their parents' income level and ability to afford housing in a particular neighborhood or city.
- Provide scholarships for Black high school graduates to cover four years of undergraduate education (similar to the G.I. Bill model) to address specific and ongoing discrimination faced in California schools.
- Implement systematic review of public and private school disciplinary records to determine levels of racial bias and require all schools to implement racially equitable disciplinary practices.
- Require that curriculum at all levels and in all subjects be inclusive, free of bias, and honor the contributions

and experiences of all peoples regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, or sexual orientation.

- Advance the timeline for ethnic studies classes in public and private high schools
- Adopt a K-12 Black Studies curriculum that introduces students to concepts of race and racial identity; accurately depicts historic racial inequities and systemic racism; honors Black lives, fully represents contributions of Black people in society, and advances the ideology of Black liberation.
- Encourage identification and support of teachers who give culturally nurturing instructions and adopt new models for teacher development to improve teacher habits in the classroom.
- Improve funding and access for educational opportunities for all incarcerated people in both juvenile and adult correctional facilities.

Racism in Environment and Infrastructure

- Identify and address the impact of environmental racism on predominantly Black communities including, but not limited to, unequal exposure to pollutants associated with roadway and heavy truck traffic, oil drilling, drinking water contamination, and current or former heavily-industrial and other potential pollutants in Black neighborhoods.
- Require and fund the statewide planting of trees to create shade equity and minimize heat islands in Black neighborhoods.
- Ensure that state and local allocation of resources to public transit systems is equitable on a per-rider basis for methods of transit that are disproportionately utilized by low-income, urban, and Black residents.
- Support development of policies and practices that limit the unequal citing of vice retail businesses (e.g., liquor stores, tobacco retail) in Black neighborhoods.
- Support Black neighborhoods to develop policies and practices that promote locating healthy retailers (e.g., grocery stores, farmers markets) within Black neighborhoods.
- Support the work of community-based organizations in identifying Black resident interests and needs within neighborhoods (e.g., farmers markets, public transportation).
- Support the work of community-based organizations to ensure safe access to neighborhood-level physical activity spaces (e.g., public parks).
- Reduce the density of food swamps (i.e., high densities of fast-food restaurants) in Black neighborhoods.
- Introduce climate change mitigation and adaptive capacity strategies and measures (e.g., cooling centers, increasing greenspaces that reduce urban heat island effects and air pollutant concentrations).
- Equalize community benefit infrastructure funding among Black and white neighborhoods (i.e. bike trails, drinking water pipes, sidewalks, etc.)

Pathologizing Black Families

- Compensate families who were denied familial inheritances by way of racist anti-miscegenation statutes, laws, or precedents, that denied Black heirs resources they would have received had they been white.
- Realign federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families funding devoted to direct assistance to impoverished families in order to provide greater funding to poor Black families that have historically been denied equal welfare benefits pursuant to a variety of subversive racist policies and practices.
- Address the severely disparate involvement of Black families within the child welfare and foster care systems.
- Review and adopt policies that caregivers in the child welfare system are allowed to meet the requirements and have access to resources to care for family members.
- Ensure that Black men and women have access to effective, high quality, trauma-informed, culturally competent intimate partner and/or guardian violence treatment and services outside of the criminal legal system.
- Eliminate past-due child support owed to the government for non-custodial parents.
- Eliminate the collection of child support as a means to reimburse the state for current or past government assistance.
- Ensure that all child support payments are provided directly to the custodial parent and the child.

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- Eliminate the annual interest charged for past due child support.
- Allow incarcerated parents, when appropriate, to strengthen and maintain their relationships with their children by doing the following:
 - » Provide on-going wrap around family reunification and maintenance services to incarcerated people and their families.
 - » Provide mental health support designed specifically to heal trauma and strengthen family ties, including both individual and family treatment when needed.
 - » Develop spaces and programs for incarcerated people to spend time with their children in non-institutional, non-punitive settings when appropriate.
 - » Prohibit the state prison system and local jails from cancelling family visits as a form of punishment.
 - » Require that all visitation policies be culturally competent, trauma-informed, and non-threatening for the family members.
 - » Allow free telephone and video calls to allow incarcerated parents to maintain connections to their children and other family members, for cases not involving domestic or familial abuse.
 - » Accommodate telephone and video meetings between incarcerated parents and their children's caregivers, physicians, and teachers to allow parents to participate in decision making regarding their children's care, needs, and education.

Control Over Creative Cultural and Intellectual Life

- Identify and eliminate anti-Black discrimination policies in the areas of artistic, cultural, creative, athletic, and intellectual life.
- Provide financial restitution and compensation to athletes or their heirs for injuries sustained in their work if those injuries can be linked to anti-Black discrimination policies.
- Compensate individuals who have been deprived of rightful profits for their artistic, creative, athletic, and intellectual work.
- Identify and eliminate discrimination in the industries of art, culture, invention, sports, leisure, and business,

including but not limited to: ensuring access to patents and royalties for cultural, intellectual, and artistic production; prohibiting discrimination and glass ceilings that harm Black artists and entrepreneurs; removing anti-Black memorials and monuments; placing clear restrictions on the use of artistic works in disciplinary or law enforcement actions; and providing a pathway to compensation for student athletes.

Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity

- Identify and eliminate racial bias in employment and advancement, especially for Black Californians seeking public employment or promotion to higher-paying positions in government. Pass legislation to advance pay equity.
- Adopt a clean slate policy for both young people and adults to ensure that eligible criminal record expungements are done quickly and equitably.
- Remove unnecessary barriers to employment for individuals with criminal records.
- Raise the minimum wage and require scaling-up of the minimum wage for more experienced workers, require provision of health benefits and paid time off, and provide other missing protections for workers in food and hospitality services, agricultural, food processing, and domestic worker industries.
- Require or incentivize private and public employers to undergo training regarding bias in employment practices and measures to address bias in hiring, promotion, pay, and workplace practices.
- Create a fund to support the development and sustainment of Black-owned businesses and eliminate barriers to licensure that are not strictly necessary and that harm Black workers.
- Create and fund intensive training programs that enable Black Californians to access employment opportunities from which they have been excluded.
- Ban employment practices that lock in and perpetuate historic and continuing discrimination and should make eligibility for public contracts contingent on elimination of employment practices that disproportionately harm Black workers.
- Address disparities in transportation that limit access to jobs.

- Increase funding to the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing and other relevant state agencies to effectively enforce civil rights laws and regulations.

An Unjust Legal System

- Eliminate discriminatory policing and particularly killings, use of force, and racial profiling of African Americans.
- Eliminate and reverse the effects of discrimination within the criminal justice system including, reviewing the cases of incarcerated African Americans in order to determine whether they have been wrongfully convicted or have received longer or harsher sentences than white people convicted of the same or similar crimes.
- Review the security level determinations made by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in order to eliminate and reverse anti-Black discriminatory policies and decisions that have resulted in a disproportionate number of Black incarcerated people being identified as members of security threat groups, held in segregated housing, or housed in higher security levels than their white peers.
- Prevent discrimination by algorithms in new policing technologies.
- Eliminate the racial disparities in police stops.
- Eliminate the racial disparities in criminal sentencing and the over incarceration of African Americans.
- Eliminate the over-policing of predominantly Black communities.
- Eliminate the racial disparities and discrimination against African Americans in the parole hearing process (including in the criminal risk assessments used to determine suitability for parole).
- Eliminate both implicit and explicit bias in the criminal justice system, including implementing training and accountability for prosecutors, judges, parole commissioners, and parole and probation officers.
- Reduce the scope of law enforcement jurisdiction within the public safety system and shift more funding for prevention and mental health care.
- Invest in institutions that reduce the likelihood of criminal activity such as care based services, youth development, job training and increasing the minimum wage.

- Require the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), CDCR, the Judicial Council and the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, and the Board of Parole Hearings to work with the Attorney General to collect comprehensive data on policing, convictions, sentencing, and incarceration, including the use of less lethal weapons by law enforcement and demographic characteristics on a regular (monthly, quarterly, annual) basis. As part of the data collection, mandate that law enforcement (at all levels) report the data accurately and in a timely manner. In addition, require that the data be made available through an open data system that can be accessed and downloaded by researchers, advocates, policy makers and the public.

Mental & Physical Harm and Neglect

- Eliminate anti-Black healthcare laws and policies and anti-Black discrimination in healthcare.
- Compensate, both financially and with cost-free high quality comprehensive services and supports, individuals whose mental and physical health has been permanently damaged by anti-Black healthcare system policies and treatment, including, but not limited to, those subjected to forced sterilization, medical experimentation, racist sentencing disparities, police violence, environmental racism, and psychological harm from race-related stress.
- Identify and eliminate discrimination and systemic racism, including but not limited to, discrimination by healthcare providers; inequity in access to healthcare; inaccessibility of health insurance; funding needs of health-focused community organizations; the dearth of clinical research on health conditions that affect African Americans; the underrepresentation of African Americans among medical and mental health providers; and the lack of race-conscious public health policy.
- Create free healthcare programs.
- Provide ongoing medical education, particularly on illnesses and other issues that historically impact health of African Americans; provide medical clinics.
- Implement Medi-Cal reforms to increase flexibility for the use of community evidence practices designed, tested and implemented by the Black community and

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reduce the tendency to use culturally bankrupt evidence based practices that are not field tested.

- Identify and eliminate the biases and discriminatory policies that lead to the higher rate of maternal injury and death among Black women.
- Ensure that Black women have access to competent, trained medical staff and services for all of their lifetime reproductive healthcare needs including birth control, prenatal and postnatal care, labor and delivery, abortion services, and perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause care.

The Wealth Gap

- Implement a detailed program of reparations for African Americans.
- Develop and implement other policies, programs, and measures to close the racial wealth gap in California.
- Provide funding and technical assistance to Black-led and Black community-based land trusts to support wealth building and affordable housing.

The California African American Freedmen Affairs Agency

- Establish a cabinet-level secretary position over an African American/Freedmen Affairs Agency tasked with implementing the recommendations of this task force. The role of the agency is to identify past harms, prevent future harm, work with other state agencies and branches of California's government to mitigate harms, suggest policies to the Governor and the Legislature designed to compensate for the harms caused by the legacy of anti-Black discrimination, and work to eliminate systemic racism that has developed as a result of the enslavement of African Americans in the United States.
- The Agency should include the following:
 - » A branch to process claims with the state and assist claimants in filing for eligibility.

- » A genealogy branch in order to support potential claimants with genealogical research and to confirm eligibility.
- » A reparations tribunal in order to adjudicate substantive claims for past harms
- » An office of immediate relief to expedite claims.
- » A civic engagement branch to support ongoing political education on African American history and to support civic engagement among African American youth.
- » A freedmen education branch to offer free education and to facilitate the free tuition initiative between claimants and California schools.
- » A social services and family affairs branch to identify and mitigate the ways that current and previous policies have damaged and destabilized Black families. Services might include treatment for trauma and family healing services to strengthen the family unit, stress resiliency services, financial planning services, career planning, civil and family court services.
- » A cultural affairs branch to restore African American cultural/historical sites; establish monuments; advocate for removal of racist relics; support knowledge production and archival research; and to provide support for African Americans in the entertainment industry, including identifying and removing barriers to advancement into leadership and decision-making positions in the arts, entertainment, and sports industries.
- » A legal affairs office to coordinate a range of free legal services, including criminal defense attorneys for criminal trials and parole hearings; free arbitration and mediation services; and to advocate for civil and criminal justice reforms.
- » A division of medical services for public and environmental health.
- » A business affairs office to provide ongoing education related to entrepreneurialism and financial literacy; to provide business grants; and to establish public-private reparative justice-oriented partnerships.

Endnotes

- ¹Pres. Proc. No. 95, (Jan. 1, 1863); U.S. Const. amend. XIII, § 1.
- ²The Reconstruction Amendments' Debates: The Legislative History and Contemporary Debates in Congress on the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments (Alfred Avins Ed., 1967), p. 122.
- ³The Civil Rights Cases, (1883) 109 U.S. 3, 20.
- ⁴Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619 – 1877* (1993) (Kolchin), at pp. 17 – 18; Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (2016) (Kendi) p. 38–41.
- ⁵See generally Chapter 3 Political Disenfranchisement
- ⁶See generally Chapter 3 Racial Terror
- ⁷See generally Chapters 2. Enslavement; 3. Racial Terror; Chapters 4. Political Disenfranchisement; 5. The Root of Many Evils Residential Segregation; 6. Separate and Unequal Education, 8. Pathologizing the Black Family; 9. Control Over Spiritual Creative and Cultural Life; 10. Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity; 11. An Unjust Legal System; 12. Harm and Neglect Mental Physical and Public Health
- ⁸See generally Chapters 6. Separate and Unequal Education; 7. Racism in Environment and Infrastructure; 8. Pathologizing the Black Family; 10. Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity; 11. An Unjust Legal System; 12. Harm and Neglect Mental Physical and Public Health; 13. The Wealth Gap.
- ⁹See generally Chapter 12. Harm and Neglect Mental Physical and Public Health;
- ¹⁰Chapter 2, section V.B, see also Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (2014) (Baptist) at p. xxiii.
- ¹¹Chapter 2, section V.B.
- ¹²Baptist, *supra*, at p. xxiii.
- ¹³Chapter 2, Section IV.C.
- ¹⁴Baptist, *supra*, at pp. 9 – 11. For an in depth discussion, see Chapter 2, Section IV.C.
- ¹⁵Presidents who owned enslaved people while in office included George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, John Tyler, James K. Polk, and Zachary Taylor. See Rosenwald, [Slave-owning presidents become targets of protestors](#) (June 3, 2020) Washington Post (as of Jan. 24, 2022).
- ¹⁶Weil and Adrian Blanco, [More than 1,700 Congressmen Once Enslaved Black People. This Is Who They Were, and How They Shaped the Nation](#) (Jan. 20, 2022) Washington Post (As of January 24, 2022) (Weil and Blanco).
- ¹⁷Ericson, *The Federal Government and Slavery: Following the Money Trail* (Spring 2005) 19 Stud. in Amer. Pol. Dev. 107.
- ¹⁸*Id.* at pp. 112 – 115.
- ¹⁹Pritchett, Quantitative Estimates of the United States Interregional Slave Trade, 1820 – 1860 (June 2001) 61 J. of Econ. Hist. 474.
- ²⁰Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man* (1837), p. 69.
- ²¹Rosenthal, *Reckoning with Slavery: How Revisiting Management's Uncomfortable Past Can Help Us Confront Challenges Today* (2021) 20 Academy of Management Learning & Ed. 467–472.
- ²²Baptist, *supra*, at pp. 116–124. For an in depth discussion of the horrors suffered by enslaved people, see Chapter 2, section V
- ²³Berry, *The Price for their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (2017) pp. 78 – 83; Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. Written by Himself* (1845), pp. 3 – 4.
- ²⁴Thomas Jefferson, [Letter to Joel Yancey](#), Jan. 17, 1819 (as of May 9, 2022)
- ²⁵[U.S. Census of 1860](#), Introduction, p. vii (as of May 9, 2022)
- ²⁶Kendi, *supra*, at pp. 38–41.
- ²⁷Kendi, *supra*, at p. 48.
- ²⁸Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (1975) (Morgan), at pp. 369, 385 – 386.
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- ³¹[An act concerning Servants and Slaves XXXIV](#) (1705), Records of the American Colonies, p. 459 (as of Apr. 24, 2022).
- ³²See e.g., US Constitution, Article I, Section 2; Kolchin, *supra*, at pp. 17 – 18, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393; Darlene Goring, *The History of Slave Marriage in the United States*, 39 J. Marshall L. Rev. 299 (2006) (Abolitionist William Goodell described the way that American law treated the families of enslaved people in 1853 as: “The slave has no rights. Of course, he or she cannot have the rights of a husband, a wife. The slave is a chattel, and chattels do not marry. ‘The slave is not ranked among sentient beings, but among things;’ and things are not married.”); Campbell, *Making Black Los Angeles: Class, Gender, and Community, 1850–1917* (2016). (The 1850 and 1860 federal censuses did not list most enslaved people by name, as they did for white Americans, but en masse in “slave schedules.”)
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I. California's Stories

Why Reparations in California?

After all, California promised to be a free territory not once, but twice. First, in 1823 as a part of Mexico.¹ Then again in 1850, by the time California entered the Union and declared in its Constitution that “neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude, unless for the punishment of crimes, shall ever be tolerated in this state.”²

So why is California considering reparations for African Americans and descendants of enslaved people?

Consider Basil Campbell. Campbell was born enslaved in Missouri, where he married a woman named Mary Stephens and had two sons.³ In 1854, four years after California joined the Union as a free state, a man named J.D. Stephens bought Campbell for \$1,200 and forcibly moved him 1,500 miles away to a farm in Yolo County, California.⁴ Campbell never saw his wife or two sons again.⁵ J.D. Stephens enslaved Basil Campbell in California, ignoring California's status as a free state, for another seven years, until Stephens decided that Campbell had sufficiently paid off his purchase price.⁶ Over the rest of his life, Campbell married again, adopted his wife's children, and amassed a small fortune in land and livestock.⁷ A few years after his death in 1906, his two sons from his first marriage in Missouri filed a petition for a portion of Campbell's estate.⁸ A California appellate judge concluded that a marriage between enslaved people “is not a marriage relation, and it is mockery to speak of it as such.”⁹ The land once owned by Campbell is now a nature preserve.¹⁰

Consider the Short family. In December 1945, O'Day Short, his wife Helen, their seven-year-old daughter Carol Ann, and their nine-year-old son Barry moved into the house that they had built in Fontana, California.¹¹ In 1945, Fontana was a white neighborhood.¹² Deputy sheriffs warned Short that he was “out of bounds,” and that to avoid “disagreeableness,” Short should move his family back to the segregated Black neighborhood on “the other side of the Baseline.”¹³ The real estate agent who sold the property to the Shorts warned them on December 3, 1945 that a “vigilante committee had a meeting on your case last night. They are a tough bunch to deal with. If I were you, I'd get my family off this property at once.”¹⁴



Enslaved people working in California's Gold Mines. (1852)

On December 6, two weeks after they moved in, an explosion and a fire engulfed the house.¹⁵ Neighbors reported seeing Helen try to beat down the flames consuming her children.¹⁶ Helen, Carol Ann, and Barry died in the hospital.¹⁷ The San Bernardino County Coroner and District Attorney concluded that the explosion was an accident.¹⁸ The District Attorney based this conclusion partly on a statement given by O'Day while he was in the hospital. During the same conversation, O'Day also said, "I am here on my sick bed, my hair burned off my head, my legs twisted under me. You have no respect for my position. All you want to do is get the information you are looking for."¹⁹ The District Attorney told O'Day that his wife and two young children had died when doctors had been keeping the information from him for fear that his condition would worsen.²⁰ O'Day Short died a few days later.²¹ A subsequent California Attorney General report investigating the murders concluded that no evidence of vigilante activity in Fontana could be found.²²

Consider Alfred Simmons, a Black school teacher who rented a house from his white colleague in the Elmwood district of Berkeley in 1958.²³ The Berkeley chief of police asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to investigate how Simmons managed to live in the all-white community.²⁴ The FBI referred the case to the U.S. Attorney, who did not prosecute because no laws had been broken.²⁵ The Federal Housing Administration, the agency created by the federal government to help Americans buy homes, then wrote to Simmons's white landlord to tell him that his future

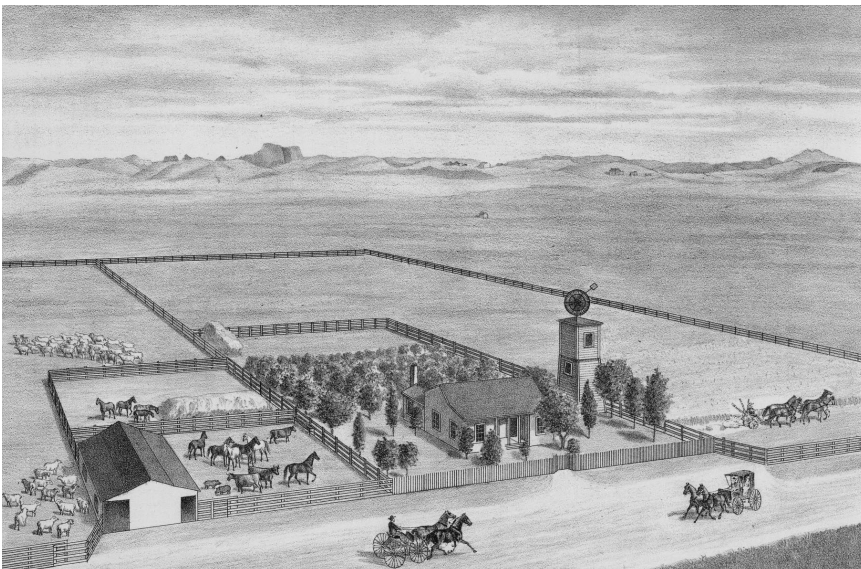
mortgage insurance applications would be rejected because renting to a Black American was an "Unsatisfactory Risk Determination."²⁶

Consider Paul Austin and Tenisha Tate-Austin, who bought a home in Marin City in 2016. Three years later, a white appraiser valued their home for \$500,000 less than it was worth, calling it a "distinct, marketable area."²⁷ "I took that as code word as: it's a Black area," said Paul Austin, who testified before the Task Force that he felt physically sick when he read the appraisal report.²⁸ Paul Austin testified that his grandparents had moved to California in the 1940s to work in the shipyards in Sausalito.²⁹ When they had saved up enough money to buy a house, his grandparents realized that they could not buy homes outside of Marin City due to redlining.³⁰ Redlining is a set of government policies that helped white families buy homes in the suburbs while forcing

A California appellate judge concluded that a marriage between enslaved people "is not a marriage relation, and it is mockery to speak of it as such."

Black families to remain in urban centers.³¹ These policies have devalued Black neighborhoods³² and led to continued education segregation.³³ In 2019, a California Attorney General investigation found that the Sausalito-Marin City School District intentionally established a racially and ethnically segregated elementary and middle school, by offering inferior education programming and directly harming a mostly Black and Latino student body.³⁴ In the 1950s, Paul Austin's paternal grandparents were one of the first Black families to move to Mill Valley, a white neighborhood.³⁵ Paul's grandfather built a home where the driveway dropped 90 degrees so that the house could not be seen from the road. "Grandson," Paul's grandfather told him, "I had to build this home at nights and on weekends, so we wouldn't be detected, because they didn't want any Black families living in their city."³⁶ A white man picked up the lumber for them.³⁷ Like Alfred Simmons's white landlord, the white woman who sold her land to Paul's grandfather was, in Paul's words, "blackballed," because the neighbors found out that

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"Residence & Ranch Basil Campbell, near Fairview, Yolo Co." Basil Campbell became one of the wealthiest African Americans in California and owned this ranch. (1879)

she had sold her property to a Black family.³⁸ In 2021, Paul testified that the smaller houses in a white neighborhood that are a mile away from Paul and Tenisha's house are valued at \$200,000 to \$300,000 more.³⁹

Consider Paul Austin and Tenisha Tate-Austin, who bought a home in Marin City in 2016. Three years later, a white appraiser valued their home for \$500,000 less than it was worth, calling it a “distinct, marketable area.”

What does California owe the Campbells, the Shorts, the Simmonses, the Austins, and the 2.28 million Black Californians who have experienced different versions of these stories throughout their lives, their parents' lives, their grandparents' lives, and their great-grandparents' lives, some of whom were enslaved?

Similar stories are repeated throughout the history of California and the nation.

As W.E.B. Du Bois asked in 1935: “Nations reel and stagger on their way; they make hideous mistakes; they commit frightful wrongs; they do great and beautiful things. And shall we not best guide humanity by telling the truth about all this, so far as the truth is ascertainable?”⁴⁰

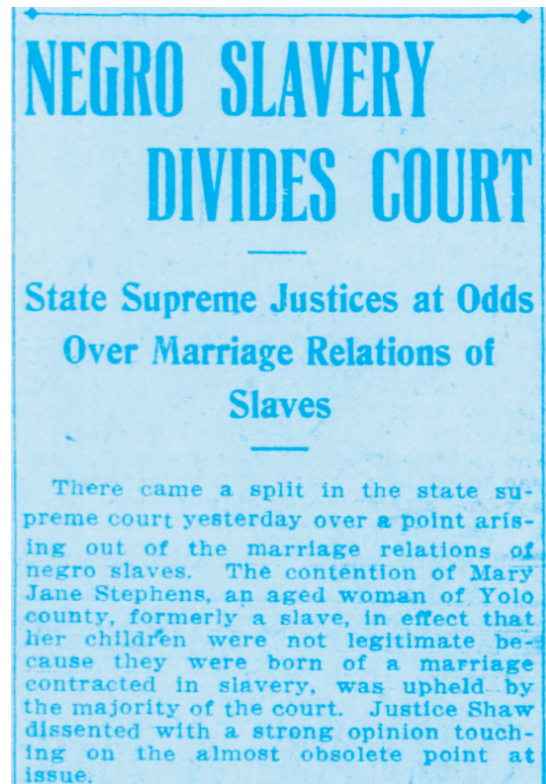
To that end, the following twelve chapters will recount the horrors and harms perpetrated against African Americans in California and the nation in a number of different areas:

To maintain a system of enslavement and subjugation in the United States, white government leaders used the belief system of white supremacy to restrict the freedom of African Americans and the flourishing of Black culture and prosperity.⁴¹ These belief systems have served to normalize and perpetuate crimes against humanity and systemic racism in our governmental institutions. These beliefs created dehumanizing stereotypes of African Americans, which mainstream arts and culture disseminated and amplified, fueling racial terror and violence long after enslavement ended. These beliefs were enshrined into the United States' laws, court decisions, and government policies and practices, and into California's laws, court

decisions, and government policies and practices.⁴² Government actors used these laws and practices to suppress and criminalize Black political participation and rip apart Black families. Federal, California, and local government, acting in tandem and in parallel with private actors, created and intensified housing segregation. Government actions intertwined with private action and segregated America, leading to environmental harms, unequal educational and health outcomes, and over-policing of Black neighborhoods in California and across

the nation. Government actions and failures over 400 years have created a wealth gap that persists between Black and white Americans at all levels of income, regardless of education or family status. In fact, the wealth gap today is the same size it was two years before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁴³

COURTESY OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CALL (MAY 8, 1910)



In 1910, the California Supreme Court decided that California law did not recognize the family that Basil Campbell created while he was enslaved, and that family could not inherit his fortune.

II. The Task Force's Charge

What does California owe its Black residents?

Assembly Bill 3121 (S. Weber) established this Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans.⁴⁴ The Task Force consists of nine members⁴⁵ charged with studying the institution of slavery and its lingering negative effects on society and on living African Americans, including descendants of persons enslaved in the United States.⁴⁶ The Task Force must synthesize documentary evidence of the capture, procurement, and transportation of Africans for the purpose of enslavement; the domestic trade of trafficked African Americans; the treatment of enslaved people; the denial of humanity and the abuse of African Americans;

for African-Americans, with a special consideration for African-Americans who are descendants of persons enslaved in the United States.⁴⁸ The Task Force recommendations must address how they comport with international standards and how the State of California will apologize for its role in perpetuating gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity on enslaved Africans and their descendants.⁴⁹ The Task Force must address the role of California laws and policies in continuing the negative lingering effects on African Americans as a group and how these injuries can be reversed.⁵⁰ The recommendations must include how to calculate compensation, what form it will take, and who should be eligible.⁵¹

In order to maintain slavery, American government officials used the belief system of white supremacy to restrict the freedom and prosperity of African Americans. These beliefs were enshrined into the laws, court decisions, and policies and practices of the United States and of the state of California.

and the discrimination and lingering negative effects that followed in the colonies that eventually became the United States, and the United States of today.⁴⁷

The Task Force must recommend appropriate remedies of compensation, rehabilitation, and restitution

The Task Force must issue a public report to the Legislature by June 1, 2022.⁵² On June 1, 2021, the Task Force voted to issue a report in two parts.⁵³ The interim report, to be published by June 1, 2022, will describe the institution of slavery, the ensuing discriminatory systems created by slavery, and its reverberations throughout American history and into the present.⁵⁴ It will make

preliminary recommendations. The final report will include the Task Force's final recommendations, following further hearings, community engagement, and consultations with experts, regarding potential forms that an apology and reparations should take.⁵⁵

III. Overview of Activities

AB 3121 authorizes the Task Force to hold public hearings to pursue its mission.⁵⁶ In order to inform the contents of the interim report, the Task Force held nine public meetings, during which it considered public comments, expert, and personal witness testimony, in addition to considering the voluminous materials submitted to the Task Force via email from those unable to attend the meetings.

In total, the Task Force has heard over 40 hours of testimony from 103 witnesses and 16 hours of public comment, and received 1,075 emails and 100 phone calls. In addition, on September 23, 2021, the Task Force contracted with the Ralph J. Bunche Center at UCLA to implement a community engagement and communications plan.

IV. Structure of the Report

The interim report focuses on anti-Black, racist federal, state, and local government actions and negligence throughout American history and into the modern day.

Under international law, a government is responsible where its wrongful actions or negligence caused injury to a specific group of people.⁵⁷ Once proven, governments have a duty to remedy wrongful actions.⁵⁸ Reparations offer such a remedy, and the United Nations recognizes five formal categories of reparations: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition.⁵⁹ American courts of law have long recognized a similar concept—that parties must redress the harms caused by their actions or omissions where there was a duty to act.⁶⁰ Advocates frame reparations as a program that seeks acknowledgment, redress, and closure for injustice.⁶¹

This report is created by the Task Force to support the Legislature in its future effort to acknowledge the wrongful actions and negligence of California as well as the wrongful actions and negligence of the local governments within its jurisdiction that have harmed African Americans.

In addition to California's potential legal obligations, repairing a wrong is a political and moral obligation. America and California's democratic forms of government exist to embody the will of the people.⁶² In accepting this system, we, as Americans and as Californians, are more than a random group of people who live in the same geographic area; we bind ourselves into a community that lives beyond the lifespans of its individual members.⁶³ Through government, a community channels its visions for the society it wants to create through the laws that govern it.⁶⁴

Following the charge of AB 3121 to describe the trade of trafficked African people across the oceans and within the lands of the United States, in this report, the Task Force will recount the moral and legal wrongs the American and Californian governments have inflicted upon their own Black citizens and residents. The first chapter describes the institution of slavery as it existed in the geographic territory of the United States, and the legal, political, economic, and cultural systems maintaining and enriched by enslavement. The subsequent eleven chapters describe how these racist systems metastasized throughout America and

California, reaching into all corners of American life. Each chapter traces an issue from its historic foundations in slavery, through successive discriminatory government actions, and government failures to correct and remedy the harms of anti-Black racism. Each chapter describes the uncorrected, compounding, and continuous harms all levels of the American government inflicted upon African Americans, as well as the modern-day effects of those harms.

By focusing on the role of government actors at all levels of local, state and national authority in enslavement and racial discrimination, this report does not and cannot ignore the countless racist actions of private citizens throughout American history. The government's role does not absolve private actors of their own responsibility or prevent private individuals and entities who benefited from this state of affairs for generations from offering their own apologies and engaging in their own acts of reparations.⁶⁵ As the report makes clear in the following pages, federal, state, and local governments often worked in tandem with private individuals⁶⁶ to build and maintain a system placing African Americans in the lowest social strata of this country.⁶⁷

This report's focus on African Americans does not and cannot ignore the countless ways in which the California government and private citizens enslaved, dehumanized, or discriminated against other marginalized communities.

The report's focus on African Americans also does not and cannot ignore the countless ways in which the Californian government and its private citizens enslaved, dehumanized, or discriminated against other marginalized communities.

Often, government discrimination or racist mob violence targeted many communities at once. During the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, white mobs of U.S. servicemen, off-duty police officers, and civilians indiscriminately attacked Latino, Black, and Filipino men in Los Angeles.⁶⁸ Sometimes, one racial group enacted violence against another. As AB 3121 charges this Task Force solely with investigating the history of systemic racism as it relates to Black Californians, it does not focus on the innumerable acts of racist violence and discrimination by government officials and private citizens against other people of color.

V. Immigration and Migration Patterns

The first ship carrying enslaved people landed in what would become the United States in 1619 on the shores of Virginia.⁶⁹ Although Congress outlawed the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1807, between 1525 and 1866, approximately 388,000 enslaved people were trafficked to the United States.⁷⁰ These African men, women, and children were mostly captured on the west coast of the African continent between modern day Senegal and Angola.⁷¹ Once in the United States, the majority of enslaved people remained in the South, although southern enslavers often brought enslaved people into free states.⁷²

In the 1800s and early 1900s, very few African people voluntarily immigrated to the United States due to immigration laws that limited the number of African immigrants.⁷³ Between 1870 and 1920, 17,376 African immigrants arrived in the United States representing 0.06 percent of the total immigrant population at the time.⁷⁴ The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 established an immigration system that limited the number of immigrants from the African continent.⁷⁵ Between 1920 and 1970, 58,449 African individuals entered the United States, or about 0.51 percent of the total immigrant population.⁷⁶ Beginning in the 1960s, Congress passed immigration reforms which significantly increased Caribbean and African immigration to the United States.⁷⁷ As a result, the Black population of the United States became increasingly diverse. In 1990, 363,819 African immigrants entered the United States.⁷⁸

COURTESY OF BUYENLARGE/GETTY IMAGES



African Americans take a break from their work on the railroad. (1938)

Today, approximately 47 million Black people live in the United States, according to the 2020 census.⁷⁹ Of those 47 million Black individuals, academics and other experts differ on the number who are the descendants of people enslaved in the United States. Name changes, destruction of culture, inaccurate records, forced family separation, and other consequences of 400 years of racial oppression make it extremely difficult to trace which Black individuals living today are American descendants of slaves. On the other hand, about 12 percent of Black people in American were born in a foreign country.⁸⁰ Nine percent of African Americans have at least one foreign-born parent.⁸¹ By 2060, the Black foreign-born population is projected to make up about one-third of the U.S. Black population.⁸² 58 percent of Black immigrants arrived in the United States after 2000.⁸³ Every U.S. census conducted since 1970 has found that Black immigrants from the English speaking Caribbean earn more, are more likely to be employed than U.S.-born African Americans, are more likely to hold more financial assets,⁸⁴ are more likely to own their home,⁸⁵ and most are more likely to be healthy than U.S.-born African Americans.⁸⁶

In California, the Black population remained small until World War II. Unlike the English speaking colonies on the east coast, racial boundaries were not strict, and a multi-racial population lived in California as a Spanish colony in the 1500s.⁸⁷ By 1850, when California entered the union, the Black population of California was a mix of African Americans from the North and South, foreign-born Black Afro-Latinos from Mexico, Peru and Chile, and Jamaicans.⁸⁸ The 1860 census counted 4,086 “total free colored” people in California.⁸⁹ Sources vary in the estimates of enslaved people in California, with some sources estimating up to 1,500 enslaved African Americans lived in California in 1852.⁹⁰ The 1920 census counted 38,763 African Americans, out of a total population of 3.4 million in the state.⁹¹

California’s Black population increased significantly during World War II, as many moved to the state in search of war industry jobs.⁹² More Black people moved to California in the 1940s than in the entire previous century of statehood combined.⁹³ The Black population of California ballooned from 124,306 in 1940 to 1,400,143 in 1970.⁹⁴

VI. State of Black California

California is home to the fifth largest Black population in the United States, after Texas, Florida, Georgia, and New York.⁹⁵ As of 2020, about 39.5 million people live in California, of whom about 2.8 million self-identify as Black.⁹⁶ Of the current 2.8 million Black Californians, 244,969 are foreign born, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.⁹⁷

While the number of Black Californians has increased in the last thirty years, the overall percentage of Black Californians has fallen over the same period.⁹⁸ Black Californians make up about six percent of the state's population today, a decrease from 8.1 percent of the state's population in 1990.⁹⁹

Black Californians live in all 58 Californian counties, but most Black Californians live in Los Angeles County (943,145), San Bernardino County (223,116), San Diego County (211,354), Alameda County (198,250), and Riverside County (197,329).¹⁰⁰ The counties with the highest number of Black Californians, as a percentage of the total population, are Solano County (16.87 percent), Sacramento County (12.43 percent), Alameda County (11.78 percent), Contra Costa County (10.69 percent), and San Bernardino County (10.23 percent).¹⁰¹ In the past three decades, about 275,000 Black Californians have left expensive coastal cities to move inland or to other states.¹⁰² During the same timeframe, the Black populations of some of California's historically Black neighborhoods in cities across California have plunged: Compton by 45 percent, San Francisco by 43 percent, and Oakland by 40 percent.¹⁰³

Despite the history of Black voter suppression throughout the United States and California, California has steadily improved voting access since the late twentieth century.¹⁰⁴ Surveys from 2019 show that six percent of likely voters are Black, equal to their share of the population in California.¹⁰⁵



Nevertheless, the effects of 400 years of compounding governmental and private acts of racial violence and discrimination described in this report have resulted in disparities between Black and white Californians

in almost every corner of life. Compared to white Californians, Black Californians earn less and are more likely to be impoverished. In 2018, on average, Black Californians earned \$53,565, compared to \$87,078 for white Californians.¹⁰⁶ Around 19.4 percent of Black Californians live below the poverty line, compared to nine percent of white Californians.¹⁰⁷ Black Californians

Compared to white Californians, Black Californians are

2x MORE LIKELY to live below the poverty line

are also far less likely to own a home than white Californians; in 2019, 59 percent of white households owned their homes, compared with 35 percent of Black Californians.¹⁰⁸ And in contrast to the advances in voting rights in California, the rates of Black homeownership in California have declined by over 11 percent since 2010.¹⁰⁹ In fact, Black homeownership in California in the 2010s has been lower than in the 1960s, when sellers could still legally discriminate against Black home buyers.¹¹⁰

Homelessness is a more acute problem in California than in the rest of the country, and the burden falls heaviest on Black Californians. Almost 50 percent—or nearly one in every two Black Californians—lives in a household where rent or mortgage payments eat up more than 30 percent of the residents' income, compared to about 30 percent of white Californians who suffer similar housing cost burdens.¹¹¹ Nearly 40 percent of California's unhoused people are Black, even though Black Californians represent only six percent of the state's total population.¹¹²

The pervasive effects of racial discrimination have seriously harmed the health of Black Californians. In 2021, the life expectancy of an average Black Californian was 75.1 years, six years shorter than the state average.¹¹³ Black babies are more likely to die in infancy¹¹⁴ and Black mothers giving birth die at a rate of

almost four times higher than the average Californian mother.¹¹⁵ Compared with white Californians, Black Californians are more likely to have diabetes,¹¹⁶ to die from cancer,¹¹⁷ or be hospitalized for heart disease.¹¹⁸

Racial discrimination in housing, education, and the legal system, along with institutionally racist approaches and militarized culture, have collectively resulted in the over-policing of Black communities and the mass incarceration of Black citizens.¹¹⁹ According to data from 2020, the police are more than two times more likely to stop and search African Americans in California than white Americans, even though officers reported no criminal activity for the Black individuals stopped more than twice as often as they did for the white individuals stopped.¹²⁰ In 2020, law enforcement officers used force against African Americans in California more than twice as often than they did against white Americans,¹²¹ and data from 2016 to 2019 indicates that law enforcement officers in California are three times more likely to seriously injure, shoot, or kill a African American in California, even when other factors are taken into account.¹²² About 28 percent of people imprisoned in California are Black—even though they make up about six percent of the population in the state.¹²³

Black youth in the state also face heightened risk of punishment. Black students in California are suspended at rates 2.4 times higher than the statewide average,¹²⁴ and lose the most number of days of instruction to suspensions when compared with other racial groups.¹²⁵ Recently, the California Attorney General’s Office

identified racial disparities in discipline for Black students across three different school districts.¹²⁶

Further, school discipline is often the first step toward law enforcement involvement. Black students in California are disproportionately referred by schools to law enforcement.¹²⁷ A California Attorney General’s Office investigation found that, since 2015, Black and Latinx students in Stockton Unified School District were significantly more likely to experience severe policing outcomes than other students, including being cited or booked into police custody.¹²⁸

In the past three decades, about 275,000 Black Californians have left expensive coastal cities to move inland or to other states. During the same timeframe, the Black populations of some of California’s historically Black neighborhoods in cities across California have plunged: Compton by 45 percent, San Francisco by 43 percent, and Oakland by 40 percent.

As a result, compared to white youth in California, Black youth are over 30 times more likely to be held in a juvenile justice facility in the State.¹²⁹ In 2019, African American youth comprised 36 percent of those ordered to be placed in state juvenile detention facilities, even though they make up only 14 percent of the youth population in California.¹³⁰

VII. Terms Used Throughout the Report

When discussing issues as complex as race and reparations, precision is paramount. Precision helps ensure that we — the writers and the reader, as American and Californian citizens and residents — begin in the same place, to arrive at the same understanding. As described later in this report, words have been weaponized throughout American history to dehumanize African Americans. Words can also be used to mend —to acknowledge, to respect, and to uplift. To that end, this report defines and adopts the following terms throughout its pages.

The N-word— the word “nigger” has been used for centuries to dehumanize African Americans.¹³¹ The terms “Negro” and “Colored person” (as opposed to “person of color”), although adopted by Black communities for

periods of time, have since been recognized as derogatory terms.¹³² When quoting historical documents, this report will quote these words—not to condone the words or their vicious meanings—but to present them in the context in which these slurs were used. The California Legislature enacted AB 3121, recognizing that the lasting wounds of slavery and discrimination cannot begin to mend until those wounds are first addressed. In that same spirit, we quote these terms recognizing that reparations or any other answer to racism cannot be complete until we squarely face slavery and the systemic discrimination that followed and persists today.

White supremacy — white supremacy is a system of belief and power that white people are superior to other races.¹³³ This report confronts the idea of white supremacy

and the various forms that it takes. When discussing the concept of white supremacy, the report uses the term to refer to one of two concepts.

First, this report uses the terms “white supremacy” or “white supremacists” to identify groups or individuals who believe that white people are superior to people of other races. When used this way, “white supremacy” describes individual prejudice. Examples of white supremacist groups—including groups that exist to this day—include, for example, the Ku Klux Klan.¹³⁴

Second, this report uses the term “white supremacy” in the American context to describe the racist premise upon which social and legal rules and practices are formed with the intention of discriminating or enacting violence against people of color, including Black people.¹³⁵ This report also uses it to describe cultural images and stereotypes that reinforce prejudices against people of color, including Black people.¹³⁶ When used this way, white supremacy describes forms of racism that extend beyond individuals or organizations, a form of racism often described as structural or systemic racism.¹³⁷ As this report demonstrates, the fundamental political, social, and economic system of our country negatively impacts people of color regardless of the intent of any one person to be racist.

This report does not use the term “white supremacy” to describe white people as a group, white Americans, or white Californians. Not all white people are white supremacists. Anyone, regardless of race, with or without intent, consciously or unconsciously, can engage in acts of white supremacy, or be a part of a racist system. A racist system harms all who live in it, even those who may have historically reaped the benefits of the system.¹³⁸

Throughout the report, we also use words that center the people discussed. We avoid words that describe solely their conditions, especially when enslavement and other racist laws and policies have imposed these conditions.

Rather than refer to “slaves,” we refer to “enslaved persons.” As the White House Historical Association notes, most historians now refer to “enslaved persons” instead of “slaves” because the term “slave” reduces the enslaved person to an object.¹³⁹ Instead, historians use “enslaved person” to grant agency and recognition to the enslaved individual and to remind us about the violence and inhumanity of slavery.¹⁴⁰ For similar reasons, this report refers to “enslavers,” rather than “owners” or “masters.”¹⁴¹

Similarly, instead of “owners” or “masters,” we refer to “enslavers.” The words master or owner suggests a false sense of natural authority and suggest that the enslaved person is less capable than the enslaver.¹⁴² It also hides the fact that these individuals actively chose to enslave other human beings who are entitled to the same human rights as themselves.¹⁴³

Instead of “fugitive,” this report refers to “freedom-seekers” when describing enslaved persons or other people seeking to escape slavery and other forms of captivity. The term “fugitive” was commonly used with laws such as the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1793 and 1850 passed by Congress, which used the term to reinforce the system of enslavement and criminalize those who sought freedom.¹⁴⁴

Rather than refer to “felon” or “ex-offender,” this report uses terms such as “formerly incarcerated” and “returning citizen.” Similarly, this report uses terms such as “person in prison” or “incarcerated person,” rather than “inmates.” Like the term “fugitive,” the terms “felon,” “ex-offender,” and “inmate” have stigmatized people who are or have once been in jail or prison. By labeling people as nothing more than their criminal justice status, these words deny people their full personhood and reinforce a stigma that prevents people from fully participating in society.¹⁴⁵

Instead of referring to people without homes as “the homeless,” this report uses terms such as “unhoused people” or “people experiencing homelessness.” This follows the practice of the Associated Press Style Guide, which recognized that the phrase “the homeless” dehumanizes people by collectively reducing them to a label based on housing status, rather than their status as people.¹⁴⁶

Though the report uses person-centered terms, the report may sometimes quote historical documents or statements that do not. This report presents these quotations unaltered to present them unfiltered.

In using person-centered words, this report recognizes that words alone may not cure the wounds that people have suffered.¹⁴⁷ While words may not fix the systems they describe, this report uses these words, recognizing that they are the beginning—not the end—of what we must do to redress racism, past and present.

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Endnotes

- ¹Lapp, [Blacks in Gold Rush California](#) (1977) pp. 3-9, 130-139.
- ²Cal. Const. of 1849, art. I, § 18; *id.* at p. 127.
- ³L.H., [The Roots of Slavery in Woodland](#) (Mar. 20, 2016) The Davis Vanguard (as of Mar. 28, 2022); Smith, [Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction](#) (2013), pp. 231-233.
- ⁴L.H., *supra*; Smith, *supra*, at pp. 231-233.
- ⁵L.H., *supra*; Smith, *supra*, at pp. 231-233.
- ⁶L.H., *supra*; Smith, *supra*, at pp. 231-233.
- ⁷L.H., *supra*; Smith, *supra*, at pp. 231-233.
- ⁸L.H., *supra*; Smith, *supra*, at pp. 231-233.
- ⁹*In re Campbell's Estate* (1910) 12 Cal.App. 707, 718.
- ¹⁰Restore/Restory: A People's History of the Cache Creek Nature Preserve, [Basil Campbell](#) Restore/Restory (as of Mar. 28, 2022).
- ¹¹Hudson, [West of Jim Crow: The Fight Against California's Color Line](#) (2020) p. 190.
- ¹²*Id.* at p. 192.
- ¹³*Ibid.*
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*
- ¹⁵*Id.* at p. 193
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*
- ¹⁸*Id.* at p. 194.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*
- ²⁰*Id.* at p. 204.
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I. Introduction

On July 5th, 1852, Frederick Douglass gave a speech to a crowd of 600 mostly white antislavery activists in Rochester, New York, the day after Independence Day.¹ Douglass was one of the most famous Black antislavery and civil rights activists at the time.² He began by praising the courage of the nation's founders in winning their freedom from the British Empire.³ But Douglass did not come to celebrate American independence and liberty.⁴ The United States was founded on the idea that “all men are created equal[.]” but white Americans enslaved their fellow African Americans and “notoriously hate[d] [...] all men whose skins are not colored like your own.”⁵ For Douglass, the Fourth of July only highlighted the “immeasurable distance” between free white Americans and enslaved African Americans.⁶ “The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common.—The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me,” he explained; “*You may rejoice. I must mourn.*”⁷

Frederick Douglass's speech about the Fourth of July shows the conflict at the heart of American history. The United States prides itself on liberty, equality, and justice for all, but for over 400 years, white people of European ancestry built and continued a brutal caste system based on false notions of racial difference: white people at the top, people of African descent at the bottom, and all other groups ranked in between.⁸ From the beginning, America's wealth was built by the forced labor of people from Africa and their descendants. These people were forcibly sold and traded as commodities and millions of them cultivated crops—tobacco, sugar, rice, indigo, wheat, corn, and especially cotton—that allowed American colonies and the early United States to prosper. Colonial governments and the U.S. government at all levels allowed and participated in the exploitation, abuse, terror, and murder of people of African descent so that white people could profit as much as possible from their enslavement. To justify stealing the intellect, skill, and labor of African Americans, enslavers created and spread false, racist ideas that African Americans were less intelligent than whites, that they loved their children less than white parents, and that they felt less pain than white people did.



Captives being brought on board of a slave ship on the West Coast of Africa. (c. 1880)

Insisting that African Americans were less than human made it easier for enslavers and the American government at all levels to deny them the legal rights that many white Americans believed were a basic part of being American. After enslavement officially ended in 1865, white Americans terrorized African Americans with violence and racist ideas. African Americans lived under violent threats to themselves and their families and did not have the economic opportunities or political rights of their white peers. Through laws allowing, promoting, and protecting enslavement, federal, state, and local governments were complicit in stealing centuries of unpaid wages from African Americans. The racist ideas invented to control enslaved people have echoed through centuries of American laws and policies and inflicted physical, mental, and emotional trauma on approximately 16 generations of African Americans. The state and federal governments of this country have never atoned for these harms.

This chapter traces the long arc of enslavement in early North America and the United States. Sections III and IV examine the origins of race-based enslavement

targeting people of African ancestry, the ways slavery generated wealth for white colonists in English North America, and the emergence of transatlantic trafficking in enslaved African people. Section V discusses the importance of enslavement to the founding of the United States from the American Revolution to the creation of the U.S. Constitution. Sections VI, VII, and VIII describe the lives of enslaved people during the height of the domestic slave trade, the complicity of northerners in the perpetuation of enslavement, and enslavement's importance to American educational, religious, and governmental institutions. Section IX discusses the expansion of enslavement into western U.S. territories, the establishment of enslavement in California, and the complicity of the California state government in promoting enslavement, oppressive laws, and anti-Black sentiment. Finally, sections X, XI, and XII conclude the chapter by examining the U.S. Civil War, the formal abolition of enslavement, policies toward formerly enslaved people during Reconstruction. It ends by considering the lingering, harmful effects of efforts to recast the defeat of the Confederate States of America into a "Lost Cause" myth that endures to the present day.

II. The Origins of American Enslavement

Pre-Modern Enslavement

Enslavement has existed for thousands of years in many different cultures across the world.⁹ It is only in the past 400 to 500 years that white Europeans developed a type of enslavement based heavily on the color of someone's skin and that mainly targeted people of African ancestry.¹⁰ This type of enslavement developed gradually between the 1400s and the 1700s.¹¹ It was based on the ideas that African ancestry could be the basis for life-long enslavement that the children of enslaved African-descended women could be enslaved from birth, and that people of African descent were naturally destined to be enslaved.¹²

Before the 1400s, a time period known as the "pre-modern era," enslavement and enslaved people differed widely.¹³ In the ancient Roman Empire, for instance, those who were enslaved were mostly conquered people who came from multiple racial, ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds across Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.¹⁴ In the Middle Ages (600s to 1400s), Celtic peoples, North Africans, Scandinavians, and especially Slavic people from Eastern Europe (from whom the word "slave"

comes) were the most commonly enslaved groups in Europe.¹⁵ In the Muslim kingdoms of North Africa and the Middle East, both Slavic people and sub-Saharan African people (Africans who lived south of the Sahara Desert) made up a large number of those who were enslaved.¹⁶

Enslaved people in these diverse societies became enslaved in different ways: they could be prisoners of war, victims of kidnapping, targets of religious crusades,

To justify stealing the intellect, skill, and labor of African Americans, enslavers created and spread false, racist ideas that African Americans were less intelligent than whites, that they loved their children less than white parents, and that they felt less pain than white people.

people sentenced to enslavement as a punishment for crimes, or poor people sold to pay off debts.¹⁷ Depending on the culture or time period, children born to one or more enslaved parent were not always automatically enslaved, and it was fairly common for enslavers to free

the children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren of enslaved people.¹⁸

Finally, early enslaved people fulfilled a variety of roles in their societies beyond being forced agricultural laborers or house servants.¹⁹ Enslaved people could be status symbols who represented the wealth and power of their enslavers, trusted advisors, poorly treated members of their enslavers' extended families, coerced sexual and marriage partners, or slave-soldiers forced into military service.²⁰

Beginnings of Modern Enslavement

Enslavement changed with European world exploration and global colonization between the 1400s and the 1600s.²¹ In North America and South America, English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Dutch colonizers took Indigenous peoples' land to grow crops such as sugarcane, tobacco, rice, and coffee and to mine for gold.²²

In most of these new colonies, natural resources and land to grow crops were common, but laborers were scarce.²³ In order to efficiently exploit these resources, Europeans first captured, enslaved, and exploited the Indigenous peoples of North and South America.²⁴ Because the enslavement of Indigenous people could not keep up with the demand for labor, European colonizers began to traffic enslaved people from the continent of Africa.²⁵

Portuguese and Spanish colonizers brought the first enslaved Africans to North and South America to supplement forced Indigenous labor.²⁶ Portuguese merchants had been trafficking West Africans and selling them in Portugal for many years before the colonization of North and South America.²⁷ It was these captives who were first forcibly moved in small groups to European colonies across the Atlantic Ocean.²⁸ Portuguese and Spanish colonizers eventually started buying thousands of enslaved Africans along the coasts of West Africa and Central Africa and bringing them directly to colonies in the Caribbean and Brazil.²⁹ Around 500,000 enslaved people of African descent had already arrived in North and South America³⁰—including Spanish settlements in present-day South Carolina (by 1526)³¹ and Florida (by 1539)³²—by the time Dutch pirates sold around 20 African captives to English colonists in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619.³³

Creating the American Racial Hierarchy

When these first Africans were brought by force to the English colonies that became the United States, a caste system based mostly on skin color did not yet fully exist.

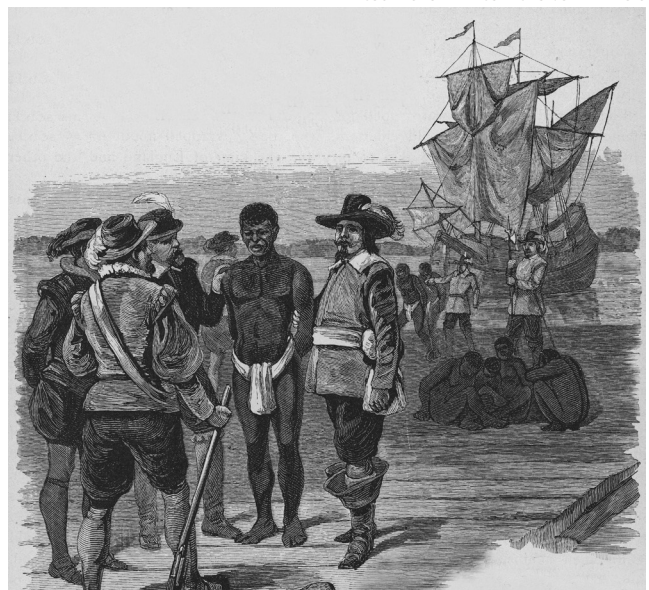
Instead, European colonists who wanted to exploit enslaved Black people and profit from their labor built this caste system gradually during the 1600s and 1700s.

In the very earliest years of English colonization in Virginia, European indentured servants were the most common workers.³⁴ Indentured servants were usually either poor people who agreed to work for wealthy people for several years in exchange for transportation to the colonies, or they were people found guilty of crimes who had to work for several years in the colonies before getting their freedom.³⁵

At first, there was not much difference between the treatment of enslaved Africans and European indentured servants.³⁶ The major divisions in Virginia were between wealthy people and poor people who were forced to labor, not between Black and white people.³⁷ Wealthy white Virginians who controlled the colony and profited from the labor of both indentured white people and enslaved African people feared that rebellions by these lower-class people might undermine their power and wealth.³⁸

Wealthy white colonists attempted to solve this problem by using race as a way to divide these two groups and stay in power.³⁹ Rich white Virginians began to grant more rights and privileges to poorer white people.⁴⁰ This move created a false sense of greater equality among rich and poor white English colonists, who began to come together around a shared idea that they were “white” people who were naturally superior to “Black” people

COURTESY OF KEAN COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES



'Introduction of Slavery,' probably Jamestown, Virginia, late 1610s.

of African descent.⁴¹ The new unity between rich and poor white people in Virginia encouraged poor whites to keep Africans and their descendants enslaved and to help their wealthy neighbors squash rebellions of enslaved people.⁴²

Colonial lawmakers then established new laws that made the racial caste system a permanent part of American culture and society.⁴³ Colonial laws aimed to control people of African descent, keep them in life-long enslavement, and keep poor whites and enslaved African-descended people divided.⁴⁴ In the late 1600s and early 1700s, these colonial laws gradually built up a legal system that treated people of African descent as permanent outsiders whose skin color made them naturally different from and unequal to all white people.⁴⁵ These Virginia laws, called “Slave Codes,” did the following:

- Made enslavement permanent and automatic for most people of African descent by saying that children born to enslaved mothers would be enslaved for life⁴⁶; that becoming a Christian would not end enslavement⁴⁷; and that enslavers could not set enslaved people free unless they paid to take them out of the Virginia colony;⁴⁸
- Made it easier for whites to control free people of African descent (those born into freedom or who did manage to escape enslavement) by denying them

legal, political, and social rights.⁴⁹ These included the right to vote, serve in colonial military organizations, have political office, or carry firearms;⁵⁰ and

- Divided all white people from all Black people by making interracial sex or marriage a crime,⁵¹ punishing white women who gave birth to mixed-race children,⁵² and forcing these mixed-race children (and their children) into indentured servitude until they were 31 years old.⁵³

Other southern colonies that depended on enslavement passed similar laws across the 1700s, sometimes copying the laws of Virginia directly.⁵⁴ These early slave codes ensured that this racial caste system became widespread across much of the area that would later become the United States.⁵⁵

Only after enslavement became widespread and profitable and racist policies were in place, did white people develop elaborate racist ideas to explain why the racial caste system was natural and good.⁵⁶ European enslavers argued either that enslavement “civilized” Africans by introducing them to European climates and lifeways, or that the Christian Bible had automatically cursed them to suffer enslavement.⁵⁷ The overall goal of these racist ideas was to defend enslavement and white supremacy by claiming that Black people were, and always had been, inferior to white people with European ancestry.⁵⁸

III. The Transatlantic Trafficking of Enslaved People

The Growth of Slavery

The search for profits, the unity of rich and poor white colonists, and the development of racist ideas paved the way for the massive increase of slaving voyages to Africa and the enslavement of people of African descent in the lands that would later become the United States.⁵⁹

The enslavement of people of African descent played a major role in the population boom of English colonies in North America during the 1700s.⁶⁰ Enslaved Africans and African descended peoples made up 47.5 percent of all people who arrived in the English colonies between 1700 and 1775 (around 278,400 of the 585,800 new arrivals documented during this period).⁶¹ This meant that the transatlantic slave trade was nearly as important to the growth of English North America as free (or indentured) immigration from Europe.⁶²

The populations of the English colonies showed this change: Between 1680 and 1750, people of African

descent increased from 7 percent to 44 percent of the total population of Virginia, and from 17 percent to 61 percent of the total population of South Carolina.⁶³ This trend was even more pronounced in the nearby British colonies of the Caribbean (known as the West Indies) where almost one million enslaved Africans were forcibly brought during the same period of time,⁶⁴ and where enslaved people made up 80 to 90 percent of the total population.⁶⁵

To keep the profits of enslavement growing, British merchants, the British monarchy, and the British government worked together to become the leaders of the transatlantic slave trade.⁶⁶ Just one English company, the Royal African Company, forcibly brought nearly 150,000 enslaved people from Africa across the Atlantic Ocean between the early 1670s and the early 1720s.⁶⁷ This total was more than any single company in the entire history of the transatlantic slave trade.⁶⁸

The English transatlantic slave trade of the 1600 to 1700s differed from the slave trades which existed in West Africa before or during the same period.⁶⁹ Enslavement was common in sub-Saharan Africa, including West Africa, which (in addition to Central Africa) was one of the main areas of the transatlantic slave trade.⁷⁰ In West African societies, enslaved people were usually people captured in wars or attacks on other ethnic or lineage (family ancestry) groups, people who owed debts, or people found guilty of crimes.⁷¹ Enslaved people in West African societies also had a wide variety of social and economic roles.⁷² Many, especially children, lived in the same home as their enslavers and were treated as “pawns,” low-status members of the family group.⁷³ Some worked in agriculture or as house servants, while some became wives or concubines (involuntary sexual partners or secondary wives).⁷⁴ This enslavement was not usually permanent or passed on to the next generation.⁷⁵ Most enslaved people and their children in West Africa gradually lost their enslaved status and became part of the families and communities of their enslavers.⁷⁶

The arrival of Europeans made enslavement along the western coast of Africa more widespread and violent.⁷⁷ European enslavers depended on African slave-trading networks for captives to send across the Atlantic Ocean.⁷⁸ But the massive demand for African captives, which kept growing as Europeans colonized more areas of the world, changed African enslavement greatly.⁷⁹ Warfare and kidnapping raids increased to capture more people to sell to Europeans.⁸⁰ The focus of the West African slave trade also shifted to the coasts and port cities where Europeans set up trading forts to buy people who had been captured.⁸¹

The transatlantic slave trade eventually involved capturing Africans from an enormous geographic area covering much of West Africa and Central Africa, and even extending to the island of Madagascar off the southeast coast of Africa.⁸² This trafficking in human beings spanned 3,500 miles along the western African coast from present-day Senegal in the north to present-day Angola in the south, and as many as 500 to 1,000 miles into the interior of the continent.⁸³ Captive African people often changed hands many times and traveled long distances before they arrived at coastal ports where Europeans bought them.⁸⁴

The Middle Passage

African captives suffered horrific physical, emotional, and mental trauma before and during the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.⁸⁵ This journey was called the “Middle Passage” and it was so dangerous, unhealthy, and violent that almost 1.8 million people died before they ever reached the Americas.⁸⁶

Enslaved Africans’ suffering began even before the slave ships set sail for the Americas.⁸⁷ Once European enslavers purchased people who had been captured from African enslavers, they incarcerated them for days, weeks, or even months until they were ready to sail.⁸⁸ In the earlier years of the slave trade, European enslavers imprisoned enslaved people in large corrals called “bar-racoons.”⁸⁹ The most common practice, however, was to incarcerate enslaved people on board the slave ships until it was time to sail for the Americas.⁹⁰

During the journey across the Atlantic Ocean, enslaved Africans went through months of torture trapped inside slave ships.⁹¹ The voyage, which was called the “Middle Passage” because it was the second leg of a triangular trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas,⁹² took 80 to 100 days (around 2.5 to 3 months or more) in the early years of the trade (although new sailing technol-

Almost 1.8 million Africans died as they were trafficked across the Atlantic Ocean to slavery.

ogies cut the length of the trip to 60 to 80 days in later years).⁹³ Slaving ships came in many different sizes, but the average Royal African Company boat held around 330 enslaved people.⁹⁴

African men, who made up around two-thirds of all those captured,⁹⁵ spent almost all of the journey—sixteen hours or more every day—laying down in specially constructed rooms inside the ships.⁹⁶ Crews stripped them naked, chained them up,⁹⁷ and forced them to lay down on their sides, or to lay head to feet, so that they could fit in as many people as possible.⁹⁸ On English slave ships, each man had a space smaller than the size of a coffin.⁹⁹ On ships with “tight-packing,” captains added an extra platform so that men laid in two rows stacked on top of each other with only 2.5 feet of vertical space to lay down.¹⁰⁰ Enslaved women and children, who were usually smaller in number, lived together in groups in small rooms inside the ship.¹⁰¹

Conditions inside slave ships were horrific and caused massive amounts of sickness and death.¹⁰² Hundreds of people were crowded together in the blazing heat and tossed back and forth with the ship's movement, especially during bad weather.¹⁰³ Enslaved captive Olaudah Equiano, who survived the Middle Passage, wrote that “the closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us.”¹⁰⁴

Captives did not have much fresh air and their rooms were covered with human waste.¹⁰⁵ Rats and insects swarmed around them.¹⁰⁶ Low-quality food, as well as scarce water, led to widespread lack of nutrition and dehydration.¹⁰⁷ Filthy conditions and poor nutrition caused waves of sickness, including scurvy (a lack of vitamins B and C) and “bloody flux” (amoebic diarrhea or dysentery).¹⁰⁸ Highly contagious diseases—especially smallpox—spread fast in the overcrowded spaces.¹⁰⁹ Slave ships were filled with people who were very sick, dying, or dead.

Enslaved Africans also suffered physical and sexual violence at the hands of ships' crews.¹¹⁰ Crew members moved people who had been captured to the top deck of the ship on a regular basis to force them to bathe and dance for exercise.¹¹¹ They often raped and impregnated women and girls.¹¹² Heavily armed crew members watched enslaved people carefully, and they threatened,

beat, tortured, and sometimes killed them, especially if they resisted or rebelled.¹¹³

There is also evidence that ship crews threw sick enslaved people overboard to prevent them from spreading disease to others and to claim insurance money for “lost” human cargo.¹¹⁴ In one especially brutal case in 1781, an English slave ship captain ordered his crew to throw 132 Africans overboard because he had run out of supplies and his insurance company would only pay him if enslaved people

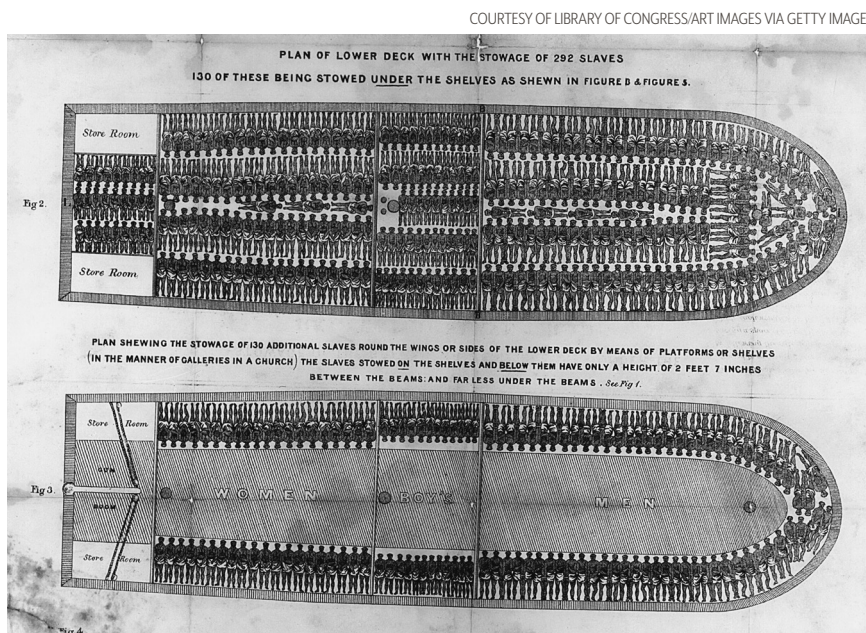
Crews stripped enslaved Africans naked, chained them up, and forced them to lay down on their sides, or to lay head to feet, so that they could fit in as many people as possible. On English slave ships, each man had a space smaller than the size of a coffin.

drowned, not if they starved to death.¹¹⁵ During the worst storms, crews also tried to keep from sinking by throwing enslaved people overboard to decrease the weight of the ship.¹¹⁶ British insurance companies allowed this and paid ship captains for any human beings who their crews threw overboard to drown.¹¹⁷

The transatlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage had a sickening cost in human lives. European enslavers forced around 12.5 million enslaved Africans to cross the Atlantic Ocean between 1500 and 1866.¹¹⁸ More than 14 percent of these people, around 1.8 million in total, died of sickness, neglect, abuse, murder, or suicide.¹¹⁹

The men, women, and children who survived the Middle Passage were then sold to local slave traders, merchants, or owners of plantations and forced labor camps.¹²⁰

When their voyage across the Atlantic Ocean finally ended in North America, South America, or the Caribbean, enslaved Africans suffered “social death,” which meant they were now permanently separated from their home communities, cultures, and families.¹²¹ They were outsiders in an unfamiliar place, surrounded by strangers with completely different cultures, religions, and languages. Enslaved Africans had to build new families, languages, cultures, and religious practices rooted both in the pre-colonial traditions of



Engraving “Stowage of the British Slave Ship ‘Brookes’ Under the Regulated Slave Trade Act of 1788” (circa 1788)

their homelands and the new cultures that they found in the Americas.¹²²

Slavery and the Founding of the United States

Starting in the late 1600s, enslaved people and the institution of enslavement became increasingly important to the colonial societies of North America that would later become the United States.¹²³ The southern English colonies of North America, which eventually included Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, began trafficking more and more enslaved people as the 1700s went on.¹²⁴

These colonies gradually built economies and societies that depended heavily on enslavement for growing cash crops to sell in international markets.¹²⁵ In the colonies of the Upper South, including Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and North Carolina, enslaved people grew tobacco. Enslaved people in the low country and coastal plains of the Carolinas and Georgia grew rice and indigo (a plant for making blue dye).¹²⁶

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Growing rice and indigo, for instance, required skilled labor and knowledge of specialized techniques for successful production.¹²⁷ In fact, rice and indigo growing was already highly developed along the western coast of Africa, and, later the Caribbean, where people of African descent had already innovated several production techniques.¹²⁸ Enslavers were eager to buy enslaved people who already had these specialized agricultural skills.¹²⁹

Human trafficking in enslaved people was not limited to the southern colonies.¹³⁰ Whites in northern colonies also trafficked enslaved people, and enslavement became a feature of life in every northern colony.¹³¹ In most New England colonies, enslavement was not a major institution, but in colonies farther south, such as New York, enslavement was often a part of daily life.¹³² For example, one-fifth of New York City's population was enslaved in 1746, making it the second largest slaveholding city in the 13 original English colonies behind only Charleston, South Carolina.¹³³

By the time white English colonists began to complain about their mistreatment by the British government and began comparing their lack of rights in the British Empire to enslavement, the real enslavement of people of African descent was already well established in all 13 original British colonies.¹³⁴ Five hundred thousand enslaved Black people, who made up 20 percent of the entire colonial population, knew the real horrors and trauma of enslavement.¹³⁵

The American Revolution

When white colonists declared their independence from Great Britain, they explained their actions by saying that the King of England and the British government had taken away their freedom and their rights as “freeborn Englishmen.”¹³⁶ In the Declaration of Independence, Americans famously announced that “all men are created equal” and “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”¹³⁷ At the same time, these same colonists bought and sold people of African descent who had no freedom and very few rights.

People who opposed the American Revolution were quick to point out the hypocrisy of these words.¹³⁸ Thomas Day, an Englishman who opposed enslavement, said that “[i]f there be an object truly ridiculous in nature, it is an American patriot, signing resolutions of independence with the one hand and with the other brandishing a whip over his affrighted slaves.”¹³⁹ Even white American colonists understood the hypocrisy of the Declaration of Independence.¹⁴⁰ Abigail Adams, an opponent of enslavement from New England, the wife of John Adams, and a future first lady of the United States, wondered just how strongly white colonists felt about human liberty

when they were “accustomed to deprive their fellow citizens of theirs.”¹⁴¹

The founders of the United States, especially those who owned enslaved people and profited from enslavement, were well aware of these contradictions and they tried

Thomas Jefferson, the author of the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, owned around 600 enslaved people over the course of his lifetime. He willingly freed only 10 of the 600 people who he had enslaved over the course of his life. Four of those 10 people were his own children with Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman who he owned as his property and who he never freed.

to downplay them. They knew that enslavement made them, and their independence movement, look hypocritical, but they also wanted to continue to profit from the stolen labor of enslaved people.

Thomas Jefferson, the author of the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, owned around 600 enslaved people over the course of his lifetime.¹⁴² His original draft of the Declaration of Independence openly criticized the transatlantic slave trade, which he called “a cruel war against human nature itself, violating it’s [sic] most sacred rights of life and liberty,” but he blamed it almost all on King George III of England.¹⁴³ Jefferson claimed that the king not only failed to stop the slave trade, but also that the king encouraged enslaved people to rise up and kill white colonists.¹⁴⁴

Embarrassment over enslavement, and the hope to keep making money from it, was clear when the Continental Congress rejected this part of the Declaration and voted to remove it.¹⁴⁵ Jefferson explained the rejection in his notes.¹⁴⁶ Representatives from South Carolina and Georgia depended on enslavement and wanted to continue in the trafficking of humans.¹⁴⁷ Men from the northern colonies were embarrassed by the criticism of the slave trade because they were highly involved in shipping enslaved Africans across the Atlantic.¹⁴⁸ The final version of the Declaration of Independence only mentioned enslavement indirectly by claiming that King George III was trying to cause “domestic insurrections” (code words for rebellions by enslaved people) in the colonies.¹⁴⁹

The founders of the United States tried to dodge the issue of enslavement, but enslaved and free people of African

descent would not let them. They tested the new nation’s ideas of freedom during the American Revolutionary War (1775 to 1783).¹⁵⁰

Around 30,000 to 40,000 people (and maybe as many as 100,000 people) escaped their enslavement during the American Revolution.¹⁵¹ Virginia’s colonial governor, John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, quickly took advantage of enslavement in the colonies by promising freedom to any enslaved man who fought for the British Army against the Americans.¹⁵² Some male freedom seekers did join the British Army, but large numbers died from smallpox during their service.¹⁵³ Others, including many women and children, took advantage of

wartime chaos to escape to areas where the British Army was strong.¹⁵⁴ The massive number of freedom seekers greatly damaged enslavement in the lower southern states.¹⁵⁵ For instance, around 30 percent of South Carolina’s enslaved population left or died during the Revolution.¹⁵⁶

Some states tried to solve this problem by promising freedom to enslaved men who fought on the side of the Americans.¹⁵⁷ Other states recruited free Black men to boost the size of the small American army.¹⁵⁸ Even though they were smaller in number than whites, free Black men were more likely to volunteer for military service and to serve longer than whites because they wanted both independence for the United States and greater rights for themselves.¹⁵⁹ Overall, around 9,000 free or enslaved African American men served alongside white revolutionaries in integrated military units to fight for American independence.¹⁶⁰

African Americans’ struggles for freedom during the American Revolution led to the end of the enslavement in most of the northern states where the enslaved population was small and local enslavement was less central to the economy.¹⁶¹ Enslaved people used the revolutionary ideals of freedom to convince northern judges and the general public to end enslavement.¹⁶²

When enslaved people in Massachusetts sued for their freedom, the state courts decided that enslavement went against the state’s new constitution, which said that “all men are born free and equal.”¹⁶³ Enslavement ended there in 1783.¹⁶⁴ Nearby, the state of Vermont approved a new constitution that outlawed enslavement completely in 1777.¹⁶⁵ States farther south, such as New

York and Pennsylvania, depended much more on enslavement and so passed gradual emancipation laws to cover enslavers' loss of profits.¹⁶⁶ These laws required children born to enslaved mothers to go through a long indenture (up to 28 years) and then be set free.¹⁶⁷

Southern states that profited the most from enslavement kept and rebuilt it, but the process looked different in the Upper and Lower South.

States in the Upper South—Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware—temporarily began to relax their laws against freeing enslaved people.¹⁶⁸ “Manumission,” the legal process by which enslavers freed enslaved people or allowed them to save money and purchase their freedom, became more common.¹⁶⁹ This was partly because the Revolutionary War had hurt the market for tobacco and made enslavement less profitable in the Upper South.¹⁷⁰ Revolutionary ideas about human freedom also motivated some of this manumission, although with limits.¹⁷¹ For instance, Virginian George Washington, leader of the revolutionary army and the first president of the United States, freed all of the people he enslaved, but only upon his death.¹⁷²

Washington, however, was not the norm. Thomas Jefferson, the next slaveholder from Virginia to win the presidency, willingly freed only 10 of the 600 people who he had enslaved over the course of his life.¹⁷³ Four of those 10 people were his own children with Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman who he owned as his property and who he never freed.¹⁷⁴

Jefferson's fellow white southerners in the Upper South increasingly stopped manumission when they found that selling “surplus” enslaved people to cotton growers in South Carolina and Georgia could be a profitable replacement for tobacco.¹⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the Lower or Deep South states rebuilt their plantation economies by buying enslaved people from the Upper South and trafficking in large numbers of enslaved Africans from the transatlantic slave trade.¹⁷⁶

Overall, the American Revolution created a new nation that was increasingly divided into three regions: The North, where enslavement was immediately or gradually ended; the Upper South, where older patterns of enslavement were

changing; and the Lower South, where enslavement remained an important and growing part of the economy.

The New Cotton Economy and the Expansion of Slavery

Instead of dying out after the American Revolution, enslavement became the economic lifeblood of the United States, North and South. After winning independence, the United States built one of the largest and most profitable enslaved labor economies in the world.¹⁷⁷ Between the end of the American Revolution in 1783 and the start of the Civil War in 1861, roughly the length of one human lifetime, the enslaved population of the United States increased almost five times from just under 650,000 enslaved individuals to almost four million enslaved people.¹⁷⁸

Two major processes made this possible. First, new technologies for producing cotton increased the value of enslaved people's labor and encouraged the expansion of enslavement into lands in the Deep South.¹⁷⁹ Second, white Americans adopted a national constitution that protected enslavement and gave proslavery white Americans outsized political power in the federal government.¹⁸⁰ This power allowed enslavers to increase the profits of enslavement and to enjoy those profits with little regulation by the federal government.

Starting in the 1790s new technologies made enslavement more profitable than ever in North America. A new machine, the cotton gin, made it much easier and faster to remove the seeds from short-staple cotton, a

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sturdy breed of cotton that could be grown in many different climates and soils in the South.¹⁸¹ Cotton growing breathed new life into the institution of enslavement. Enslavers looked for new lands to the west to expand cotton plantations.¹⁸²

To help these land-hungry cotton planters, the United States government increasingly pressured Native Americans in the Deep South to give up their homelands.¹⁸³ Native Americans in the southeastern United States, some of whom had adopted the practices of white colonizers such as growing cotton and owning enslaved African Americans, resisted this pressure.¹⁸⁴ The U.S. government eventually used a brutal policy of removal in which soldiers rounded up Native Americans, removed them from their land, and force marched (or sailed) them hundreds of miles to lands west of the Mississippi River.¹⁸⁵ People of African descent enslaved by Native Americans were also forcibly moved west with their enslavers, and some Native Americans even purchased more enslaved people to take west with them.¹⁸⁶ Thousands of Native Americans and an unknown number of enslaved African Americans died from disease and neglect along the way and the removal process came to be known as the “Trail of Tears.”¹⁸⁷ As white southern cotton planters moved into Native homelands, the removal, death, and land theft suffered by Native Americans went hand-in-hand with the widespread enslavement and forced relocation of African Americans.

Slavery in the New U.S. Constitution

Around the same time that the cotton gin took off, southern enslaving states left a permanent mark on the American legal system by shaping the U.S. Constitution to meet their needs in upholding enslavement. During the Constitutional Convention in 1787, southern proslavery representatives pushed for protections for enslavement, partly by threatening not to sign onto the new Constitution.¹⁸⁸

A major protection for enslavement in the Constitution came in a clause that prohibited Congress from outlawing U.S. participation in the transatlantic slave trade for another 20 years.¹⁸⁹ During those important 20 years, slave ships legally brought around 86,000 enslaved Africans to the United States.¹⁹⁰ Congress was also required, and given the power, to use military force to stop “insurrections” and “domestic violence,”¹⁹¹ which would have included rebellions by enslaved people.¹⁹² Proslavery southerners also ensured that the Constitution included a fugitive slave law, which required the return of enslaved people who sought freedom across state lines.¹⁹³

The most important proslavery constitutional policy was the 3/5 Clause. The Constitution was built on the idea of representative government and that Americans should elect people to represent their needs and interests in the federal government. In the U.S. House of Representatives, the number of representatives each state got was based on population with the idea that more populous states should get more representation than less populous states.¹⁹⁴ This part of the Constitution raised controversial questions: Was it reasonable or fair for southern states with large numbers of enslaved people to count those people toward their Congressional representation when they allowed enslaved people no vote, no political rights, and very few legal rights? If enslavers usually treated enslaved people as property, why should they suddenly be counted as people for purposes of representation?¹⁹⁵ People who opposed counting enslaved people toward Congressional representation came mostly from the North and they argued that the enslaved population should give little or no boost to southern states’ power.¹⁹⁶ At the same time, enslavers demanded to count the enslaved as whole people, not because they believed enslaved people were equal to white Americans, but because they wanted more voice in Congress and to counterbalance the power of the more populous northern states.¹⁹⁷ The authors of the Constitution reached a compromise.¹⁹⁸ States would get to count each enslaved person toward their representation in Congress, but each enslaved individual would only count as 3/5 (or 60 percent) of a free white person when it came time to determine how many representatives each state received in the House.¹⁹⁹ This was an enormous benefit for enslavers. They could continue to treat enslaved people as property but still get to count 60% of the enslaved population toward getting more power in Congress.²⁰⁰

The Founding Fathers embedded slavery into the U.S. Constitution by:

- Protecting the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved people for another 20 years, resulting in the trafficking of 86,000 Africans.
- Giving power to Congress to use military force to stop insurrections, including slave rebellions.
- Requiring the return of enslaved people who fled towards freedom across state lines.
- Counting enslaved people as 3/5 of a person

COURTESY OF JOHN PARROT/STOCKTREK IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

More Than 50 percent of U.S. Presidents from 1789 to 1885 enslaved African Americans



The first twenty-one Presidents seated together in The White House. The enslavers are shaded in red.

Representation in Congress also had a major influence on presidential elections.²⁰¹ The Constitution set up an electoral college in which a group of representatives (called “electors”) voted to choose the next president. Each state got a number of electors equal to the number of senators and representatives that it had in Congress.²⁰² In this way, enslaving states, which gained more representatives in Congress from the 3/5 Clause, automatically gained more presidential electors, and more power to influence presidential elections, too.²⁰³

At the same time, some historians argue that white southerners would have gone even further to make the U.S. Constitution a proslavery document if they did not have to compromise with representatives from the northern states.²⁰⁴ The words “slave” and “slavery” could not be found anywhere in the new Constitution. Instead, it used code words for enslaved people such as “Person held to Service or Labour”²⁰⁵ or just “other Persons.”²⁰⁶ Some historians see this as a sign that white northerners who helped write the Constitution were growing less comfortable with enslavement and did not want the nation’s founding document to say openly that owning human beings as property was legal.²⁰⁷

The Constitution also gave Congress the power to end U.S. participation in the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, rather than leaving it completely open, and the fugitive slave law was vague and not well enforced.²⁰⁸ Finally, the 3/5 Clause probably disappointed proslavery southerners who pushed hard for enslaved people to be counted as whole people, rather than as 60 percent of a person, for purposes of representation in Congress.²⁰⁹

No matter what the Constitutional Convention intended to do, the new Constitution ended up giving proslavery southerners outsized power in the federal government, strengthening the institution of enslavement.²¹⁰ Northerners complained that the enslaving states’ 60 percent boost in Congressional representation and in the electoral college, both due to the 3/5 Clause, gave enslavers too much power over national politics. Some northerners tried to get rid of the 3/5 Clause.²¹¹

The linking of Congressional representation to presidential electors also helped proslavery southerners control the White House. Enslavers Thomas Jefferson, in 1800, and James K. Polk, in 1846, would not have won election to presidency without the South’s extra electoral votes based on counting enslaved people.²¹²

The power of proslavery white southerners was evident throughout the United States' early government. Fifty percent of the nation's pre-Civil War presidents were enslavers.²¹³ Between George Washington's election and 1850, enslavers held the presidency for 50 years, the position of Speaker of the House for 41 years, and the chair of the House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee for 42 years.²¹⁴ Control of the presidency also meant control of the U.S. Supreme Court, where presidents chose justices to serve for life. Enslavers made up 18 of the 31 justices (or 58 percent) who sat on the U.S. Supreme Court before 1850.²¹⁵ Ultimately, throughout American history, more than 1,700 Congressmen, representing 37 states, once enslaved Black people.²¹⁶ They did not only represent the South, but also every state in New England, much of the Midwest, and many Western states.²¹⁷

Proslavery southerners' control of Congress, the presidency, and the U.S. Supreme Court increased the lifespan of enslavement and the geographic area where it was legal. Together, proslavery officials in the federal government paved the way for enslavement's expansion into new states and territories in the West by letting enslavers move without regulation into the large geographic area south of the Ohio River.²¹⁸

Between the ratification of the Constitution in 1788 and the start of the Civil War in 1861, Congress approved

the creation of nine new enslaving states (roughly 43 percent of all 21 new states).²¹⁹ This expansion of enslavement included parts of the new territory of Louisiana, which the United States purchased from France in 1803. French Louisiana had long been an enslaving colony where sugar production based on enslaved labor was becoming a major source of wealth.²²⁰ Louisiana became a state in 1812 and, by the time of the Civil War, produced one-quarter of the world's sugar and was the second richest state.²²¹ In addition to creating this major new enslaving state, enslavers won another big victory in 1820 when Congress voted, after protests by antislavery

Between 1790 and 1859, slave traders sold approximately 845,720 people within the U.S. They made enormous fortunes in this trafficking of human beings, amounting to more than \$159 million between 1820 and 1860.

politicians, to let Missouri become a state with a constitution that both allowed enslavement and banned free African Americans from settling there.²²² The major tradeoff that opponents of enslavement got from the Missouri Compromise was the policy that enslavement would be illegal in all parts of the Louisiana Territory located north of Missouri's southern border.²²³ For the time being, white Americans reached an unsteady political peace over enslavement's westward expansion.

IV. The Lives of Enslaved People During the Height of the Domestic Slave Trade

Domestic Trafficking of Enslaved People

Cotton solidified enslavement's importance to the United States, especially in the Deep South where the crop grew the best. The demand for enslaved people in the Deep South allowed enslavers in the Upper South to profit from enslavement in a new way: the interstate trafficking of enslaved people. Enslavers on worn-out tobacco farms in Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia could not grow cotton themselves, but they could sell enslaved people to the growing cotton plantations farther south.²²⁴

Between 1790 and 1859, slave traders sold approximately 845,720 people within the U.S.²²⁵ They made enormous fortunes in this trafficking of human beings,

amounting to more than \$159 million between 1820 and 1860.²²⁶ Slave traders force marched, or sailed, hundreds of thousands of enslaved people to new territories along the Mississippi River or the Gulf of Mexico. Today's states of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and (later) Texas were built on the brutal forced migration of the enslaved.²²⁷

The trafficking of enslaved people destroyed enslaved people's families, communities, and their bodies. Enslavers and slave traders often ambushed enslaved people with a surprise sale so that they could not attempt to run away or plead to stay with their families.²²⁸ A person "sold south" was almost always separated from their family members and home communities forever.

Parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and extended family members and friends never saw each other again.²²⁹

On top of the grief and mental and emotional trauma of family separation came physical violence. Slave traffickers usually chained the hands and feet of enslaved people and then chained several individuals together in a line (called a “coffle”). Then, traffickers force marched their captives by gunpoint to the next place of sale.²³⁰

Newly purchased people might be added to the coffle along the way, or enslaved people might be sold to a string of different traders as they moved South.²³¹ Some enslaved people might make part of their forced journey via ship or riverboat.²³² But it was common practice to march enslaved people hundreds of miles over land to their destinations.²³³ Handcuffs and chains rubbed their skin raw, their feet ached and bled, and they suffered from a lack of food, clothing, shelter, and sleep.²³⁴

Charles Ball, an enslaved man who was bought by slave traffickers Maryland and forced to march to South Carolina, later remembered: “I seriously meditated on self-destruction, and had I been at liberty to get a rope, I believe I should have hanged myself at Lancaster... I had now no hope of ever again seeing my wife and children, or of revisiting the scenes of my youth.”²³⁵

At the end of their forced march south, enslaved people faced the terrifying process of being sold to their new enslavers. Many of the enslaved ended up in the city of New Orleans, the human trafficking center of the Deep South.²³⁶

Some buyers specifically bought Black people that they could subject to sexual and reproductive violence. The “fancy trade” was the term for selling young women and girls to white men for the purpose of constant rape and/or forced sex work in brothels. Other enslavers bought young mothers (with or without their children) because a woman who had recently given birth to children showed that she was able to have more children in the future to enrich her buyer.

Enslaved people waited until their day of sale in a high-walled outdoor yard, called a “slave pen,” where they were crowded together with 50 to 100 people.²³⁷ Upon arrival, traffickers allowed enslaved people food, rest, baths, and new clothing to make them look more

appealing to future buyers and bring a higher price upon sale.²³⁸ Later, traders who trafficked in enslaved people sold them in a showroom next to the pen.²³⁹

As historian Walter Johnson has written, one of the great obscenities of enslavement was that enslavers forced enslaved people “to perform their own commodification.”²⁴⁰ Slave traders coached enslaved people on how to act and what to say to potential buyers, to hide any injuries or disabilities, and to highlight their valuable skills.²⁴¹ When sales began, enslaved people were required to line up by gender and height, separate from any family members.²⁴² Buyers questioned and examined them, forcing them to open their mouths to show their teeth and to undress to reveal any signs of illness, disability, disease, or scars from previous whippings (which whites saw as signs of disobedience).²⁴³

Enslaved people with specialized skills, such as the ability to play a musical instrument, might perform for buyers, while slave traders forced everyone to parade around and dance to show their physical well-being.²⁴⁴ Women and girls often suffered the most violent inspections of their bodies. Buyers took them behind closed doors, stripped them naked, and forcibly examined their breasts and genitals to see if they would be good “breeders” and were free of sexually transmitted infections.²⁴⁵

The moment of sale was extremely painful and traumatic. Buyers purchased enslaved people based on racist stereotypes about African Americans’ capabilities and skills, which were often connected to skin color, gender, and physical size.²⁴⁶ Younger enslaved Black men and women, as well as teenagers, often sold at high prices as “prime” field hands to pick cotton and do other hard labor.²⁴⁷ Enslaved men with specialized knowledge and skills, such as carpentry, barrel making, or driving carts, also sold for higher prices.²⁴⁸ Enslavers often bought younger enslaved women to work in the cotton fields, but also valued their knowledge and skills in home-based work such as cooking, washing clothes, sewing, cleaning, and childcare.²⁴⁹ Finally, elderly people and very young children usually were sold for a lot less

money because white buyers viewed their labor and skills as less valuable.²⁵⁰

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“fancy trade” was the term for selling young women and girls to white men for the purpose of constant rape and/or forced sex work in brothels.²⁵² Other enslavers bought young mothers (with or without their children) because a woman who had recently given birth to children showed that she was able to have more children in the future to enrich her buyer. Pregnant and breastfeeding women could be forced to nurse all the children, Black and white, on a plantation to free up other enslaved mothers for field work.²⁵³

All of these factors often meant that even if an enslaved family had managed to stay together up to this point, they would now face permanent separation. Solomon Northup, a free Black man from New York who was kidnapped and sold into enslavement, remembered the case of an enslaved woman named Eliza. Eliza begged to be sold with her two children, Emily, who was seven or eight years old and Randall, who was four to five years old. Slave traders sold off Randall to another buyer and refused to sell Emily to Eliza’s buyer because they hoped to sell the tiny girl as a “fancy” to a wealthy enslaver when she was a little older. Northup wrote that the sale of her children was absolutely soul crushing for Eliza. She died young from the grief of losing them.²⁵⁴

Cotton and Capitalism

Enslavers were capitalists, and like all capitalists, they strived for profit maximization. They wanted to get the most work out of enslaved people by pushing them up to, but not beyond, their physical breaking point. To do this, enslavers used violence, or the threat of violence, to make the enslaved work harder and faster and to maintain a constant, carefully calculated rate of production. The result for enslaved people was a nearly endless daily round of work under the constant threat of violence.²⁵⁵

Once enslaved people were sold to the Deep South, their new enslavers subjected them to a lifetime of brutal, backbreaking work growing cotton, which was a never-ending, year-round process.²⁵⁶ Enslaved people began every spring by plowing the land and planting cotton seeds. For the next several months they hoed the fields to kill grass and weeds that might damage the fragile young cotton plants.²⁵⁷ Starting in August, enslaved people worked from sunup to sundown to pick cotton, sometimes working by the light of the moon to finish. They only stopped for a 10- to 15-minute meal break per day.²⁵⁸ This exhausting workday did not end when the cotton picking was done. Everyone still had to cut wood, feed farm animals, and do all of the other daily tasks that kept the plantation running. Then, enslaved people went back to their cabins, made their

evening meals, and cooked food to eat in the cotton fields the next day.²⁵⁹

The cotton-picking season went on for months into the winter.²⁶⁰ After the cotton season ended, enslaved people harvested the corn crop, which, according to Solomon Northup, was used for “fattening hogs and feeding slaves.”²⁶¹ After the corn harvest was complete, enslaved people burned all the dead corn and cotton plants and began the process of planting the next year’s crops all over again.²⁶²

The American colonial Slave Codes created a new type of slavery that was different than the slavery which existed in pre-modern times.

- These laws enslaved babies at birth, for their entire lives, and for the entire lives of their children, and their children’s children.
- These laws denied political, legal and social rights to free and enslaved Black people alike in order to more easily control enslaved people.
- These laws divided white people from Black people by making interracial marriage a crime.

Some of these laws survived well into the 20th century. The Supreme Court only declared that outlawing interracial marriage was unconstitutional in 1967.

To make sure that enslaved people worked as hard and as quickly as possible, enslavers came up with the “pushing system.” The main idea behind the pushing system was that every enslaved person should farm a certain number of acres of cotton per year.²⁶³ This number kept increasing, from five acres per enslaved person in 1805 to double that number (10 acres) by the 1850s.²⁶⁴ In fact, many of today’s financial accounting and scientific management practices to increase profits had their early beginnings among enslavers in the U.S. South and the Caribbean who wanted to perfect the pushing system.²⁶⁵

To make sure that the production of cotton and profits kept increasing, enslavers intensified the physical violence.²⁶⁶ Frederick Douglass remembered that sleep-deprived enslaved people who accidentally slept past sunrise were whipped for lateness.²⁶⁷ Solomon Northup, the free Black man kidnapped and

sold into enslavement in Louisiana, remembered that enslavers followed enslaved people into the fields on horseback and whipped them if they stopped work or

Enslavers also forced sexual intercourse between enslaved people—an act historian Daina Ramey Berry has called third-party rape—so that they could “breed” more children to make more money.

fell behind.²⁶⁸ He also remembered that each adult was responsible for picking 200 pounds of cotton per day and that those who did not pick enough got whipped. Even picking less than one’s own personal best daily weight record, or accidentally breaking a branch on a cotton plant, resulted in whipping.²⁶⁹ Northup himself was whipped for failing to pick cotton fast enough when he was sick and exhausted.²⁷⁰

Southern slave codes, the state and local laws that enforced enslavement, became more severe to support the increased brutality and profitability of enslavement, especially in the Deep South. Many southern states outlawed all meetings of enslaved people—including religious observance—without supervision by white people, prohibited teaching enslaved people to read and write, and banned enslaved people from trading.²⁷¹ These laws also increased slave patrols, the police forces that enforced these laws.²⁷² Finally, new laws made it much more difficult for enslaved people to achieve their freedom by banning “manumission,” voluntary emancipation by enslavers. Altogether, these developments in slave codes aimed to maintain the racial caste system by cracking down on all resistance by enslaved people and to prevent them from ever getting their freedom.²⁷³

Neglect and Violence

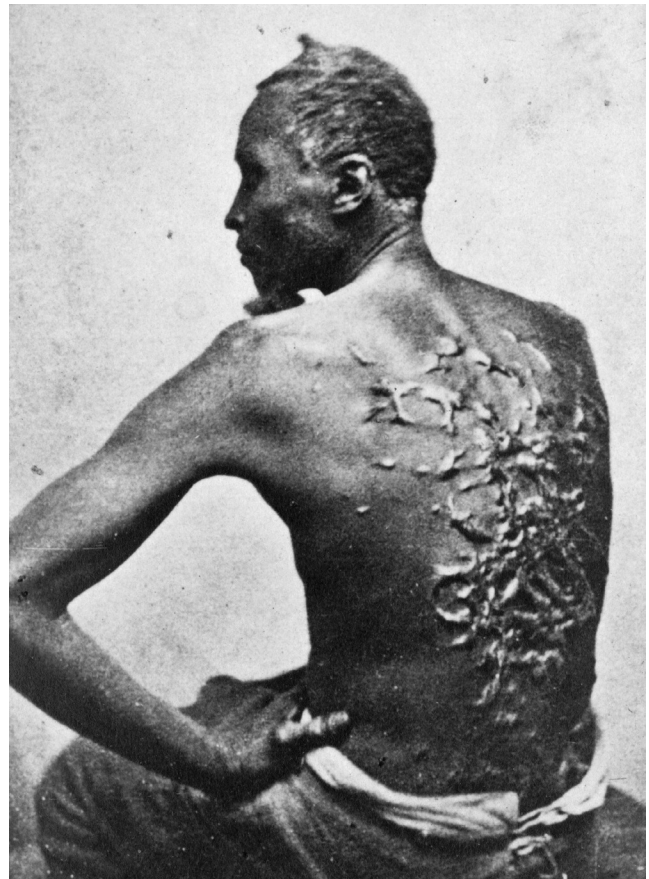
Living conditions for enslaved people showed enslavers’ inhumane, brutal emphasis on profit maximization. Most of the enslaved lived in small, poorly built cabins. Gaps between the log walls were so big that the wind and rain constantly blew in.²⁷⁴ Furniture was either rare or non-existent. Solomon Northup’s bed “was a plank [of wood] twelve inches wide and ten feet long.”²⁷⁵

Frederick Douglass reported that enslaved people on the Maryland tobacco plantation where he was born had no beds at all; they slept on the cold dirt floor with only a rough blanket.²⁷⁶ On the coldest nights, the young Douglass would steal a sack used for carrying corn and sleep inside it with his head inside and his feet

hanging out. Years later, when he wrote about his life, he remembered that “[m]y feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.”²⁷⁷

Besides cold, one of the greatest things Douglass suffered was hunger. Douglass’s enslaver fed enslaved children mashed-up boiled corn in a trough on the ground. The children were then forced to eat “like so many pigs” and “[h]e that ate fastest got most.”²⁷⁸ Solomon Northup remembered a similar lack of food on the Louisiana plantation where he lived for 10 years. Each person received only three and a half pounds of bacon and a peck of corn (about eight dry quarts) per week.²⁷⁹

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Formerly enslaved person named Gordon, also known as “Whipped Peter,” showing his scarred back at a medical examination, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. (1863)

Enslaved people, particularly women and girls, also suffered sexual and reproductive violence. Enslavers frequently raped and impregnated enslaved women and girls and increased their profits by doing so.²⁸⁰ Frederick Douglass pointed out that since children born to enslaved women were automatically enslaved at birth,

enslavers often owned and sold their own children as property.²⁸¹ Additionally, Douglass remembered that white women often harassed enslaved victims of rape and their mixed-race children by insisting on their sale or punishing them even more cruelly than other enslaved people.²⁸²

Enslavers also forced sexual intercourse between enslaved people—an act historian Daina Ramey Berry has called third-party rape—so that they could “breed” more children to make more money.²⁸³ Frederick Douglass remembered that a poor white farmer named Edward Covey owned only one enslaved woman named Caroline and had to rent additional enslaved people from others (a practice called hiring out). To increase his own wealth, Covey forced Caroline and one of the rented enslaved men, who was already married, to have sex. Not long after, Caroline gave birth to twins. Douglass remembered that “[t]he children were regarded as being quite an addition to his wealth.” Sexual violence tripled Covey’s wealth—from one to three enslaved people—within just one year.²⁸⁴

Finally, enslavers also used the bodies of enslaved people, living and deceased, for medical and scientific experimentation. For an in-depth discussion of medical experimentation on enslaved people and African Americans throughout U.S. history, please see Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect.

Enslaved Communities and Cultures: Resilience, Resistance, and Rebellion

Enslaved people of African descent defied enslavers’ efforts to dehumanize them by creating resilient families and communities, vibrant cultures, and distinctive religious and intellectual traditions. Family ties, community ties, cultural practices, and religious traditions ensured African American survival. They were the foundation of Black resistance to enslavement and the struggle for human rights both before emancipation and long afterward.

Family life was the building block of enslaved life in the American South.²⁸⁵ Although enslaved families were always in danger of being broken apart by sale, enslaved people built strong extended family ties and fought to preserve these relationships.²⁸⁶ Husbands and wives struggled to have enslavers recognize their marriage ties by claiming their right to live together in their own private cabins, or to visit spouses who lived on different plantations.²⁸⁷ Enslaved parents chose their children’s

names to honor their own family ties, not according to the will of their enslavers, and frequently named children after grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.²⁸⁸ Enslaved people often chose their own last names, even if enslavers refused to recognize them, and they passed down their skills to their children.²⁸⁹ Enslaved

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people also rebelled against the sale of their family members, sometimes by fleeing to see their relatives on distant plantations.²⁹⁰

Enslaved people built close communities bound together by blood, marriage, and adoptive family ties. On larger plantations, multiple extended family groups lived in the same “slave quarters” and were often linked to each other through marriages or adoptive kin relations.²⁹¹ For instance, Frederick Douglass remembered that the enslaved children on the Maryland plantation where he was born referred to older enslaved men as their uncles, demonstrating both their respect for their elders and the close family-like relationships that grew between community members unrelated by blood.²⁹² These close ties can best be seen in cases of young enslaved children orphaned by the sale or death of their parents: extended family members and non-kin alike frequently raised these children along with their own children.²⁹³

Close-knit families and communities ensured that cultural practices, language, and oral histories were passed down to the next generation. “Slave quarters,” the clusters of cabins where the enslaved lived, were often distant from the “big house” of the enslavers and allowed the enslaved some privacy to pray, dance, sing, tell stories, rest, and tend to their homes.²⁹⁴ The lively cultural spaces that enslaved people created for themselves allowed for the persistence of elements of African language, music, medicine, and storytelling in African American culture across generations.²⁹⁵

Religious life was often the heart of family and community experience for enslaved people, creating spaces for freedom of expression, cultural resilience, and resistance. Enslaved people who were stolen from Africa continued the spiritual practices of their homelands, whether indigenous West African religions or Islam.²⁹⁶ Over time, enslaved communities fused elements of

African religious practice—including song, dance, call and response, and healing practices—with Protestant Christianity.²⁹⁷ They created a distinctive American religious culture that taught a message of liberation, a “gospel of freedom.”²⁹⁸ Enslaved preachers emphasized freedom from enslavement, both in the afterlife and on earth. They focused on Biblical liberation stories, such as Moses leading the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, as well as stories that emphasized the power of the weak to defeat the mighty, such as David and Goliath.²⁹⁹

Enslavers tried to suppress this religious expression by prohibiting religious gatherings or by emphasizing parts of the Bible that said that “servants” should obey their “masters.”³⁰⁰ Still, enslaved people resisted these efforts by meeting in secret to worship.³⁰¹ As a formerly enslaved woman named Alice Sewell remembered, “We used to slip off in the woods in the old slave days on Sunday evening way down in the swamps to sing and pray to our own liking. We prayed for this day of freedom. We come from four and five miles to pray together to God that if we didn’t live to see it, to please let our children live to see a better day and be free.”³⁰²

As Alice Sewell’s memory shows, religious and community life became a foundation for enslaved people’s resistance to the brutal and dehumanizing conditions of their enslavement. In some cases, religious and community ties catalyzed outright rebellions against

enslavement. The alleged Denmark Vesey conspiracy in Charleston, South Carolina in 1822, and the Nat Turner rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831, developed among communities of free and enslaved African Americans who believed strongly in the gospel of freedom.³⁰³ Most often, though, enslaved communities, cultures, and spiritual beliefs made possible smaller forms of everyday resistance that pushed back against the relentless work and violence of enslavement. Enslaved people slowed down work, broke tools, or temporarily escaped to avoid abuse or brutal working conditions.³⁰⁴ Everyday resistance forced enslavers to recognize enslaved people’s humanity and showed their deep longings to be free.

Ultimately, enslaved people in the United States created a distinctive *American* Black culture that was different from ancestral African cultures, white European cultures, or African-diaspora cultures elsewhere in the world. Distinctive African American artistic expression—especially music and dance—literary and linguistic styles, and culinary innovations, among many other practices, would shape mainstream American culture across centuries.

For a detailed discussion of African American cultural and artistic impact on the United States, see Chapter 9, Control over Spiritual, Creative and Cultural Life.

V. Northern Complicity in Enslavement

White New Englanders, the Slave Trade, and the Textile Industry

Although enslavement itself was disappearing in the North, white northerners’ participation in enslavement

Cotton grown by enslaved people in the South fed mills employing thousands of people across New England. By the time of the Civil War in 1861, New Englanders had invested more than \$69 million in cotton fabric production and operated 570 separate mills. Over 81,000 Americans worked in the New England textile mills and the total profits amounted to over \$79 million dollars per year.

grew along with the southern cotton economy. White people in New England, for instance, profited from the transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans, rum manufacturing, and cotton textile production.

White northerners had been involved in the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved people for a long time as shipping company owners, slave ship captains, and slave traders. For example, businessmen from the northern state of Rhode Island controlled most of the trade in captive human beings.³⁰⁵ Slaving ships from Rhode Island brought rum to the coast of West Africa and traded barrels of the liquor for enslaved people, who they trafficked to North America.³⁰⁶ Around 24 rum distilleries in the town of Newport, Rhode Island, fed this profitable trade.³⁰⁷ By the time of the American Revolution, these Rhode Island merchants controlled two-thirds of the entire transatlantic slave trade in the Thirteen Colonies and they held onto this control after U.S. independence.³⁰⁸ When added together, white Rhode Islanders were responsible for bringing 100,000 enslaved Africans to North America.³⁰⁹

Fifty thousand of these enslaved people were captives whom Rhode Island enslavers rushed to bring into the United States before Congress outlawed participation in the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved people in 1808.³¹⁰

At the same time, textile mills, the factories which processed southern cotton into cloth, were the basis of early northern industrial growth.³¹¹ Cotton grown by enslaved people in the U.S. South fed these mills and the mills employed thousands of people across New England.³¹² By the time of the Civil War in 1861, New Englanders had invested more than \$69 million in cotton fabric pro-

In 2005, JP Morgan Chase, the banking giant, wrote a formal apology because two banks that it now owned had taken 13,000 enslaved people as security for loans in the state of Louisiana. When enslavers could not pay back the loans, the banks ended up taking ownership of 1,250 of these people.

duction and operated 570 separate mills.³¹³ Over 81,000 Americans worked in the New England textile mills and the total profits amounted to over \$79 million dollars per year.³¹⁴

Slavery and the Economic Power of New York City

New York City is a strong example of how northerners participated in and profited from enslavement. Captive Africans, enslaved by the Dutch West Indian Company, were part of the labor force that constructed the early walled street that eventually became Wall Street, the economic center of the United States.³¹⁵ Later, the street became the city's first slave market. City leaders decided in 1711 that whites who wanted to rent out enslaved Black or Native American people could only do so at the end of Wall Street next to the East River.³¹⁶

Enslaved people became less and less common in the city after the state of New York passed a law in 1799 that gradually freed children born to enslaved mothers, and then outlawed enslavement completely in 1817.³¹⁷ But as enslavement itself was dying out, white New Yorkers were building strong economic ties to southern enslavement that brought millions of dollars in profit every year. New York City was the main destination of southern cotton and the center of the transatlantic cotton trade.³¹⁸ New York-based shipping companies gathered the cotton in

southern cities and took it north to New York City where merchants packed it and shipped it to Europe.³¹⁹

New York City was also the banking center of the United States and New York banks helped finance the expansion of enslavement in the South. Banks loaned money to enslavers to buy more land and more enslaved people.³²⁰ Banks also accepted enslaved people as security for these loans, which meant that they could take and sell enslaved people if their enslavers failed to pay back their debts. For example, in 2005, JP Morgan Chase, the banking giant, wrote a formal apology because two banks that it now owned had taken 13,000 enslaved people as security for loans in the state of Louisiana. When enslavers could not pay back the loans, the banks ended up taking ownership of 1,250 of these people, and then most probably sold them.³²¹

New York City was also strongly connected to southern enslavement through the insurance industry. Insurance companies insured the lives of enslaved, and paid enslavers if an enslaved person died.³²² Some insurance companies also insured shipments of trafficked enslaved people sold within the United States.³²³ Some of these companies were the early ancestors of today's most important insurance companies, including New York Life, US Life, and Aetna.³²⁴ American insurance companies' investment and complicity in enslavement was so widespread that the California government required all insurers who did business in the state to make their records of participation in enslavement open to the public.³²⁵

Corporate Manufacturing Profits

A variety of New York businesses also profited from processing and manufacturing agricultural products grown by enslaved people into goods for consumers to buy. Brooks Brothers, still a well-known New York City clothing company, made money from enslavement in multiple ways. The company made fashionable, expensive clothing woven from southern cotton grown by enslaved people.³²⁶ It also profited from making cheap clothing that enslavers bought to dress enslaved people.³²⁷

At the same time, sugar refineries, factories which processed raw sugar into a usable form, became a major New York industry, especially in the borough of Brooklyn. These factories processed thousands of pounds of raw sugar grown by enslaved people in Louisiana and Cuba.

By 1855, fifteen New York City refineries were producing over \$12 million of sugar per year.³²⁸

The profits of sugar refining can still be seen in New York City today. Columbia University's Havemeyer Hall was funded by and named after one of the city's most important sugar refining families from the 1800s whose business relied on sugar grown by enslaved people.³²⁹ The Havemeyer family built what was once the largest sugar refining factory in the world, the Domino Sugar Refinery, which still stands beside East River in Brooklyn.³³⁰ Although the Brooklyn location is no longer running, the Domino Sugar brand, now owned by the ASR Group, continues to be processed in factories in New York, Maryland, and Louisiana.³³¹

The legacies of enslavement in the sugar industry continue in the present-day. After the Civil War and the end of enslavement, southern states such as Texas and Louisiana rented out imprisoned African Americans to white sugarcane farmers. Many died in the brutal sugar production process.³³² The Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola and the Texas State Penitentiary at Sugar Land also supported themselves, and profited these state governments, by growing and processing sugar cane on prison grounds.³³³ Incarcerated individuals at Angola continued to process sugar to sell in the prison gift shop as recently as 2014.³³⁴

VI. Slavery and American Institutions

Historically White Universities and Religious Organizations

A wide range of U.S. colleges and universities, both private and public, profited from enslavement or ties to enslavers, while at the same time denying admission to African Americans for most of the nation's history. Almost all Ivy League universities and colleges can be included in this category.

Harvard University Law School was created in 1817 and funded largely by land donations from a wealthy merchant named Isaac Royall, Jr. Royall, who was the son of a human trafficker in enslaved people, owned multiple sugar plantations in the Caribbean and Latin America that were worked by enslaved people.³³⁵ Other early Harvard donors made their money by trading enslaved people or goods produced by enslaved people in the Caribbean; smuggling enslaved Africans into the United States after Congress banned American participation in the transatlantic slave trade in 1808; or running textile mills fed by southern cotton.³³⁶

The wealth of Brown University (formerly known as the College of Rhode Island) was greatly tied to the human trafficking activities of its home state, Rhode Island. Members of the Brown family, early donors after whom the university is named, owned enslaved people and participated in the transatlantic slave trade.³³⁷ University Hall, the oldest building on the Brown University campus, was partially built by enslaved people and made of wood donated by one of the state's largest slave trading companies.³³⁸ South Carolina slave traffickers and enslavers also gave money to help fund the college.³³⁹

Other Ivy League schools have similar connections to enslavement. The University of Pennsylvania,³⁴⁰ Princeton University,³⁴¹ Columbia University,³⁴² Yale University,³⁴³ and Dartmouth College³⁴⁴ count enslavers, slave traffickers, and/or proslavery defenders among their early donors, founders, trustees, administrators, building namesakes, faculty, students, and alumni.

Enslavement was also strongly linked to religious life and religious organizations in colonial America and the early United States. Some churches and religious colleges owned, bought, and sold enslaved people.³⁴⁵ In the southern enslaving states, some churches raised money to buy enslaved people. Anglican and Episcopalian churches in Virginia during the 1600s and 1700s attracted new ministers by allowing them use of church-owned enslaved people.³⁴⁶ Some wealthy churchgoers donated enslaved people to churches so that the profits of their labor could be used to fund free schools for poor white children.³⁴⁷ In the 1700s and 1800s, many Virginia Presbyterian churches hired out enslaved people so that they could use the profits to pay ministers and fund church upkeep.³⁴⁸

Colleges with religious missions also owned and profited from enslaved people. Virginia's College of William and Mary, which was originally an Anglican college to train new ministers, started owning enslaved people by around 1704.³⁴⁹ Enslaved people worked in the college's kitchens, dormitories, laundries, stables, and gardens, or on the college-owned tobacco plantation to raise money for student scholarships.³⁵⁰ Although the college sold off many enslaved people during the American Revolution to pay off its debts, tearing them away from their families and

communities,³⁵¹ enslavement continued on the William and Mary campus until during the Civil War.³⁵²

Some colleges run by the Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious group better-known as the Jesuits, also depended on the lives and labor of the enslaved. The Jesuits who operated Georgetown College (now Georgetown University) owned plantations and hundreds of enslaved people.³⁵³ The profits of these plantations funded the school.³⁵⁴ In 1838, when the college was struggling due to a lack of funding, Jesuits sold 272 enslaved Black people to Deep South plantations so that they could pay off the school's debts.³⁵⁵ Even though Jesuit leaders in Rome required that the enslaved people be kept together as families and given Catholic religious education in their new homes,³⁵⁶ buyers in Louisiana failed to keep these promises.³⁵⁷ Altogether, the mass sale of elders, men, women, children, and infants raised \$115,000 (equal to around \$3.3 million in 2016) to fund Georgetown College/University.³⁵⁸

Direct Federal Government Investment and Participation

Finally, the federal government directly invested in, protected, and profited from the enslavement of African Americans. The early U.S. national banking system played an important role in funding the expansion of cotton growing and the interstate slave trade. For example, in the years 1831 to 1832, the Second Bank of the United States, the private bank that the United States used to handle all of the federal government's banking needs, gave five percent of all its loans to just one slave trading company in New Orleans.³⁵⁹ By 1861, just under two percent of the entire budget of the United States went to pay for expenses related to enslavement.³⁶⁰ These expenses included dealing with the illegal transatlantic slave trade;³⁶¹ colonization projects to remove formerly enslaved people from the United States and settle them in other parts of the world;³⁶² enforcing

fugitive slave laws;³⁶³ and renting enslaved people to build federal military sites in the South.³⁶⁴

The U.S. federal government also actively participated in upholding enslavement because it directly controlled the nation's capital at Washington, D.C. The District of Columbia was formed from lands that once belonged to the two enslaving states of Maryland and Virginia. As a result of this, Washington, D.C. had to carry over

In the southern enslaving states, some churches raised money to buy enslaved people. Anglican and Episcopalian churches in Virginia during the 1600s and 1700s attracted new ministers by allowing them use of church-owned enslaved people. Some wealthy churchgoers donated enslaved people to churches so that the profits of their labor could be used to fund free schools for poor white children. In the 1700s and 1800s, many Virginia Presbyterian churches hired out enslaved people so that they could use the profits to pay ministers and fund church upkeep.

the laws of those two states, including laws supporting enslavement.³⁶⁵ U.S. courts in Washington, D.C., took direct responsibility for punishing enslaved people and deciding cases involving the buying, selling, and inheritance of enslaved people.³⁶⁶ Since there were no laws against moving enslaved people through D.C., and because D.C. was centrally located in the Upper South, the area also became an important location in the interstate slave trade.³⁶⁷ Slave traffickers gathered and imprisoned enslaved people in D.C. "slave pens" where they waited to be moved to the Deep South and sold.³⁶⁸ Solomon Northup, a free Black man who was kidnapped and sold into enslavement in 1841, remembered that he waited to be sold south in a "slave pen within the very shadow of the Capitol!"³⁶⁹ That U.S. capitol building,³⁷⁰ along with another major national landmark and symbol of democracy, the White House, was partially built by the labor of enslaved people.³⁷¹

VII. Enslavement in California

Slavery's Expansion into the West

Even though large numbers of white northerners profited from the labor of enslaved people, many also began to worry about the place of enslavement in the nation's future and to question whether it should be allowed to

expand west into new American territories. Some of this new concern sprung from the abolitionist movement, a northern interracial movement of Black and white antislavery activists who pushed to end enslavement immediately.³⁷² Across the 1830s and 1850s, American

abolitionists published thousands of texts, and gave thousands of speeches, to convince their fellow citizens that enslavement was wrong and against the will of god.³⁷³ They also helped thousands of freedom seekers escape enslavement via a secret network called the Underground Railroad.³⁷⁴

While most white northerners disapproved of abolitionism and worried that it would tear the North and South apart, the high-profile nature of the movement and the actions of freedom seekers raised new opposition to enslavement moving west. Most white northerners' opposition to the westward expansion of enslavement was based on self-interest. They argued that new western territories should be "free soil" so that free white people could have access to inexpensive farmland and opportunities to build wealth without having to compete with wealthy enslavers and enslaved people.³⁷⁵ Keeping slavery out of the West became a major goal for a growing number of northerners and it put them into conflict with proslavery southerners who wanted enslavement to keep growing westward and to create new enslaving states.³⁷⁶

The conflict over the westward expansion of enslavement caused bitter political battles and violence in the years leading up to the Civil War.³⁷⁷ In the 1840s, some northerners opposed allowing Texas, an independent enslaving nation that had broken off from Mexico, to join the United States. They worried that Texas would add an enormous amount of new territory for enslavement to grow.³⁷⁸ When the United States declared war

By 1861, just under two percent of the entire budget of the United States went to pay for expenses related to enslavement. These expenses included dealing with the illegal transatlantic slave trade; colonization projects to remove formerly enslaved people from the United States and settle them in other parts of the world; enforcing fugitive slave laws; and renting enslaved people to build federal military sites in the South.

on Mexico in 1846 over conflicts related to Texas, many northerners supported the idea of outlawing enslavement in any new lands that the United States might take away from Mexico.³⁷⁹ In 1848, the U.S. did force Mexico to give up a massive territory that included today's states of California, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah, as well as parts of present-day Arizona, Wyoming, and Colorado.³⁸⁰

A political crisis grew over whether enslavement should be allowed into these new territories or closed out forever. This crisis intensified when thousands of people rushed to California after the discovery of gold in the state and to set up a new state government with a constitution that outlawed enslavement.³⁸¹

Northern and southern politicians in Congress tried to hold the country together by passing a set of laws called the Compromise of 1850. Together, these laws said that California could join the U.S. as a free state and that the residents of New Mexico and Utah territories could decide for themselves whether they wanted to allow enslavement.³⁸²

The Compromise of 1850 also gave other important concessions to both the opponents and defenders of enslavement. It ended the slave trade in Washington, D.C.³⁸³ It also included a harsher fugitive slave law that gave enslavers greater federal aid in chasing down enslaved people who escaped to the free states, limited freedom seekers' ability to defend themselves in court, and harshly punished people who helped freedom seekers or people who refused to participate in enforcing the law.³⁸⁴

This fugitive slave law further divided white northerners and white southerners. Northerners hated the new law for forcing them to participate in enslavement.³⁸⁵ Southerners viewed northern opposition to the law as a refusal to enforce the U.S. Constitution.³⁸⁶ Eventually, this conflict spread all the way to California where proslavery southerners and antislavery northerners fought over what should happen to enslaved people who escaped their enslavement once they got to the free state.³⁸⁷

Enslavers and the Enslaved in the California Gold Rush

While people in northern and southern states fought over whether enslavement should be allowed to expand west, enslavement already had moved to California. Even though California was supposed to be a free state with an antislavery

constitution,³⁸⁸ enslavement existed in the state.³⁸⁹ More importantly, California's early state government protected the institution of enslavement and greatly limited African Americans' civil rights.³⁹⁰

The enslavement of African Americans had already started in California before the state adopted an antislavery constitution in 1849. California had been part of Mexico

before the United States took it in the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846 to 1848. Mexico had already outlawed enslavement in 1829,³⁹¹ but American enslavers began trafficking en-

slaved people into California before, during, and after the U.S.-Mexico War, especially once the gold rush began in 1848.³⁹²

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The exact number of enslaved African descended people in California is difficult to estimate. Federal and state census records, which counted the number of people in California, show around 203 enslaved African descended people living in the state in 1850 and around 178 in 1852.³⁹³ These are probably undercounts because early census records are very incomplete.³⁹⁴ These incomplete records, though, do show support for the findings of historian Rudolph Lapp who estimated that at least 500 to 600 enslaved African Americans lived and worked in California during the gold rush.³⁹⁵ But these numbers may be even higher because another gold rush source estimated that 1,500 enslaved African Americans lived in California in 1852.³⁹⁶

Each of these enslaved people suffered traumatic uprooting from their homes and families. Going to California meant a forced separation from family, friends, and community by a distance of thousands of miles.³⁹⁷ Even though enslavers thought of the move to California as only temporary, most gold seekers spent at least two years in California—and usually many more—due to the distance and difficulty of traveling between the East and West Coast.³⁹⁸ For example, an enslaved North Carolina man, known only as John, arrived in California with slaveholder Robert M. Dickson in 1852 and stayed at least three years, until Dickson suddenly died in 1855.³⁹⁹ We do not know how long John remained in California or whether he ever returned to North Carolina. His journey to California may have resulted in permanent separation from his family.

Like John, more than 75 percent of the enslaved people trafficked to California were younger men or teenaged boys who ended up working as gold miners.⁴⁰⁰ These enslaved miners faced backbreaking and often dangerous working conditions. Placer mining, the most common type of mining in the earliest days of the California gold rush, involved digging up soil from the beds and banks of rivers and creeks. Sometimes, miners dammed up these bodies of water to get at soil deep in the beds. These

practices often required standing knee- or waist-deep in cold water for several hours each day in the broiling summer heat.⁴⁰¹

Overwork, exposure to bad weather, unclean working and living environments, a lack of nutritious food, and the absence of medical care often resulted in long-term illnesses or death by disease.⁴⁰² For instance, several enslaved men from western North Carolina died from cholera, a disease caused by contaminated food or water, along with their enslaver, in Tuolumne County in 1852.⁴⁰³ Accidents and injury were also common, as seen in the life of an enslaved man from Kentucky, known only as Rheubin. He drowned in the American River while working in a mining area in 1851.⁴⁰⁴

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Enslaved people working in California Gold Mines. (1852)

Not all enslaved people worked directly in mining. Women and girls, who made up less than one quarter of all recorded enslaved people in California,⁴⁰⁵ often worked as servants, cooks, or laundry workers in private homes, hotels, restaurants, or boarding houses.⁴⁰⁶ People with these skills were so scarce, and their work was so valuable, that enslavers often hired out both enslaved women and men as servants. Enslavers then pocketed all or most of the enslaved people's wages from their rented labor.⁴⁰⁷

Violence Against the Enslaved and Resistance to Enslavement in California

Much like enslaved people in the South, those in California also faced brutal violence. In 1850, one slaveholder beat an enslaved man in the town square of San Jose for disobeying him. The police arrested both men, but ultimately determined that the slaveholder was not guilty of assault because his victim was legally his property.⁴⁰⁸

In another case from 1850, an elderly enslaved couple ran away near the town of Sonora. When the slaveholder caught them, he whipped the elderly man until his blood flowed so heavily that it filled his shoes. The couple later escaped with the help of a free Black neighbor.⁴⁰⁹ One of the worst violent events also happened in 1850, this time in Los Angeles. A group of white southerners chased, shot at, and captured a handful of escaped enslaved people and then beat them until one almost died.⁴¹⁰

The forced journey to California had different outcomes for the enslaved people who survived it. Many people probably worked in California for a few years before returning to enslavement in the South. Others, especially those who were allowed to keep a small portion of their wages from hiring out or digging gold, saved enough money to buy their freedom.⁴¹¹ Finally, some enslaved people worked under formal or informal “indenture” agreements by which they promised to work for a certain number of years in California, or to earn a certain amount of money, in exchange for their freedom.⁴¹² Enslaved people who bought their own freedom might then also earn enough money to free their family members.⁴¹³

Large numbers of enslaved people also saw California as a place where they could take their own freedom or challenge their enslavement. The California gold mining country was large, rural, and full of diverse people, including antislavery Black and white northerners. It was much easier to run away, hide, and find allies in California than in the southern enslaving states.⁴¹⁴ But it is important to remember that all enslaved people who went west were forced to leave their family members and communities behind in the South. For this reason, escape was not a good option for many enslaved people because staying with enslavers was their only way to keep in touch with their families.

In this way, enslavers used their control over enslaved people’s family members to force them to cooperate. For this reason, enslaved people may have been more likely to resist in other ways besides running away. For example, some refused to work or escaped temporarily until they were allowed to keep more of their earnings.⁴¹⁵ This might have been a safer path to freedom than running away if they could earn enough money to buy themselves and their family members out of enslavement.

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California Legislature’s Complicity

California’s 1849 antislavery state constitution did little to stop the violence and exploitation that enslaved people suffered. The new constitution said that “neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude, unless for the punishment of crimes, shall ever be tolerated in this State.”⁴¹⁶

The problem was that enslavement already existed in the state and was already being tolerated there. The constitution also said nothing about what should happen to those enslaved people who already lived in California or those who came after statehood. The California constitution could say that the state would not tolerate enslavement, but this statement did not mean much without laws making it a crime to keep someone enslaved, laws to free enslaved people, laws to punish enslavers, or laws to protect African Americans’ freedom.⁴¹⁷

Proslavery white southerners took advantage of this lack of specific laws against enslavement to keep enslavement going in California. During California’s 1849 Constitutional Convention, a meeting to write the state’s first constitution, proslavery politicians from the South quietly accepted the law banning enslavement.⁴¹⁸ But after statehood, a large number of southern proslavery men ran for political office in California so that they were overrepresented in the state government compared to their overall population in California. White southerners with proslavery views had a great deal of power in the state legislature, the state court system, and among California’s representatives in the U.S. Congress.⁴¹⁹ During the 1850s, these men used their political power to make sure that California protected

enslavers. They passed and upheld laws that skirted around the antislavery constitution.

The California government's most proslavery action was passing and enforcing a state fugitive slave law in 1852.⁴²⁰ Proslavery southerners were angry when they discovered that the federal fugitive slave law of 1850, a harsh new law to help slavecatchers chase down and re-enslave freedom seekers who escaped enslavement, did not apply to most cases in California. Enslavers could only use the federal law to chase down and re-enslave people who escaped across state lines, not those who ran away inside one state's borders.⁴²¹

In 1852, the California state legislature dealt with this issue by changing the definition of who counted as a "fugitive slave." Instead of just covering people who escaped across state lines, California's new state law said that a fugitive slave was any enslaved person who arrived before California officially became a U.S. state in September 1850 but who refused to return to the enslaving states with their enslavers. These people could be arrested, placed under the control of their enslavers, and forced to return to the South.⁴²²

The legal reasoning behind this law was that California's antislavery constitution did not become official until the moment of statehood. Before then, California was a federal territory controlled by the U.S. government. Proslavery southerners believed that the U.S. Constitution gave every white citizen the right to move into the federal territories and to take their property with them, including human beings who were considered property. For this reason, the law's supporters

The California legislature's decision to pass this fugitive slave law made California a much more proslavery state than most other free states. In the northeastern U.S., many free states protested the federal fugitive slave law of 1850 and tried to give African Americans more legal rights to defend their freedom against slavecatchers. California did the opposite.⁴²⁴

The California fugitive slave law of 1852 allowed enslavers to use violence to capture enslaved people. The law

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also required state officials to help enslavers capture and arrest enslaved people. Those who refused to help could lose their jobs and/or have to pay expensive fines. Finally, the California fugitive slave law, much like the federal fugitive slave law, said that people accused of being fugitive slaves could not testify in court to defend their rights.⁴²⁵ Since California had already outlawed non-white people from testifying in any court case involving whites, free Black Californians, who were usually involved in helping people escape from enslavement, could not be witnesses in any of these cases either.⁴²⁶

California's fugitive slave law was supposed to be a temporary one-year policy, but it ended up lasting much longer. In 1853, California legislators extended the fugitive slave law for another year.⁴²⁷ They did the same thing again in 1854.⁴²⁸ This meant that for three years, from 1852 to 1855, anyone accused of being a runaway from enslavement could be chased down, dragged before a court, and sent back to lifelong enslavement in the South, even if they had been living in the free state of California for five years or more.⁴²⁹

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argued that the state of California had no choice except to help enslavers capture any enslaved person who they had brought in before official statehood in late 1850.⁴²³

The California Court System's Complicity
California's courts, including the California Supreme Court, also participated in the enslavement of African

Americans. Free Black activists, with the help of white lawyers, challenged the legality of the fugitive slave law because it went against the antislavery state constitution. They took a test case called *In re Perkins* all the way to the California Supreme Court in 1852.⁴³⁰ The state's supreme court justices finally decided that three Black men—Carter Perkins, Robert Perkins, and Sandy Jones⁴³¹—should be forced to go back into enslavement in Mississippi because they had arrived with their enslaver before official statehood.⁴³²

The court said that the antislavery law in the California constitution was only a “declaration of a principle.” The constitution said the state would not tolerate enslavement, but California had no laws in place to enforce it by actually setting people free.⁴³³ The justices also agreed with the state legislature that California could not give freedom to enslaved people who arrived before official statehood. The court accepted the extreme proslavery legal view that the U.S. Constitution gave enslavers the right to bring enslaved people into the federal territories without any limits.⁴³⁴ This decision came before the similar one in the much more famous case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* five years later in 1857. In that historic decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the federal government could not outlaw enslavement in any of the federal territories.⁴³⁵

Altogether, California courts were involved in at least 10 cases, connected to the freedom of 13 people, under the state fugitive slave law between 1852 and 1855. In five of those 10 cases, the courts returned seven freedom seekers to enslavement. These numbers may seem small, but this list only includes cases that were well-known enough to make it into the newspapers, or for which court records happen to survive.⁴³⁶

The small numbers also do not accurately show the terror that all African Americans, free or enslaved, would have suffered under this law. When combined with the outlawing of Black court testimony against whites, the California fugitive slave law put every Black person at risk of being accused of running away, arrested, and enslaved without being able to defend themselves.⁴³⁷

Finally, the California fugitive slave law was important for symbolic and political reasons. In supporting the law, California's legislature and courts sent an important message: they were friendly to the southern enslaving states, they believed enslaved people should have no legal rights, and they thought that the U.S. Constitution should protect enslavers and enslavement.⁴³⁸

The California legislature finally let the state fugitive slave law expire in 1855.⁴³⁹ Still, cases involving freedom seekers from enslavement continued. At least six additional cases, involving the freedom of 19 people, came before the California courts between 1855 and the official end of enslavement in 1865.⁴⁴⁰ All of these cases—including the famous 1856 freedom case of Bridget “Biddy” Mason in Los Angeles County—eventually led to enslaved people's freedom.⁴⁴¹

But in one example, the case of Archy Lee from 1857 to 1858, the proslavery California Supreme Court made every effort to return him to enslavement. Lee's enslaver, Charles Stovall, forced him to go with him to California years after the state fugitive slave law had expired. But California's supreme court justices decided that since Stovall was a young man who suffered from constant illness, and he did not know about California's laws, he should not be punished by losing his right to own Archy Lee. It took several more lawsuits by free Black Californians, and a new decision from a federal legal official, before Lee finally won permanent freedom.⁴⁴²

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California's Political Leadership and Anti-Black Oppression

During the 1850s, California's political leaders, including governors, state assemblymen, and state senators, supported other anti-Black laws. California's 1849 Constitutional Convention restricted the right to vote to white male citizens⁴⁴³ and also debated (but did not pass) an exclusion law to outlaw all future African American migration to the state.⁴⁴⁴

Peter Burnett, California's first governor, opposed both enslavement and the presence of African Americans, so he was angry that the new state constitution did not have a Black exclusion law.⁴⁴⁵ Before coming to California, Burnett had served in Oregon's provisional government and had personally helped pass a Black exclusion law, the “Lash Law,” which said that African Americans who arrived in Oregon would be whipped every six months until they left.⁴⁴⁶

Burnett encouraged the California legislature to pass a Black exclusion law immediately.⁴⁴⁷ He said that failing to exclude Black residents would lead to enslavers bringing more enslaved people into the state.⁴⁴⁸ When the California legislature failed to pass a Black exclusion law in 1850, Burnett gave another speech in 1851 demanding a law to ban Black residents.⁴⁴⁹ This time he claimed that any free Black residents would be so poor, and so upset about not having any civil rights under California law, that they would start a race war against whites.⁴⁵⁰ Overall, California tried to pass a Black exclusion law at least four times during the 1850s, but the state legislature was either too politically divided to agree on a law or ran out of time before the legislative session ended.⁴⁵¹

California legislators focused instead on limiting the rights of African Americans who were already in the state. In addition to outlawing African American court testimony in cases involving whites, the California legislature also made interracial marriage between Black and white people illegal,⁴⁵² excluded African American people from getting homesteads (free or cheap farms)

on state lands,⁴⁵³ refused to offer state funding for Black children to attend public schools,⁴⁵⁴ and would not accept petitions from Black activists who wanted to change these unjust laws.⁴⁵⁵

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After free Black activists successfully rescued Archy Lee from enslavement in 1858, angry proslavery legislators tried to make these anti-Black laws even worse. They tried to pass another state fugitive slave law and to pass yet another Black exclusion law. Although both of these laws failed to pass before the end of the legislative session, the vicious anti-Black tone of state politics prompted many Black Californians to leave the state in search of greater freedom and equality.⁴⁵⁶ Starting in 1858, up to 800 African American men, women, and children migrated north to the British colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, in what is now Canada, where many became British subjects.⁴⁵⁷

VIII. The U.S. Civil War and the End of Enslavement

Political Struggles Leading up to the U.S. Civil War

Between 1850 and the start of the Civil War in 1861, the political fight over enslavement's westward expansion and African Americans' legal rights became more intense and more violent. Proslavery politicians in Congress pushed through the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, a law that overturned the 1820 Missouri Compromise that had outlawed enslavement in most of the Louisiana Purchase lands.⁴⁵⁸ This meant that white settlers in the new western territories of Kansas and Nebraska territories could allow enslavement if they wanted to do so. A bloody civil war broke out in Kansas between proslavery and antislavery settlers who had rushed there to claim the new territory for their side.⁴⁵⁹ The Kansas-Nebraska Act and "Bleeding Kansas," as this violence came to be called, shocked many northerners who opposed enslavement moving into the West. They formed a new political party, the Republican Party, which was based mostly in the North and whose main goal was stopping the westward expansion of enslavement.⁴⁶⁰

As northerners became more antislavery, proslavery southerners became even louder in their defense of enslavement.⁴⁶¹ They falsely claimed that enslavement

was a gentle and humane institution, and that enslaved people got just as many benefits from the institution as white people because they received life-long care and support in exchange for their work.⁴⁶² Proslavery people also used scientific racism, the false theory that all white people were naturally smarter and more "civilized" than African descended people, to argue that enslavement was good for people of African descent because it "uplifted" them.⁴⁶³

In the late 1850s, the U.S. Supreme Court supported these false theories that African Americans were inferior to white Americans and helped open the western U.S. to enslavement. In the 1857 case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, the court decided that African Americans were not citizens of the United States and did not have any of the legal rights that white Americans had.⁴⁶⁴ Chief Justice Roger Taney, from the enslaving state of Maryland, explained that white people had always treated Black people as slaves and that African Americans were "so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."⁴⁶⁵ In addition to denying African Americans' claims to legal rights, the court also said that the federal government had no power to close enslavement out of the western territories.⁴⁶⁶ The U.S.

Constitution allowed slaveholding southerners to take their property, including property in human beings, into the western territories.⁴⁶⁷

Free African Americans resisted their legal exclusion from U.S. citizenship both before and after the *Dred Scott* decision by claiming birthright citizenship. This was the idea that birth on U.S. soil automatically made them citizens of the United States.⁴⁶⁸ Across the first half of the 1800s, African Americans used local courthouses and everyday interactions with state and municipal governments to establish that their U.S. birth entitled them to the title and rights of citizenship.⁴⁶⁹ The groundwork laid by free African Americans was eventually the foundation of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which made everyone born in the United States a citizen of the United States.⁴⁷⁰

The conflict over enslavement's westward expansion and African Americans' rights broke out into a full civil war in 1861. Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, won the presidential election of 1860 by promising to keep enslavement from moving West into any new territories.⁴⁷¹ Proslavery southerners claimed Lincoln's election was proof that all northerners wanted to end enslavement, give citizenship rights to African Americans, and cause a race war in the South.⁴⁷²

Less than two months after Lincoln's election, South Carolina, an enslaving state, voted to leave the United States.⁴⁷³ Over the next two months, an additional six enslaving states—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas—also left the United States. They formed the Confederate States of America, also known as the Confederacy. Once war broke out in 1861, another four enslaving states—Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee—joined the Confederacy.⁴⁷⁴ The deadliest war in U.S. history had begun.

The Civil War, and the Emancipation Proclamation

The Confederate States of America, also known as the Confederacy, fought to create a new nation built on the enslavement of people of African descent. The Confederate Constitution was based strongly on the U.S. Constitution, except that it outlawed the national government from ending enslavement⁴⁷⁵ and it said that white people living in any new Confederate territories had the right to own enslaved people.⁴⁷⁶

Alexander Stephens, the Confederate Vice-President, declared that, unlike the United States, the Confederacy was not based on the notion that all men were created

equal. Instead, the “cornerstone” of the Confederacy, the foundation on which it was built, was “the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.”⁴⁷⁷

For many white southerners in the Confederacy, keeping enslavement was even more important than winning independence from the United States. When the Confederacy lacked soldiers to fight in the later years of the Civil War, Confederate military leaders, including General Robert E. Lee, supported recruiting enslaved men as soldiers. The idea was that enslaved men would fight for the Confederacy in exchange for their freedom.⁴⁷⁸

In the end, recruiting enslaved men as soldiers and giving freedom to those who fought for the Confederacy was very unpopular because proslavery whites feared that it would weaken enslavement and go against the enslaving states' reason for seceding.⁴⁷⁹ For example, Howell Cobb, a Confederate general from Georgia, said that giving guns to the enslaved was a “suicidal policy” and “[t]he day you make soldiers of them is the beginning of the end of the revolution.”⁴⁸⁰

Since many white southerners agreed with Cobb, the Confederacy did not accept the idea of freeing and arming enslaved men as soldiers until March 1865, the last month of the Civil War. The Confederacy organized a handful of enslaved men as soldiers in these very last days of the war, but none of them fought in battle.⁴⁸¹

Unlike the Confederacy, the Union made freeing the enslaved and recruiting enslaved men into the military a major part of its war strategy. Even though Abraham Lincoln and many Republican politicians were not interested in freeing the enslaved at first, the actions of enslaved people pushed the United States toward ending enslavement.⁴⁸²

Enslaved people began escaping to U.S. military sites even before the war began.⁴⁸³ When the United States Army began moving into the Confederacy, large numbers of refugees from enslavement—as many as 500,000 people or 12.5 percent of the entire enslaved population—sought freedom in U.S. Army camps.⁴⁸⁴ These freedom seekers worked as wagon drivers, laundry workers, cooks, manual laborers, and nurses for the U.S. army.⁴⁸⁵ However, not all African Americans served in the Army voluntarily, as a small number were kidnapped and forced to enlist against their will.⁴⁸⁶

Congress understood that these freedom seekers would play a key role in winning the war against the

Confederacy. Every formerly enslaved person working for the U.S. took away resources from the South and helped the Union.⁴⁸⁷ In 1861 and 1862, Congress passed laws called “confiscation acts,” which allowed the U.S. military to give shelter and work to enslaved people who were being forced to work for the Confederacy, and, later to any enslaved person whose enslaver supported the Confederacy.⁴⁸⁸

Even as the United States was dismantling enslavement, the Union could not immediately or completely abolish the institution. With the secession of 11 Southern states, the number of enslaving congressmen decreased accordingly, which did give opponents of enslavement a

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political advantage.⁴⁸⁹ However, more than 20 percent of the members of Congress during the Civil War remained either current or former slaveholders, mostly from the border states that had not seceded.⁴⁹⁰

Abraham Lincoln was also slow to use his presidential power to free enslaved people. In September 1862, Lincoln wrote a preliminary version of the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all the enslaved people in any area still in rebellion against the United States on the first day of the new year in 1863.⁴⁹¹ Lincoln’s preliminary proclamation also recommended transporting newly-freed African Americans out of the United States and resettling them elsewhere⁴⁹² (a scheme that Lincoln considered seriously for years until it was clear that most African Americans refused to leave the land of their birth).⁴⁹³ Then, on January 1, 1863, Lincoln signed his final Emancipation Proclamation, setting enslaved people free everywhere in the Confederacy, except the parts already controlled by the U.S. Army,⁴⁹⁴ and

making no reference to removing African Americans overseas.⁴⁹⁵ The Emancipation Proclamation also left out the enslaving Border States that had not joined the Confederacy—Maryland, Kentucky, Delaware, and Missouri—to keep them loyal to the Union.⁴⁹⁶

Enslaved People Tear Down Enslavement and Fight for their Freedom

Enslaved people set the Emancipation Proclamation in motion by seeking freedom by the thousands, and they also fought for their freedom on the battlefield. Congress stopped excluding Black men from the U.S. Army in 1862⁴⁹⁷ and the Emancipation Proclamation opened the way for Black men to join the army and navy.⁴⁹⁸ Free African Americans in Union states quickly organized military units, including the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry.⁴⁹⁹

But most Black Civil War soldiers were formerly enslaved men recruited in the South as part of the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Altogether, 178,000 Black men served in 175 USCT regiments.⁵⁰⁰ Another 29,000 Black men served in the U.S. Navy.⁵⁰¹ By the end of the Civil War, Black servicemen made up roughly 10 percent of the entire Union military.⁵⁰² They fought in every major Union military campaign between 1864 and 1865,⁵⁰³ and participated in 39 major battles and 410 smaller armed conflicts.⁵⁰⁴ Around 40,000 of these men (around 20 percent) died during the Civil War.⁵⁰⁵

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The 107th U.S. Colored Infantry stand guard during the United States Civil War. (c. 1860-1865)

The federal government and the U.S. military did not treat Black soldiers equally. Black soldiers faced doing hard labor, being fed less nutritious food than white soldiers, and having less access to medical care.⁵⁰⁶ The federal government also paid Black soldiers less than white soldiers, and Black soldiers were closed out of opportunities to lead their units as high-ranking officers because these positions were given to white men only.⁵⁰⁷ Black soldiers' resistance to poor treatment helped fix some of these inequalities.⁵⁰⁸ After Black soldiers protested strongly against lower pay, Congress finally began paying Black and white soldiers equally in 1864.⁵⁰⁹ By the end of the war, 80 Black men also won their promotion to high-ranking officer positions.⁵¹⁰ For a further discussion the U.S. military's discriminatory treatment of African Americans, see Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity.

These Black servicemen fought bravely to win their freedom and to claim equal rights with white Americans. Sattira A. Douglas, a Black woman whose husband, H. Ford Douglas, fought in the war, explained that Black soldiers wanted "to strike the blow that will at once relieve them of northern prejudice and southern slavery."⁵¹¹ They fought courageously because they had "everything to gain in this conflict: liberty, honor, social and political position," and losing the war would result in "slavery, [and] prejudice of caste."⁵¹²

For instance, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the most famous northern Black unit, and the one in which Frederick Douglass's two sons served, led a heroic attack on Fort Wagner, South Carolina in July 1863.⁵¹³ More than 40 percent of the men died or were wounded in the attack.⁵¹⁴ One of the survivors of Fort Wagner, Sergeant William Harvey Carney, eventually was awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest military honor in the United States, for saving the 54th Massachusetts flag from the enemy.⁵¹⁵ Carney was among 26 Black Civil War soldiers who earned this prestigious medal for bravery above and beyond the call of duty.⁵¹⁶

Black soldiers also faced more violence on the battlefield than white soldiers. The Confederacy threatened to kill or enslave Black soldiers who Confederates captured as prisoners of war.⁵¹⁷ Abraham Lincoln tried to protect Black soldiers by warning the Confederacy that the Union would kill or force into hard labor one

Confederate prisoner of war for every Black soldier that Confederates killed or enslaved.⁵¹⁸

Still, some Confederates targeted Black servicemen with violence. In 1864, Confederates attacked a much smaller Union force of mostly Black soldiers at Fort Pillow in Tennessee. The Confederates entered the fort and killed 300 men, 200 of whom were Black.⁵¹⁹ Witnesses said that

By the end of the Civil War, Black servicemen made up roughly 10 percent of the entire Union military. The federal government and the U.S. military did not treat Black soldiers equally. Black soldiers faced doing hard labor, being fed less nutritious food than white soldiers, and having less access to medical care. The federal government also paid Black soldiers less than white soldiers, and Black soldiers were closed out of opportunities to lead their units as high-ranking officers because these positions were given to white men only.

Confederates killed these Black soldiers instead of capturing them as prisoners of war.⁵²⁰ After this massacre, it became popular for Black soldiers to shout "Remember Fort Pillow!" as they went into battle to fight for their lives and their freedom.⁵²¹

The End of the Civil War and the Thirteenth Amendment

The United States won the Civil War against the Confederacy in 1865, effectively ending enslavement in all of the ex-Confederate states. Enslaved people in Texas, one of the very last places reached by the United States Army, did not hear that they had been legally freed until June 19, 1865.⁵²² This was two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Formerly enslaved Black Texans began celebrating June 19th as "Juneteenth," a day to remember their hard-fought battle for freedom.⁵²³

Six months later, on December 6, 1865, the required number of states finally approved the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawing enslavement and making emancipation permanent.⁵²⁴ The Amendment said that "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."⁵²⁵ Section 2 of the Thirteenth

Amendment also empowered Congress to pass “appropriate legislation” to enforce the elimination of enslavement,⁵²⁶ which the U.S. Supreme Court later

interpreted as the power to outlaw all “badges and incidents of slavery.”⁵²⁷

IX. Reconstruction and the Lost Cause

Reconstruction Begins

After the end of the Civil War and the outlawing of enslavement, the United States went through a process known as Reconstruction, a period of rebuilding and reuniting the country.⁵²⁸ Abraham Lincoln had begun this process during the Civil War.⁵²⁹ But Lincoln’s assassination in April 1865 put Reconstruction in the hands of his vice-president, Andrew Johnson, and Republicans in Congress.⁵³⁰

President Johnson was a former Democrat from Tennessee who remained loyal to the Union. He disapproved of the Confederacy and wanted to punish wealthy enslavers who participated in it.⁵³¹ But he also wanted to keep white people in charge of the South and opposed giving equal political rights to African Americans.⁵³² As Johnson wrote in an 1868 letter to the governor of Missouri: “This is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President; it shall be a government for white men.”⁵³³

Johnson fought with Republicans in Congress over the direction of Reconstruction and African Americans’ civil rights, which eventually led to Johnson’s impeachment.⁵³⁴ Congressional Republicans took over the process of Reconstruction and passed new laws aimed at giving formerly enslaved people basic legal rights.⁵³⁵

Congressional Republicans had several overlapping goals: re-growing the southern cotton economy,

rebuilding the ex-Confederate states’ governments before allowing them to come back fully into the United States, and making sure that formerly enslaved people could no longer be held in enslavement.⁵³⁶ Some of the most progressive Republicans (known as Radical Republicans) wanted to completely change social, economic, and political life in the South to support Black equality.⁵³⁷ But moderate and conservative Republicans mostly focused on laws that would give African Americans basic legal and economic rights such as making contracts to work and getting paid for their work.⁵³⁸

The formerly enslaved and former enslavers in the South had their own goals. Formerly enslaved people wanted more than just basic legal rights. They wanted to be independent, out of the control of their former enslavers, and to own small farms where they could work for themselves.⁵³⁹ They wanted to educate themselves and their children.⁵⁴⁰ They wanted the ability to move around in search of family members sold away during enslavement.⁵⁴¹ Finally, they wanted political rights such as the right to vote and hold office.⁵⁴²

Former enslavers refused to acknowledge African Americans’ new freedom. In every ex-Confederate state, white southerners passed laws called “Black Codes.”⁵⁴³ Black Codes included vagrancy laws that allowed police to arrest any Black person without an employer and force them to work. Black Codes in some states also forced Black parents to give control over their children to their former enslavers. State courts generally punished African Americans more harshly than white Americans charged with the same crimes.⁵⁴⁴

Republicans in Congress would have to force former enslavers in the South to treat the formerly enslaved fairly, equally, and with basic human dignity. Republicans briefly considered passing laws that would take away land from wealthy Confederates and give it to formerly enslaved people so that they could support themselves as independent farmers.⁵⁴⁵

Immediately before the end of the Civil War, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands to provide for the welfare of formerly enslaved African Americans, including through “issues of provisions, clothing, and fuel, as [necessary]

In every ex-confederate state, white southerners passed laws called the Black Codes. Examples include:

- Vagrancy laws that allowed police to arrest any Black person without an employer and force them to work
- Laws that forced Black parents to give control over their children to their former enslavers.
- Laws that did not allow African Americans to change employers without permission

for the immediate and temporary shelter and supply of destitute and suffering refugees and freedmen and their wives and children,” according to the statute.⁵⁴⁶ Commonly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau, the agency had the authority to supervise labor relations in the South, with the mandate to provide education, medical care, and legal protections for formerly enslaved African Americans, along with the authority to rent out and eventually sell allotments of abandoned or confiscated land to free African Americans.⁵⁴⁷

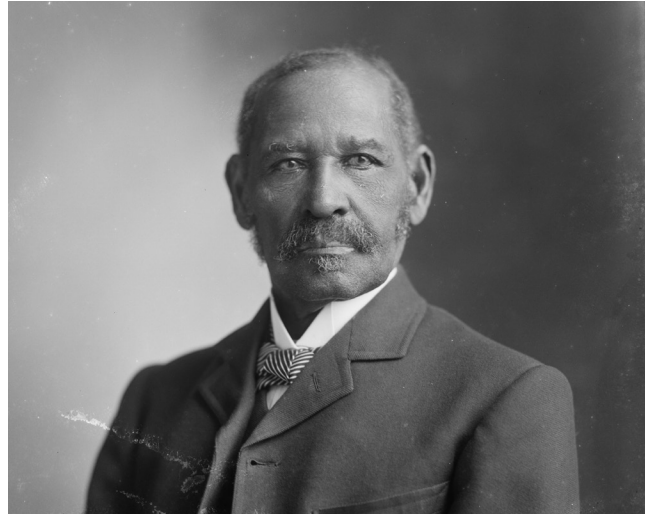
The original goal of the Freedmen’s Bureau Act was the more radical notion of allowing African Americans the means to become self-sufficient.⁵⁴⁸ In the closing days of the Civil War, Union General William Tecumseh Sherman issued Special Field Order No. 15, setting aside 400,000 acres of confiscated land for those who had been freed, and two months later, the Freedman Bureau’s Act formalized the field order, “providing that each negro might have forty acres at a low price on long credit.”⁵⁴⁹ Many free African Americans and northern Republicans believed that land reform in the South—granting formerly enslaved African Americans access to their own land—was the true way that formerly enslaved people would be free from their enslavers.⁵⁵⁰ The resulting independent Black farmers would provide a power base for a new social and political order in the postwar South.⁵⁵¹

This new vision of social relations in the South was opposed by white southerners as well as northerners who opposed enslavement but did not believe in full equality for African Americans.⁵⁵² Most white Americans, even in the North, thought these policies were too “radical” because they took away ex-Confederates’ individual property rights and set a dangerous precedent that wealth could be redistributed to poorer members of society.⁵⁵³ Moreover, a large number of Black landowners would threaten plantations and disrupt the southern economy and social system.⁵⁵⁴ White capitalists in the North and South believed that Black freedom should mean Black workers continuing to work on a plantation, although they would now be paid.⁵⁵⁵ They did not believe that African Americans should be able to support themselves independently through subsistence farming, which would have led to less cotton being grown and posed a threat to the interests of cotton merchants and other capitalists in the South, elsewhere in the United States, and in Europe.⁵⁵⁶ In less than a full harvest season, the land that Sherman had given to freed persons was returned to the prior owners.⁵⁵⁷

Although the Freedmen’s Bureau tried to assert and protect the rights of the formerly enslaved, it also

perpetuated racist stereotypes, paternalistic attitudes, and continued to limit African Americans’ economic and social power. Bureau agents often viewed formerly

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“Gibbs, Judge M.W.” Judge Miffin Wistar Gibbs (1823-1915) was a prominent civil rights and entrepreneur in San Francisco who fought against California’s anti-black laws. (c. 1901-1903)

enslaved African Americans as children, unprepared for freedom, and needing to be taught the importance of work and wages.⁵⁵⁸ The Freedmen’s Bureau abandoned the possibility of land reform in the South, and focused mostly on labor relations between Black and white southerners instead.⁵⁵⁹

Republicans’ other major Reconstruction policies focused on making sure that formerly enslaved Black southerners had access to basic civil rights, such as rights to make contracts, own property, keep their families together, have physical safety, and be treated fairly by the courts and the criminal justice system.⁵⁶⁰ In 1866, Congress passed a civil rights act that made anyone born in the United States a citizen, without regard to their race, color, or previous enslavement.⁵⁶¹ Newly freed Black citizens were supposed to have the same equality under the law “as is enjoyed by white citizens.”⁵⁶²

Republicans feared that a federal law like the Civil Rights Act of 1866 could be overturned easily if another political party came into power. They pushed for a constitutional amendment that would make Black citizenship and civil rights permanent.⁵⁶³

The Fourteenth Amendment, approved by Congress in 1866 and ratified by the required number of states in 1868, said that any person born in the United States was a citizen (birthright citizenship); that state governments could not take away the life, liberty, or property of any

person (citizen or non-citizen) without due process of law (following standard legal procedures); and that the states had to treat every person equally under the law.⁵⁶⁴ Black activists had finally won their decades-long battle for birthright citizenship, and all people born in the United States now benefitted from their work.⁵⁶⁵

Congress soon decided that formerly enslaved people's legal and economic rights could not be protected unless African Americans had political rights, specifically rights to vote and hold office.⁵⁶⁶ The Fifteenth Amendment, approved by Congress in 1869 and ratified by the required number of states in 1870, made it illegal for states to discriminate against voters based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."⁵⁶⁷ The intention was to stop the states from denying voting rights to African American men.⁵⁶⁸ As with the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, the Fifteenth Amendment gave Congress the power to pass future legislation to ensure that the states followed the law.⁵⁶⁹

California Rejects Reconstruction Civil Rights Legislation

The legislature and governor of California strongly opposed Congress's Reconstruction civil rights laws and tried to stop them.⁵⁷⁰ During the Civil War, Black Californians had fought for and won new rights, such as the right to testify in court cases involving whites.⁵⁷¹ This was because white Republicans controlled the legislature and governorship during the early 1860s and took power away from the proslavery Democrats who used to control the state.⁵⁷² But many white Californians opposed Congressional civil rights laws to protect formerly enslaved people and worried that these laws would apply to other non-white people in the state.⁵⁷³

Democrats came back into power in California in 1867 by promising white voters that they would fight against Reconstruction and any new law that would make African Americans, Native Americans, or Chinese Americans equal to whites or give them voting rights.⁵⁷⁴

California Democrats who controlled the state legislature kept this promise when it came time to ratify the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.⁵⁷⁵ California's legislature ignored the Fourteenth Amendment and never considered it.⁵⁷⁶ The legislature voted to reject

ratifying the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870.⁵⁷⁷ Enough other states had ratified the amendments that they became part of the U.S. Constitution without California's approval.⁵⁷⁸ Still, California would continue its resistance to Reconstruction civil rights legislation by refusing to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment until 1959⁵⁷⁹ and the Fifteenth Amendment until 1962.⁵⁸⁰

California also led the way in establishing the legal defense for segregation during Reconstruction. In 1874, the Supreme Court of California made a destructive

In the case of *Ward v. Flood*, California's Supreme Court justices decided that segregation in the state's public schools did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment as long as Black children and white children had equal access to similar schools and educational opportunities. Twenty-two years later, the U.S. Supreme Court made a similar "separate but equal" decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This decision supported the segregation of public facilities in the United States for almost 60 years.

decision that the rest of the United States eventually followed. In the case of *Ward v. Flood*, California's Supreme Court justices decided that segregation in the state's public schools did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment as long as Black children and white children had equal access to similar schools and educational opportunities.⁵⁸¹ Twenty-two years later, the U.S. Supreme Court made a similar "separate but equal" decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This decision supported the segregation of public facilities in the United States for almost 60 years.⁵⁸²

The Destruction of Reconstruction

African Americans fought for and took advantage of many new legal rights during Reconstruction, but this time period of growing legal equality was short. White supremacist terrorist groups, first the Ku Klux Klan and then later militias such as the White League of Louisiana and the Red Shirts of South Carolina, eventually overthrew the Reconstruction governments that Black and white Republicans had established together in the South.⁵⁸³ (For a detailed discussion of African Americans' political accomplishments during Reconstruction and white supremacist terrorism in the U.S. South, see Chapters 3, Racial Terror, and 4, Political Disenfranchisement, of this report).

White southern Democrats, who wanted to keep African Americans working on plantations and out of politics, retook control of the southern states.⁵⁸⁴ The long and expensive process of Reconstruction lost popularity with white northerners, and many of them wanted to give up on the project of trying to change the racial, legal, and economic relationships of the South.⁵⁸⁵

During the U.S. presidential election of 1876, white northern Republicans abandoned Reconstruction in the South in exchange for keeping control of the presidency of the United States.⁵⁸⁶ After the election, Ohio Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and New York Democrat Samuel Tilden both claimed to be the winner.⁵⁸⁷ It was well-known that white southerners had used violence, threats, and fraud to keep African Americans from voting for the Republican Hayes.⁵⁸⁸ The national leadership of the Republican and Democratic parties made a secret deal: in exchange for Democrats acknowledging Hayes's victory in the presidential election, Republicans would reduce federal support for Reconstruction.⁵⁸⁹ Soon after Hayes became president in 1877, he pulled U.S. troops out of key areas in the South where they had been protecting African Americans' political rights and Republican officeholders.⁵⁹⁰ Hayes' action effectively ended direct federal protection of African Americans' political rights in the South.⁵⁹¹

The U.S. Supreme Court played its own important role in defeating Reconstruction.⁵⁹² In the 1870s, the court made several decisions that greatly reduced the power of the Fourteenth Amendment and federal laws to protect Black equality.⁵⁹³

At the end of the 1800s and the start of the 1900s, white southerners began building thousands of monuments and statues all over the South to celebrate famous Confederates, and to name important buildings after Confederate figures. White Californians also built Confederate monuments across the state.

The last of these decisions happened in the 1883 *Civil Rights Cases*, a group of several cases that African Americans had brought under the federal Civil Rights Act of 1875.⁵⁹⁴ That act had made it illegal for theaters, hotels, and public transportation companies such as railroads to exclude African Americans.⁵⁹⁵

The Supreme Court decided in 1883 that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional because the Fourteenth Amendment, on which it was based, only gave Congress

the power to stop state governments from discriminating against African Americans. Congress could not outlaw individual people and private business owners from discriminating against African Americans; only the state governments themselves could do that.⁵⁹⁶

The Supreme Court decision in the *Civil Rights Cases* legalized racial discrimination and segregation in most public places. It set the stage for the “separate but equal” decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and practices such as housing discrimination and education segregation.⁵⁹⁷

The Rise of the Lost Cause Myth

After Reconstruction ended, white southerners created the myth of the Confederate “Lost Cause” in order to downplay the horrors of enslavement and terrorize African Americans.⁵⁹⁸ Southerners who opposed Black civil rights falsely argued that the Civil War had little to do with enslavement. The Lost Cause myth claims that the Confederacy had fought a heroic war to save the southern way of life from being destroyed by the North.⁵⁹⁹ This untruthful history also claims that the Confederacy lost the Civil War only because the more populated, industrialized North overpowered white southerners, not because enslavement or the Confederate cause was wrong.⁶⁰⁰

The Lost Cause is not just a story that white southerners tell. It is a weapon of terror against African Americans and a rejection of the southern defeat in the Civil War and Black civil rights. At the end of the 1800s and the start of the 1900s, white southerners began building thousands of monuments and statues all over the South to celebrate famous Confederates, and to name important buildings after Confederate figures.⁶⁰¹

In the 1910s, the Ku Klux Klan, which the federal government had broken up during Reconstruction, re-emerged and began terrorizing and murdering African Americans.

The combination of violence against African Americans and the constant sight of monuments celebrating the enslaving Confederacy were terrorist tactics meant to silence African Americans and keep them from challenging white supremacy.⁶⁰²

Lost Cause symbols became especially important to white southerners who tried to stop the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. White southerners who opposed African American civil and human

rights beat and murdered Black (and some white) civil rights activists. They also began regularly flying versions of the battle flag of the Army of Northern Virginia (the Confederate “Stars and Bars,” popularly known as the “Confederate Flag”) to threaten civil rights activists and to show that they were determined not to give equality to African Americans.⁶⁰³

Even though defenders of the Lost Cause have argued that Confederate monuments and flags stand for “heritage, not hate,” and they claim that removing them erases history, this argument ignores the true history of these objects. White southerners have used them strategically as symbols of terror to try and keep African Americans from fighting for full equality.⁶⁰⁴

California and the Lost Cause

In California, white Americans popularized the Lost Cause mythology with national audiences. The Hollywood film industry was responsible for bringing the Lost Cause to

movie screens and making it popular with many white Americans, North and South, during the first half of the 1900s.⁶⁰⁵

D.W. Griffith's blockbuster film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), falsely showed members of the Ku Klux Klan as heroes who were protecting white women and southern honor against violent African Americans (mostly played by white actors who painted their faces black). This film was the main factor behind the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1900s.⁶⁰⁶ *Gone with Wind* (1939) celebrated the pre-Civil War South by showing a world of kindly enslavers, loyal and happy enslaved people, and heroic Confederates fighting for the southern way of life.⁶⁰⁷

White Californians also built Confederate monuments across the state. For example, a plaque honoring Confederate President Jefferson Davis, set up by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, stood along a Bakersfield, California, highway for almost 80 years.⁶⁰⁸

A monument in the Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles, California, built in 1925, celebrated all Confederates who died on the Pacific Coast.⁶⁰⁹ Although both of these monuments have now been removed, their existence reminds us of California's complicity in the United States' long history of enslavement, white supremacist terrorism, and systemic racism against African Americans.

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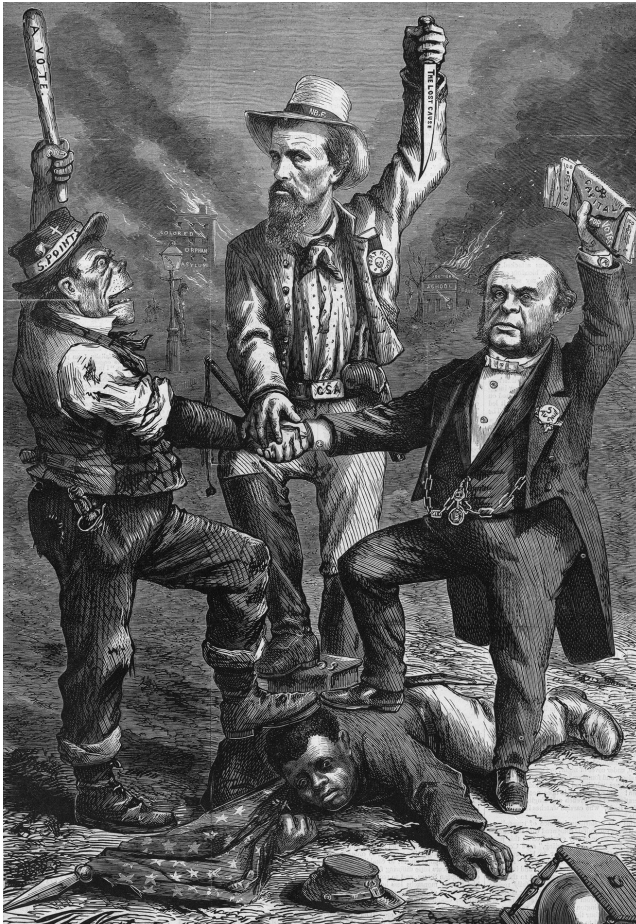
X. Conclusion

In order to steal and profit from the labor of millions of human beings for 244 years, the colonial American and U.S. governments built an institution of enslavement that was markedly different from the type of slavery that the world had seen before. Americans passed laws that enshrined a racial hierarchy with white people at the top and Black people at the bottom. This hierarchy was based on the false idea that all white people were naturally superior in intelligence and morality to all Black people, and white Americans then used these ideas to justify the lifelong enslavement of people of African ancestry and their descendants. American law enslaved babies from the moment they were born, through adulthood, until the moment they died, and ensured that all their descendants suffered the same fate. During certain time periods, state governments even passed laws that made it illegal for enslavers to voluntarily free enslaved people from

their bondage. Enslavement was a badge pinned on people of African descent because of the color of their skin.

When slavery formally ended in 1865, this racial hierarchy continued functioning. The end of Reconstruction and the rise of the Lost Cause brought a long period of political, social, economic, and legal inequality for African Americans that white people enforced through terrorism, violence, and exploiting legal loopholes. This period was known as “Jim Crow,” after a racist stereotyped character popular with white Americans, and it lasted roughly 60 to 70 years, from the 1890s to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Without the laws that made enslavement legal, American citizens, aided by government officials, terrorized, murdered, and abused their Black neighbors to maintain this legacy of slavery, as discussed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror. During this period, white southerners gradually took

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"This is a white man's government" (1868)

away Black southerners' rights to vote by using violent intimidation against and legal loopholes such as literacy tests and poll taxes to disqualify Black voters, as discussed in Chapter 4, Political Disenfranchisement. As Black people fled violence and oppression in the rural South to find economic opportunity in the North and the West, government officials maintained the racial hierarchy by putting up barriers to prevent Black and white Americans from living in the same neighborhoods, as discussed in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, and allowing private companies to prevent Black and white Americans from holding the same jobs, as discussed in Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity. New systems of forced labor, such as convict leasing, sharecropping, and debt peonage kept formerly enslaved African Americans working for white Americans on cotton plantations or in other industries, as discussed in Chapter 10. Much of this forced labor rested on

discrimination in law enforcement, judicial decisions, and prison sentencing that doomed African Americans to slavery-like conditions, as discussed in Chapter 11, An Unjust Legal System.

Government actions relegated African Americans to mostly urban neighborhoods with underfunded schools, as discussed in Chapter 6, Separate and Unequal Education, and menial and service jobs. U.S. Supreme Court decisions such as the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883) and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) excluded African Americans from using public facilities such as schools on equal terms with white Americans and validated discrimination in housing that excluded African Americans from desirable neighborhoods. These legal decisions and violent practices caused direct physical harm to African Americans by segregating them in polluted, unhealthy neighborhoods, as discussed in Chapter 7, Racism in Environment and Infrastructure, and denying them equal access to quality healthcare, as discussed in Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect.

The racial hierarchy that laws created during enslavement also created deeply harmful and untrue racial stereotypes, which have followed African Americans throughout American history, as discussed in Chapter 9, Control over Spiritual, Creative and Cultural Life. Inequalities in the criminal justice system, child welfare laws, housing, and healthcare harmed the survival of Black families, as discussed in Chapter 8, Pathologizing the Black Family, while discriminatory, predatory banking practices and employment discrimination prevented many African Americans from accumulating generational wealth to pass down to their children, as discussed in Chapter 13, The Wealth Gap.

Four hundred years of discrimination has resulted in an enormous and persistent wealth gap between Black and white Americans, as discussed in Chapter 13 The Wealth Gap, and continuous and compounding harm on the health of African Americans, as discussed in Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect.

As the following chapters will show, these effects of slavery continue to be embedded in American society today and have never been sufficiently remedied. The governments of the United States and the State of California have never apologized to or compensated African Americans for these harms.

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⁴¹⁰*An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, California* (1889), pp. 358–359; *Letter from California* (Oct. 11, 1850) *Liberator*, p. 161 col. 3.

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⁴¹⁴*Id.* at pp. 50–52.

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⁴²⁷An Act to Amend an Act respecting Fugitives from Labor and Slaves Brought to this State prior to her Admission into the Union, Act of April 15, 1853, ch. 67, Cal. Stat., at 94.

⁴²⁸An Act Amendatory to an Act to Amend an Act respecting Fugitives from Labor and Slaves Brought to this State prior to her Admission into the Union, Act of April 13, 1854, ch. 22, Cal. Stat., at 30.

⁴²⁹*Freedom's Frontier, supra*, at pp. 71–72.

⁴³⁰*In re Perkins*, 2 Cal. 424 (1852); *Freedom's Frontier, supra*, at pp. 70–71.

⁴³¹The three men had arrived in California in 1849 with Charles Perkins, the son of their enslaver. When Charles Perkins went back to Mississippi in 1851, he informally emancipated the men. Once he heard about the new California fugitive slave law, Perkins decided to use it to reclaim the men and force them to return to Mississippi as slaves.

⁴³²*In re Perkins*, 2 Cal. 424 (1852).

⁴³³*Id.* at pp. 455–457.

⁴³⁴*Id.* at pp. 452–455.

⁴³⁵*Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) 60 U.S. 393; In fact, one California antislavery attorney asserted that the lawyers for Dred Scott's enslavers cited the California case of *In re Perkins* as a precedent to support Scott's continued enslavement. For this evidence, see Cornelius Cole, "Judicial Influence--Politics upon the Bench, no. 3," scrapbook no. 1, box 38, Cole Family Papers, Charles E. Young Research Library, Department of Special Collections, University of California-Los Angeles.

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2) the *Perkins* case, described in *In re Perkins*, 2 Cal. 424 (1852); 3) the case of Harriet Jordan, described in *Another Fugitive Slave Case* (Sept. 22, 1852) Daily Alta California p. 2, col. 2 and *A Fugitive Slave Case* (Sept. 22, 1852) Placer Times and Transcript p. 3, col. 1; 4) an anonymous enslaved woman in El Dorado County, described in *Fugitive Slave Case* (Oct. 2, 1852), Sacramento Daily Union p. 2, col. 3; 5) the case of Lucy Brown, described in *Fugitive Slave* (April 20, 1853) Daily Alta California, p. 2, col. 2; 6) the *O'Neil* case, described in *Habeas Corpus* (Jan. 19, 1854) Sacramento Daily Union p. 3, col. 2; 7) the case of an anonymous enslaved boy in Marysville, described in *Kidnapping* (March 31, 1854), Daily Alta California p.2, col. 2 and *The Kidnapping Case* (April 1, 1854) Placer Times and Transcript p. 2, col. 4; 8) the case of Stephen Spencer Hill, described in Johnson, Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush (2000), pp. 67–68, 191 (Roaring Camp); 9) the *Kibbe* case, described in untitled article (April 7, 1855) Daily Alta California, p. 2, col. 4; and 10) the case of *George Mitchell*, described in Lapp, *supra*, at p. 147.

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⁴³⁸*Remaking Slavery*, *supra*, at pp. 49–50.

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California's Last Slave Case (March 5, 2014) New York Times (as of Jan. 26, 2022).

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⁴⁴³Cal. Const. of 1849, art. II, § 1.

⁴⁴⁴Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War* (2007), pp. 73–77.

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I. Introduction

Enslavement was followed by decades of violence and intimidation intended to subordinate African Americans across the United States.¹ Racial terror, and lynchings in particular, pervaded every aspect of pre- and post-enslavement Black life.² African Americans faced threats of violence when they tried to vote, when they tried to buy homes in white neighborhoods, when they tried to swim in public pools, and when they made progress through the courts or in legislation.³ Led and joined by prominent members of society, and enabled by government officials, ordinary citizens terrorized African Americans to preserve a caste system that kept African Americans from building the same wealth and political influence as white Americans.⁴ Racial terror also continued the generational trauma that began during enslavement.⁵

While lynching, mob violence, and other forms of racial terror are no longer socially acceptable, the threat and legacy of terror continue to haunt Black communities.⁶ Such violence has found a modern form in extrajudicial killings of African Americans by police and vigilantes.⁷ Racial terror targeted at successful African Americans has contributed to the present wealth gap between Black and white Americans.⁸ Today, the monitoring of polling places by white supremacist groups evokes a history of violent suppression of Black voters.⁹

This chapter chronicles the racial terror inflicted on African Americans, including in California, and the lasting impact of racial terror. First, this chapter addresses the overarching purpose of racial terror as a method of social control. Second, this chapter will identify the perpetrators of racial terror, most notably the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and their objective of preserving their dominance in society. This chapter pays special attention to the KKK's history and spread in California. Third, this chapter will discuss the various forms of racial terror, such as lynching, mob violence, and sexual violence. The chapter also identifies numerous instances of racial terror in California. This chapter shows how racial terror allowed white Americans to politically, economically, and socially subordinate African Americans. Finally, this chapter will discuss the consequences of racial terror, such as intergenerational trauma and the racial wealth gap, which continue to this day.



II. Objectives of Racial Terror: Social, Political, and Economic Oppression

The practice of racial terror began during enslavement and has continued ever since, developing through Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the 20th century, and today. A critical key to understanding the widespread use of racial terror is recognizing how its perpetrators sought to oppress African Americans socially, psychologically, politically, and economically in order to maintain a racial hierarchy.

As the journalist Isabel Wilkerson argues, a caste system is a social hierarchy created by people in a community that separates groups of human beings based on ancestry, skin color, or other characteristics that cannot be changed.¹⁰ In a caste system, one group of human beings is believed to be superior, while other groups are believed to be in-

In America, for centuries, the perpetrators of racial terror have rarely been held accountable for their violence, and so they have continued to enforce their dominant caste position.

ferior and treated as less than human.¹¹ In the racially ordered caste system of the United States, white people occupy this higher social position.¹² One pillar holding up the American racial caste system is the use of physical and psychological terror, which serves to control African Americans and prevent resistance.¹³ For this caste system to continue functioning, the rest of society, including government officials, only need to look the other way.¹⁴ For state and local government officials, this is a neglect of their duty to protect.¹⁵ In America, for centuries, the perpetrators of racial terror have rarely been held accountable for their violence, and so they have continued to enforce their dominant caste position.¹⁶

The system of racial terror in America started during enslavement, when whipping was a tool to control enslaved people and break their spirit.¹⁷ Enslavers openly publicized their use of violence.¹⁸ When an enslaved person sought freedom by escaping, enslavers sometimes turned to torture, or invited others to kill the freedom seeker.¹⁹ White enslavers could thus use a public display of violence to demonstrate their power over Black enslaved persons, scare enslaved persons into submission, and uphold the institution of enslavement.²⁰

Rebellions of the enslaved were also violently suppressed.²¹ For example, white officials purportedly

discovered an extensive conspiracy of insurrection in Charleston, South Carolina in 1822.²² The enslaved, led by the free Black carpenter Denmark Vesey, allegedly plotted to take over the city and kill all of its white residents, including women and children.²³ After the discovery of the alleged conspiracy, Vesey was arrested, along with dozens of enslaved persons.²⁴ Confessions and testimony against the alleged conspirators were procured in at least some instances by coercion and torture.²⁵ The prosecution had no physical evidence to support its case.²⁶ In the end, Vesey and thirty-four others were executed, although no insurrection ever occurred and no white person was actually killed.²⁷ Indeed, there is significant doubt as to whether any such insurrection plot ever existed.²⁸ Then-governor of South Carolina Thomas Bennet condemned the trial as hasty and unreliable; his brother-in-law, Supreme Court Justice William Johnson, described the proceedings as perjury and “legal murder.”²⁹

After the formal end of enslavement, Black southerners began to gain political and economic influence. As discussed in Chapter 2 on Enslavement, the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 gave voting rights to African Americans, and following the laws' enactment, Black voter turnout reached nearly 90 percent in many jurisdictions.³⁰ During Reconstruction, approximately 2,000 Black men held a public office, including 600 Black state legislators, 18 Black state executive officials, 16 Black representatives elected to Congress, and two of the nation's first Black senators.³¹ Nearly twenty percent of all public officials in the South were Black between 1870-1876.³² In spite of violence and other obstacles, Black southerners began owning land, particularly in the Upper South (Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.).³³ Black land ownership grew to such an extent that by 1910, nearly half of the Black farmers in the Upper South owned land.³⁴ In addition, Black literacy rates surged from approximately 20 percent in 1870 to approximately 70 percent in 1910.³⁵

In 1876, partially as a result of a disputed presidential election, Reconstruction came to an end. In exchange for Democrats not blocking the certification of Republican Rutherford B. Hayes as President, Hayes and other Republicans agreed to remove federal troops from key locations of political conflict in the South.³⁶ With the

end of Reconstruction, supporters of white supremacy returned to power.³⁷ They regained political, social, and economic control, and prevented African Americans from voting.³⁸ After federal troops no longer had a strong presence in the South, white southerners intensified the violent oppression of African Americans.³⁹ As shown in detail below, racial terror took on many forms throughout American history: lynchings, massacres, intimidation, murders, beatings, and police killings. Today, extrajudicial killings of African Americans by police and vigilantes represent a modern form of racial terror.⁴⁰

White Americans feared that newly empowered African Americans would destroy the racial hierarchy.⁴¹ The Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacists beat, burned, and killed African Americans.⁴² Terror pervaded every aspect of Southern life and had a devastating effect on the psyche of African Americans.⁴³ The perpetrators' principal goal was to use violence and intimidation to prevent Black people from voting, achieving equality,⁴⁴ and amassing political and economic power.⁴⁵ For example, white supremacists murdered Black political activists in the 1873 Colfax massacre and Black military members in the 1876 Hamburg massacre.⁴⁶ The Supreme Court's 1876 decision in *United States v. Cruikshank* enabled such violence to continue by making it more difficult to prosecute.⁴⁷ According to the then-governor

of Louisiana, *Cruikshank* “establish[ed] the principle that hereafter no white man could be punished for killing a Negro.”⁴⁸

White supremacists often targeted the greatest perceived threats to the caste system: Black political, economic,

According to the then-governor of Louisiana, *Cruikshank* “establish[ed] the principle that hereafter no white man could be punished for killing a Negro.”

and social activities, and those perceived to be accomplished members of the Black community. After the end of Reconstruction, government actors in the South did little to correct the view that Black people did not deserve human dignity or basic legal and political rights.⁴⁹ Across the country, white people often rejected the idea that African Americans were equal to white Americans,⁵⁰ and used violence to preserve America's racial caste system.⁵¹

As explained below, racial terror advanced three main goals: maintaining the superior social position of white people; destroying Black economic competition and stealing Black wealth; and limiting the political influence of Black people while advancing white supremacy through government offices.

III. Perpetrators of Terror: Private Citizens, Government Support

Throughout American history, from enslavement to the present day, private citizens and government actors have perpetrated and enabled racial terror. Ordinary people committed heinous acts of violence, while others did nothing, watched, or obstructed investigations.⁵² Meanwhile, government officials often did nothing to prevent or prosecute racial terror—and sometimes encouraged or assisted the perpetrators.⁵³ Indeed, white supremacists and Ku Klux Klan members have held positions in all levels of American government.⁵⁴

Among the numerous perpetrators of racial terror, the Ku Klux Klan was especially prominent. The KKK is not the only hate group in American history, and oftentimes racial violence was and is committed by individuals unassociated with an organized group.⁵⁵ But because the KKK has been active and influential for several intervals during its long history, it is centrally important

to the history of racial terror in the United States.⁵⁶ Throughout its history, the Klan has targeted members of all racial groups, as well as Jews, Catholics, and others, but its origins were anti-Black.⁵⁷

The KKK was especially powerful during three periods. The first iteration of the KKK lasted from 1866 until 1869. After several decades of dormancy, the second iteration of the KKK lasted from 1915 until about 1944. The third version of the KKK arose in the 1950s and 1960s and went into decline in the 1980s. Each of these iterations will be discussed in greater detail below.

Origins of the Ku Klux Klan

The first iteration of the Ku Klux Klan took shape in early 1866, during Reconstruction, and formally disbanded in 1869.⁵⁸ After the Civil War ended, many white

southerners resented Reconstruction and its policies, which threatened their superiority.⁵⁹ Reconstruction policies led to social, political, and economic gains by formerly enslaved people.⁶⁰

Around this time, the KKK emerged to oppose Reconstruction, led by former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest and a group of Confederate veterans in Pulaski, Tennessee.⁶¹ This first version of the KKK consisted of ex-Confederates and other white southerners, and it was tacitly supported by most white southerners.⁶² Their hooded costumes were intended to represent the ghosts of Confederate soldiers and evoke the history of slave patrols.⁶³ Their hoods also allowed KKK members to remain anonymous as they spread fear and violence.⁶⁴ In order to re-exert control over the Black labor force and maintain white supremacy, the KKK used fear tactics and violence, such as robbery, rape, arson, and murder.⁶⁵ The KKK was effective at targeting its violence and intimidation tactics at Black voters, including hanging and beating Black officeholders.⁶⁶ It is unknown how many Black people were killed by white supremacists during Reconstruction, though it is estimated to be in the high thousands, if not tens of thousands.⁶⁷

In the late 1860s, the KKK began to decline as it succumbed to infighting and increased federal scrutiny.⁶⁸ The federal Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871, in conjunction with federal policing, helped weaken the KKK.⁶⁹ When the KKK formally disbanded by the end of Reconstruction, the KKK had achieved its objectives, as white southerners were able to openly revive many aspects of life during enslavement.⁷⁰ Having effectively intimidated and suppressed Black voters, and without the presence of federal troops to protect Black voters, white southerners were successful in retaking control of state governments.⁷¹ Once in control, white

supremacists passed laws to take away the rights that Black southerners had gained during Reconstruction.⁷² It also became less necessary to wear a mask to commit violent crimes against African Americans, as public lynching became an openly accepted part of Southern culture and was tolerated by law enforcement.⁷³

State and local governments often looked the other way or supported the KKK. Although state governments

It is unknown how many Black people were killed by white supremacists during Reconstruction, though it is estimated to be in the high thousands, if not tens of thousands.

passed laws in response to the KKK's violence, these laws were seldom locally enforced.⁷⁴ Sheriffs, prosecutors, local witnesses, and jurors were sympathetic to white supremacy or afraid of retaliation.⁷⁵ Some attacks were even led by local police.⁷⁶ Thus, few KKK members ever went to prison for their crimes.⁷⁷ And while the federal Enforcement Acts of the early 1870s helped lead to the dissolution of the KKK, the Supreme Court largely nullified the Enforcement Acts with its 1876 decision in *United States v. Cruikshank*, which hindered federal prosecutions and enabled white supremacist violence.⁷⁸

Second Iteration of the Ku Klux Klan

The second iteration of the Ku Klux Klan began in 1915, continued through the late 1920s and 1930s, and disbanded by 1944.⁷⁹ After the end of Reconstruction, the KKK remained dormant until 1915, when the California film industry played a unique role in reviving the KKK. That year, celebrated filmmaker D.W. Griffith released *The Birth of a Nation*, which was based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*.⁸⁰ Made in and around Los Angeles, *The Birth of a Nation* is acknowledged both as one of the most pioneering and most racist films in cinematic history.⁸¹ President Woodrow Wilson praised *The Birth of a Nation* and showed the film at the White House—a federal government endorsement of white supremacy and anti-Blackness.⁸²

In writing *The Clansman*, Dixon openly wished to depict the “suffering” of white Southerners during Reconstruction and to advocate white supremacy.⁸³ *The Birth of a*

COURTESY OF SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE/THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



“Armed crowds searching for a negro,” Chicago. (1922)

Nation, recognized as historically inaccurate racist propaganda, adhered closely to the source material's racism.⁸⁴ For instance, the film portrayed lynching as rightful retribution against a Black man accused of sexually assaulting a white woman.⁸⁵ Griffith would later say that the heroic depiction of the KKK coming to rescue the South from Black advancement during Reconstruction "was needed to serve the purpose."⁸⁶

The Birth of a Nation was a nationwide blockbuster, and its popularity led directly to the KKK's revival just months after its release.⁸⁷ During a five-year national roadshow of the film from 1915 to 1919, a scholar found that the film incited significant increases in racial violence.⁸⁸ The counties where the film was shown were five times more likely to have a lynching or race riot, and three times more likely to have a KKK chapter after the movie's arrival.⁸⁹ As a result of this surge in recruitment, there were four to five million KKK members by the mid-1920s.⁹⁰ The film remained a KKK recruiting tool for decades.⁹¹

Having supporters and members in prominent positions of power allowed the KKK to act with impunity. For example, the KKK was able to commit lynchings in front of a public audience and leave bodies on display—all without intervention by law enforcement.

Unlike the first iteration of the KKK, this version had a broader geographic base of support beyond the South, including in California.⁹² This second version of the KKK was generally considered to be less violent, as it focused on gaining influence through the political process.⁹³ In this regard, it succeeded: during the 1920s, the KKK's membership included state government officials in Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Texas.⁹⁴ Neither major political party was willing to formally repudiate the KKK out of fear of political repercussions.⁹⁵

Regardless of its political turn, the second iteration of the KKK remained violent. In the summer of 1921, the KKK engaged in whippings and tar-and-feather raids.⁹⁶ According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the KKK also "use[d] acid to brand the letters 'KKK' on the foreheads of [African Americans], Jews, and others" whom the KKK considered to be anti-American.⁹⁷ In the mid-1920s, the KKK launched a terror campaign including lynchings, shootings, and whippings against African Americans, Jews, Catholics, Mexicans, and other immigrant groups.⁹⁸

Eventually, after a series of scandals, in-fighting, and a change in public perception of its image, the second iteration of the KKK lost credibility, and its membership declined in the late 1920s and 1930s.⁹⁹

Third Iteration of the Ku Klux Klan and Hate Groups Today

A third version of the Ku Klux Klan arose in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁰⁰ While the KKK still exists today, it has been in decline since the late 1980s.¹⁰¹ This time, the KKK returned to its anti-Black roots to counter the social and political gains sought by the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰² This version of the KKK was particularly violent against African Americans and civil rights workers in the South.¹⁰³ For example, in 1963, the KKK detonated a bomb at a Birmingham Baptist church that killed four Black girls and injured several more.¹⁰⁴ KKK members also murdered three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964.¹⁰⁵ As recently as 1981, Klansmen in Mobile, Alabama lynched Black 19-year-old Michael Donald.¹⁰⁶ His mother brought a civil suit against the KKK and won a \$7 million award after one of the perpetrators admitted he was carrying out an organization-wide directive to harass, intimidate, and murder Black people.¹⁰⁷

An essential part of the success of the KKK is that their actions and ethos were sanctioned by white society—a recurring theme in the history of racial terror.¹⁰⁸ Rarely did the perpetrators face punishment, as ministers, editors, sheriffs, police officers, judges, and elected officials ignored or participated in the violence.¹⁰⁹ Having supporters and members in prominent positions of power allowed the KKK to act with impunity.¹¹⁰ For example, the KKK was able to commit lynchings in front of a public audience and leave bodies on display—all without intervention by law enforcement.¹¹¹ Witnesses often obstructed any investigation or prosecution for these acts by refusing to give information.¹¹² Police not only refused to intervene, but also gave the KKK information about potential targets.¹¹³ Thus, where the KKK led, white society followed, participated, and looked on.

While the KKK no longer enjoys the degree of sociopolitical power it once held,¹¹⁴ contemporary white supremacist groups have taken up the KKK's mantle to threaten the dignified existence of African Americans and others. The 2017 white nationalist rally in Charlottesville,¹¹⁵ the Proud Boys,¹¹⁶ and a 2021 "White Lives Matter" rally in Orange County¹¹⁷ have variously invoked the symbols, propaganda, and ideology of the KKK.

California

Neither racial terror nor the Ku Klux Klan were confined to the South.¹¹⁸ During Reconstruction, the federal government did not send troops to California, as a non-slave state.¹¹⁹ This allowed white supremacy groups to flourish in the West.¹²⁰ The western KKK complemented

In 1922, for example, Democrat Thomas Lee Woolwine lost his bid for California governor, suggesting that his fight against the KKK was a political liability. The KKK backed winning candidate Republican Friend Richardson—who was believed to have been a KKK member, and which he never denied.

their southern counterparts by violently asserting white superiority against the perceived threat of racial outsiders.¹²¹ As the Black population in California was relatively small at the time, the KKK and other hate groups mainly terrorized Chinese communities.¹²²

During the second iteration of the KKK, California became a “strong Klan state” with a sizable and violent Klan resurgence in the 1920s.¹²³ Shortly after the release of *The Birth of a Nation*, the KKK emerged in San Francisco, establishing a KKK presence in California for the first time.¹²⁴ KKK chapters in Los Angeles, Oakland, Fresno, Riverside, Sacramento, Anaheim, and San Jose soon followed.¹²⁵

The KKK’s national magazine, *Imperial Night-Hawk*, shows that California ranked 11th out of all 48 states in terms of the number of KKK events held between March 1923 and November 1924.¹²⁶ By hosting 89 events in that 20-month period, California even outranked the old enslavement states of Mississippi, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Tennessee.¹²⁷

California’s KKK consisted of prominent individuals who held positions in civil leadership and police departments.¹²⁸ Its members were largely middle-class, educated Protestants who, in socioeconomic terms, were not much different from their neighbors.¹²⁹ These KKK members registered to vote (in higher percentages than non-members), joined civic organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and rotary club, and sought political power by running for elected office or supporting candidates who sympathized with the KKK.¹³⁰

The California KKK exerted significant political influence in the 1920s, winning seats on city councils, gaining control of the press and airwaves in some towns, and

pressuring other public officials.¹³¹ In 1922, for example, Democrat Thomas Lee Woolwine lost his bid for governor, suggesting that his fight against the KKK was a political liability.¹³² The KKK backed winning candidate Republican Friend Richardson—who was believed to have been a KKK member, and which he never denied.¹³³

While the KKK declined on a national scale in the 1930s with the Great Depression, and after the 1925 trial and conviction of the KKK’s then-leader, California’s KKK remained active through the 1940s and into the 1950s.¹³⁴ As detailed below, the KKK had branches—and spread terror—throughout the state, and exercised significant power in local governments.

The Ku Klux Klan in Southern California.

Los Angeles was the epicenter of Ku Klux Klan activity in California.¹³⁵ Prominent and numerous city government

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About fifty members of the Ku Klux Klan held a cross burning ceremony on a small ranch outside of Sacramento. Gun-toting guards wearing Klan outfits and helmets surrounded the ranch, while members made speeches and paraded around the burning cross. (May 3, 1980)

officials were KKK members or had KKK ties, including the mayor, district attorneys, and police officers.¹³⁶ Due to aggressive recruitment efforts beginning in 1921, several KKK branches formed in Los Angeles.¹³⁷ KKK chapters also formed in the nearby communities of Santa Monica, Huntington Park, Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach, Long Beach, Glendale, San Pedro, and Anaheim.¹³⁸

By the 1920s, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) was “a den of corruption” that was infiltrated with KKK members who practiced retaliatory policing in the city’s Black neighborhoods.¹³⁹ “In speaking to the police, you are frequently talking to the Klan,” warned the *Eagle*, a Black Los Angeles newspaper.¹⁴⁰ Los Angeles Deputy Sheriff Nathan Baker regularly recruited KKK members to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and was thought to be a member of the KKK himself.¹⁴¹

On April 22, 1922, more than 100 armed and hooded Klansmen broke into the Inglewood home of Spanish immigrants.¹⁴² The Klansmen forced the couple’s two teenage daughters to disrobe and ransacked the house.¹⁴³ The Klansmen then brutally beat, bound, and gagged the father and his brother, dragged them to a car, and dumped them six miles away.¹⁴⁴ Thirty-seven Klansmen were indicted for the Inglewood raid, but in a trial that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called a “farce,” all were acquitted.¹⁴⁵

The raid prompted an investigation by the District Attorney, who obtained membership lists revealing that the KKK had infiltrated all levels of state and local government.¹⁴⁶ There were 3,000 KKK members in Los Angeles County, over 1,000 in the city limits, and three KKK members on the District Attorney’s own staff.¹⁴⁷ LAPD Chief Louis D. Oaks and County Sheriff William I. Traeger were also identified as members.¹⁴⁸ Law enforcement from nearly every city in California appeared on the list, including 25 San Francisco police officers.¹⁴⁹

Even after the Inglewood raid exposed the breadth of KKK membership, and after the Legislature passed an anti-KKK bill, the KKK still proceeded to hold nine events in Los Angeles between March 1923 and April 1924.¹⁵⁰ The raid and its aftermath inspired KKK members and caused the KKK to redouble its efforts.¹⁵¹ In 1929, KKK supporters helped elect John C. Porter, who had a past with the KKK, as mayor of Los Angeles.¹⁵² And in the 1930s, even after enthusiasm for the KKK began to subside, the KKK still remained active in Los Angeles and the surrounding community, with rallies attended by thousands of people and cross-burnings.¹⁵³

In December 1939, the KKK ceremoniously marched through downtown Los Angeles burning crosses in full view of thousands of people.¹⁵⁴

Beyond Los Angeles, the KKK was active throughout Southern California, including in Orange County, Riverside, and San Diego.¹⁵⁵

KLANSMEN IN THE TOWN OF BREA 1924-1936



2/3 of the fire chiefs



5 of the first 8 mayors



6 of 10 councilmen on board of trustees



Half the treasurers, engineers, clerks and marshals

In Anaheim, by 1923, the KKK had almost 900 members,¹⁵⁶ out of a total city population of about 6,000.¹⁵⁷ Its members generally held more prestigious jobs than the rest of the white population and were politically and civically active.¹⁵⁸ The Anaheim KKK burned crosses and held rallies drawing thousands of people.¹⁵⁹ One such event, an initiation in July 1924, attracted 20,000 people and included a parade of Klansmen with a marching band, airplanes, and fireworks.¹⁶⁰ By spring 1924, the KKK dominated the Anaheim city council, which had initiated a program to replace non-KKK city employees with its own members. Their plan succeeded: ten new policemen, out of 15, were members of the KKK.¹⁶¹

In Brea, five of the town’s first eight mayors were Klansmen, as were six of the 10 councilmen who sat on

In the 1920s, Los Angeles Deputy Sheriff Nathan Baker regularly recruited KKK members to the Los Angeles Police Department and was thought to be a member of the KKK himself.

the board of trustees, half of the city’s treasurers, half of the city’s engineers, half of its city clerks, half of its city marshals, and two-thirds of its fire chiefs between 1924

and 1936.¹⁶² And in Fullerton, from 1918 to 1930, seven of 18 city councilmen were Klansmen.¹⁶³

The Riverside KKK were successful recruiters, claiming over 2,000 members in the 1920s.¹⁶⁴ In Riverside, the KKK held mass events that attracted thousands of people and included parades with marching bands, floats, and KKK members in full regalia.¹⁶⁵ The Riverside KKK prioritized policing interracial contact, which meant monitoring Black residents' activities.¹⁶⁶ For example, the KKK was preoccupied with the City's 1922 settlement with the NAACP to desegregate a white-only pool.¹⁶⁷ In response, they targeted Black swimmers with humiliation and violence.¹⁶⁸ The Riverside KKK gained political influence, and in 1927, helped elect a mayor, Edward M. Deighton, who openly boasted about his support from the KKK.¹⁶⁹ In the 1930s, Riverside Sheriff Carl Rayburn openly sympathized with the KKK, and "KIGY," meaning "Klan I Greet You," was painted on streets and sidewalks throughout the county.¹⁷⁰ The KKK's membership in Riverside decreased in the 1930s, but they still made appearances and burned crosses.¹⁷¹

The San Diego KKK, in the 1920s and 1930s, focused on using violence and other intimidating tactics to "chas[e] the wetbacks across the border."¹⁷² The KKK in the 1930s also merged with other racist and fascist groups, such as the Silver Shirts League, that were focused on attacking African Americans, Latino Americans, and Jews.¹⁷³

The Ku Klux Klan in the Central Valley

The Ku Klux Klan had an active presence in Fresno and Kern County.¹⁷⁴ As of 1922, a local Fresno newspaper reported over 240 alleged Klansmen in Fresno County, and the KKK held public events and parades with as many as 600 attendees during the early to mid-1920s.¹⁷⁵ The investigation in the aftermath of the Inglewood raid also revealed that a number of Fresno officials were KKK members.¹⁷⁶

In the early 1920s, the KKK actively recruited in Kern County and developed what was considered the most violent KKK chapter in California.¹⁷⁷ In Kern County, in 1922 alone, there were over 100 cases of KKK violence, which included extrajudicial beatings, kidnappings, and tar-and-feathering.¹⁷⁸ In 1922, a local newspaper reported that several high-ranking officials in

Kern County were associated with the KKK, including the deputy sheriff, the police chief, the Board of Supervisors chair, and a former assistant district attorney.¹⁷⁹ Although the KKK's influence started to decline in the 1930s,¹⁸⁰ white supremacist culture persisted in

During the 2000s in the California Central Valley, members of the white supremacist group the Peckerwoods were involved in multiple violent attacks against Black, Hispanic, and Asian American residents that involved the use of racial slurs.

Kern County in the decades that followed.¹⁸¹ As recently as the 1960s, a sign across the Kern River between Oildale and Bakersfield read "Nigger, Don't Let the Sun Set on You in Oildale."¹⁸² There were also unconfirmed reports that a similar sign was spray painted on the same bridge as recently as the late 1990s.¹⁸³ In 1981, three KKK members were arrested for burning a cross on the front lawn of a Black family in the Kern County town of Boron, and KKK rallies were reported as recently as 1987.¹⁸⁴ In the early 1990s, Black motorists were attacked on the streets of Oildale by whites hurling racial slurs and epithets.¹⁸⁵ In the 2000s, members of the white supremacist group the Peckerwoods were involved in multiple violent attacks against Black, Hispanic, and Asian American residents that involved the use of racial slurs.¹⁸⁶

The Ku Klux Klan in Northern California and the Bay Area.

The Ku Klux Klan established a presence in the Bay Area during the 1920s.¹⁸⁷ By 1922, there were KKK chapters in San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose.¹⁸⁸ In addition to burning crosses, KKK chapters in the Bay Area held rallies, initiation events, and public parades, which were attended by thousands.¹⁸⁹ In Oakland, the politically active KKK took control of the city government to create policy that would limit Black home ownership, including by embracing restrictive covenants.¹⁹⁰ Between 1921 and 1924, the Oakland KKK grew to at least 2,000, and the chapter enjoyed political success well into the 1920s, winning an election for county sheriff in 1926 and city commissioner in 1927.¹⁹¹ The Oakland KKK also operated as a vigilante group, accompanying federal agents on prohibition raids.¹⁹²

IV. Forms of Racial Terror: Violent Tools of Social Control

Racial terror has taken many forms throughout its long history. Although the primary component of racial terror is physical violence, perpetrators of racial terror have also destroyed and repossessed Black property. And given the public nature of racial terror, overt action has often been unnecessary. Threats and intimidation have often successfully kept African Americans from voting, living in certain neighborhoods, and exercising other civil rights. As one scholar has argued, “fear of physical death not only hinders the possibility of freedom, but also limits productive and meaningful living.... [A]s [the oppressed] submit to oppression and preserve biological life, they invariably suffer a degree of *psychological* and *social* death.”¹⁹³

From Reconstruction onward, racial terror undermined African Americans’ legal rights, with lasting social repercussions. By attacking African Americans who were never found guilty in a court of law, racial terror popularized the idea that Black people bear a presumption of guilt—contrary to the presumption of innocence, which the Supreme Court has described as “foundation[al]” to “our criminal law.”¹⁹⁴ Many white lynch mobs killed Black criminal suspects who were later found to be innocent.¹⁹⁵ Some Black men were even lynched after a jury found them innocent of their alleged offense.¹⁹⁶ White people justified racial terror as a mode of self-defense against African Americans, as a tactic to deter future perpetrators, regardless of whether a crime had actually been committed.¹⁹⁷ This history of racial terror reinforced a view that African Americans were dangerous criminals who posed a threat to white society.¹⁹⁸

Lynching

Key Features of Lynching

The most gruesomely iconic form of racial terror was lynching: violent and public acts of torture, which were largely tolerated by officials at all levels of government.¹⁹⁹ Such violence traumatized Black people throughout the country, although it most frequently occurred in the South.²⁰⁰ Although lynchings were carried out against individual victims, the practice of lynching was ultimately aimed at the entire Black community.²⁰¹ Indeed, historians have described the trauma of lynching as a “contagion” that has a “multiplier effect” across families, communities, and generations.²⁰² Much like Jim Crow laws and racial segregation, lynching was primarily a method of enforcing the political, economic, and cultural exploitation of African Americans.²⁰³ For instance, after Booker T. Washington visited the White House to meet with President Theodore Roosevelt, South

Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman remarked, “now that Roosevelt has eaten with that nigger Washington, we shall have to kill a thousand niggers to get them back to their places.”²⁰⁴

Lynching was often carried out as a public spectacle. It did not simply involve hanging; rather, public lynching often featured the prolonged torture, mutilation, dismemberment, and/or burning of the victim.²⁰⁵ These events attracted large crowds of white people, often numbering in the thousands, which included elected officials, prominent citizens, and entire families, including children.²⁰⁶ Children were given front-row views of the victim, imprinting upon their minds for the rest of their life the concept that Black people do not deserve human dignity.²⁰⁷ The white press justified and promoted these carnival-like events, while vendors sold food, and printers produced postcards featuring photographs of the lynching and corpse.²⁰⁸ Spectators would fight over fingers, ears, toes, sexual organs, and other body parts as souvenirs.²⁰⁹ The physical objects associated with a lynching were prized mementos for the crowd.²¹⁰

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Large crowd looking at the burned body of Jesse Washington, 18 year-old African American, lynched in Waco, Texas. (May 15, 1916)

The publicity of lynchings not only terrorized African Americans, but also allowed white communities to economically and politically benefit. The terror of being lynched prevented African Americans from achieving political power, and preserved them as a compliant, intimidated workforce.²¹¹ This, in turn, largely maintained the Southern economy as it was during enslavement.²¹² And while lynching was overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) a Southern phenomenon,²¹³ its effects were felt throughout the United States—just as white supremacists intended to victimize and oppress all African Americans.²¹⁴

Lynchings to Maintain White Supremacy

Lynchings were based on a broad range of perceived violations of the racial caste system. Hundreds of Black people were lynched after being accused of murder or rape, though almost none were legally convicted of their alleged crimes.²¹⁵ Regardless, lynching is never an acceptable form of punishment. Many lynchings were based on weak or contrived evidence.²¹⁶ For example, white men perpetuated the myth of the “unbridled, brutish, black rapist” to justify lynching Black men for allegedly sexually

For example, after a 1912 lynching in Forsyth County, Georgia, white vigilantes distributed leaflets demanding that all Black people leave the county or suffer deadly consequences.²²⁴ As a result, the Black population dropped from 1,100 to 30 in eight years.²²⁵ And in 1918, in Unicoi County, Tennessee, after lynching a Black man, a group of white men rounded up 60 Black residents—including children—and forced them to watch the corpse burn.²²⁶ The white people told the Black people in the town to leave the county within 24 hours.²²⁷

Judges contributed to these outcomes by presiding over a process that systematically excluded African Americans from juries, mistreated Black witnesses, and held trials in jurisdictions with a racist bias.

assaulting white women.²¹⁷ The lynchings of Black men accused of rape or sexual assault often involved castration, which underscored how white men felt threatened by Black men and used lynching to attack Black manhood.²¹⁸

Many lynchings were based on much more minor accusations. According to the Tuskegee Institute, approximately 30 percent of lynching victims were accused of nonviolent “offenses.”²¹⁹ Some victims were lynched only for minor social transgressions, or for demanding basic rights and fair treatment. Black victims were lynched for referring to a white police officer by name, associating with white women, accidentally bumping into a white woman, “passing” as white, speaking out about racial equality, testifying on behalf of a Black defendant, and refusing to take off an Army uniform after returning from World War I.²²⁰

African Americans were also lynched for asserting their labor rights and economic rights. For example, in 1918, a Black man in Earle, Arkansas refused to work on a white-owned farm without pay.²²¹ In response, the white citizens of the city cut him into pieces with butcher knives and hung his remains from a tree.²²² In numerous instances, African Americans were also lynched after disputes over wages or debts: in such disputes, if a white person became violent and a Black person reacted in self-defense, the Black person was often lynched for murder or assault.²²³ By killing African Americans for seeking fair treatment or for trivial social disputes, white Americans continued to assert the total control they had held over Black lives during slavery.

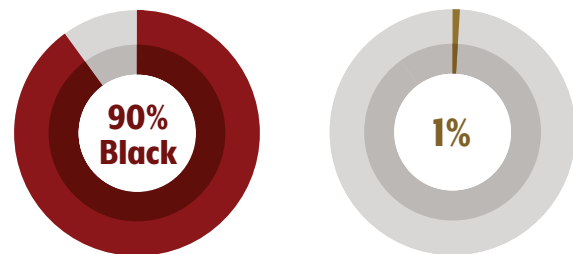
Apart from responding to specific accusations, lynchings were used to drive Black residents from a community.

Lynchings also united white Americans of all socioeconomic levels. The public violence of lynchings portrayed the white population as strongly allied against the perceived threat of African Americans.²²⁸ White mobs asserted their racial superiority by publicly torturing and killing Black victims.²²⁹ Through

the Jim Crow period, white Americans experienced divisions along political, economic, and social lines.²³⁰ Although poor white Americans may have lived in conditions more similar to those of poor African Americans, lynching helped prevent interracial class-based alliances by unifying white Americans around a core purpose and identity.²³¹

Complicit Government Officials

Government actors, including police officers, prosecutors, judges, and elected officials, tacitly approved of or assisted in lynchings.²³² Law enforcement officers released Black people who had been incarcerated to mobs, placed Black prisoners in areas where lynch mobs were known to gather, joined mobs to find African Americans, and assisted with lynchings.²³³ Prosecutors and law enforcement regularly failed to identify and try lynchings for their crimes.²³⁴ Only one percent of all lynchings after 1900 resulted in a conviction.²³⁵ Judges contributed to these outcomes by presiding over a

Americans Lynched After 1900

Only **1%** of lynching perpetrators convicted

process that systematically excluded African Americans from juries, mistreated Black witnesses, and held trials in jurisdictions with a racist bias.²³⁶

Local coroners and coroners' juries refused to indict lynchers and made impossible conclusions—such as ruling a death was a suicide after a Black farmer was found riddled with bullets.²³⁷

Throughout the South, state and local politicians protected the perpetrators of violent acts instead of protecting Black southerners from extrajudicial violence.²³⁸ Some governors, rather than condemn lynchings, made statements that focused on the accused crime of the lynched Black person—suggesting that the lynching was justified—and in other cases, affirmatively supported the lynching.²³⁹ And government officials outside the South did little to stop the campaign of widespread lynching.²⁴⁰ National leaders, for their part, failed to pass even one of more than 100 anti-lynching bills that were proposed in Congress between 1852 and 1951.²⁴¹

While there is no conclusive evidence proving that the death penalty replaced lynching in the South, data shows that executions increased as lynchings declined. Indeed, Southerners themselves referred to these executions as “legal lynchings,” and Southern leaders argued that African Americans could be intimidated and controlled just as effectively with the death penalty.

The public was also complicit. Studies show that thousands of white people, at all levels of class and educational status, participated directly in lynch mobs. Many more participated as spectators, and millions did nothing.²⁴² Participants, meanwhile, were protected by a code of silence.²⁴³ Because witnesses refused to cooperate with law enforcement, criminal investigations were thwarted, and the perpetrators of lynchings were able to avoid accountability.²⁴⁴

The Prevalence of Lynching over Time

Despite numerous efforts, it is impossible to know how many Black people were killed by lynching. In the late 19th century, Ida B. Wells started the Red Record Efforts to identify incidents of extreme racial violence for research, advocacy, and public policy purposes.²⁴⁵ Other researchers and activists have followed Wells' lead, but there is disagreement on figures among those who study racial terror. Researchers use different criteria of what

counts as a lynching, and perpetrators hide their crimes—to list just two reasons that there is no definitive number

Equal Justice Initiative estimates 6,500 lynchings nationwide between 1865 and 1950, although any count is an underestimate because of gaps in the evidence like inadequate reporting at the time, lack of documentation, and cover-ups.

of Black lynching victims.²⁴⁶ By any measure, however, lynching occurred in every region of the United States, with victims of all races and genders.²⁴⁷ And despite disagreement over exact numbers, there is a consensus that between the Civil War and World War II, thousands of African Americans were lynched in the United States and were the primary targets of lynch mobs.²⁴⁸ The nonprofit organization Equal Justice Initiative, for example, counts nearly 6,500 lynchings nationwide between 1865 and 1950.²⁴⁹ Any count of lynchings, however, will fall short of the true number, as a result of inadequate reporting at the time, lack of documentation, cover-ups by perpetrators and local officials, and other gaps in the evidence.²⁵⁰

In the 1890s, when the frequency of lynchings peaked, an average of 104 Black people were estimated to have been killed each year by lynch mobs.²⁵¹ Then, as Black southerners moved north and west, lynching rates steadily declined during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, and lynch-

ings eventually became extraordinary events.²⁵² Thus, when 15-year-old Emmett Till was lynched in 1954 for allegedly whistling at a white woman,²⁵³ and when a white mob abducted Mack Charles Parker from his jail cell and lynched him in 1959,²⁵⁴ the killings provoked national public outrage.²⁵⁵ However, the decline in lynchings did not correspond with an end to the racial caste system that led to lynchings in the first place.²⁵⁶ Rather, the decline can be attributed to strict segregation laws, tactics of disenfranchisement, and the surge of the death penalty.²⁵⁷

Beginning in the early 1900s, white Southerners began to fear that the barbaric imagery of lynching would harm the Southern economy.²⁵⁸ The death penalty offered a more respectable form of violence and the appearance of the rule of law.²⁵⁹ As early as the 1930s, lynchings were often avoided when government actors made clear that the accused would receive a swift judicial conviction

and execution.²⁶⁰ While there is no conclusive evidence proving that the death penalty replaced lynching in the South, data shows that executions increased as lynchings declined.²⁶¹ Indeed, Southerners themselves referred to these executions as “legal lynchings,” and Southern leaders argued that African Americans could be intimidated and controlled just as effectively with the death penalty.²⁶² And “legal lynchings,” like actual lynchings, disproportionately victimized African Americans.²⁶³ From the 1890s to the 1950s, between 53 and 81 percent of lynchings and executions were of African Americans, although African Americans represented approximately only 10 percent of the entire U.S. population.²⁶⁴

By 1915, court-ordered executions outpaced lynchings in the former slave states for the first time, and by the 1930s, two-thirds of those executed were Black—a trend that would continue.²⁶⁵ While Black people were executed for allegedly killing white people, the reverse was not true. As lynchings declined from 1930 to 1970, there was a sharp increase in the number of African Americans who were executed for rape, but there is no evidence that a white person was executed for raping a Black woman.²⁶⁶ According to one study, out of more than 11,000 executions in the United States, only two white men were executed for killing a Black person.²⁶⁷ Another study of approximately 15,000 executions, from colonial times to the 1990s, found that white people were executed for killing Black people in only 29 cases—and in most of those cases, the defendants had also killed white people.²⁶⁸ These trends in executions reinforce a central

theme of lynching: that the lives of Black people were worth less than those of white people.²⁶⁹

Mob Violence

Whereas lynching involves group action against a person as a response to that person’s alleged wrongdoing, mob violence involves assaults by civilians of one ethnic group on members of another ethnic group on the

A study of approximately 15,000 executions, from colonial times to the 1990s, found that white people were executed for killing Black people in only 29 cases—and in most of those cases, the defendants had also killed white people.

basis of their ethnicity.²⁷⁰ These tactics were often used together against the Black community.²⁷¹ Lynchings were sometimes followed by mob violence, with white mobs burning Black homes, devastating Black neighborhoods, and forcing Black residents to relocate.²⁷² Mob violence was motivated by the same objectives as lynchings, including extinguishing African Americans’ political influence and economic gains, and maintaining social control over African Americans.²⁷³

The racial hierarchy benefited from mob violence. Mob violence was a ritual that built a sense of community among white people and helped the South to sustain a cohesive culture of white supremacy and enforce legal segregation.²⁷⁴ (As discussed above, mass participation was a typical element of lynchings, which drew upwards of thousands of spectators.²⁷⁵) But mass violence was not strictly a Southern phenomenon. White mob violence occurred in several Northern states prior to 1865, including New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.²⁷⁶ These Northern white mobs, which numbered in the hundreds or thousands, attacked and killed Black people and set fire to Black properties.²⁷⁷ The violence was often accompanied by inaction or inadequate response by law enforcement.²⁷⁸ Virtually none of the perpetrators were prosecuted or convicted; those that were, received extremely lenient punishments.²⁷⁹

When white Americans felt African Americans threatened their superiority, mob violence sometimes escalated into massacres, destroying cohesive Black communities and the prosperity that they built.²⁸⁰ Historically, these attacks have often been called “riots” or “race riots,” but these terms obscure the nature of this violence. Throughout Reconstruction, segregation, and the civil rights era, so-called riots were actually massacres.



Postcard depicting the lynching of Lige Daniels, Center, TX. A mob of over 1,000 men stormed the county jail and took the young man who was both charged with and confessed to the murder of a local farmer’s wife. (1920)

In these attacks, white mobs proactively killed African Americans and destroyed Black property, though the Black victims were often blamed for inciting the violence in the immediate aftermath.²⁸¹ This pattern of violence has evolved and continued through the 20th and 21st centuries, as is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System.

Massacres inflicted tremendous damage upon Black lives and property.²⁸² It is estimated that over 100 such massacres occurred between the end of the Civil War and the 1940s.²⁸³ Among several notable examples,²⁸⁴ the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre is especially prominent. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, a Black man was arrested for allegedly assaulting a white woman.²⁸⁵ In response, a white mob looted, burned homes and businesses, and murdered at least 300 Black people in Greenwood, a prosperous Black neighborhood known as “Black Wall Street.”²⁸⁶ Over the course of 24 hours on May 31 and June 1, the mob destroyed 35 square blocks, more than 1,200 Black-owned homes, over 60 businesses, a hospital, a public library, and a dozen Black churches.²⁸⁷ Thousands of Black Tulsans were left homeless and placed in internment camps.²⁸⁸ Lawyer and reparations advocate Eric J. Miller has testified that, in addition to death and destruction, the massacre inflicted catastrophic mental and emotional trauma upon the Black survivors and their descendants.²⁸⁹ The destruction remained over generations as the city, state, and chamber of commerce worked to prevent rebuilding and turned away funding that could have benefited Greenwood.²⁹⁰

The Tulsa Race Massacre Commission confirmed that Tulsa officials not only did nothing to prevent the massacre, but also participated in the violence and provided firearms and ammunition to the mob.²⁹¹ Indeed, the city and county police deputized hundreds of white people to participate in the massacre, and the Oklahoma National Guard joined the massacre as well.²⁹² The Commission’s report confirmed that no one prosecuted or punished any of the perpetrators for the violent acts that occurred, despite overwhelming evidence of their guilt.²⁹³ Instead, the all-white grand jury falsely blamed Black people for the massacre.²⁹⁴ As stated in the grand jury report: “There was no mob spirit among the whites, no talk of lynching and no

arms. The assembly was quiet until the arrival of the armed Negroes, which precipitated and was the direct cause of the entire affair.”²⁹⁵

This example also highlights the role of the government, at all levels, in mob violence, just as government had once enforced the legal regime of slavery. By looking the other way, declining to prosecute mob members, or by actively fomenting and assisting mob violence, government officials enabled violent white mobs to devastate Black communities.

Torture

Southern lynchings often included torture of the victim before death, in addition to burning, mutilation, and

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Photograph shows destroyed houses and billowing smoke during the Tulsa Race Massacre, when a white mob attacked the predominantly African American Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa, Oklahoma. (1921)

decapitation after death.²⁹⁶ The torture preceding public killings usually lasted hours, and could involve shoving a hot poker iron down the victim’s throat and pressing it against their body; gouging out eyes; castration; cutting off hands and feet; tearing into the flesh with a large corkscrew; and burning the victim alive.²⁹⁷ As historian Leon F. Litwack explains: “The story of a lynching . . . is the story of slow, methodical, sadistic, often highly inventive forms of torture and mutilation.”²⁹⁸

Torture was thus another method with which white people sought to punish Black people for stepping beyond their relegated social roles.²⁹⁹ Victims were often tortured even if they were not convicted of any crime, such

as when two brothers in Paris, Texas were tortured for trying to escape abusive work conditions.³⁰⁰

Like slave patrols, police violence during Jim Crow was intended to intimidate Black communities and subordinate African Americans within the segregated social order.

As lynching became less common, so too did the accompanying torture. But just as lynching was replaced with the “legal lynching” of state executions, the police used torture to extract confessions from Black suspects.³⁰¹ The police objective was to quickly convict the suspects.³⁰² Thus, even facing the death penalty, Black suspects were frequently denied a fair and impartial trial.³⁰³

For example, in 1938, Dave Canty, a Black man, was arrested for killing a white woman and wounding another in the course of a robbery in Montgomery, Alabama.³⁰⁴ After hours of police questioning, Canty signed a written confession, admitting responsibility for the attack.³⁰⁵ At trial, however, Canty testified from the witness stand that the police had forced him to confess by torturing him.³⁰⁶ He gave detailed information about the torture and his torturers, and he showed his wounds and scars to the jury.³⁰⁷ Police officers and prison staff, however, denied Canty’s account of his torture, and at the conclusion of his three-day trial, Canty was sentenced to death.³⁰⁸ After a new trial reduced his sentence to life in prison, Canty died in the same prison in which he claimed to have been tortured.³⁰⁹

Unlike lynching, this form of torture was not public.³¹⁰ In fact, hiding it was critical to supporting a racist system.³¹¹ It was difficult for victims and advocates to realize the prevalence of torture, and denials and secrecy made it more difficult to fight the practice.³¹² When torture was reported and individuals tried to bring charges, allegations and evidence were ignored and invalidated by white judges, prosecutors, and other officials.³¹³ While this practice occurred throughout the country, it was especially prevalent in large cities like Chicago and New York City, as well as the American South.³¹⁴ There were very rarely any consequences for violence used by

police in coercing confessions.³¹⁵ Police officers often denied the use of such violence, while claiming that regulating police work would lead to an increase in crime.³¹⁶ Thus, the decline of lynching and public torture was not a sign of enlightenment.³¹⁷ Rather, lynching and torture developed into more modern forms of racial violence—namely, swift executions and coerced confessions.³¹⁸

Evidence suggests that police continue to coerce confessions from suspects, including Black suspects, leading to wrongful convictions and years of undeserved jail time.³¹⁹ From the early 1970s to the early 1990s, for example, then-Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge led officers in torturing over 125 suspects into confessing to crimes, most of whom were African American, and many of whom have said their confessions were false.³²⁰ Burge was convicted for lying under oath about the torture.³²¹

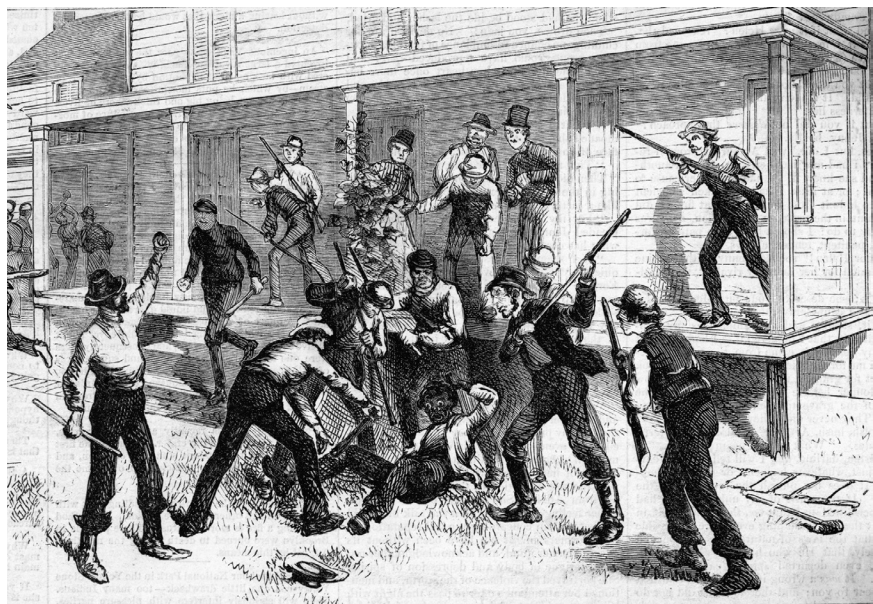
Police Killings and Vigilantism

State-sanctioned violence against African Americans continues today in the form of extrajudicial violence by police officers and vigilantes.

Police Violence as a Modern Form of Lynching

Throughout American history, including the present day, the police have held the power to strip Black people of their rights and lives for any reason—or for no reason at all. Police violence is a leading cause of death

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Print shows a scene during a riot between Irish American and African American railroad workers employed by the Easton and Amboy Railroad to build the Musconetcong Tunnel, in which Denis Powell, an African American man, is beaten to death by a mob of white men, during the Pattenburg Massacre, Pattenburg, New Jersey. (1872)

for Black people in America.³²² Today's extrajudicial killings have historical roots in the social control of slave patrols,³²³ the lynchings of the late 1800s and early 1900s, and police violence against Black southerners during legal segregation.³²⁴ Slave patrols, which began in the early 1700s, were made up of white volunteers.³²⁵ Patrollers were empowered to forcibly discipline enslaved persons, crush potential uprisings, and return enslaved persons who had escaped to their enslavers.³²⁶ Like slave patrols, police violence during Jim Crow was intended to intimidate Black communities and subordinate African Americans within the segregated social order.³²⁷

From the end of the Civil War through the early 20th century, racialized policing was often tailored to local concerns.³²⁸ In urban areas, in response to growing economic competition between white workers and Black workers moving to cities, the police targeted Black residents with curfews, high incarceration rates, and violence—often deadly violence.³²⁹ In rural areas, sheriffs and deputy sheriffs enjoyed essentially unchecked power from their white constituents.³³⁰ As a result, the police violently enforced the racist social order against Black citizens, even for seemingly minor transgressions.³³¹

As recognized by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, “contemporary police killings and the trauma that they create are reminiscent of the past racial terror of lynching.”³³² Recent incidents of police violence demonstrate this connection. The British Broadcasting Company has collected a list of recent high-profile killings of African Americans by police,³³³ highlighting just a fraction of the more than 1,500 African Americans killed by police since 2015.³³⁴ In 2016, after a Minneapolis police officer killed Philando Castile during a traffic stop,³³⁵ Castile's sister said, “It's just like we're animals. It's basically modern-day lynching that we're seeing going on, except we're not getting hung by a tree anymore—we're getting killed on camera.”³³⁶ Similarly, in 2020, George Floyd was stopped for allegedly using a counterfeit \$20 bill, which could have been handled with a ticket.³³⁷ Instead, Floyd was killed by an officer kneeling on his neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds.³³⁸ Historian Arica Coleman described Floyd's death as “a modern-day lynching.”³³⁹

Vigilantism Continues Today

In addition to extrajudicial police violence, our country's history of lynching is reflected in the vigilantism

taken against Black people, even when they have not committed any offense.³⁴⁰ The Southern Poverty Law Center has compiled a list of African Americans (and white activists) killed during the Civil Rights Movement.³⁴¹ More recent examples of this violence are the killings of Trayvon Martin and Ahmaud Arbery. In 2012, George Zimmerman shot and killed the unarmed, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, who Zimmerman described as a “suspicious person” in his neighborhood.³⁴² After Zimmerman was acquitted for the shooting, in the tradition of lynching, he auctioned his gun as a souvenir.³⁴³

In 2020, while Ahmaud Arbery was out for a jog, he was chased, attacked, and killed by three white men who claimed he resembled a suspect in local break-ins (al-

Moreover, the United Nations found that federal, state, and county regulations on use of force and firearms do not comport with international standards, which makes it more likely that extrajudicial violence against Black individuals will continue.

though no police reports were filed about the alleged break-ins). Arbery was unarmed, and as he lay dying on the ground, one of the white men called him a “fucking nigger.”³⁴⁴ Arbery's family called the killing a lynching.³⁴⁵ The three men attempted to use a citizen's arrest provision added into the Georgia Code of 1863.³⁴⁶ The men argued that the 1863 provision allowed them to arrest another person if a crime was committed “within his immediate knowledge.”³⁴⁷ The Georgia Code was drafted in part by Thomas R.R. Cobb, a legal scholar who claimed that a Black mother “suffers little” when her children are stolen from her, since she lacked maternal feelings.³⁴⁸ Cobb helped write principles of white supremacy into Georgia law, including a provision that presumed African Americans were enslaved people unless proven otherwise.³⁴⁹ The citizen's arrest provision was significantly weakened in 2021 in the wake of Arbery's murder.³⁵⁰

As with lynchings, a lack of accountability appears to exist for police violence and vigilantism. The Guardian reports that out of 1,136 killings registered in 2015, only 18 law enforcement officers were charged with crimes.³⁵¹ Moreover, the United Nations found that federal, state, and county regulations on use of force and firearms do not comport with international standards, which makes it more likely that extrajudicial violence against Black individuals will continue.³⁵²

Sexual Violence and Eugenics

As further discussed in Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect, the Black female body has been brutally and routinely compromised in the absence of legal protection. Black women faced forced procreation during enslavement, while after enslavement, Black women were forcibly sterilized.³⁵³ As with other forms of racial terror, sexual violence served the social, economic, and political goals of white supremacy.

As discussed in Chapter 2 Enslavement, enslavers used sexual violence and the threat of sexual violence as a way to control enslaved Black people. Enslavers also used sexual violence and forced procreation to grow their fortunes.

While the end of enslavement as an institution may have removed an economic incentive for sexual violence, Black women have continued to suffer from the violence that arises from stereotypes projected upon them. During the Jim Crow era, white men used rape and threats of rape to oppress African Americans, and particularly Black women.³⁵⁴ Throughout their daily routines, Black women and girls faced the threat of sexual violence by white men.³⁵⁵ Rapes during Jim Crow were intended to maintain white domination and for white men's sexual gratification.³⁵⁶ Some rapes also took place during other instances of racial violence, such as attacks to steal Black land and destroy Black property.³⁵⁷ White men were rarely punished for committing sexual violence against Black women and girls, while African Americans frequently faced retaliation for reporting such attacks.³⁵⁸

As discussed in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System, Black women continue to be depicted through tropes of hypersexuality, creating a myth that Black women cannot credibly claim to be victims of sexual violence.³⁵⁹

Black women also suffered a different kind of sexual violence as a result of the eugenics movement. During the early 20th century, the eugenics movement, which claimed to be acting according to "scientific" principles and for the good of human society, scrutinized Black sexual behavior and reproduction. The result was that Black people, and especially Black women, were disproportionately forced into sterility.³⁶⁰ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect.

Family Separation and Violence Against Children

The threat of selling non-compliant enslaved people away from their families was one of the most terrifying tools of coercion that enslavers wielded to control

enslaved persons and suppress rebellions.³⁶¹ As discussed above, under the laws of slave states, the status of a newborn followed the status of their mother.³⁶² Separation was horrifying and traumatic to the parents and their children.³⁶³ Children and their parents were treated not as people, who loved and cared for each other, one generation after another, but as bodies used exclusively for labor.³⁶⁴ Frederick Douglass said that he began to understand himself as a slave following the separation from his mother, as in the absence of nurturing kin, he was completely subjected to the will of others.³⁶⁵ The practice of selling away infants was so common that it was a focus of the northern abolitionist movement, and according to Professor Laura Briggs, in the 1850s, many Southern states outlawed taking infants from their mothers in an effort to prove that slavery was not as bad as antislavery northerners claimed.³⁶⁶

After enslavement, southern states re-enslaved Black children, removing them from their parents, and forcing them into so-called apprenticeships to white former enslavers.³⁶⁷ The children, sometimes as young as six, worked for white families as if they were enslaved.³⁶⁸ Throughout the 20th century, government officials disproportionately separated Black children from their families to threaten and coerce mothers into withdrawing from welfare programs.³⁶⁹ A detailed discussion of family separation is in Chapter 8 Pathologizing the Black Family.

COURTESY OF SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE/THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



"Whites stoning Negro to death," Chicago. (1922)

Mass incarceration, another tool of racist social control, has also had the consequence of breaking up Black families. The war on drugs, beginning with Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign, was explicitly designed to target the antiwar left and African Americans.³⁷⁰ Due to

these policies, by 2015, one in nine Black children had at least one parent in prison.³⁷¹ At the same time, Black families were targeted by racist policing of parenting.³⁷² Black children were increasingly placed in the child welfare system due to parental neglect—but in reali-

Hundreds of white people were responsible for looting, killing, and destroying property, enabled and assisted by Tulsa government officials. The massacre caused \$1.8 million in property damage—\$25 million in today’s dollars, though others estimate that the damage totaled \$50 to \$100 million in today’s dollars. However, no one, except one white pawnshop, was given any compensation for the damage.

ty, this “neglect” was often only poverty.³⁷³ These two forms of racist policing combined to double and then triple the rate of incarceration of Black women during the 1980s.³⁷⁴ Eighty percent of these women had children living with them at the time of the arrest, many of whom were then placed in foster care.³⁷⁵ As a result, between 1985 and 1988, the number of children in out-of-home placement—foster care, psychiatric institutions, and the juvenile justice system—increased by 25 percent.³⁷⁶

Finally, Black children have faced disproportionate police violence. As discussed above, law enforcement continues to treat Black people as a dangerous criminal group; Black children are no exception.³⁷⁷ A 2020 study led by Children’s National Hospital researchers found that Black youth are six times likelier than white youth to be shot and killed by police.³⁷⁸ A detailed discussion of the criminalization of Black children is in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System.

Economic Terror

White people have used various types of racial violence in order to erase Black economic gains, allowing the unrestricted theft of Black labor during enslavement to carry on in new forms. In the 1890s, the prominent journalist and anti-lynching advocate Ida B. Wells conducted a detailed study of lynchings and found that the vast majority were not in response to sexual crimes, but were rather motivated by economic or political concerns.³⁷⁹ For example, perpetrators initiated attacks as a form of economic intimidation against African Americans who disputed labor contracts.³⁸⁰ Employers also whipped and

lynched Black freedmen who argued with them or left the plantations where they were contracted to work.³⁸¹

Once African Americans became successful, ran businesses, and owned homes, they were even more targeted. In the South, even before the Civil War, the Associated Press reports that 24,000 acres of land were stolen from 406 Black landowners, including by means of racial terror.³⁸² The success of Black neighborhoods and Black individuals triggered white mobs to initiate violence,³⁸³ as white Americans felt threatened by the growing economic power and independence of Black communities.³⁸⁴

There are numerous historical examples of economically motivated violence against prosperous Black communities.³⁸⁵ Perhaps the most significant example is the 1921 Tulsa massacre, discussed above in relation to mob violence, in which a white mob devastated the prosperous Black neighborhood of Greenwood.³⁸⁶ In 1997, the Oklahoma legislature formed the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission (recently renamed the Tulsa Race Massacre Commission³⁸⁷), which was tasked with investigating the Tulsa massacre and recommending methods for reparations.³⁸⁸ The Commission confirmed that hundreds of white people were responsible for looting, killing, and destroying property, enabled and assisted by Tulsa government officials.³⁸⁹ The Commission found that the massacre caused \$1.8 million in property damage—\$25 million in today’s dollars, though others estimate that the damage totaled \$50 to \$100 million in today’s dollars.³⁹⁰ However, the Commission found that no one, except one white pawnshop, was given any compensation for the damage to their property, and there was no other benefit or restitution for victims.³⁹¹

Economically motivated violence was also directed at prosperous Black individuals, not just communities and neighborhoods. An illustrative case is that of Elmore Bolling, a successful Black man in Lowenesboro, Alabama.³⁹² He owned a small fleet of trucks that ran livestock and made deliveries, and he also leased a plantation where he had a general store with a gas station and a catering business.³⁹³ At the peak of his business, Bolling employed 40 other Black people.³⁹⁴ In December 1947, a group of white men showed up at Bolling’s home where he lived with his wife and seven children, shot him seven times, and left him in a ditch to die.³⁹⁵ At the time of Bolling’s death, the family had \$40,000 in the bank and

more than \$5,000 in assets (approximately \$500,000 in today's dollars), but creditors (or those who purported to be creditors) took the money, leaving the family with nothing.³⁹⁶ As someone told the local newspaper at the time, "He was too successful to be a Negro."³⁹⁷

In addition to attacks on successful Black business owners, white people also committed racial violence against Black individuals who moved into white neighborhoods.³⁹⁸ Their goal was to pressure the new Black residents to move away and maintain housing segregation, as discussed in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation.³⁹⁹ Such violence consisted of pelting homes with rocks, throwing bricks and firebombs at homes, setting garages on fire, and beating Black neighbors in the streets.⁴⁰⁰

Political Terror

Just as groups of white people responded violently to Black economic gains, they also resorted to violence to set back Black political gains. Black voters, and political candidates favored by Black voters, were intimidated and sometimes murdered.⁴⁰¹ By using violence, white Americans kept their grip on political power. They used this power to oppress African Americans and prevent African Americans from achieving equal levels of wealth and political influence. In this way, even after slavery

ended, African Americans were often prevented from achieving political power and influence.

Reconstruction—and the resulting political gains made by African Americans—provoked violent backlash from white southerners.⁴⁰² Violence typically soared right before elections, as the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups strategically targeted their violence to deny Black voters access to the polls, or to sway election results by forcing Black voters to vote for Democrats.⁴⁰³ As white supremacists killed thousands of African Americans over numerous attacks during Reconstruction,⁴⁰⁴ the balance of power began to shift against Reconstruction and Republicans.⁴⁰⁵

For example, in 1868, in response to growing Black support for Republican candidates in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, white people terrorized the Black community.⁴⁰⁶ Over the course of two weeks, the attacks left more than 100 Black people dead—and by some estimates, over 200.⁴⁰⁷ The white attackers achieved their intended effect: although the parish gave 5,000 votes to the Republican governor in the spring 1868 election, there was not a single Republican vote counted in the fall 1868 election in the parish.⁴⁰⁸ The Republican Party was unable to recover in the parish for the remainder of Reconstruction.⁴⁰⁹

White supremacists also assassinated political figures. On the eve of the 1868 election, KKK members murdered James Hinds, a white Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives who advocated for Black civil rights.⁴¹⁰ This was the first-ever assassination of a U.S. congressman.⁴¹¹ When Benjamin Franklin Randolph, a Black state senator from South Carolina, was assassinated in 1868, the Ku Klux Klan was suspected of his murder, though no one was convicted of the crime.⁴¹² Similarly, in 1875, election results split the Florida legislature evenly between Republicans and Democrats.⁴¹³ White supremacist assassins broke the tie by killing E.G. Johnson, a Black state senator, to give the Democrats a majority.⁴¹⁴

After Reconstruction, Southern white politicians sought to advance white supremacy in state governments and to push back against federal laws protecting Black voting rights.⁴¹⁵ They relied on lynching and vigilante violence to achieve these political goals.⁴¹⁶ As the national lynching rate soared, in 1892, the Southern-dominated Democratic Party was able to win the White House and a majority of Congress.⁴¹⁷ In response, the Republican Party abandoned racial equality as part of its platform.⁴¹⁸ White supremacists were thus able to take control of state governments and pass laws that, in combination with racial terror, suppressed Black voters.⁴¹⁹ For instance,

COURTESY OF PHOTO12/UNIVERSAL IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES



Ku Klux Klan parade on Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington D.C. with the U.S. Capitol Building in the background. (1926)

BECAUSE OF POLITICAL TERROR

BLACK VOTING IN

SOUTH CAROLINA

DECLINED 97%

1876-1900



IMAGE SUPPLIED BY BETTMANN/BETTMANN VIA GETTY IMAGES

while more than 90,000 Black citizens voted in South Carolina in 1876, by the end of the 19th century, less than 3,000 Black citizens voted.⁴²⁰ While Black people represented a majority of registered voters in Mississippi in 1868, only six percent of eligible Black people were registered to vote in Mississippi in 1890.⁴²¹ And in Louisiana, the number of Black registered voters dropped from 130,344 to 5,320 between 1896 and 1900.⁴²²

Voter suppression was not always enough for white supremacists. In one instance, they also directly overthrew the local government. After the 1898 election in Wilmington, North Carolina, armed white men overtook the Republican-led city government.⁴²³ A months-long voter suppression agenda culminated on Election Day, when armed white men patrolled Wilmington to intimidate Black voters and their allies, and white supremacists threatened poll workers as they counted ballots.⁴²⁴ In one precinct, a group of 150 to 200 white men caused a scuffle, and in the process, stuffed ballot boxes to secure their party's victory.⁴²⁵ After the election, Black people were massacred in the street.⁴²⁶

A mob of nearly 2,000 white people indiscriminately murdered between 30 and 100 Black men, women, and children, and forced 2,000 other Black residents off their property.⁴²⁷

Meanwhile, a mob of over 100 white men occupied the Wilmington city hall and forced city officials to resign under threat of violence.⁴²⁸ All of those elected officials resigned and were replaced by men selected by an all-white committee.⁴²⁹ The new city leadership fired all Black municipal employees, and banned prominent Black leaders, Black businessmen, and white Republicans from the city.⁴³⁰ There was no state investigation of the violence in Wilmington, and the federal investigation produced no indictments.⁴³¹ To date, this has been the only successful coup d'état of a U.S. American government.⁴³²

Similar political violence continued into the 20th century. In Ocoee, Florida, on Election Day 1920, a mob of 250 white people, including KKK members, killed dozens of African Americans, set fire to their homes, and drove them out of the city to prevent them from voting.⁴³³ This massacre has been called the “single bloodiest election day in modern American history.”⁴³⁴

Due to this extensive history of violence and political repression, it was not always necessary for the KKK or other white supremacists to take direct violent action to intimidate Black voters from the polls. Threats were often just as effective. For example, in August 1922, just a year after the Tulsa massacre, the KKK reportedly flew over Oklahoma City in airplanes, dropping cards into

After the 1898 election in Wilmington, North Carolina, armed white men overtook the government, murdered between 30 and 100 Black men, women, and children, and forced 2,000 other Black residents off their property. To date, this has been the only successful coup d'état of a U.S. American government.

Black neighborhoods, warning people to be cautious before heading to the polls.⁴³⁵ That same year, the Topeka State Journal reported that the KKK committed to staking out polling places in Texas to “take careful note of the voting procedure.”⁴³⁶

Racist voter intimidation continues in contemporary times. During the 2016 election, neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups, including the KKK and the Oath

Keepers, organized poll watchers in all 50 states, focusing on urban areas.⁴³⁷ In the 2020 presidential debate, President Trump told his supporters to “go into the polls and watch very closely,” and told a white supremacist organization, the Proud Boys, to “stand by.”⁴³⁸

The racist overtones that surrounded the 2020 election culminated in the January 6, 2021 Capitol Riot, where armed white people violently stormed the U.S. Capitol while Congress was counting the electoral vote.⁴³⁹ The rioters shouted racist epithets at Black Capitol Police officers, paraded around the Capitol waving a Confederate flag,⁴⁴⁰ and built a gallows to hang a noose in front of the Capitol building.⁴⁴¹ This was the first time the Confederate flag was brought into the Capitol as an act of insurrection, something that was not even done during the Civil War.⁴⁴²

Further discussion of the use of violence and terror to suppress the development and rise of Black political power is in Chapter 4 Political Disenfranchisement.

Cross-Burning and Other Forms of Intimidation

Even when not physical in nature, the perpetrators of racial terror used the threat of violence to intimidate African Americans and preserve the American racial hierarchy. The Ku Klux Klan, for example, often conducted masked rides through towns at night to frighten Black residents, an intimidation technique that mirrored antebellum slave patrols.⁴⁴³ As discussed above, slave patrols used violence to discipline enslaved persons, prevent uprisings, and capture enslaved persons who managed to escape.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, the KKK’s disguises were designed to capitalize on the superstitions of formerly enslaved people, and their activities resembled plantation scare tactics.⁴⁴⁵

The KKK also frequently burned crosses.⁴⁴⁶ While the cross-burning itself may not have physically harmed anyone, it undoubtedly became a well-known symbol of racial terror to intimidate minorities.⁴⁴⁷ During oral argument in *Virginia v. Black*, a 2002 case contemplating whether a state could criminalize burning a cross, Justice Thomas made a point of connecting the “symbol” of cross-burning to its terrorizing effect: the burning cross is “unlike any symbol in our society . . . There’s no other purpose to the cross, no communication, no particular message.”⁴⁴⁸ As he explained, the burning cross “was intended to cause fear and to terrorize a population.”⁴⁴⁹ In his opinion in the case, Justice Thomas observed that a cross-burning could serve only to “terrorize and intimidate”: “In our culture, cross burning

has almost invariably meant lawlessness and understandably instills in its victims well-grounded fear of physical violence.”⁴⁵⁰

Government entities have also used tactics of racial intimidation to subjugate Black citizens and enforce white supremacy. The State of Mississippi, for example, created the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, which formally existed from 1956 to 1977, and was funded from the state budget.⁴⁵¹ The Sovereignty Commission was an intelligence organization targeting civil rights activists and engaged in spying, intimidation, false imprisonment, and jury tampering.⁴⁵² The Sovereignty Commission served as a model for similar agencies fighting to oppose racial justice in other states.⁴⁵³ The Sovereignty Commission’s activity was involved in the false imprisonment of Clyde Kennard.⁴⁵⁴ Kennard, a Black man, attempted to integrate a segregated local college in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.⁴⁵⁵ Files of the Sovereignty Commission reveal that state officials openly discussed that they would prefer to kill or frame Kennard rather than allow him to enroll.⁴⁵⁶

California Western Vigilantism

In its first decades of statehood, California had a reputation for vigilantism, including extralegal executions by hanging.⁴⁵⁷ For example, the lynching of people who committed crimes was a common method of “justice” in gold mines,⁴⁵⁸ and Placerville was originally known as “Hangtown.”⁴⁵⁹ As in the South, California lynchings involved active participation by law enforcement.⁴⁶⁰

Ken Gonzales-Day, an expert in California lynchings, found evidence of 352 lynchings that occurred between 1850 and 1935, including of eight African Americans, but mostly of Native, Chinese, and Latino Americans.⁴⁶¹ (As discussed above, counts of lynchings are lower than the true number, due to lack of documentation and cover-up efforts.)⁴⁶² As was the case elsewhere in the United States, Black Californians were often lynched in response to labor disputes or alleged crimes.⁴⁶³ In the 1871 Chinese massacre, 10 percent of Los Angeles (500 people) formed a mob and lynched 17 Chinese men and boys because they believed that Chinese people had killed a white saloon owner.⁴⁶⁴ Barely anyone was held accountable for these and the other many murders of people of color.⁴⁶⁵

A 1933 lynching of two white kidnapers in San Jose put a stamp of approval on lynching nationwide.⁴⁶⁶ The lynching received more attention than any other lynching in U.S. history, partly because the victims were white—an anomaly for lynchings.⁴⁶⁷ Then-California Governor James Rolph praised the lynchers and vowed to pardon

them if they were charged.⁴⁶⁸ Although the victims in the San Jose lynching were white, anti-lynching activists understood at the time that African Americans, who were the typical target of lynchings, would face the repercussions for the glorification of the San Jose lynching.⁴⁶⁹ As such, they swiftly and widely condemned the lynching and the Governor's response.⁴⁷⁰

Fearful of a growing Black population, and emboldened by the silence and cooperation of police and government officials, the KKK initiated a new wave of violent activity in the late 1930s and 1940s to stem the influx of Black populations—or to keep Black people entirely out of white communities.

The anti-lynching activists were correct: mobs in other parts of the country followed the Governor's enthusiastic endorsement to perpetrate their own lynchings, mostly of African Americans.⁴⁷¹ The fact that the San Jose lynching occurred in the West underscored that lynching was a national, not solely Southern, problem.⁴⁷² But the lynching and the subsequent praise of the mob by the Governor also lent credibility to the practice of lynching and decoupled its exclusive association with Jim Crow.⁴⁷³ The *New York Times* reported in 1933 that southerners widely reacted to the San Jose lynching by remarking, "California's my address from now on," or "those Westerners are learning how the South handles 'em."⁴⁷⁴ The *Times* concluded that, by endorsing the practice of lynching, the Governor of California had gone *further* than some Southern governors who had sought to prevent lynchings.⁴⁷⁵

Backlash against Black Prosperity

As was the case elsewhere in the country, the Ku Klux Klan and other perpetrators of racial violence in California focused their attacks against those who threatened the system of racial and socioeconomic subjugation of African Americans—those Black people who found well-paying jobs, amassed wealth, bought homes, used public pools and parks, and otherwise engaged in civil society.

The surge of KKK activity, and its accompanying violence, was connected to the migration of over a quarter million African Americans to California during World War II—the state with the largest increase in its Black population during that time.⁴⁷⁶ The "Great Migration" was inspired, at least in part, by the recurring incidents of racial terror throughout the South, as well as the poor

economic, political, and social conditions that Black southerners experienced.⁴⁷⁷ California, which was experiencing a dramatic increase in manufacturing jobs during World War II, was an appealing destination.⁴⁷⁸ California's Black wartime workers, as the Black press noted, had a higher standard of living compared to Black workers in the South.⁴⁷⁹ Simultaneously, new KKK members moved to California during World War II just as Black homeowners renewed their offensive against restricted housing.⁴⁸⁰

The comparative freedoms that Black Californians enjoyed motivated white supremacists to organize against Black workers and homeowners (as well as other non-white veterans, such as Mexican and Japanese veterans, returning from

the war).⁴⁸¹ White people were threatened by African Americans with good jobs who purchased property, voted, and inhabited public spaces and institutions.⁴⁸² Fearful of a growing Black population, and emboldened by the silence and cooperation of police and government officials, the KKK initiated a new wave of violent activity in the late 1930s and 1940s to stem the influx of Black populations—or to keep Black people entirely out of white communities.⁴⁸³ For instance, the KKK's resurgence in the Inland Empire and Southern California in the 1940s was linked to the gains made by Black workers, homeowners, and civil rights activists.⁴⁸⁴

Throughout California, the revived KKK had one primary goal: to enforce racial segregation and maintain the social inferiority of African Americans.⁴⁸⁵ They aimed to keep neighborhoods, schools, pools, parks, and beaches all-white and monitor people of color who transgressed racial boundaries.⁴⁸⁶ For further discussion of residential segregation, see Chapter 5, Housing Segregation.

Violence Against Black Homeowners

Violence to stifle and reverse Black advancement was perhaps most evident in the attacks on Black homeowners during the 1940s. As new Black migrants were able to afford homeownership, white supremacist backlash grew.⁴⁸⁷ The Ku Klux Klan sought to promote segregation and prevent the integration of Black residents into white neighborhoods.⁴⁸⁸ Violence against Black homeowners in California peaked in the 1940s.⁴⁸⁹ The KKK mainly relied on arson and physical attacks on homeowners to intimidate people of color from buying in majority-white neighborhoods.⁴⁹⁰ This practice dates back to 1909, when white Pasadena residents set fire to the homes of Black arrivals in the neighborhood.⁴⁹¹

This violence was thoroughly racist. The violence against Black homeowners was not caused by concern over a “lower social class of neighbors,” as the Black homeowners were often of a higher occupational and social status than the white attackers.⁴⁹² Similarly, when Black homeowners moved into a neighborhood, they took better care of their homes and lawns than their white neighbors.⁴⁹³

The murder of O’Day Short, a refrigeration engineer, is emblematic of the racial terror perpetrated against

Within months following the explosion at the Shorts’ home, Black homeowners were increasingly under attack by the KKK in Southern California.⁵⁰⁰ For example, the KKK staged a comeback in Big Bear Valley focused on restrictive covenants, violence, and cross burnings.⁵⁰¹ The KKK’s stated goal was to achieve a “One Hundred Per Cent Gentile Community.”⁵⁰²

Coercive Sterilization

As discussed in Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect, California was one of the first states to begin forcibly sterilizing people in the early 1900s, and conducted by far the most sterilizations in the United States (one third of the nationwide total).⁵⁰³ From 1909 to 1979, under the state eugenics law, California state institutions forcibly sterilized approximately 20,000 people deemed “unfit to produce.”⁵⁰⁴ While men made up the majority of sterilizations at first, by the 1930s, women were more frequently the subject of sterilizations, and in the middle of

the century, nearly all of the operations were performed on women.⁵⁰⁵ Black people were also disproportionately sterilized in California.⁵⁰⁶ They constituted just over one percent of California’s population in the 1920s, yet they accounted for four percent of total sterilizations by the State of California.⁵⁰⁷

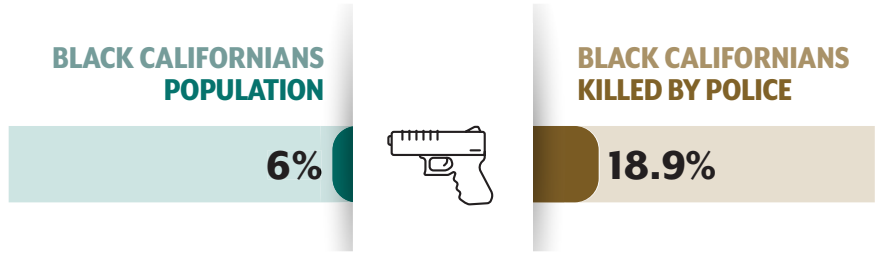
Extrajudicial Police Violence

Scholars have argued that extrajudicial violence by police officers represents a modern form of lynching. In California, since 2015, 158 Black people were shot and killed by police, at least 16 of whom were known to be unarmed.⁵⁰⁸ Among those whose race and ethnicity were known, Black people represent 18.9 percent of those killed by the police, despite representing only six percent of the population.⁵⁰⁹ Those responsible for these killings have largely never been found to be criminally liable.⁵¹⁰ The Los Angeles Times reports, for example, that since 2001, Los Angeles County law enforcement has killed over 900 people—nearly 80 percent of whom were Black or Latino.⁵¹¹ On average, one police shooting

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Black communities during the 1940s in California. After he and his family moved into the white neighborhood of Fontana in 1945, Short was threatened by police, and a local vigilante group said it wanted the Shorts out of the neighborhood.⁴⁹⁴ On December 6, 1945, two weeks after they moved in, the Shorts died in a house fire that killed the family of four.⁴⁹⁵ As with much of the violence against African Americans, state officials failed to hold anyone accountable for the murder, and inexplicably blamed the fire on the Shorts.⁴⁹⁶ Then California Attorney General Robert W. Kenny investigated the murder, but the report failed to confirm that vigilantes caused the fire or that there was any vigilante activity in the community.⁴⁹⁷ The NAACP called the report a “white wash.”⁴⁹⁸

The murder of the Shorts, and the subsequent failure to hold the perpetrators accountable, confirmed to the power of white supremacy in California. A Los Angeles Sentinel editorial said: “Jim Crow had kept Short from finding a home in Los Angeles; Jim Crow had cast him in the role of a violator of Community traditions if he built a house on the lot he purchased; Jim Crow had warped the sense of duty of deputy sheriffs to the extent that they themselves had joined in a plan to deprive an American citizen of his constitutional rights...All the Shorts are dead. Only Jim Crow is alive.”⁴⁹⁹



occurred every five days.⁵¹² Out of all of those cases, only two officers were charged as a result of a civilian shot on duty, and in virtually all of the cases, the Los Angeles County District Attorney deemed the use of force legally justified.⁵¹³ Similarly, officers with the Vallejo Police Department killed 19 people from 2010 to 2020, but no Vallejo police officer has been found to be criminally liable for killing a civilian while on duty.⁵¹⁴

Below are only a few examples of the hundreds of incidents where police have used extrajudicial violence in California to inflict pain or cause death, a topic that is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System. In general, these acts of violence were often the result of officers enflaming or failing to de-escalate the situation, and sometimes occurred in a manner that appeared to show little regard for the Black lives harmed or killed. Taken together, these incidents can be understood to perpetuate the myth of Black criminality and function as a threat to the overall well-being of Black people, whom law enforcement may often consciously or unconsciously view as dangerous criminals.

- In 1991, four LAPD officers repeatedly beat Rodney King on the ground with batons for 15 minutes while a dozen officers stood by and watched.⁵¹⁵ He was unarmed.⁵¹⁶ The officers had used racial slurs to refer to King over the LAPD communications systems.⁵¹⁷ The officers who committed the beating—three of whom were white—were acquitted, which sparked local unrest.⁵¹⁸
- In 1998, four officers were called to help Tyisha Miller, who had locked herself in the car and fallen asleep.⁵¹⁹ When the officers failed to wake her from outside, they broke her window to grab the firearm that was sitting in her lap.⁵²⁰ That caused Miller to bolt upright, and the officers shot her out of fear—firing 24 bullets and shooting her 12 times in the chest.⁵²¹ While the officers were fired, the U.S. Justice Department’s civil rights division—as well as the California Department of Justice, which was conducting a civil investigation into the police department as a whole—declined to bring charges against the individual officers.⁵²²
- On New Years’ Day 2009, Bay Area Rapid Transit police officers responded to a report of fighting on a train.⁵²³ One officer pinned Oscar Grant down with a

knee on his neck.⁵²⁴ While Grant was lying face-down, the other officer purportedly mistook his gun for a Taser and shot Grant.⁵²⁵ The officer who shot Grant was convicted of involuntary manslaughter.⁵²⁶

- In November 2013, Tyler Damon Woods was shot by police while on his knees after fleeing a traffic stop by foot.⁵²⁷ The officers believed he was armed, which was inaccurate, and shot at Woods approximately 39 times.⁵²⁸ Nineteen bullets hit him, six of which were each individually enough to kill Woods.⁵²⁹ The police continued to shoot him, claiming he exhibited superhuman resilience.⁵³⁰
- In 2019, Vallejo police responded to a wellness request for Willie McCoy, a 20-year-old Black man who was asleep in his car in a Taco Bell parking lot.⁵³¹ Six officers surrounded the cars when McCoy started to wake up.⁵³² The police claimed that McCoy was reaching for a firearm—which did not appear to be supported by the police video—and six police officers fired 55 shots at McCoy, killing him.⁵³³ All of the officers involved in the shooting returned to their regular duties. McCoy’s family said McCoy was “executed by a firing squad.”⁵³⁴

In the 1990s, a federal district court found that a group of deputies in the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, known as the Lynwood Vikings, was “a neo-Nazi, white supremacist gang” that engaged in “terrorist-type tactics” with the knowledge and acquiescence of their superiors. The court found that these gangs committed “systemic acts of shooting, killing, brutality, terrorism, house-trashing, and other acts of lawlessness and wanton abuse of power,” particularly against Latinos and Black people.

- In August 2020, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department stopped Dijon Kizzee for “riding a bicycle on the wrong side of the road” and “splitting traffic.”⁵³⁵ Kizzee refused to stop, abandoned his bicycle, and fled on foot.⁵³⁶ The Sheriff’s office claims that deputies fired when Kizzee reached back to pick up a gun he dropped, but video evidence appears to contradict this claim.⁵³⁷ An independent autopsy concluded that Kizzee was struck 15 times by two deputies’ 19 rounds.⁵³⁸ After they fired, the deputies called for backup, and Kizzee bled to death on the street.⁵³⁹

There have also been incidents where law enforcement officers in California have participated in racist, nationalist, and sexist social media activity online; showed white supremacist sympathies; or worse, systematically carried out attacks against minority members of the community.⁵⁴⁰ In the 1990s, a federal district court found that a group of deputies in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, known as the Lynwood Vikings, was "a neo-Nazi, white supremacist gang" that engaged in "terrorist-type tactics" with the knowledge and acquiescence of their superiors.⁵⁴¹ The court found that

these gangs committed "systemic acts of shooting, killing, brutality, terrorism, house-trashing, and other acts of lawlessness and wanton abuse of power," particularly against Latinos and Black people.⁵⁴² In 1996, the Sheriff's Department paid \$9 million in fines and training costs to settle the matter.⁵⁴³ Despite that settlement, according to independent reports, law enforcement gangs still allegedly thrive in low-income, high-minority areas of Los Angeles, where they have allegedly committed excessive force against minority members of the communities, sometimes using racial epithets while doing so.⁵⁴⁴

V. Legacy: Devaluing Black Lives

As discussed above, racial terror played a critical role in white efforts to subjugate Black people to an inferior economic, political, and social stature and maintain the caste structure that was established during enslavement. As such, racial terror has contributed to many racial inequities in America today.⁵⁴⁵ While Black communities have remained resilient in the face of numerous structural, social, economic, and political barriers, the threat of racial violence continues to harm African Americans.⁵⁴⁶

Criminal Justice

The legacy of the Ku Klux Klan's infiltration of law enforcement continues today. Law enforcement officers in at least 14 states, including California, have been tied to white supremacist groups and far-right militant activities.⁵⁴⁷ Advocates and scholars have argued that police killings of unarmed Black people should be understood as the modern-day equivalent of lynching. Just as the threat of lynching controlled African Americans, the threat of murder by police imposes controls on the lives of African Americans. Today, some Black parents feel compelled to educate their children early on about how to interact with racialized targeting by the police.⁵⁴⁸ As was the case with lynchings, those involved in these extrajudicial killings are only rarely held accountable for their actions.⁵⁴⁹

Created during enslavement in order for white enslavers to control Black enslaved people, and perpetuated through lynchings, the racist myth that Black people are criminals continues today. As discussed in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System, this myth of

Black criminality still contributes to racial disparities between Black and white Americans in arrests, convictions, and imprisonment.⁵⁵⁰ The death penalty, which scholars argue is a vestige of racialized violence against African Americans, also discussed in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System, disproportionately kills African Americans.⁵⁵¹ Death penalty lawyer Stephen B. Bright argues that capital punishment in the United States is so thoroughly compromised by bias and racial disparities that it must be understood as "a direct descendent of lynching."⁵⁵²

Economic Effects

Violence and terror targeting African Americans has directly destroyed Black wealth—which has a compounding effect over time to prevent African Americans from amassing more wealth and thus contributing greatly to the wealth gap.⁵⁵³ The disparities are stark: white Americans have seven times the wealth of African Americans.⁵⁵⁴ Although Black people make up nearly 13

The effect of violence by the Ku Klux Klan, buttressed by the support of law enforcement, real estate brokers, and federal loan programs, paved the way for segregated neighborhoods with unequal city services for Black neighborhoods.

percent of the U.S. population, they hold less than three percent of the nation's wealth.⁵⁵⁵ The median family wealth for white people is \$171,000, compared to \$17,600 for Black people.⁵⁵⁶ And 19 percent of Black households have zero or negative net worth, compared to nine percent of white families.⁵⁵⁷

Lynchings, police brutality, and other forms of violence and intimidation were used to seize land from Black farmers, rendering African Americans landless and unable to accumulate generational wealth.⁵⁵⁸ Although Black farmers collectively increased their land holdings at a greater rate than whites between 1900 and 1920, Black farm owners lost 57 percent of their land, whereas white farm owners lost 22 percent of their land, from 1900 to 1978.⁵⁵⁹

Images of mutilated bodies on public display or dragged through the streets traumatized the psyche of African Americans. These images left an especially indelible impression on Black children, framing their view of the world as a dangerous and unpredictable place, and causing lifelong damage.

Similarly, rates of Black homeownership have stagnated and declined. In 1909, 36 percent of Black residents of Los Angeles were homeowners before the implementation of policies and carrying out of violent acts designed to prevent Black home ownership.⁵⁶⁰ By 2021, the rate of Black homeownership had declined to 34 percent.⁵⁶¹

The effect of violence by the Ku Klux Klan, buttressed by the support of law enforcement, real estate brokers, and federal loan programs, paved the way for segregated neighborhoods with unequal city services for Black neighborhoods.⁵⁶² In Los Angeles, for example, Black residents were pushed to neighborhoods like Watts, while the city stopped running street cars that would have transported Black workers to shipyard and aircraft jobs in other parts of the city, limiting Black employment opportunities.⁵⁶³ Even though KKK activities declined after the 1940s, the KKK had already succeeded in restricting Black opportunities for wealth and homeownership at a time of significant economic opportunity after the end of World War II.⁵⁶⁴

Although the 1968 Fair Housing Act made violence to prevent neighborhood integration a federal crime, and the U.S. Department of Justice prosecuted several cases, frequent attacks on African Americans attempting to move into predominantly white areas continued into the 1980s, with 130 cases of move-in violence in 1989 alone.⁵⁶⁵ Not until the late 1980s were a majority of these crimes prosecuted.⁵⁶⁶ The broad lack of enforcement sent a message that these crimes were tolerable, which emboldened perpetrators to continue their violent actions.⁵⁶⁷

Impact on Health and Family Life

Fear of racial terror, past and present, has also resulted in trans-generational trauma for African Americans. Black families and communities were profoundly affected by lynchings.⁵⁶⁸ The constant threat of lynching affected interpersonal interactions.⁵⁶⁹ Family members of victims could not obtain justice out of fear that they too would be lynched, and they were often frightened to even attend a funeral of their lynched loved one.⁵⁷⁰

Images of mutilated bodies on public display or dragged through the streets traumatized the psyche of African Americans.⁵⁷¹ These images left an especially indelible impression on Black children, framing their view of the world as a dangerous and unpredictable place, and causing lifelong damage, including sleep disturbances, flashbacks, and emotional detachment.⁵⁷²

These psychological traumas have extended across generations. Violence has reinforced white supremacist cultural and institutional systems, while the arbitrary nature of lynching socialized Black people to understand that any act of perceived insubordination could be a matter of life or death.⁵⁷³ In this way, racial terror was a powerful tool for social, educational, and political control, as it encouraged Black people to change their own behavior and avoid opportunities for advancement, lest they risk being the victim of violence.⁵⁷⁴ African Americans continue to experience the effects of trauma induced by racial terror today, including heightened suspicion and sensitivity to threat, chronic stress, decreased immune system functioning, and greater risks of depression, anxiety, and substance use.⁵⁷⁵

The history of racial terror has influenced the use of violence by both white people and Black people in the present day.⁵⁷⁶ For example, in Mississippi and North Carolina, studies show that Black people are killed at a higher rate in counties that had more lynchings and anti-civil-rights violence.⁵⁷⁷ The legacy of racial terror encourages vigilante violence among white communities.⁵⁷⁸ And, in Black communities, the government's failure to protect African Americans from lynching has fostered the use of violence for self-help.⁵⁷⁹ As a result, criminologists have linked higher rates of Black involvement in crime with the violent racial subordination of African Americans.⁵⁸⁰

VI. Conclusion

As a badge of slavery, racial terror has enforced the domination of a racial hierarchy set in place in service of slavery. After the formal end of slavery, racial terror became a method by which white Americans and the nation as a whole sought to keep African Americans as poor and powerless as they had been while enslaved. From slavery through to the present day, racial terror has gravely harmed African Americans mentally and physically.

Racial terror often takes direct forms, such as physical assault, threats of injury, and destruction of property. It also inflicts psychological trauma on those who witness the harm and injury.⁵⁸¹ Lynchings and other forms of racial terror occurred in communities where African Americans today remain marginalized, disproportionately poor, overrepresented in prisons and jails, and underrepresented in positions of influence. The traumatic experience of surviving mass violence creates insecurity, mistrust, and alienation—psychological harms that were amplified by the dangers inherent in navigating Southern racial boundaries.⁵⁸² Lynchings in the American South were not isolated hate crimes committed by rogue vigilantes. Lynchings were targeted racial violence that formed part of a systematic campaign of terror perpetrated in furtherance of an unjust social order. Selective public memory compounds the harm of officials' complicity in lynching and maintains the otherness of Black people.⁵⁸³

The same is true of other forms of racial terror such as mob violence, torture, extrajudicial violence, sterilization and sexual violence, and economic and politically influenced terror. Racialized terror is woven into the fabric of America, and although many racial groups have been victims, perhaps no racial group has been targeted more than African Americans. From the violence of enslavement to contemporary police killings, both actual and threatened violence against African Americans has functioned to establish and maintain white supremacy.⁵⁸⁴ Federal, state, and local governments have been complicit in the infliction of terror through silence, failure to hold the perpetrators accountable, and even on some occasions, endorsement of the actions. California is no exception; the state, its local governments, and its people have played a significant role in enabling racial terror and its legacy to persist here in California.

The tactics of white supremacy at any time in history are simultaneously overtly violent and subversively traumatic for African Americans. Racial terror remains the constant backdrop and tool for other forms of discrimination intended to exert control of African Americans—from redlining and segregated schools to disparate healthcare and denial of bank loans—that has prevented many African Americans throughout history from living a dignified life of equal opportunity.

Endnotes

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¹¹Ibid.

¹²*Id.* at pp. 19, 52.

¹³*Id.* at p. 151.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵U.S. Const., 10th Amend.; *United States v. Morrison* (2000) 529 U.S. 598, 618.

¹⁶Caste, *supra*, at pp. 151, 153; EJI 2015, *supra*, at p. 18.

¹⁷*Id.* at pp. 152, 154.

¹⁸*Id.* at pp. 153-55.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰*Id.* at pp. 151-154.

²¹See, e.g., Thomas Wentworth Higginson, [The Story of Denmark Vesey](#) *The Atlantic* (June 1861) (as of April 4, 2022) (Higginson).

²²*Id.*

²³*Id.*

²⁴*Id.*

²⁵*Id.*; see also Michael P. Johnson, *Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators* (Oct. 2001) 58(4) *William and Mary Quarterly* 915, 919, 945-48 (Johnson).

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²⁷Higginson, *supra*.

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²⁹Philip D. Morgan, *Conspiracy Scares* (Jan. 2002) 59(1) *William and Mary Quarterly* 159, 163.

³⁰EJI 3d ed., *supra*, at p. 10.

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³⁷Third Degree, *supra*, at p. 16.

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³⁹Case for Reparations, *supra*; Caste, *supra*, at p. 155; Third Degree, *supra*, at p. 17.

⁴⁰U.N. Working Group Report, *supra*, at p. 16; Trayvon Martin, *supra*.

⁴¹Caste, *supra*, at p. 228.

⁴²Ifill, *supra*, at p. 274.

⁴³Lawfare, *supra*.

⁴⁴Ifill, *supra*, at pp. 273-74; Lawfare, *supra*.

⁴⁵Ifill, *supra*, at pp. 273-74; Lawfare, *supra*.

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⁵¹Caste, *supra*, at pp. 90-91, 151, 155; Third Degree, *supra*, at p. 20; Jordan, *A History Lesson: Reparations for What?* (2003) 58 *N.Y.U. Ann. Surv. Am. L.* 557, 593 (Jordan); Ward, *Critical Race Theory and Empirical Methods: Microclimates of Racial Meaning: Historical Racial Violence and Environmental Impacts* (2016) 2016 *Wis. L. Rev.* 575, 607-08 (Ward); Ifill, *supra*, at pp. 267, 279-80, 284.

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⁵⁷See generally SPLC History.

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⁷⁵*Ibid.*

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¹⁹¹Rhomberg, *supra*, at pp. 39, 44.

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¹⁹⁴*Coffin v. United States*, 156 U.S. 432, 453 (1895); see also EJI 2015, *supra*, at p. 20.

¹⁹⁵Jordan, *supra*, at p. 588-589.

¹⁹⁶*Id.* at p. 588.

¹⁹⁷EJI 3d ed., *supra*, at p. 61.

¹⁹⁸EJI 2015, *supra*, at p. 21.

¹⁹⁹*Id.* at pp. 3, 7. The Task Force recognizes that “lynching” has been defined differently at various points in history by the entities who recorded incidents of lynching. This has presented challenges in terms of tracking lynching data and assessing the complete impact of racial terror. Hudson, *supra*, at p. 135. For the purposes of this section, the Task Force uses “lynching” to refer to acts of terrorism, specifically the murder of one or more individuals by hanging, where the public or community supported the action. Hudson, *supra*, at p. 135. Lynchings are distinct from other forms of racial violence and hate crimes that were prosecuted as criminal acts.

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²⁰⁸EJI 2015, *supra*, at pp. 12, 14; Caste, *supra*, at pp. 93-94.

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²¹¹Ifill, *supra*, at p. 294.

²¹²*Ibid.*

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²¹⁴*Id.* at p. 5; EJI 3d ed., *supra*, at pp. 27, 38; see also Hudson, *supra*, pp. 131-133.

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²²⁴EJI 2015, *supra*, at p. 14.

²²⁵*Ibid.*

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²²⁷*Ibid.*

²²⁸Third Degree, *supra*, at p. 20.

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²³⁰See Fox, *supra*, at p. 158.

²³¹*Ibid.*

²³²Ifill, *supra*, at pp. 267-268.

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²⁴⁶*Id.* at pp. 585, 596-97.

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⁵²⁶ Malaika Fraley, [Oscar Grant Case: Civil Jury Rules in Favor of Johannes Mehserle, Denies Award to Slain Man's Father](#) (updated Aug. 12, 2016) (as of Apr. 5, 2022).

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⁵⁶⁸ Ifill, *supra*, at p. 289.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ *Id.* at pp. 289-90.

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I. Introduction

African Americans have pursued equal political participation since before the Civil War.¹ But the federal, state, and local governments of the United States have suppressed, and continue to suppress, Black votes and Black political power. The United States did not explicitly prohibit states from discriminating against Black male voters until almost a century after the nation's founding, and it denied Black women this protection from discrimination for nearly a half century more.²

After the United States amended the Constitution to protect the voting rights of American citizens against racial and gender discrimination, for African Americans, this right existed only on paper for most of American history. Whites terrorized Black voters with violence to prevent them from voting while federal, state, and local governments ignored the violence, failed to prosecute offenders, or participated in the violence themselves.³

States, especially in the South, passed vagrancy and curfew laws to criminalize African Americans, strip away their right to vote, and prevent them from organizing politically.⁴ States found legal loopholes for the voting protections in the U.S. Constitution, including literacy tests, poll taxes, and other devices used to prevent African Americans from voting in elections.⁵ States also barred African Americans from serving on juries,⁶ effectively denying African Americans other opportunities to serve in civic and public life.

These restrictions secured the power of white supremacists in local, state, and federal government, allowing them to block hundreds of civil rights laws and rewrite many of the country's most important pieces of legislation to exclude or discriminate against African Americans.⁷ Over centuries, as Black activists struggled and made advances towards equal political participation, federal, state, and local governments throughout the United States continued to pass laws, issue court decisions, or take actions to smother Black political power.⁸

In recent years, the Supreme Court has issued decisions eliminating the protections of the Voting Rights Act,⁹ as federal, state, and local officials have continued to take actions that impair African Americans' ability to vote and express their political voice. Despite the historical



advancements African Americans have made in political participation, African Americans remain underrepresented, both in elected office¹⁰ and in the policies enacted to meet Black communities' needs.¹¹

California imposed similar restrictions on Black political participation throughout its history.¹² Though California professed to be a free state when it joined the union, white and African Americans did not possess the same freedoms. California refused to ratify the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments for nearly a century,¹³ and it built many of the same barriers to Black political participation as those used in the South, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and the disenfranchisement of people convicted of felonies.¹⁴ The state also enacted other legal barriers, such as its law banning any non-white person

from testifying in any court case involving a white person.¹⁵ While California eventually eliminated many of these restrictions,¹⁶ its adoption of these discriminatory practices has had longstanding effects on Black political participation, representation, and the current inequalities that persist within the state.¹⁷

This chapter begins in section II by discussing the long history of white officials portraying Black political participation as a threat to undermine Black political power and maintain racial subordination. Section III discusses the early history of Black political participation, from America's founding to the end of Reconstruction. Section IV and V describes the many devices that local, state, and federal officials have used to suppress Black political power, as well as the voting rights legislation that the United

States and California have enacted after centuries of Black sacrifice and struggle. This chapter ends in Section VI by describing the consequences of both past and present efforts to suppress Black political participation, and how the exclusion of African Americans from political power have produced deep inequalities in the policies that shape America and the lives of African Americans.

Senator Richard Nixon promised “law and order” during the presidential campaign of 1968, preying on white fears of social upheaval amidst the civil rights movement. Nixon’s victory in 1968 began what became known as the Republican “Southern Strategy”: winning votes from the South by appealing to racial prejudice.

II. Political Demonization of African Americans

White politicians have long portrayed Black political participation as a threat in order to undercut Black political power and maintain the racial hierarchy of enslavement, even after Emancipation.¹⁸

During and after Reconstruction, white southern Democrats used fears of Black political power to propel themselves into office.¹⁹ For example, in 1870, West Virginia Democrats used the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to provoke fear that African Americans would threaten the “white man’s government.”²⁰ After Democrats won the governor’s seat and control of the state legislature in West Virginia, one Republican observed that “[h]ostility to negro suffrage was the prime element of our defeat.”²¹ In 1901, the President of the Alabama Constitutional Convention warned against the “menace of negro domination” to justify the state’s efforts “to establish white supremacy in this State.”²²

White politicians continued to employ the same tactics throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. Despite the nonviolent protests led by Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr. and others during the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, white Americans portrayed Black civil rights activists as violent rioters and criminals.²³ Exploiting this racist imagery, then-Senator Richard Nixon promised “law and order” during the presidential campaign of 1968, preying on white fears of societal upheaval amidst the civil rights movement.²⁴ This move contributed to Nixon’s victory in the 1968 election, beginning what became known as the “Southern Strategy”: the Republican strategy to win votes from the South by appealing to the racial prejudice of white southerners.²⁵

In 1981, Republican campaign strategist Lee Atwater described the evolution of the Southern Strategy, shifting from express racial discrimination to more indirect dog whistles: “You start out in 1954 by saying, ‘Nigger, nigger, nigger.’ By 1968 you can’t say ‘nigger’—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, forced busing, states’ rights, and all that stuff, and you’re getting so abstract. Now, you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, [B]lack get hurt worse than

whites.... 'We want to cut this,' is much more abstract than even the busing thing, uh, and a hell of a lot more abstract than 'Nigger, nigger.'"²⁶

Lee Atwater continued this strategy in the presidential election of 1988. With George H.W. Bush trailing his rival by 15 points in the polls, Atwater convinced the campaign to shift gears and go on the attack.²⁷ The weapon they would use: a Black man named Willie Horton.²⁸

Released from penitentiary in the state governed by Bush's rival, Willie Horton was convicted and incarcerated for sexually assaulting a white woman.²⁹ Preying on stereotypes and fears of Black criminality and Black assault on white womanhood, Atwater and the Bush campaign played television ads prominently displaying Horton's Black face over ominous warnings, to great success. In focus groups, half of prospective voters almost immediately switched to supporting Bush after seeing the ad.³⁰ In practice, the ad helped transform Bush's 15 point deficit into a presidential victory, 426 electoral votes to 111.³¹ When critics

pointed out the racial fearmongering of the Horton ad, the Bush campaign tried to distance itself from it.³²

Today, the same stereotypical imagery persists in American politics. Echoing the language of elections past, Donald Trump declared himself the "law and order candidate."³³ After the police murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, Trump called protesters in Minnesota "thugs" and said that "when the looting

The federal government erased the humanity of enslaved Black people in many ways. The 1850 and 1860 federal censuses did not list most enslaved people by their own name, but by the name of their enslavers.

starts, the shooting starts," using the exact same phrase that a white Miami police chief repeated in response to Black protestors in 1968.³⁴ When peaceful protestors marched in D.C., the Trump administration met those protests with tear gas, smoke bombs, and beatings.³⁵

III. Reconstruction and the Constitution

Nationally

From its beginning, the United States excluded enslaved Black people from American citizenship, declining to count them as full people.³⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2 Enslavement, in 1789, the U.S. Constitution included a "Three Fifths Clause," counting enslaved Black persons as "three[-]fifths of all other persons" for the purpose of establishing the number of representatives each state would have in Congress, as well as the number of electoral votes each state would cast in a presidential election.³⁷

On the one hand, the Three-Fifths Clause dehumanized enslaved African Americans by not counting them as a full person. On the other hand, by allowing proslavery southerners to partially count enslaved people toward their total number of electoral votes and representatives in Congress, even though enslaved people could not vote or express any political voice, the Constitution gave the states that enslaved them much more power than they would have had otherwise.

For example, southerner Thomas Jefferson would not have won the presidential election in 1801 without the additional electoral votes given to southern states based on the number of African Americans they enslaved within

their borders.³⁸ Further, the manner in which the federal government counted the enslaved population of African Americans erased their humanity. The 1850 and 1860 federal censuses did not list most enslaved people by name, as they did for white Americans, but by the name of their enslavers.³⁹

While denying enslaved African Americans their citizenship, the United States also denied free African Americans the right to vote. When the Framers signed the Constitution in 1787, they left voting laws to the states—whose laws protected the right to vote only for white, male property owners.⁴⁰ Though a few northern states would eventually extend the right to vote to African Americans, by the time of the American Civil War, most states, including every southern state, prohibited African Americans from voting.⁴¹

During Reconstruction (1865 to 1877), the federal government aimed to give newly freed African Americans access to basic civil rights. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 granted citizenship to anyone born in the United States regardless of color, or previous enslavement.⁴² The Fourteenth Amendment made birthright citizenship and civil rights permanent.⁴³ By achieving these

changes, African Americans not only redefined their own citizenship—they redefined citizenship for all Americans.⁴⁴ Birthright citizenship might not have come into existence in the United States without African Americans' struggle against slavery, and it helped open the door to citizenship for all immigrants and their U.S. born children.⁴⁵

Congress also recognized that political rights were essential to Black civil and economic rights,⁴⁶ so the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870 which prohibited states from discriminating against voters based on “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”⁴⁷

However, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments had limitations. The Fourteenth Amendment did not protect African Americans' right to vote.⁴⁸ Instead, the Fourteenth Amendment only punished states that legally denied male citizens the right to vote by reducing their number of representatives in Congress,⁴⁹ a penalty that has never been enforced.⁵⁰ While the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited states from denying a person's

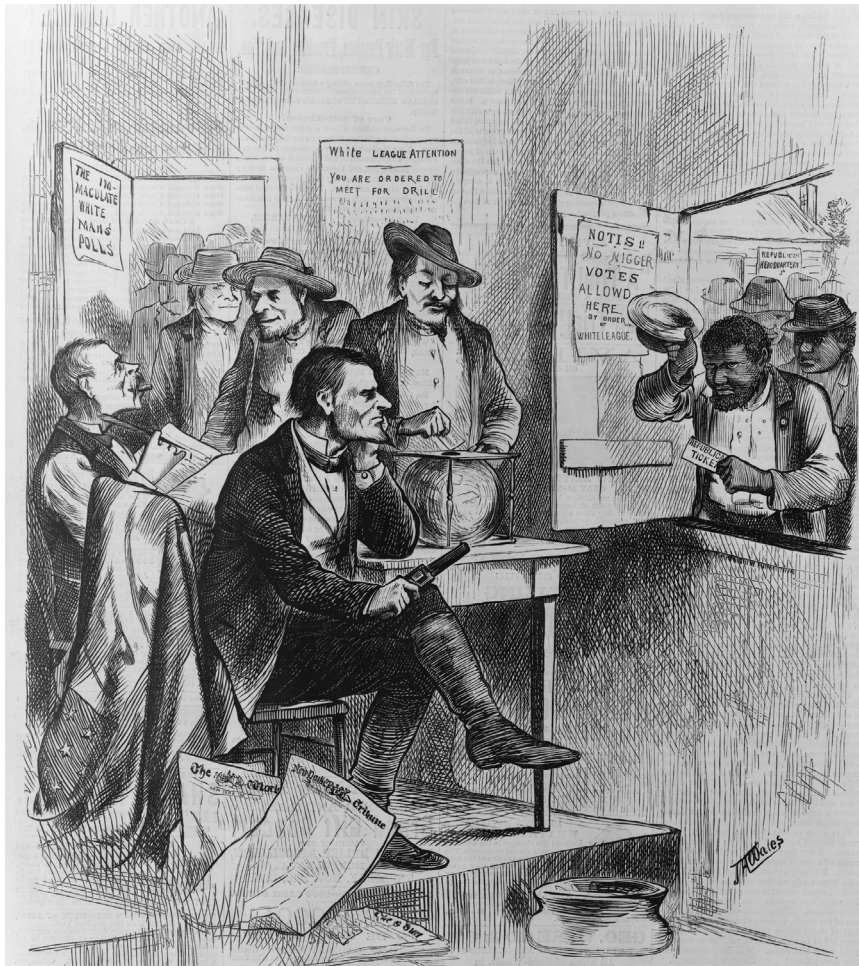
right to vote based on race, it contained no enforcement mechanism without an act of Congress.⁵¹

In 1870 and 1871, Congress passed several Enforcement Acts, giving the federal government the authority to prosecute violations of the Fifteenth Amendment.⁵² But in 1875, the U.S. Supreme Court held that because the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments only empowered the federal government to prohibit discrimination by the states, it did not empower the federal government to prosecute the private white militants who used racial terror to suppress Black voting.⁵³ And to the extent that the Fifteenth Amendment protected Black men in the right to vote, it did not extend the same protection to Black women, who would have to wait another half century for the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.⁵⁴

African Americans responded by taking full advantage of their new political rights. African Americans held conventions across the country⁵⁵ and participated in state constitutional conventions to secure their voting rights.⁵⁶ Republicans in Congress increasingly began to believe that they needed to overhaul southern governments and ensure that ex-Confederates did not return to power.⁵⁷ As a result, Congress passed a series of laws from 1867 to 1868 called the Reconstruction Acts, which required most ex-Confederate states to hold constitutional conventions and write new state constitutions acknowledging Black civil rights.⁵⁸

The Reconstruction Acts guaranteed Black men the right to vote for constitutional delegates and on the new constitutions.⁵⁹ Across the South in 1867, Black turnout ranged from 70 percent in Georgia to 90 percent in Virginia.⁶⁰ Black votes were nearly unanimous in support of ballot measures to hold constitutional conventions to amend their state constitutions to guarantee equal rights.⁶¹ Hundreds of Black men served in the southern state constitutional conventions under the Reconstruction Acts, and they participated alongside white Republicans in writing new constitutions which protected equal voting rights, civil rights,

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"Every thing points to a democratic victory this fall" (Oct. 31, 1874)

and educational rights (although usually in segregated facilities) for African Americans.⁶² By 1868, more than 700,000 Black men were registered to vote in the South.⁶³ One white Republican in Alabama said that African Americans “voted their entire walking strength—no one stayed at home that was able to come to the polls.”⁶⁴

With Black voters came Black elected officials. During Reconstruction, over 1,400 African Americans held federal, state, or local office, and more than 600 served in state assemblies.⁶⁵ Many of these new Black officials were formerly enslaved, and many took seats formerly

White politicians—including Republicans who had favored Emancipation and Black enfranchisement—treated Black elected officials as junior partners in government. In 1874, 16 Black politicians in Louisiana publicly complained of being excluded from “any knowledge of the confidential workings of the party and government” and “not infrequently humiliated in our intercourse with those whom we have exalted to power.”

held by men who had enslaved others.⁶⁶ The ranks of elected Black officials included 16 Black men elected to Congress, 14 to the U.S. House of Representatives and two to the U.S. Senate.⁶⁷

The election of African Americans into office, however, did not translate to full political representation. African Americans took a lower share of elected seats in both state and federal office relative to their proportion of the electorate, and rising presence in office did not always carry greater power at the highest levels of state government.⁶⁸ White politicians—including Republicans who had favored Emancipation and Black enfranchisement—treated Black elected officials as junior partners in government.⁶⁹ In 1874, 16 Black politicians in Louisiana publicly complained of being excluded from “any knowledge of the confidential workings of the party and government” and “not infrequently humiliated in our intercourse with those whom we have exalted to power.”⁷⁰

Over time, white northern support for Reconstruction collapsed. Southern Democrats intensified violent insurrection, and white northerners tired of the economic and military costs necessary to enforce equal rights.⁷¹ An economic depression in the 1870s further weakened the federal government’s resolve and undermined support for pro-Reconstruction officials in the south.⁷² To

regain support, President Ulysses S. Grant shared power with southern Democrats who opposed Reconstruction, causing one northerner to complain that the government was filling “every Dep[artment]” with southern Democrats to “placate the rebels and get their votes.”⁷³

These pressures came to a head in the presidential election of 1876, when both the candidates—Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel Tilden—claimed to have won due to contested votes in the southern states where election violence and fraud was high.⁷⁴ Southern Democrats contested the results,

threatening revolt.⁷⁵ To avoid another civil war, the Republicans and Democrats reached a compromise: the Democrats stopped contesting the presidential election and the Republicans agreed to withdraw federal troops from key locations in the south, effectively ending Reconstruction.⁷⁶ As the chairman of the Kansas state Republican committee wrote, “I think the policy of the new administration will be to conciliate to the white men of the South. Carpetbaggers to the rear, and niggers take care of yourselves

.”⁷⁷ An article published in *The Nation* predicted, “[t]he negro... will disappear from the field of national politics. Henceforth, the nation, as a nation, will have nothing more to do with him.”⁷⁸

California

The State of California entered the union in 1850, and its constitution proclaimed that “neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude, unless for the punishment of crimes, shall ever be tolerated in this State.”⁷⁹ But that very same document gave only “white male citizen[s]” the right to vote.⁸⁰ From the beginning, freedom in California meant something different for white and Black Californians. As detailed in Chapter 2 Enslavement, despite California’s prohibition on slavery, enslavers forced hundreds of enslaved African Americans into the state.⁸¹ California became one of the few free states to pass a fugitive slave law, authorizing and even enforcing the ability of white Californians to kidnap and traffic Black Californians to southern enslaving states.⁸²

Meanwhile, free Black Californians faced other restrictions on their ability to participate in civic life. California banned African Americans and other nonwhite people from testifying in court against a white person.⁸³ In some cases, this law allowed a white man to get away with murder. In 1854, the California Supreme Court

overturned the murder conviction of a white man because he was convicted based upon the testimony of Chinese witnesses.⁸⁴

Admitting that California designed the law to protect white defendants from justice, California’s Supreme Court defended the law as a matter of public policy, warning that allowing any non-white person to testify “would admit them to all the equal rights of citizenship, and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls,” a prospect that the Court viewed as an “actual and present danger.”

Reversing the murder conviction, the California Supreme Court explained: “In using the words, ‘No Black, or Mulatto person, or Indian shall be allowed to give evidence for or against a White person,’ the Legislature... adopted the most comprehensive terms to embrace every known class or shade of color, as the apparent design was to protect the White person from the influence of all testimony other than that of persons of the same caste.”⁸⁵ Admitting that California designed the law to protect white defendants from justice, California’s Supreme Court defended the law as a matter of public policy, warning that allowing any non-white person to testify “would admit them to all the equal rights of citizenship, and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls,” a prospect that the Court viewed as an “actual and present danger.”⁸⁶

One case drew public attention to the law and its effects on Black Californians. In 1861, a white man named Rodney B. Schell robbed a Black-owned business.⁸⁷ When George W. Gordon, a Black barber, complained to the police, Schell shot and murdered Gordon in his shop.⁸⁸ At Schell’s murder trial, his attorneys used California’s ban on non-white testimony to exclude the prosecution’s key witness, hiring two “hairologists” who examined the witness’s hair under a microscope and claimed that the witness had “African blood in his veins.”⁸⁹ Consequently, the court excluded the key testimony, resulting in Schell’s conviction for second-degree murder, rather than first-degree murder.⁹⁰

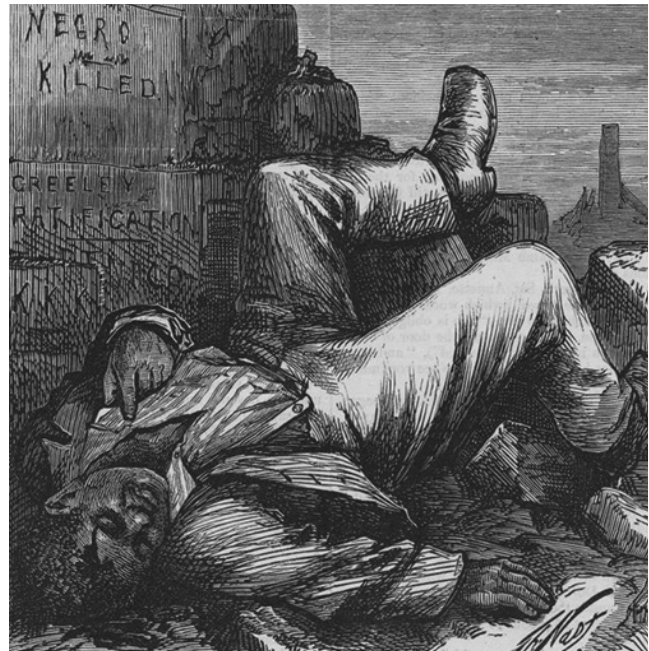
A Black-owned local newspaper called the case a “Mockery of Justice” in “one of the most deliberate and cold-blooded murders that ever disgraced California, even in her rudest and most lawless days.”⁹¹ One California legislator observed that Schell had murdered Gordon, knowing that Black testimony against him would

be barred in court.⁹² Another legislator proclaimed that the law banning Black testimony served as “a legislative license for the commission of crimes.”⁹³ Though the Schell trial generated a firestorm of controversy, California’s Legislature refused to change the law that year.⁹⁴

Many other Black Californians suffered crimes without recourse to testimony and justice in court. When Jim Howard, a white man, stole from a Black laundryman named Albert Grubbs, Grubbs testified and helped secure Howard’s conviction for grand larceny.⁹⁵ On appeal, the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court, Stephen J. Field—who would later become

a Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court—overturned the conviction, declaring that California’s law categorically barred any Black testimony, even if “crime may go unpunished.”⁹⁶

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“One vote less” (1872)

Discriminated against by both the laws and those who would break it, many Black Californians, like Peter Lester—who was assaulted and robbed in his store but unable to testify against the perpetrators—left the state.⁹⁷ From San Francisco alone, some 200 Black families, a substantial portion of the 4,000 total African Americans who had settled in California between 1850 and 1860,⁹⁸ left during the 1850s in a mass exodus to British colonies in what is now Canada.⁹⁹

Other Black Californians organized in response to these restrictions. Black citizens formed the Colored Executive Committee and founded their own weekly newspaper, *Mirror of the Times*.¹⁰⁰ Drawing from Black activism in other parts of the nation, Black Californians held the first of four “Colored Citizens’ Conventions” in 1855 at the St. Andrews African Methodist Episcopal Church in Sacramento.¹⁰¹ At this convention and later meetings, they advocated against slavery, urged repeal of California’s law barring Black testimony against whites in state courts, and petitioned for the right to vote.¹⁰²

After an eight-year campaign, convention delegates convinced the California Legislature to repeal its ban on Black testimony in 1863.¹⁰³ As soon as the ban on Black testimony ended, Black Californians spearheaded legal efforts to protect their rights in court. Black women organized legal efforts to file charges against streetcar drivers who refused to pick up Black riders or harassed them on the car.¹⁰⁴

In other cases, Black testimony proved crucial to preventing Black Californians from being enslaved. Thirteen years after California entered the union as a free state, in 1863, an enslaver purchased and trafficked a 12-year-old Black girl, Edith, selling her to a farmer in Sacramento County.¹⁰⁵ But a free Black man named Daniel Blue intervened on her behalf, filing a case in court.¹⁰⁶ With his testimony and the testimony of other Black citizens, he persuaded the Sacramento probate judge to remove Edith from the enslaver’s custody.¹⁰⁷

After the repeal of the ban on Black testimony in 1863,¹⁰⁸ and the abolition of slavery in 1865,¹⁰⁹ Black activists in California turned their attention to voting rights. The California Colored Citizens’ Convention of 1865 petitioned the state legislature for a constitutional amendment to give African Americans voting rights.¹¹⁰ But when a Republican State Senator presented the petition to the state legislature, its members never discussed it.¹¹¹

In the following two years, Black activists drafted another petition asking the state legislature to grant voting rights to Black men, if approved by a two-thirds vote by the state assembly and the state senate.¹¹² But by then, the Democrats had taken over the legislature after campaigning on anti-Black and anti-Chinese platforms.¹¹³ Black activists could not find a single member of the

state legislature who would agree to present the petition for the state legislature’s consideration.¹¹⁴

California continued to deny equal rights for its Black citizens. When the United States adopted the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1868, guaranteeing the equal protection of law to African Americans, the California Legislature ignored the Amendment and never ratified it.¹¹⁵ Similarly, California later refused to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibited states from discriminating against voters on the basis of race.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, enough states voted for the Fifteenth Amendment to make it the law of the country in 1870, and upon its ratification,¹¹⁷ Black Californians registered to vote in droves.¹¹⁸ But California officials openly refused

California continued to deny equal rights for its Black citizens. When the United States adopted the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1868, guaranteeing the equal protection of law to African Americans, the California Legislature ignored the Amendment and never ratified it. Similarly, California later refused to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibited states from discriminating against voters on the basis of race.

to abide by the Fifteenth Amendment.¹¹⁹ California’s Attorney General Joseph Hamilton instructed county clerks not to register Black voters until Congress passed legislation commanding them to do so.¹²⁰

When Black Californians and their allies protested in response, in some areas, county clerks caved to public pressure and eventually permitted Black Californians to vote.¹²¹ Others resisted more firmly. In southern California, Louis G. Green was the first Black Californian in Los Angeles who tried to register to vote.¹²² When the Los Angeles County Clerk refused to allow him to do so, Green filed suit in court.¹²³ The County Judge—who was the brother-in-law of the County Clerk being sued—upheld the Clerk’s refusal to register Green.¹²⁴

Recognizing the resistance to Black voting in California and other states, Congress enacted the Enforcement Act of 1870, a federal law imposing penalties for states who violated the Fifteenth Amendment.¹²⁵ Only after the passage of this law did California officials submit and allow Black men to register to vote.¹²⁶ It would take California

nearly another decade to change its constitution to partly conform to the Fifteenth Amendment's requirements in 1879,¹²⁷ and nearly another century to formally ratify

the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution in 1959 and 1962, respectively.¹²⁸

IV. Devices Used to Suppress Black Political Participation

Though African Americans strove to build and maintain the promise of Black citizenship after Emancipation, the end of Reconstruction left them unprotected against the white supremacists who had previously enslaved them. After Reconstruction, white Americans in both the North and South employed a host of devices to reassert white supremacy and suppress Black political power. As a result, African Americans who had already been voting for many years were barred from voting.

Racial Terror to Suppress Black Political Power

As Chapter 3 Racial Terror details, white Americans resorted to kidnapping, mass murder, and other forms of racial terror to reassert white supremacy and destroy Black political power all across the southern states.¹²⁹ The federal and Republican-run state governments tried to suppress this violence, but white local officials and law enforcement across the South often turned a blind eye or even participated in the violence themselves.¹³⁰ Federal and state officials themselves have used their power to target and terrorize civil rights leaders.¹³¹

Even during Reconstruction, about 10 percent of Black political officials reported receiving violent threats and suffered physical assaults.¹³² At least 35 Black officials were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan or similar terrorist organizations.¹³³ Though the federal government intervened to stop early violence in Louisiana,

point of bayonet' aroused more Northern opposition than any previous federal action in the South."¹³⁵

President Grant's cabinet urged the President to "wash the hands of the Administration entirely of the whole business," referring to the repeated white insurrections in Louisiana, and white political backlash made Congressional Republicans wary of further military intervention in the south.¹³⁶ When the Republican Governor of Mississippi, a member of Grant's own party, requested federal aid against white supremacist insurrection, President Grant wrote, "[t]he whole public are tired out with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South... [and] are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the Government."¹³⁷

For much of American history, then, the federal government sacrificed the lives and rights of African Americans for political stability while white Americans in the South wrought racial violence to oppress African Americans.

Despite the many threats to their lives, Black activists organized in response to these campaigns of racial terror. They formed organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a group of Black intellectuals and activists who partnered with white liberals to pursue Black civil rights and equality, pursuing legal challenges against many of the devices described throughout this chapter.¹³⁸ State governments sought to sabotage these efforts. Mississippi, for instance, created the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, an agency created to resist the civil rights movement and preserve racial segregation.¹³⁹ The Commission planted clerical workers in the offices of civil rights attorneys, spied on civil rights organizations, obstructed Black voter registration, and encouraged police harassment of African Americans.¹⁴⁰

The federal government, at times, targeted and terrorized civil rights leaders as well. During the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. urged nonviolent protest to pursue racial justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover

As violence intensified in the South President Grant's cabinet urged him to "wash the hands of the Administration entirely of the whole business." For much of America history, the federal government sacrificed the lives and rights of African Americans in exchange for political stability.

white Americans in both the North and South began to protest federal military intervention in local affairs.¹³⁴ According to one historian, "[t]he spectacle of soldiers 'marching into the Hall... and expelling members at the

viewed Dr. King as a communist threat and ordered the electronic surveillance of Dr. King and his staff.¹⁴¹ While doing so, the FBI produced reports claiming that one of Dr. King's advisors was a communist, suggesting that international communists might be controlling Dr. King.¹⁴² Though the FBI's surveillance uncovered no evidence of communist influence, it uncovered evidence of Dr. King's extramarital affairs, and used this information not only to try and discredit Dr. King as a leader of the civil rights movement, but also to attempt to convince Dr. King to take his own life.¹⁴³ "They are out to break me," Dr. King confided to a friend, "[t]hey are out to get me, harass me, break my spirit."¹⁴⁴

The federal government continued to surveil and sabotage other Black activists and organizations. In the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government took extensive measures to surveil the Black Panther Party, using undercover agents to infiltrate the group and sow discord, contributing to its collapse.¹⁴⁵ Though public exposure of the FBI's surveillance activities forced the government to enact several reforms, those reforms weakened over time, and the FBI has reportedly resumed similar programs surveilling Black activists, including those in the Black Lives Matter movement.¹⁴⁶

Black Codes and Vagrancy Laws

As discussed later in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System, southern states passed a series of laws between 1865 and 1866—which historians refer to collectively as the "Black Codes"—to criminalize freed African Americans for engaging in ordinary activity and force them back into forms of enslaved labor.¹⁴⁷ During Reconstruction, Republicans in Congress managed to remove these Black Codes with the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment.¹⁴⁸ But after the end of Reconstruction, former Confederate states began passing a flurry of laws similar to the post-Civil War Black Codes, that while racially neutral on their face, added up to slavery-like conditions in practice.¹⁴⁹ Every former Confederate state except Tennessee enacted vagrancy laws, between 1890 and 1909, which criminalized "idle" behavior and forced African Americans back into conditions of enslavement,¹⁵⁰ limiting the formation of Black businesses and spaces that provided the foundation for Black community and political consciousness.¹⁵¹ By criminalizing African Americans for everyday conduct, these laws suppressed Black political participation in two ways: African Americans convicted of a crime could not vote or serve on juries,

and African Americans were prevented from organizing to protest these laws, because these laws made such gatherings illegal.¹⁵²

When Mississippi adopted literacy tests, among other voting restrictions, in its 1890 constitutional convention, the president of the convention declared: "Let us tell the truth if it bursts the bottom of the Universe. We came here to exclude the negro."

Literacy Tests

Because the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution declared that a person's right to vote shall not be denied "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude,"¹⁵³ states created many laws designed to block Black voting without referring to race.¹⁵⁴ One of these methods was the literacy test: voting registrars or poll workers would test a person's reading or writing capabilities before permitting them to register or vote. Usually, these tests required a prospective voter to either write down a certain piece of text (such as a part of the Constitution) or to write down answers to written questions.¹⁵⁵ Following Reconstruction, at least 21 states in both the North and South used literacy tests to deny African Americans their voting rights.¹⁵⁶

As described in Chapter 6 on Separate and Unequal Education, states and local governments deprived African Americans of educational resources and opportunities during enslavement and after Emancipation.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, states adopted literacy tests knowing that such barriers would primarily exclude Black voters.¹⁵⁸ At the South Carolina constitutional convention of 1895, Senator Ben Tillman explained that the literacy test was intended to take the vote away from "ignorant [B] lacks."¹⁵⁹ When Mississippi adopted literacy tests, among other voting restrictions, in its 1890 constitutional convention, the president of the convention declared: "Let us tell the truth if it bursts the bottom of the Universe. We came here to exclude the negro."¹⁶⁰

Even when many African Americans were well-equipped to pass ordinary literacy tests, states excluded Black voters by requiring them to satisfy more complex requirements than those required for white voters;¹⁶¹ asking subjective questions that gave white officials the discretion to exclude Black voters;¹⁶² or requiring Black voters to answer impossible questions, such as "how many bubbles are in a bar of soap?"¹⁶³ One Georgian official boasted, "I can keep the President of the United States from registering [to vote], if I want to. God,

Himself, couldn't understand that sentence [in the literacy test]. I, myself, am the judge."¹⁶⁴

African Americans challenged these literacy tests in court but met with little success. In 1898, the United States Supreme Court upheld Mississippi's literacy test in a case called *Williams v. Mississippi*.¹⁶⁵ After an all-white jury convicted Henry Williams, a Black man, of murder, Williams appealed, arguing that he did not receive a fair trial because Blacks were excluded from the jury.¹⁶⁶

Because the jury list was drawn from the state's voter registries, the Court examined whether Mississippi's literacy tests had illegally blocked African Americans from registering to vote.¹⁶⁷ The Court approved of the literacy tests, holding that the literacy test did not mention race and therefore did not discriminate based on race.¹⁶⁸ The strategy pursued by Mississippi and other states worked: states could pass racist laws designed to deny Black votes, and so long as the laws did not mention race, those laws would be upheld in court.

With the Supreme Court's approval, states continued to use literacy tests to restrict Black voting through the 20th century.¹⁶⁹ It took 100 years after the end of Reconstruction for the federal government to permanently ban literacy tests nationwide through an amendment to the Voting Rights Act in 1975.¹⁷⁰ Despite this federal prohibition, some states, like North Carolina, still have unenforceable literacy tests on the books today.¹⁷¹

Thus, while states enacted literacy tests after Reconstruction in the late 1800s, these voting restrictions lasted well until the late 20th century, shaping the lives of Americans who currently live and serve in public office. President Joseph Biden, and at least 80 out of the 100 current U.S. Senators, were alive when literacy tests were still legal in the United States.¹⁷²

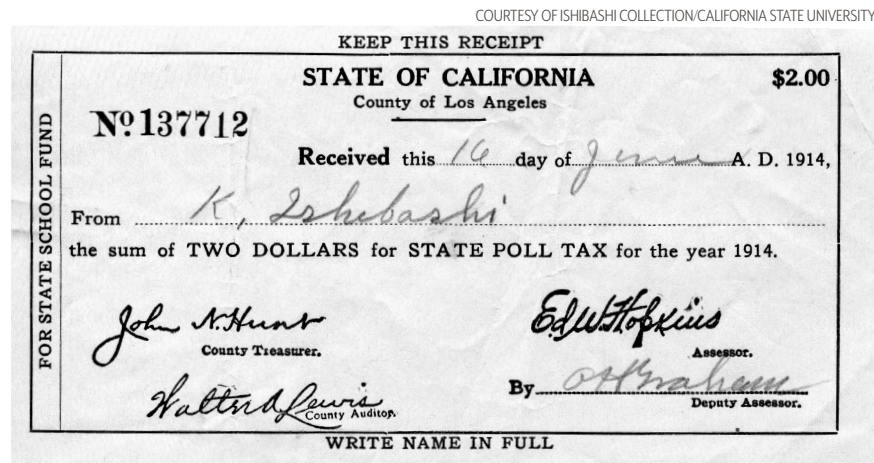
Property Requirements and Poll Taxes

States also used property requirements and poll taxes to prevent African Americans from voting.¹⁷³ Beginning in early American colonial history, states required individuals to own a certain amount of land or property before they could vote.¹⁷⁴ After American independence, more states removed or relaxed these laws, and many new states never adopted them at all.¹⁷⁵ But to prevent free Black men from voting, many states began limiting

voting only to white men.¹⁷⁶ The Fifteenth Amendment forced states to eliminate this express racial discrimination, but with the end of Reconstruction, states in both the North and South reenacted these property restrictions or created new ones, imposing poll taxes to require potential voters to make a payment before they could cast their ballot.¹⁷⁷

While these laws had the effect of excluding all poor voters—white and Black alike—the law specifically exploited the fact that African Americans, newly freed from slavery, often began their free lives without any wealth, preventing them from affording the costs of the poll tax. Additionally, some states, such as Alabama, required a person to pay poll taxes for prior elections in which they had not voted, a penalty that directly targeted African Americans, who could not have voted until after Emancipation.¹⁷⁸

Despite repeated challenges from civil rights activists, poll taxes remained a persistent barrier to the right to vote until 1965.¹⁷⁹ In 1937, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the use of state poll taxes, declaring that poll taxes did not deny any constitutional right because the “[p]rivilege of voting is... conferred by the state and... the state may condition suffrage as it deems appropriate.”¹⁸⁰



The receipt of Kumekichi Ishibashi's payment of \$2 for the State Poll Tax in year 1912.

Recognizing the effects poll taxes had on voting, Congress attempted to ban poll taxes in some fashion in 1942, 1943, 1945, and 1947.¹⁸¹ None of those laws passed the Senate due to southern senators' use of the filibuster—a Senate rule requiring a two-thirds majority before debate could end and a vote could be taken on a bill.¹⁸² The southern senators' reasoning behind their defense of the poll tax was simple: the poll tax was one of the devices used to suppress Black voters and keep the senators in power.

Although the poll tax affected whites more than Blacks, the southern senators believed that repeal of the poll tax would provide momentum to removing other barriers blocking Black voting in the south.¹⁸³ It took decades more of activism and litigation before Congress prohibited poll taxes in 1965¹⁸⁴ and the Supreme Court ruled poll taxes to be unconstitutional in 1966.¹⁸⁵

Challenger Laws and Witness Requirements

To exclude Black voters, states also used “challenger laws” and laws requiring witnesses to attest to a voter’s

Virginia enacted its first challenger law in 1870, a few months after the end of Reconstruction. The state reenacted the law in 1904, following its 1901 to 1902 constitutional convention, which the state held “mainly for the purpose of disenfranchising the Negro voter.”

qualifications.¹⁸⁶ Challenger laws allow private citizens to contest another person’s qualifications to vote, usually by making a complaint before the local or state officials charged with registering voters or administering the polls during election day.¹⁸⁷ Many states enacted such laws before the Civil War, some as far back as the American Revolution.¹⁸⁸ Following Reconstruction, however, states in both the North and South used these laws to allow white supremacists to challenge, intimidate, and suppress Black votes.¹⁸⁹

Virginia enacted its first challenger law in 1870, a few months after the end of Reconstruction.¹⁹⁰ The state reenacted the law in 1904, following its 1901 to 1902 constitutional convention,¹⁹¹ which the state held “mainly for the purpose of disenfranchising the Negro voter.”¹⁹²

In Florida, lawmakers enacted laws in 1877 requiring voters challenged at the polls to produce two witnesses “personally known” to at least two polling officials.¹⁹³ Because Florida’s polling officials were almost exclusively white, few Black citizens could provide witnesses known to them, meaning that Florida’s challenger law allowed any white citizen to block a Black voter from casting their ballot.¹⁹⁴ Though many of these challenger and witness laws have been modified through time, they remain prevalent today: as of 2012, 46 states have laws that permit private citizens to challenge other citizens’ voting eligibility.¹⁹⁵

Grandfather Clauses

Many southern states understood that the onerous voting requirements they imposed, if applied fairly, could exclude white voters, too. To ensure that these restrictions primarily excluded Black voters, a half-dozen states in the South created so-called grandfather clauses.¹⁹⁶ Grandfather clauses allowed voters to vote, even if they could not pay the poll tax or otherwise would not have passed a literacy test, as long as they had been entitled to vote prior to 1866 or 1867, or were descended from someone who had been entitled to vote prior to 1866 or 1867.¹⁹⁷

In effect, this meant that African Americans—who had not been eligible to vote prior to 1866 or 1867 in most of these states—would be the ones subject to the new voting restrictions. The Supreme Court ruled these grandfather clauses to be discriminatory and unconstitutional in 1915.¹⁹⁸ While grandfather clauses had a relatively shorter lifespan than literacy tests or poll taxes, they

presented one of many tools used in combination with others to prevent African Americans from exercising their right to vote, revealing how states enacted many of their supposedly race neutral laws with the purposeful design of disenfranchising Black voters.

Exclusion from State Primary Elections

White Americans also prevented Black voters from participating in state party primary elections.¹⁹⁹ Since the late 1890s, political parties in the United States have held primary elections to allow voters to determine the candidates from their party who would run for office.²⁰⁰ In 1910, state legislatures and state Democratic party chapters in the South created the “white primary,” excluding all Black voters from the state primary election process.²⁰¹

For states dominated by a single political party, determining who would run from that party essentially determined who would ultimately hold office. Because Democrats dominated state elections in the South in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the exclusion of Black voters from Democrat state primaries in the South during this period essentially excluded African Americans from having any say in their elected representatives.²⁰²

The NAACP brought legal challenges against the white primary and won a case in 1927 when the U.S. Supreme Court held it unconstitutional under the Fourteenth

Amendment for a state government to pass laws excluding Black citizens from a state primary election.²⁰³ However, because the Fourteenth Amendment applied only to state actions, southern Democratic party leaders skirted around the Supreme Court’s decision by excluding Black voters through the rules of its political party, which was considered a private organization.²⁰⁴

In 1944, the Supreme Court closed the loophole and ruled that states could not allow private political parties to exclude Blacks from voting in state primaries.²⁰⁵ Following the end of the all-white primary, a record 35,000 African Americans voted in the 1948 Democratic primary in South Carolina.²⁰⁶

Laws Disqualifying People Convicted of Felonies from Voting

States throughout the country have long disqualified people convicted of felonies from voting. Together with America’s discriminatory criminal justice system, described in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal system, states throughout America have used these laws to prevent African Americans from voting and continue to do so today.²⁰⁷

Laws denying people convicted of felonies their right to vote have existed since at least the colonial period of American history, finding roots in earlier English, European, and Roman law.²⁰⁸ Although early U.S. state constitutions gave their legislatures the power to pass laws disenfranchising people who had committed crimes, many states—including Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina—only passed such laws after the Civil War to deny African Americans their newly gained right to vote.²⁰⁹

Following Reconstruction, state governments sought to maintain white supremacy by using vagrancy laws, curfews, and other restrictions to target African Americans with criminal laws as a form of social control.²¹⁰ Because states targeted African Americans for prosecution, and because convicted African Americans were stripped of

their ability to vote, states effectively used criminal laws to not only control African Americans, but also to deprive them of their right to vote.

After the Civil War, in many southern states, the percentage of nonwhite people imprisoned nearly doubled between 1850 and 1870.²¹¹ In Alabama, for example, two

Because states targeted African Americans for prosecution, and because convicted African Americans were stripped of their ability to vote, states effectively used criminal laws to not only control African Americans, but also to deprive them of their right to vote.

percent of the prison population was nonwhite in 1850, but by 1870, 74 percent of the prison population was nonwhite, even though the total nonwhite population increased by only three percent.²¹² Ever since the Civil War era, states have imprisoned African Americans at higher rates than white Americans.²¹³ One study examining historical data found that when more of the people imprisoned by a state are Black, the state is significantly more likely to enact laws removing their right to vote if they have been convicted of a felony.²¹⁴

Many states made clear that they targeted African Americans with their laws removing the right to vote from people convicted of felonies. According to the North Carolina Democratic Party’s Executive Committee Handbook in 1898, North Carolina’s restriction originates from the state’s efforts “to rescue the white people of the east from the curse of negro domination.”²¹⁵ The Mississippi constitutional convention in 1890 changed its disenfranchising provision from one that included “any crime” to one affecting only certain offenses like burglary or theft, a change that the Mississippi Supreme Court explained as one made “to obstruct” Black voting by targeting certain crimes the state believed that Black residents committed more frequently.²¹⁶

Other southern states expressly tied disenfranchisement to “furtive offenses... peculiar to the Negro’s low economic and social status.”²¹⁷ Some scholars suggest that because denying the vote for those convicted of crimes was narrower in scope than literacy tests or poll taxes, and easier to justify than grandfather clauses, states used criminal disenfranchisement laws as “insurance” if courts decided to strike down other, more blatantly discriminatory laws.²¹⁸

Most of these disenfranchisement laws continue to exist across the country in some form to this day. Though

NONWHITE PRISON POPULATION ALABAMA



a Black majority, and it included nearly all of the state's Black neighborhoods in the awkward shape of a snake.²³⁹

Drawing the map this way had the effect of ensuring that only one of the state's seven legislators were Black, despite African Americans making up more than 60 percent of the state's total population. White government officials drew similarly gerrymandered congressional districts across the south, including in North Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi.²⁴⁰ The Mississippi government drew the Black electoral district in the shape of what one newspaper called a “shoestring.”²⁴¹

Gerrymandering continued in the 20th century. After World War II, a thriving Black community began organizing politically in Tuskegee, Alabama.²⁴² But white segregationists responded by proposing a bill to redraw the boundary lines of Tuskegee to exclude all neighborhoods with Black residents and exclude Black voters from having any input into the city's elections.²⁴³ Black residents fought back, bringing a case that reached the Supreme Court in 1960, where the Court struck down the racially gerrymandered map as a violation of the Fifteenth Amendment.²⁴⁴ A few years later, Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act in 1965, which prohibits states from diluting the voting strength of African Americans, including through redistricting plans that dilute the voting strength of Black communities.²⁴⁵

Despite prohibitions by both Congress and the Supreme Court, states continued to try and find ways to gerrymander state maps to limit Black representation. In the 1980s, Georgia State Representative Joe Mack Wilson de-

partisan actors—state legislatures or their appointees—to redraw their districts.²⁴⁹ While those who engage in partisan gerrymandering claim not to directly target Black voters, the fact that most Black voters register to vote as Democrats, today, means that partisan gerrymandering often affects Black representation as well.

Though African Americans had historically supported the Republican party through post-Reconstruction due to the party's role in Emancipation and Reconstruction, the Republican party's apathy and mistreatment toward African Americans during the Hoover Administration opened the door to their entry into the Democratic party during the New Deal, as northern Democrats like President Franklin Roosevelt promised economic aid amidst the Great Depression.²⁵⁰

Black support for the Democratic party then surged in the 1960s, when Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson ushered in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.²⁵¹ President Johnson's embrace of civil rights legislation caused many of the southern white supremacists in the Democratic party to defect to the Republican party, cementing Black support for Democrats to this day.²⁵² From 1994 to 2019, over 80 percent of Black registered voters have leaned toward or identified as Democrats.²⁵³

Because most Black voters today register to vote as Democrats, partisan gerrymandering harms Black representation. In the last decade, more than two dozen Black officials have had their districts redrawn in ways that could cost them their seats, leading the former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus to declare partisan gerrymandering a “five-alarm fire” for Black representation.²⁵⁴

Moreover, unlike earlier forms of racial gerrymandering, neither Congress nor the U.S. Supreme Court have prohibited partisan gerrymandering.²⁵⁵ As scholars and advocates have observed, the Supreme Court's refusal to strike down political gerrymandering permits legislators to get away with racial gerrymandering in places where race and party are highly correlated, simply by claiming that they made their redistricting decisions for partisan reasons, rather than racial ones.²⁵⁶

Prison gerrymandering refers to the practice of counting incarcerated people as part of the population in the region imprisoning them, rather than the location of their actual community.²⁵⁷ Because the government allocates greater numbers of political representatives

Gerrymandering has existed since this nation's infancy, and politicians have used it nearly as long to deny Black communities representation in government.

clared, “I don't want to draw nigger districts.”²⁴⁶ A little more than a decade later, the Supreme Court would strike down North Carolina's efforts to gerrymander on the basis of race, stating it was “unsettling how closely the North Carolina plan resembles the most egregious racial gerrymanders of the past.”²⁴⁷ Meanwhile, states continue to engage in two other forms of legally sanctioned racial gerrymandering: partisan gerrymandering and prison gerrymandering.

Political, or partisan, gerrymandering refers to the process of drawing districts to benefit one political party over another.²⁴⁸ As of September 2021, 38 states allow

and resources to places with greater populations, prison gerrymandering benefits districts that engage in mass incarceration, skewing resources and representation to areas with prisons at the expense of the communities to which those imprisoned people belong.²⁵⁸

This process particularly affects African Americans, who are disproportionately imprisoned. In 2019, African Americans made up about 33 percent of the United States's imprisoned population,²⁵⁹ despite representing about 14 percent of the total population.²⁶⁰ Given the effects of prison gerrymandering, advocates describe it as akin to or worse than the Constitution's Three-Fifths Clause, which counted enslaved people in the Census for the purpose of allowing states to amass more pro-slavery representatives, despite the fact that enslaved people were not allowed to vote and had no basic legal rights.²⁶¹

The Myth of Voter Fraud and Voter ID Laws

Claims of voter fraud have also been used to justify laws that suppress Black voting—most prominently, voter identification (ID) laws. While voter fraud has long been invoked throughout American history to justify restrictions on voting, such claims have made a recent resurgence, including in the 2020 election, despite the lack of any evidence to support allegations of widespread fraud.²⁶² In recent years, states have used this claim to enact a number of strict ID laws that disproportionately impact Black and other nonwhite voters, hindering their ability to vote.²⁶³

States and politicians have invoked the specter of voter fraud since at least the late 1800s to justify the various rules they imposed disenfranchising Black and other nonwhite communities.²⁶⁴ The Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacists claimed voter fraud to justify the violence they inflicted upon African Americans. One southern historian claimed in 1901 that “the white man of the lately dominant class in the South... saw his former slaves repeating at elections,” and quoted with favor a white supremacist leader and his announcement that he and his militants had violently suppressed Black voters such that “[f]ew negroes voted that day; none twice.”²⁶⁵ Thus, white supremacists have long used accusations of voter fraud as an excuse to justify the suppression of Black political participation.²⁶⁶

More recently, the idea of voter fraud and voter identification laws became popular following the 2000 election.²⁶⁷ The U.S. Attorney General at the time, John Ashcroft, pushed the U.S. Department of Justice to prioritize vot-

Because most Black voters today register to vote as Democrats, partisan gerrymandering harms Black representation. In the last decade, more than two dozen Black officials have had their districts redrawn in ways that could cost them their seats, leading the former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus to declare partisan gerrymandering a “five-alarm fire” for Black representation.

er fraud as an issue,²⁶⁸ even though the U.S. Department of Justice itself found only a 0.00000132 percent rate of voter fraud.²⁶⁹

Congress enacted the Help America Vote Act in 2002, which required voter identification to register to vote and deferred to states' requirements for voter identification.²⁷⁰ Many civil rights organizations opposed the bill for its discriminatory impact, arguing that the requirement would mirror a poll tax.²⁷¹ In 2005, Georgia and Indiana became the first states to enact photo identification voting laws, opening the floodgates for similar laws throughout the country.²⁷² In 2000, only 11 states required all voters to show some form of identification; this increased to 18 states in 2008,²⁷³ and, as of 2021, 35 states have laws requesting or requiring voters to show identification at the polls.²⁷⁴

Although voter identification laws may appear race neutral, they disproportionately burden Black voters due to disparities in both access and enforcement. According to one nationwide study, 20 percent of African Americans did not possess a valid photo ID, compared to seven percent of whites.²⁷⁵ Due to segregation and unequal access, many elderly Black voters were not born in hospitals, resulting in many never being issued a birth certificate—and this fact, in turn, limits their ability to obtain other forms of photo identification.²⁷⁶

Additionally, states disproportionately enforce voter ID laws against Black voters. National studies have found that 70 percent of all Black voters were asked to show photo identification at the polls during the 2008 election, as opposed to only 51 percent of white voters.²⁷⁷ These disparities in enforcement forced Black voters to file provisional ballots at four times the rate of white voters.²⁷⁸ Provisional ballots, in turn, are more likely to go

uncounted.²⁷⁹ In 2016, nearly 700,000, or 28.5 percent of all provisional ballots went uncounted; in 2018, nearly 790,000, or 42.6 percent of all provisional ballots were not counted.²⁸⁰

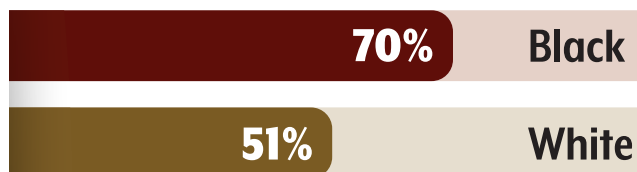
VOTER IDENTIFICATION BY RACE

Percent of voters who do not have a valid photo ID



Additionally, citizens with ready access to voter identification might underestimate the burdens that voter ID requirements impose. But as the American Civil Liberties Union has calculated, for those who need to procure a voter ID, the combined cost of time, travel, and documentation ranges from \$75 to \$175,²⁸¹ a steep cost to consider when poll taxes “of as little as \$1.50 have been deemed an unconstitutional burden on the right to vote.”²⁸² Even obtaining “free” identification cards may require a person to not only purchase a birth certificate,²⁸³ but to travel to a DMV, which in some regions could be as far as 250 miles away.²⁸⁴

2008 ELECTION REQUEST FOR PHOTO IDENTIFICATION BY RACE



In many cases, states intentionally use voter ID laws to discriminate against Black voters and people with lower incomes, perpetuating America’s legacy of creating barriers to Black voting.²⁸⁵ For example, when crafting North Carolina’s voter identification laws, one state representative expressly asked a university official to provide information “about the number of Student ID cards that are created and the [percent] of those who are African American,” and a federal appeals court characterized these restrictions as targeting Black voters with “almost surgical precision.”²⁸⁶

As one scholar points out, it is no coincidence that the states with the most rigid voter identification laws also happen to be states with substantial Black populations and a history of post-Reconstruction-style discrimination at the polls.²⁸⁷ Multiple Republican strategists

have admitted that voter ID laws have nothing to do with voter fraud, and are instead part of a strategy of ensuring that Democrats cannot vote.²⁸⁸ Because Black voters identify overwhelmingly with the Democratic Party,²⁸⁹ political strategists openly seeking to disenfranchise Democrats will necessarily target Black voters.²⁹⁰ Ultimately, scholars have found that strict voter ID laws substantially decrease voting turnout for Black and Latino voters, doubling the voting gap between white and Black voters.²⁹¹

Exclusion from Juries

In addition to barring African Americans from voting, post-Reconstruction states in both the North and South also excluded African Americans from serving on juries. The Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees criminal trials by an “impartial jury.”²⁹² Juries serve the essential role of balancing government power by giving citizens the authority to determine a just outcome in a case of law.²⁹³

In the 1800s, many states, such as Tennessee and West Virginia, expressly allowed only white men to serve on juries.²⁹⁴ While many states in the north did not have laws excluding Black jurors, one historian observed that “[i]n most of the North, custom and prejudice... combined to exclude Negroes from jury service.”²⁹⁵ During Reconstruction, Congress partially undid these restrictions with the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which prohibited states from expressly discriminating based on race in the selection of juries in state court.²⁹⁶

However, the Act did not address the many other methods that states used to exclude Black jurors.²⁹⁷ For example, states ordinarily required a jury decision to be unanimous to determine whether someone is guilty or innocent of a crime.²⁹⁸ But this meant that the presence of a single Black juror could prevent a white jury from convicting a Black defendant. To get around this, states like Louisiana and Oregon passed laws allowing a jury to convict a defendant if only 10 of the 12 jurors voted to convict.²⁹⁹

As the U.S. Supreme Court observed in *Ramos v. Louisiana* (2020), states like Louisiana and Oregon removed jury unanimity requirements after Reconstruction “to ensure that African-American juror service would be meaningless,” since one or two Black jurors could not outvote a white majority.³⁰⁰ In many states, only registered voters can serve on juries, so because these states denied African Americans the ability to register to vote, they denied them access to the jury box as well.³⁰¹ Finally, many states excluded Black jurors through various state rules that allowed judges, court officials, and local

prosecutors to prevent a person from serving on a jury without giving a reason.³⁰² As discussed in Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal system, these methods produced deep disparities in the number of African Americans convicted of crimes, including wrongful convictions.³⁰³

California

Though California amended its constitution in 1879 to allow nonwhite men to vote, the state adopted many laws similar to those adopted by northern and southern states to suppress the political participation of African Americans.³⁰⁴ California added a poll tax into its constitution in 1879, requiring payment of an average half-day's wage before someone could vote.³⁰⁵ The poll tax continued until repealed in 1914.³⁰⁶ In 1894, California added a literacy test for voting to its constitution to prevent Chinese residents from voting.³⁰⁷ Unsurprisingly, anti-Chinese and anti-Black racism in California frequently intertwined. The California state Democratic party, for instance, pledged in 1867 to establish “no Negro or Chinese suffrage,”³⁰⁸ and its racist pledge enabled Democrats to sweep state elections that year.³⁰⁹

In the years after World War II, the Black population in California rose dramatically.³¹⁰ With a growing presence in the state, Black communities in California continued pushing for greater political representation. But they faced resistance and retaliation along the way. California, like the federal government, frequently treated Black activism as a threat.³¹¹ In 1966, when civil rights protesters used the slogan of “Black power” to advocate for racial equality, the Republican Candidate for Lieutenant Governor, Robert Finch, declared that “it’s wrong, if... any minority, including the Negro people, think they can blackmail or blackjack their way into acceptance into our society, they’re just dead wrong, and the American people will not tolerate this kind of thing.”³¹²

That same year, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, seeking Black economic empowerment and the end of police brutality.³¹³ To pursue these goals, the Panthers adopted a number of community service programs, including health care clinics, a free breakfast program for school children,³¹⁴ and police observation patrols.³¹⁵

As with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the federal government and California viewed the Black Panthers as a

threat.³¹⁶ Vice President Spiro Agnew labeled the Black Panthers an “anarchistic group of criminals.”³¹⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Hoover declared that the Black Panther Party “without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.”³¹⁸ Through its counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), the FBI surveilled and sabotaged the Black Panthers.³¹⁹ The FBI sent anonymous, inflammatory letters to restaurants, grocery stores, and churches to dissuade them from providing food or facilities for the free breakfast program.³²⁰

To suppress the Black Panthers’ newsletter activities, the FBI ordered the Internal Revenue Service to audit the organization and any income they received from distributing newsletters.³²¹ Further, the FBI infiltrated the group with undercover agents and spread misinformation, paranoia, conflict, and distrust within the party.³²² Californian law enforcement also repeatedly arrested Black Panther members on harassment and public disorder charges, disrupting the organization and sapping resources away from its community service initiatives.³²³ These efforts contributed to the organization’s collapse in 1982.³²⁴

Like many states in the North and South, California also stripped individuals of their right to vote when they were convicted of a felony, embedding such a provision in its constitution since 1849.³²⁵ It took 125 years before California eventually changed this wholesale denial of voting rights in 1974, amending its constitution to allow individuals convicted of felonies to vote if they had completed their sentence and parole.³²⁶ In 2016, the state legislature restored voting rights to people convicted of a felony offense housed in jail, but not in prison.³²⁷

Californian law enforcement also repeatedly arrested Black Panther members on harassment and public disorder charges, disrupting the organization and sapping resources away from its community service initiatives. These efforts contributed to the organization’s collapse in 1982.

Still, in 2020, approximately 243,000 Californians were barred from voting due to felony convictions.³²⁸ Of that number, 50,000 (or about 20 percent) are Black.³²⁹ Only recently, in 2020, did California voters approve Proposition 17, which amended the state’s constitution to restore the right to vote to all individuals who have completed their prison term, even if they are still on parole.³³⁰

V. Voting Rights Legislation

As Black Activists Fought for Civil Rights, White Americans Reacted with Violence

After the end of Reconstruction, African Americans, facing increased threats to their liberty, organized and mobilized to assert their equal rights. Groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) used protest and litigation to advance the civil rights of African Americans and secure the rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.³³¹ Much of the NAACP's legal work focused on defending African Americans from wrongful convictions and bringing lawsuits to hold white perpetrators of racial terror accountable for their crimes.³³² The NAACP also brought legal challenges to end many of the devices states used to suppress Black political power, such as the all-white primary.³³³

In these efforts, NAACP lawyers played a critical role in using litigation to end racial segregation, most famously through *Brown v. Board of Education*, where the NAACP convinced the U.S. Supreme Court to strike down racial segregation in public schools as unconstitutional.³³⁴ In addition to its litigation, the organization lobbied the federal government to enact civil rights legislation, including anti-lynching laws, voting rights laws, and other

civil rights laws that would ensure the equal protection of African Americans.³³⁵

Black women, too, played a critical role in early Black activism. During the 1896 election in North Carolina, for instance, Sarah Dudley Pettey canvassed the Black sections of Raleigh to urge Black women to persuade their husbands, brothers, and sons to vote.³³⁶ In 1898, the “Organization of Colored Ladies” in Wilmington declared that for “Every Negro who refuses to register his name... that he may vote, we shall make it our business to deal with him in a way that will not be pleasant. He shall be branded a white-livered coward who would sell his liberty.”³³⁷

When the United States ratified the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, Black women registered in large numbers to vote.³³⁸ For instance, in Kent County, Delaware, one local paper reported “unusually large” numbers of Black women who showed up to vote, though officials would prevent many of them—and many others across the country—from voting.³³⁹

World War II contributed to a surge in Black civil rights activism.³⁴⁰ The service and sacrifice of African Americans—both abroad in the military and at home in factories and fields—underscored the moral imperative for equal treatment, especially given America's war against the Nazism and white supremacy abroad.³⁴¹

With renewed energy, Black organizations pushed to secure voting rights, continuing efforts to organize, educate, and register Black voters, despite the threats of violence and the other barriers that states had created after Reconstruction.³⁴² Black women like Ella Baker led and directed civil rights campaigns and voter registration drives for some of the nation's largest civil rights groups, including the NAACP, Southern Leadership Conference, and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.³⁴³ In addition, interracial labor unions in the South played a part in registering Black voters.³⁴⁴ In 1947, Local 22 of the Food and Tobacco Workers in Winston-Salem, North Carolina helped register 3,000 Black residents in the city, helping elect the first Black alderman to the city's board since Reconstruction.³⁴⁵

But Black veterans demanding equal treatment returned home to fierce resistance.³⁴⁶ In Decatur, Mississippi, a white senator, Senator Theodore Bilbo, warned Black residents to stay away from the polls for the Democratic primary in 1946, calling for “every red-blooded white man to use any means to keep the niggers away from the polls.”³⁴⁷

COURTESY OF BETTMANN VIA GETTY IMAGES



A civil rights marcher suffering from exposure to tear gas, holds an unconscious Amelia Boynton Robinson after mounted police officers attacked marchers in Selma, Alabama as they were beginning a 50 mile march to Montgomery to protest race discrimination in voter registration.(1965)

A mob of white people waving pistols turned five returning World War II veterans away from voting during that primary.³⁴⁸ A group of civil rights organizations complained to the U.S. Senate about Senator Bilbo's intimidation tactics, prompting a Senate committee to hold four days of hearings in Jackson, Mississippi.³⁴⁹ Two hundred African Americans, most of them veterans, packed the federal courtroom in Jackson to share their experience of violence and voter suppression.³⁵⁰

African Americans faced similar threats in other places. In March 1948, the Ku Klux Klan paraded around Wrightsville, Georgia, warning that “blood would flow” if Blacks tried to vote in the forthcoming election.³⁵¹ Seven months later, two whites threatened Isaac Nixon, a Black veteran, telling him not to vote.³⁵² He refused to heed their warning, cast his ballot shortly after sunrise, and by nightfall he had been murdered.³⁵³ Though Nixon's murderers later stood trial, an all-white jury acquitted them.³⁵⁴

In Florida, on the Christmas Eve of 1951, the KKK bombed the home of the state's NAACP director, murdering Harry T. Moore and his wife.³⁵⁵ During the 1963 civil rights protests in Birmingham, Alabama, white policemen and firefighters unleashed hounds and blasted protestors with high pressure water hoses that stripped the clothes off their backs.³⁵⁶

In Greenwood, Mississippi, white citizens and officials responded to Black voter registration efforts by cutting off food supply to Black communities, imprisoning Black people for “breach of peace,” setting fire to Black businesses, and firing gunshots at Black activists in their cars, their offices, and their homes.³⁵⁷ When Black activists organized the Freedom Vote and the Freedom Summer of 1964 in Mississippi,³⁵⁸ local sheriffs arrested three activists and turned them over to KKK members, who proceeded to murder the activists, burn their car, and bury their remains.³⁵⁹

On March 7, 1965, future Congressman John Lewis led some 600 protestors on a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.³⁶⁰ That “Bloody Sunday,” Alabama state troopers attacked.³⁶¹ Awaiting the protestors on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, state troopers rushed into the crowd with nightsticks.³⁶² Troopers beat and bloodied protestors, knocking many unconscious.³⁶³ Troopers fractured Lewis's skull in the assault.³⁶⁴ “I thought I was going to die on that bridge,” he later recalled.³⁶⁵ The bloodshed at Selma prompted outrage across the nation, becoming

the tipping point that spurred the federal government to enact the Voting Rights Act that year.³⁶⁶

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

The centuries-long Black struggle for freedom led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, a landmark law that prohibited many of the barriers described in this chapter, allowing millions of African Americans to vote.³⁶⁷ In 1964, prior to the protections of the Voting Rights Act, 57

When Black activists organized the Freedom Vote and the Freedom Summer of 1964 in Mississippi, local sheriffs arrested three activists and turned them over to KKK members, who proceeded to murder the activists, burn their car, and bury their remains.

percent of eligible African Americans remained unregistered to vote.³⁶⁸ The passage of the Voting Rights Act resulted in a 21 percent increase in Black voter registration—the largest gains were recorded in the south, where the percentage of registered Black voters increased from below 31 percent to over 66 percent by 1984.³⁶⁹

The Voting Rights Act empowered the United States Department of Justice to enforce voting rights, authorized individual voters to sue in federal court to enforce their voting rights, and authorized the federal government to send examiners to register voters.³⁷⁰ Among the Act's most important provisions:

- Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act prohibits any voting restriction that “results in” the denial of the right to vote based on race, regardless of whether a state intended to discriminate.³⁷¹
- Section 4 of the law identified certain state and local governments that had a history of discrimination against African Americans. State and local entities that demonstrated such past discrimination were “covered jurisdictions” subject to greater oversight from the federal government;³⁷² and
- Section 5 provided that “covered jurisdictions” were required to obtain approval—or “preclearance”—from the Department of Justice or a federal court in Washington, D.C. before passing any voting rights related law. The covered jurisdiction had to demonstrate that the proposed voting change did not have a discriminatory purpose or a discriminatory effect on Black or other nonwhite voters.³⁷³

Altogether, these provisions represented what the United States Department of Justice called “the most successful piece of civil rights legislation ever adopted by the United States Congress,” due to its role in eliminating many of the devices that had been used to deny Americans their right to vote.³⁷⁴

Within the last decade, however, the United States Supreme Court has removed or weakened key pillars of the Voting Rights Act.³⁷⁵ In *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), the Supreme Court struck down Section 4 of the Act as unconstitutional.³⁷⁶ And because Section 5’s preclearance requirements only applied to areas identified through Section 4, the Supreme Court effectively eliminated Section 5 as well. Though admitting that “voting discrimination still exists,” the Court felt that enough had been done because 40 years had passed and minority voting rates had improved.³⁷⁷

Thus, the Court found Section 4 to no longer be necessary, despite Congress’s renewal of Section 4 in 2006 by an overwhelming majority (the House voted 390 in favor to 33 opposed; the Senate passed it unanimously), and despite Congress’s finding that “40 years has not been a sufficient amount of time to eliminate the vestiges of discrimination following nearly 100 years of disregard for the dictates of the 15th amendment[.]”³⁷⁸ The Court’s decision prompted Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to protest in dissent that striking down this provision of the Voting Rights Act “when it has worked and is continuing to work” is “like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet.”³⁷⁹

Eight years later, the Court weakened Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act as well.³⁸⁰ Though Section 2 prohibits any voting law that “results in” the denial of voting rights based on race, the Court, in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*, re-wrote the law to limit its reach.³⁸¹ While Section 2 speaks only to voters’ rights, and the need to protect them against racial discrimination, the Supreme Court created a new requirement for courts to consider the “strength of the state interests.”³⁸² By inserting the state’s goals into the equation, the Supreme Court flipped the Voting Rights Act from a civil rights act into a balancing act, allowing voting rights to be sacrificed if a court believed the state’s goals to be worthy enough.³⁸³

The Court also declared that the legality of a voting restriction should be evaluated partly based on whether the law “has a long pedigree” or was in “widespread use” as of 1982, the year Congress amended the Voting Rights

Act to prohibit laws that “result in” racially discriminatory denials of the right to vote.³⁸⁴ But, as detailed in this chapter, many racially discriminatory voting restrictions have had a long and widespread pedigree in this nation’s history. Poll taxes and literacy tests existed for almost 100 years—some restrictions even longer.³⁸⁵ By considering a voting restriction’s use in the past as a basis for accepting it, the Supreme Court’s decision enables discriminatory restrictions to remain in place, simply because they had been used previously.

The Supreme Court’s elimination or weakening of the anti-discrimination protections in Sections 2, 4, and 5 of the Voting Rights Act has opened the floodgates for laws restricting voter access across the nation. Hours after the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, Texas implemented a strict photo ID law that had previously been rejected under Section 5.³⁸⁶

That summer, the North Carolina legislature also passed a sweeping law that instituted a stringent photo ID requirement, eliminated same-day voting registration, and cut back on early voting.³⁸⁷ Over the four years following *Shelby County*, jurisdictions previously covered under Section 5 closed 1,173 polling places, many in districts with majority Latino and Black voters.³⁸⁸ States also limited voting hours, limited the ability to vote via mail-in ballots, and purged voter registration rolls.³⁸⁹

While these restrictions limited voting access for all Americans, they also targeted or specially affected African Americans. The removal of polling places in Ohio ensured that “African Americans in Ohio wait[] in line for fifty-two minutes to vote, while whites wait[] only eighteen minutes.”³⁹⁰ After record turnout of Black voters in Georgia helped flip federal elections in favor

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of Democrats in 2020, Georgia’s Republican state legislature passed a law limiting drop boxes for mail ballots, introducing more rigid voter identification requirements for absentee ballots, and criminalizing the act of providing food or water to people waiting in line to vote.³⁹¹ In a recent lawsuit filed in federal court, the U.S. Department of Justice asserts that Georgia enacted these restrictions specifically to target Black voters.³⁹²

Overall, states across the country introduced 389 restrictive voting laws from January to May 2021, alone.³⁹³ With the Supreme Court's recent limitations of the Voting Rights Act, laws like Georgia's are becoming the new norm across the country.³⁹⁴

California

In the latter half of the 20th century, California began taking steps to expand voting access. California encouraged county and volunteer voting registration efforts in the 1950s and 1960s, and it amended its constitution to eliminate its literacy test in 1970.³⁹⁵ In the 1970s, California relaxed its rules for requesting absentee bal-

As one Virginia Senator explained, these restrictions were meant “to discriminate to the very extremity of permissible action under the limitations of the Federal Constitution, with a view to the elimination of every negro voter who can be gotten rid of, legally, without impairing the numerical strength of the white electorate.”

lots and for remaining on the voter registries from year to year.³⁹⁶ More recently, the state enacted the California Voting Rights Act in 2001, which permits citizens to file suit in state court to challenge racially discriminatory restrictions in at-large elections without having to

demonstrate the higher evidentiary standards required under the federal Voting Rights Act.³⁹⁷

Despite the state's efforts to advance voting access, the federal government has observed that California and some of its cities and counties have continued to engage in voting discrimination throughout the late 20th century. The U.S. Attorney General determined that California's use of a statewide literacy test to restrict voting during the November 1968 election violated the federal Voting Rights Act.³⁹⁸

From 1968 to 1976, the United States Department of Justice also identified Kings County, Monterey County, and Yuba County as engaging in discriminatory practices, monitoring these counties and objecting to various new voting restrictions proposed by these counties well into the 2000s.³⁹⁹ As another example, the United States Department of Justice objected to Merced County's redistricting plan in 1992, a plan opposed by both Black and Latino communities because it would have denied them the opportunity to elect their preferred candidate.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, while California has enacted laws expanding voting rights, equal access to the ballot box continues to be an ongoing challenge in parts of the state.

VI. Effects of Restrictions on Black Political Participation

Before the Voting Rights Act of 1965

When adopting the numerous voting restrictions described in this chapter, states made their intent clear. As one Virginia Senator explained, these restrictions were meant “to discriminate to the very extremity of permissible action under the limitations of the Federal Constitution, with a view to the elimination of every negro voter who can be gotten rid of, legally, without impairing the numerical strength of the white electorate.”⁴⁰¹

These methods proved effective. Once Louisiana adopted a number of these restrictive rules in its 1898 constitution, the number of Black voters in Louisiana plummeted from 130,000 to 5,000.⁴⁰² In Virginia, the number dropped from 147,000 to 21,000.⁴⁰³ Mississippi's constitutional convention cut Black voter enrollment from about 147,000 to around 8,600.⁴⁰⁴

In 1906, five years after Alabama designed its exclusionary rules, only two percent of Black voters remained on the state's voter registries.⁴⁰⁵ With the suppression of Black votes, Black representation in Congress quickly dwindled. During Reconstruction, 16 Black men held seats in Congress.⁴⁰⁶ From 1887 to 1901, just five members of Congress—in either the House of Representatives and Senate—were Black.⁴⁰⁷ From 1901 to 1929, not a single African American served in Congress.⁴⁰⁸ No Black congressman would be elected again from the South until the 1970s.⁴⁰⁹

These barriers prevented African Americans from governing, while securing the power of southern white supremacists in Congress, who voted down civil rights legislation and embedded racism into federal laws that built modern America. Near the end of Reconstruction in the 1870s, white southerners formed the “Southern

Bloc” in the Senate—a unified front of white Democratic Senators from the former confederate states.⁴¹⁰ After the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, progressive senators proposed hundreds of pieces of civil rights legislation to remedy discrimination against African Americans in education, employment, housing, transportation, public accommodations, and voting.⁴¹¹ But for 87 years, every attempt but one died in Congress, many blocked by the white “Southern Bloc” of the Senate, who vigilantly thwarted any effort to advance Black civil rights.⁴¹²

SOUTHERN VOTING RESTRICTION LAWS DECLINE OF BLACK VOTERS ONCE PASSED BY STATE



Not only did white southern lawmakers vote down civil rights legislation, they also rewrote watershed pieces of legislation to exclude African Americans. Many historians and economists consider the New Deal responsible for creating the modern middle class and many of the programs that Americans depend upon today, such as Social Security.⁴¹³ But the New Deal excluded African Americans from many of its benefits.⁴¹⁴ At the time, 90 percent of the southern Black workforce, and 60 percent of nation's total Black workforce, worked as farm laborers or domestic servants.⁴¹⁵

During the legislative process to pass various parts of the New Deal, southerners on the Senate Finance Committee excluded farm laborers and domestic servants from programs providing Social Security, minimum wage, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation.⁴¹⁶ As several historians explain, the exclusion of farm laborers and domestic servants was “racially coded . . . Southern politicians, reported one architect of the new law, were determined to block any ‘entering wedge’ for federal interference with the handling of the Negro question.”⁴¹⁷ Thus, southern politicians rewrote the New Deal to exclude African Americans from its benefits, fearing that federal benefits would discourage Black workers from taking low-paying jobs in their fields, factories, and kitchens.⁴¹⁸

In one of the final parts of the New Deal, the government spent \$95 billion in the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of

1944 (GI Bill) to give millions of veterans returning from World War II the ability to attend college, receive job training, start businesses, and purchase homes.⁴¹⁹ Yet, one report from the 1940s observed that it was “as though the GI Bill had been earmarked ‘For White Veterans Only.’”⁴²⁰

During drafting, the chair of the House Veterans Committee, a white supremacist Congressman from Mississippi, ensured that the GI Bill was administered by states instead of the federal government to guarantee that states could direct its funds solely to white veterans.⁴²¹ Similar results arose in housing and health care. For both the Hill Burton Act, which underwrote the creation of a modern health care infrastructure,⁴²² and the Housing Act of 1949, Congress included segregation clauses or rejected anti-discrimination clauses to avoid southern lawmakers' opposition, which otherwise would have doomed the legislation.⁴²³

Thus, by barring Black political participation after Reconstruction, white supremacists seized state, local, and federal power, perpetuated discriminatory policies, blocked efforts to redress discrimination, and excluded African Americans from most of the major economic legislation that produced the modern economy of the United States.⁴²⁴

After the Voting Rights Act

Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, Black voters have been among the most stable voting blocs, despite historic and ongoing efforts to restrict their ability to vote.⁴²⁵ Black support has proved critical, in particular, in modern elections. In the last three presidential elections, Black voter turnout was 67 percent in 2012, 60 percent in 2016, and 63 percent in 2020.⁴²⁶ Black voter turnout in each of these elections was higher than Latino and Asian Americans, and higher than whites in 2012.⁴²⁷ Though African Americans represent about 12.4 percent of the U.S. population today,⁴²⁸ many political pundits recognized that the Black electorate played a significant role in determining the outcome in the presidential election in 2020.⁴²⁹

Nevertheless, these longstanding limitations on Black political participation have deeply shaped the lives of African Americans. If the goal of political participation is to ensure a government is responsive to the needs of its citizens, Black political participation is particularly important to serve the needs of Black communities who experience the persisting effects of slavery and segregation. But the suppression of Black political participation has prevented African Americans from exercising their democratic voice, perpetuating policies that entrench racial inequalities.

When African Americans gain greater representation, African Americans have a greater ability to request and enact policies that meet their economic and educational needs. One recent study—the first to examine the effects of Black politicians on public finances during Reconstruction—found that Reconstruction-era communities with more Black politicians had higher local tax revenue, as well as higher Black literacy rates.⁴³⁰ In other words, the study suggests that communities with more Black politicians increased their tax revenue, which in turn increased investment in local education and Black education.

Another study found that the passage of the Voting Rights Act led to some reduction in racial wealth disparities, especially in covered jurisdictions subject to greater federal oversight.⁴³¹ Comparing neighboring counties—where one county was a covered jurisdiction subject to heightened oversight under the Voting Rights Act and the other was not—the study found that the Voting Rights Act narrowed the Black-white wage gap 5.5 percent between 1965 and 1970, a change driven primarily by increases in Black wages.⁴³²

By protecting Black voting rights, the Act helped drive increases in wages by giving African Americans greater voice to seek public employment opportunities and enabling African Americans to ask for public funds to be invested in their communities.⁴³³ The Act also allowed Black communities and their representatives to implement affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws to protect African Americans and their ability to access equal employment opportunities and equal wages.⁴³⁴ According to the study, the Voting Rights Act contributed to about one-fifth of the overall decline in the wage gap between Black and white Americans in the South between 1965 and 1970.⁴³⁵

Yet, African Americans can secure the benefits of political participation only to the extent that government policies respond to their voices. Despite modern gains in political participation and representation—including Barack Obama, the first Black man to be elected President in 2008, and Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to be elected Vice President in 2020—African Americans have not seen a similar rise in policies responsive to their needs.⁴³⁶

Studies examining more recent years have shown that not only do African Americans hold less political sway than white Americans when it comes to influencing

the government, Black support for a policy actually decreases the chances that the government will enact it.⁴³⁷ Scholars have found evidence that members of Congress are less responsive to their Black voters than to their white voters.⁴³⁸

Recent events underscore the government's failures to heed Black voices. For example, despite national and bipartisan support for police reform following the murder of George Floyd, Congress failed to enact any police reform legislation.⁴³⁹ Similarly, Congress failed to pass any voting rights legislation—including bills with bipartisan support—to counteract the slew of state laws increasing voting restrictions after the 2020 election.⁴⁴⁰

Likewise, Congress has consistently failed to pass legislation redressing the economic disparities faced by African Americans. African American households, on average, still earn one-tenth that of white households.⁴⁴¹ Chapter 13 The Wealth Gap delves into the wealth gap between Black and white families and its causes. Many of these problems can be traced to the discriminatory laws and policies that continue to be felt today. Take, for example, housing segregation. Laws that historically enforced or sanctioned racial housing segregation have produced neighborhood segregation that persists today.⁴⁴² Because modern life revolves around a family's

Studies show that Black support for a policy actually decreases the chances that the government will enact it. Scholars have found evidence that members of Congress are less responsive to their Black voters than to their white voters.

neighborhood—including access to employment, credit scores, housing values, the amount of funding for local schools or parks, and policing—the racist policies that produced neighborhood segregation have created a discriminatory foundation upon which other laws have been built.⁴⁴³

Although increased political representation can allow Black communities to try to change these systems, undoing these discriminatory systems is not a matter of flipping a switch. Discriminatory policies have piled over decades and centuries, and undoing these systems is much like undoing the literal concrete underlying a city and its streets and sidewalks.⁴⁴⁴ It requires many years, if not decades, of durable and long-term commitment to both change the old system and design a new one. The sustained, long-term commitment required for change means that the election of any one or several Black

politicians is not enough to fix the problematic policies at the root of racial inequalities.⁴⁴⁵ Political participation therefore represents just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to identifying the ongoing legacies of slavery, systemic discrimination, and what needs to be done to redress them.

California

During California's early history, Black Californians struggled to gain representation in political office or to have a voice in party politics. Beginning in 1870, most Black Californians belonged to the Republican Party, the party that had abolished slavery.⁴⁴⁶ But the white members of California's Republican Party ignored Black Californians' requests to serve in elected or appointed political offices.⁴⁴⁷ Some Black voters protested by joining the Democratic Party in the 1880s.⁴⁴⁸ But Democrats, too, refused Black men the offices that they had promised in order to lure Black voters to their side.⁴⁴⁹ Though Black men secured the formal right to vote in 1870, it would take nearly a half century before California's first Black legislator, Frederick M. Roberts, was elected to the California State Assembly in 1918.⁴⁵⁰ From 1918 to 1965, only six

Black male Californians were elected to the California Legislature.⁴⁵¹ California did not elect its first Black female legislator, Yvonne Brathwaite Burk, until 1966.⁴⁵²

In more recent years, California has made many strides in expanding voting rights access. As of January 2022, the number of Black elected officials in California's legislature is now proportional to the state's Black population.⁴⁵³ But as described in later chapters of this report, the state still has not addressed many of the socioeconomic disparities that have resulted from these

Discriminatory policies have piled over decades and centuries, and undoing these systems is much like undoing the literal concrete underlying a city and its streets and sidewalks. It requires many years, if not decades, of durable and long-term commitment to both change the old system and design a new one.

longstanding barriers, disparities that profoundly shape the lives of Black Californians. While Black Californians may have a greater ability to vote in the ballot box today, Black Californians also have voted with their feet: many have left the state for opportunities elsewhere, reflecting continued failure to address their needs.⁴⁵⁴

VII. Conclusion

Despite the promise of American democracy, the United States has excluded African Americans from equal participation in self-government. By doing so, government officials and private parties sought to recreate the racial hierarchy that existed during enslavement. Though African Americans organized to pursue their equal citizenship, government officials resisted, retaliated, and undercut Black political power through the many means

and methods described in this chapter. Many of these methods persisted for nearly a century—others persist to this day. But all of these methods have limited the country's efforts to redress the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination, producing deep inequalities in the politics and policies that shape America and the lives of African Americans today.

Endnotes

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- ³See, e.g., Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988), pp. 569-76 (“Foner, Reconstruction”).
- ⁴See Cohen, *Negro Involuntary Servitude in the South, 1865-1940: A Preliminary Analysis* (1976) 42 J. of Southern History 31, 48-54.
- ⁵See, e.g., Nat. Park Service, *supra*, at pp. 10-14.
- ⁶See, e.g., Hoag, *An Unbroken Thread: African-American Exclusion from Jury Service, Past and Present* (2020) 81 La. L. Rev. 55, 58-59.
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COURTESY OF "NOT EVEN PAST: SOCIAL VULNERABILITY AND THE LEGACY OF REDLINING" / [HTTPS://DSL.RICHMOND.EDU/SOCIALVULNERABILITY](https://dsl.richmond.edu/socialvulnerability)

I. Introduction

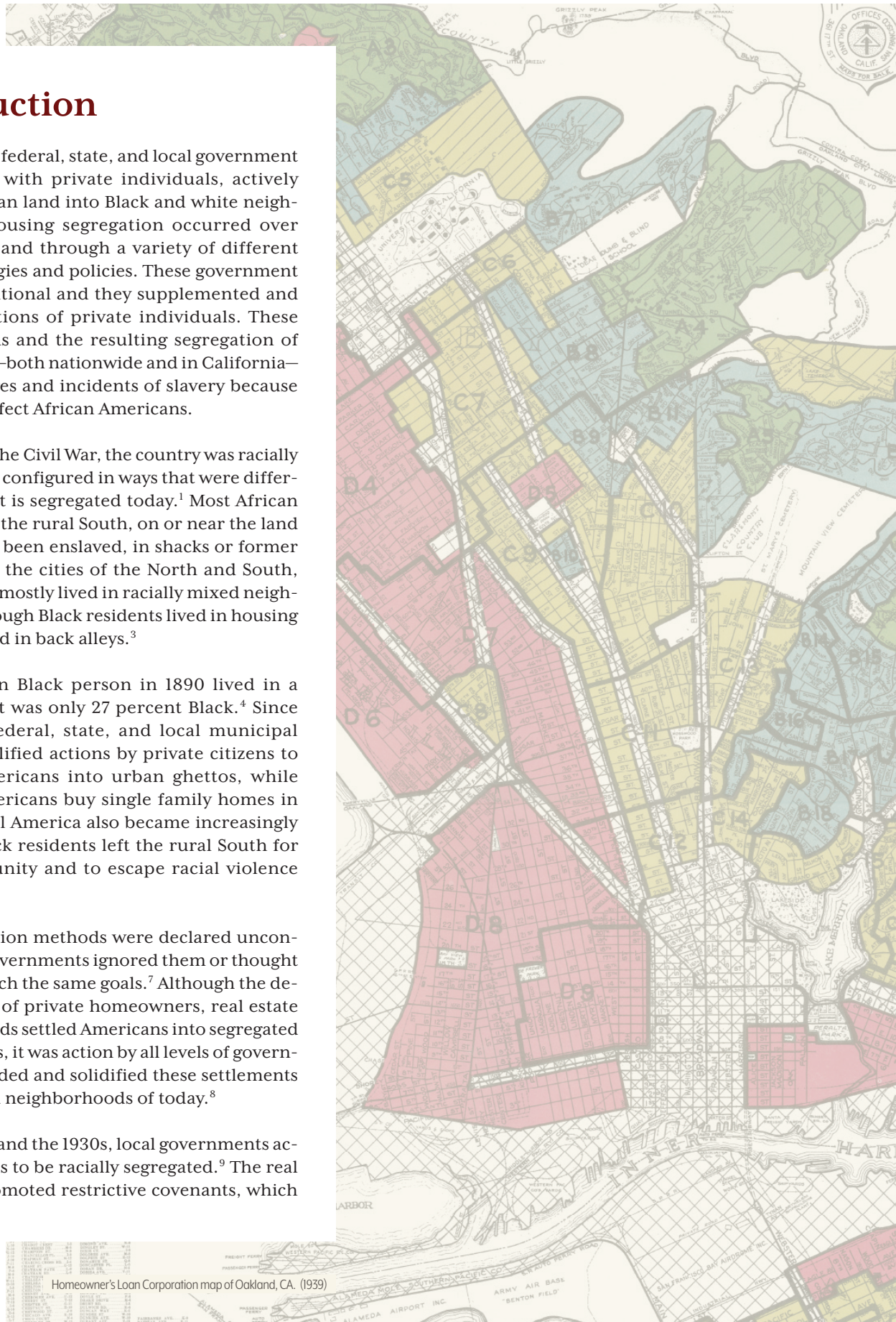
After the Civil War, federal, state, and local government officials, working with private individuals, actively segregated American land into Black and white neighborhoods. This housing segregation occurred over almost 200 years, and through a variety of different government strategies and policies. These government actions were intentional and they supplemented and intensified the actions of private individuals. These widespread actions and the resulting segregation of African Americans—both nationwide and in California—are enduring badges and incidents of slavery because they continue to affect African Americans.

Immediately after the Civil War, the country was racially and geographically configured in ways that were different from the way it is segregated today.¹ Most African Americans lived in the rural South, on or near the land on which they had been enslaved, in shacks or former slave quarters.² In the cities of the North and South, African Americans mostly lived in racially mixed neighborhoods, even though Black residents lived in housing of worse quality and in back alleys.³

The average urban Black person in 1890 lived in a neighborhood that was only 27 percent Black.⁴ Since then, American federal, state, and local municipal governments amplified actions by private citizens to force African Americans into urban ghettos, while helping white Americans buy single family homes in the suburbs.⁵ Rural America also became increasingly segregated, as Black residents left the rural South for economic opportunity and to escape racial violence and terrorism.⁶

As certain segregation methods were declared unconstitutional, local governments ignored them or thought up new ways to reach the same goals.⁷ Although the decisions of millions of private homeowners, real estate agents, and landlords settled Americans into segregated residential patterns, it was action by all levels of government which expanded and solidified these settlements into the segregated neighborhoods of today.⁸

Between the 1900s and the 1930s, local governments actively planned cities to be racially segregated.⁹ The real estate industry promoted restrictive covenants, which



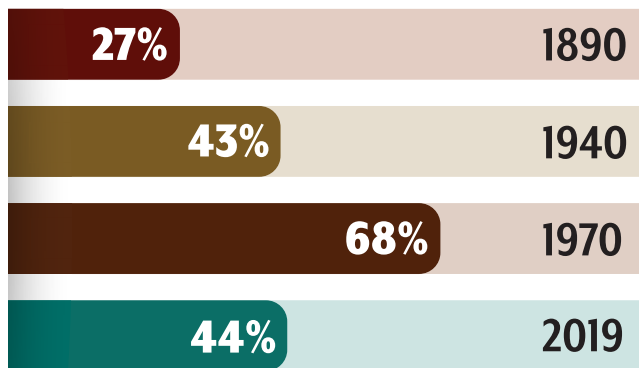
were clauses written into deeds that prohibited non-white residents from living in the house.¹⁰

By 1940, the average urban Black person lived in a neighborhood that was 43 percent Black.¹¹ From the 1930s to the 1970s, the United States federal government built public housing for white Americans, but not African Americans. The federal government helped white Americans, but not African Americans buy houses in the suburbs. Throughout American history, up until the 1970s, white residents terrorized their Black neighbors by destroying their property, bombing their houses, and burning crosses on their lawns to scare them away from living in white neighborhoods.¹² For a more detailed discussion, please see Chapter 3, Racial Terror.

By 1970, the average urban Black person lived in a neighborhood that was 68 percent Black.¹³ Even after the passage of the Federal Housing Act, which outlawed housing discrimination, urban renewal and other uses of local government actions funded by the federal and state governments maintained residential segregation.¹⁴

The problem of segregation has never been corrected. America is as segregated in 2019 as it was in the 1940s, with the average urban Black person living in a neighborhood that is 44 percent black.¹⁵

INTENSITY OF SEGREGATION IN AMERICA

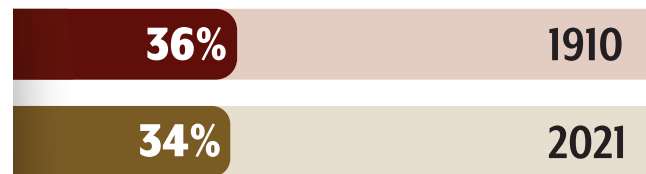


In California, the population of African Americans remained small until World War II, when African Americans moved to the state to find jobs in the war industry.¹⁶ On the one hand, Southern California is an African American success story.¹⁷ As W. E. B. Du Bois wrote of Los Angeles and Pasadena in 1913, “Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high.”¹⁸

In 1910, 36 percent of African Americans in Los Angeles owned homes, far more than most cities at the time.¹⁹ On the other hand, all success is relative. Federal, state, and local government in California helped create segregation through discriminatory federal housing policies, zoning ordinances, decisions on where to build schools and a discriminatory federal mortgage policy called redlining.²⁰ As Robert Joseph Pershing Foster, a migrant from the small town of Monroe, Louisiana who moved to Los Angeles in the 1950s said of his first days in California, “I came all this way running from Jim Crow, and it slaps me straight in the face[.]”²¹

Like elsewhere in the country, the effects of these government policies at all levels continue to this day. In 2021, in Los Angeles and Orange counties, only 34 percent of Black households owned homes,²² less than in 1910.

LOS ANGELES PERCENT OF AFRICAN AMERICANS WHO OWNED HOMES



Section III of this chapter describes the history of U.S. Supreme Court decisions which allowed residential segregation to intensify over the last 170 years. Section IV describes the state of residential segregation at the end of the Civil War, before government and private action segregated the American landscape. Section V, VI and VII explains how migration patterns across the country led states, cities and communities to exclude African Americans, how African Americans establish their own communities in response and the racism that they faced in doing so. Sections VIII – XIII details the various mechanisms used by federal, state and local governments to segregated America throughout history. Sections XIV and XV describes the state of housing segregation today and its effects. Section XVI concludes that residential segregation in America is a result of white supremacist beliefs created to support enslavement and is the root of many modern-day racial disparities. Section XVII is an appendix of relevant data for reference. Each of these sections show the persisting effects of slavery in the context of housing.

II. Constitutionally Sanctioned Housing Discrimination

The reason housing segregation has never been fixed in America is due in part to the Supreme Court. As discussed in Chapter 2, Enslavement, and Chapter 4, Political Disenfranchisement, although the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution banned actions that continued the effects of slavery, the Supreme Court of the United States decided in 1883 that the federal government could not prohibit racial discrimination by individual business owners and private parties.²³ This ruling later applied to housing.²⁴ As a result, government and private actors

essentially ignored the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and Fourteenth Amendment protections against racial discrimination until Congress passed the Fair Housing Act in 1968.²⁵

The story did not end here. At the height of segregation in the 1970s, the U.S. Supreme Court popularized the myth that the American government had no role in creating housing segregation, and therefore should not and could not fix the personal choices of millions of private citizens.²⁶

III. The End of the Civil War

Immediately after the Civil War, the country was racially and geographically configured in ways that were different from the way it is segregated today.²⁷ Immediately after the Civil War, between 1860 and 1900, almost 90 percent of African Americans lived in the South,²⁸ and 80 percent of those who lived in the South lived in rural areas.²⁹ Many Black workers lived in former slave quarters, on the same plantation on which they had been enslaved.³⁰

Most modern-day scholars agree that white and African Americans lived in the same geographic area in the cities at this time, although in unequal quality of housing.³¹ White families lived in front streets and broad avenues and Black families generally could only live in backyards, alleys, side streets, or their houses were separated by physical barriers.³² Impoverished shanty towns of unemployed African Americans also appeared around southern cities in undesirable areas like swamps, near city dumps, and next to cemeteries and railroad tracks.³³ “Ghettos were built up in nearly all Southern cities, not always sharply defined but pretty definite, and in these, Negroes must live,” wrote Du Bois.³⁴

At the same time, less than 10 percent of African Americans lived in the North and less than 0.4 percent lived in the western states.³⁵ Most lived in urban areas³⁶ that were much more segregated by neighborhood than in the South,³⁷ and in worse housing conditions than white Americans.³⁸

In 1899, W. E. B. Du Bois’s landmark sociological study of Philadelphia summed up the situation: “[H]ere is a people receiving a little lower wages than usual for less desirable work, and compelled, in order to do that work, to live in a little less pleasant quarters than most people, and pay for them somewhat higher rents.”³⁹ Some

families used up to 75 percent of their income on rent, as real estate agents raised the rent for Black tenants because they knew many landlords did not rent to Black tenants.⁴⁰ Most African Americans living in the North were only able to find jobs serving white families, and thus were forced to pay higher rents in the more expensive neighborhoods close to their employers.⁴¹

In California around the end of the Civil War, African Americans were few in number compared to other racial groups: the 1860 census counted 4,086 “[t]otal free colored,” 17,798 “Indian,” and 34,933 “Asiatic” people in California.⁴² As a result of their small numbers, Black Californians at the time generally lived in multiethnic communities⁴³ and occasionally also lived in small predominantly Black communities.⁴⁴ For example, a group of 44 settlers, half of whom were of African descent, who traveled from Sinaloa, Mexico, established a settlement that later became Los Angeles in 1781.⁴⁵ During the Mexican War, from 1846 to 1848, Los

COURTESY OF DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE/NATIONAL ARCHIVES



An old farm house with slave house in the foreground.

Angeles had a significant Black population as former enslaved African Americans were brought to the area.⁴⁶ In Northern California, there was also a concentrated Black population along the banks of the Sacramento River in a neighborhood comprised of Mexican and Chinese

settlers.⁴⁷ In that neighborhood, “rowdy young men and boys” attacked all three groups and vandalized Black and Chinese businesses.⁴⁸ African Americans also lived and worked in multiethnic mining communities such as Little Negro Hill near Folsom Lake, California.⁴⁹ California had

Many towns across the country became known as sundown towns, where African Americans were not allowed to stay after dark. Although these rules were often unwritten, local sheriffs and armed, white mobs enforced them. According one scholar, California had more sundown towns than the entire South.

four counties with fewer than 10 Black residents in 1890.⁵⁰ By 1930, California had eight counties with fewer than 10 Black residents, which author James Loewen argues is the result of intensified segregation⁵¹ Author Richard Rothstein argues that after the large influx of African Americans to the state in World War II, government actions in California imposed racial segregation where it had not previously existed.⁵²

IV. The Great Migration

Between 1870 and 1900, many African Americans moved from rural to urban areas in the South, looking for better paying jobs.⁵³ Over the next seven decades, as violence targeting African Americans intensified in the South, and as Southern states passed laws that relegated African Americans in nearly every aspect of life to worse conditions than white Americans, the promise of better jobs and the illusion of racial equality pulled African Americans out of the South to the North and the West.⁵⁴ This is called the Great Migration and, at its peak, 16,000 Black people left the South each month.⁵⁵

The Midwest path carried people from Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Arkansas to Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh.⁵⁸ The western path carried people from Louisiana and Texas to California and the rest of the West Coast.⁵⁹ More Black people moved to California in the 1940s than in the entire previous century of statehood combined.⁶⁰ The Black population of California mushroomed from 124,306 in 1940 to 1,400,143 in 1970.⁶¹ By the end of the Great Migration in the 1970s, 47 percent of African Americans lived outside of the South.⁶² Although many African Americans left the South to escape discrimination, the lingering legacy of slavery, reinforced by government actions at all levels, followed them across the country. Historians have argued that the Great Migration led to an increase in racial violence in the North and West, and an intensification of residential segregation.⁶³

Historians have identified three migration paths out of the South (though not all African Americans followed these paths exactly).⁵⁶ The eastern path carried people from Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia to Washington D.C., Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.⁵⁷

V. Exclusion or Destruction of Black Communities

Nationally

As African Americans left the South, entire states like Indiana and Oregon outright banned African Americans from living in the state.⁶⁴ Peter Burnett, who later became the first governor of the State of California, was involved in passing these Oregon laws to ban Black residents from living in Oregon.⁶⁵

Although these rules were often unwritten, local sheriffs and armed, white mobs enforced them.⁶⁷ Sundown towns were created largely between 1890 to 1940 and they legally continued to exist through 1968.⁶⁸ The sociologist James Loewen argued that most suburbs in America began as sundown towns and that the hometowns of nine out of the 32 candidates for president in the 20th century were sundown towns.⁶⁹ For example, Harry Truman grew up in Lamar, Missouri, a legal segregation town of 3,000 without a single Black family.⁷⁰ George W. Bush lived in Highland Park, a sundown

In addition to entire states, many towns across the country became known as sundown towns, where African Americans were not allowed to remain after dark.⁶⁶

suburb of Dallas that only welcomed its first Black homeowners in 2003.⁷¹

California

Much like Indiana and Oregon outright banned African Americans from living in the state as they left the south,⁷² California also tried to pass laws banning African Americans from settling in the state.⁷³ Although the laws did not pass, the California legislature, dominated by white southerners at the time, sent the clear message that African Americans were not welcome.⁷⁴ (For further discussion, see Chapter 2, Enslavement.)

Later, as residential segregation reached its height between 1940 to 1970, local governments and residents created scores of sundown towns and suburbs in California,⁷⁵ some by ordinance and some by force.⁷⁶ Loewen found evidence that eight California counties effectively excluded Black people.⁷⁷ White Californians rioted to expel Black residents from California towns.⁷⁸ According to Loewen's research, California had more sundown towns than the entire South, which Loewen attributes to the culture of racism in the South preferring to exploit rather than exclude Black residents.⁷⁹

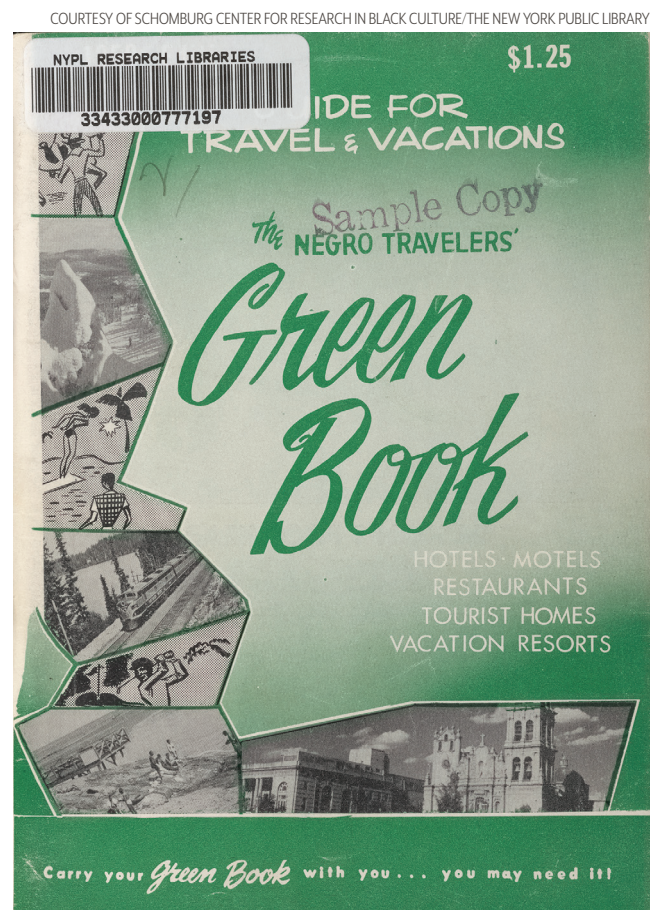
California sundown towns included most of the suburbs of Los Angeles and San Francisco, and most of Orange County.⁸⁰ Some of these places gained a national reputation as sundown towns.⁸¹ Loewen has collected research on numerous sundown towns throughout California.⁸² A list of the sundown towns identified by Loewen is included in Table 3 in the Appendix to this chapter.

Fliers for the Maywood Colony, a suburban development surrounding Corning, California, announced: "GOOD PEOPLE - In most communities in California you'll find Chinese, Japs, Dagoes, Mexicans, and Negroes mixing up and working in competition with the white folks. Not so at Maywood Colony. Employment is not given to this element."⁸³

In South Pasadena, in the late 1940s, the city administration, local civic leaders, and realtors tried to cover

South Pasadena with racially restrictive covenants.⁸⁴ A 1947 newspaper article noted the unusual and extreme extent of this effort; the goal was to blanket the entire city with racially restrictive covenants.⁸⁵

As a matter of official policy, African Americans and other nonwhite persons were only allowed to work in South Pasadena if they left by dusk.⁸⁶ Limited exceptions were made for live-in servants and caretakers, but they could not live in the city on their own, and often could not bring their children to live with them.⁸⁷ This campaign to exclude all nonwhite residents from South Pasadena only failed after the Supreme Court ruled that racially restrictive covenants could not be enforced.⁸⁸



The Negro Travelers' Green Book. The annual guide is for services and places relatively friendly to African-Americans. (1959)

VI. Freedmen's Town

Nationally

Banned from settling in entire geographic areas, and escaping discrimination and racial violence, African Americans began building all Black towns in the 19th

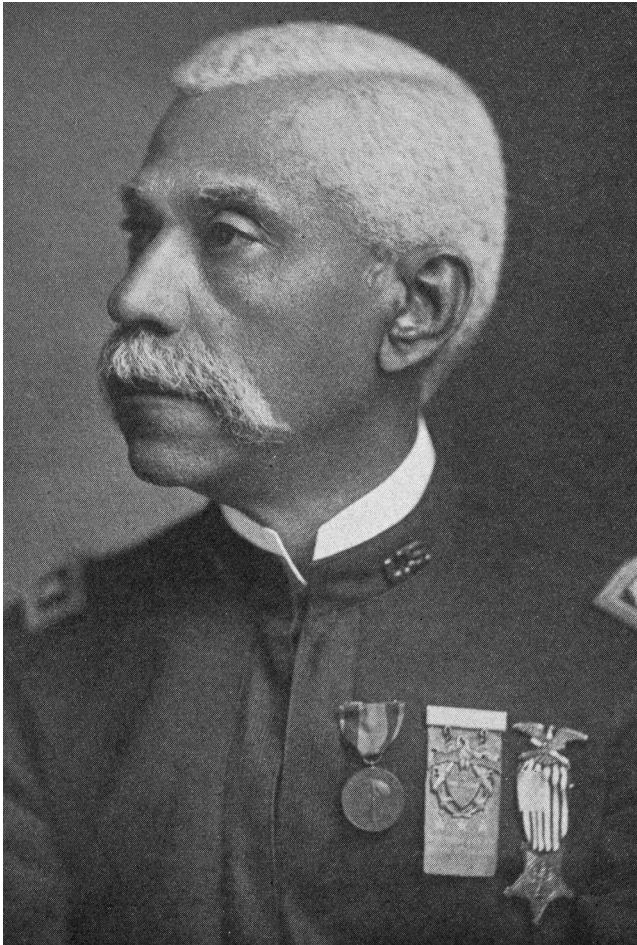
Century in the Southwest, Midwest, and West.⁸⁹ Also known as Freedmen's Towns, these towns developed in order to, in the words of one Black town newspaper editor, exercise freedom "as freedom was understood by

[African Americans].⁹⁰ Approximately 100 such towns were built between early-1800s and mid-1900s.⁹¹ A particularly large number of African Americans migrated to Kansas.⁹² Oklahoma had over 30 all Black towns.⁹³ Other states with such towns included Texas, Iowa, New Mexico, and Michigan, as well as some in the former enslavement states of Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Tennessee.⁹⁴

California

Although there is not much research on this topic, some records suggest that there were at least 15 Black towns in California between 1850 and 1910.⁹⁵ The best known and most successful was Allensworth, 40 miles north of Bakersfield.⁹⁶ Allen Allensworth, a formerly enslaved Lieutenant Colonel from the U.S. Army, founded Allensworth with others in 1908.⁹⁷ The town attracted disillusioned Black migrants who had fled the South, but found a different type of discrimination in California.⁹⁸

COURTESY OF IRMA AND PAUL MILSTEIN DIVISION OF UNITED STATES HISTORY/THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



Lieutenant Colonel Allen Allensworth founded an all Black town outside of Bakersfield with four other settlers. Today, Allensworth is a California State Park. (1926)

Unlike other Black towns in California, Allensworth was self-governing, and at the height of its success before the Great Depression, over 300 families constructed churches, a library, a school, and a general store.⁹⁹ Black midwives cared for the health of the community, as most doctors in nearby towns refused to take Black patients unless the patient was employed by a white rancher.¹⁰⁰

Allensworth spent more money on its schools than its neighboring school districts.¹⁰¹ Cornelius Pope, who lived in Allensworth and attended school there as a child, remembered that his teacher Alworth Hall “welcomed [him] to the Allensworth School and with open arms and asked, ‘Learn something for me today.’”¹⁰² When Pope left Allensworth, he said, “it didn’t take me long to find out that I was equal to the very best. I was just as powerful, could think just as good, there was nothing inferior about me. I was pretty hard to stop from there on in.”¹⁰³

Despite Allensworth’s success, it was never truly independent; it had to rely on the government and white-owned companies that controlled the water, the railroad, and job markets.¹⁰⁴ In testimony to the Task Force, Terrance Dean argues that water, land, and railroad companies discriminated against the town, leading to its demise.¹⁰⁵ The Pacific Farming Company, after first selling land plots to the Black settlers at inflated prices, then prohibited land sales to African Americans, which limited the town’s growth.¹⁰⁶ Despite its promises, the Pacific Water Company built only four water wells for Allensworth, compared to the 10 wells it built in a neighboring white town.¹⁰⁷ The water dried up within two years and was contaminated with alkaline at first, then arsenic in 1967.¹⁰⁸ The founders maintained that the settlers were victims of a racist scam and were sold land that would never have enough water.¹⁰⁹

When it was founded, Allensworth was on the Santa Fe railroad’s main line, which allowed the town to derive revenue from the rail stop.¹¹⁰ In 1914, the rail line was diverted away from Allensworth.¹¹¹ Not being able to earn revenue from the railroad stop or farming alone, residents worked multiple jobs in the surrounding, discriminatory white communities.¹¹² Young people left the town to find jobs elsewhere, and Allensworth slowly died and disappeared as economic opportunities decreased and the water calcified.¹¹³ It was established as a state park in 1974, but remained critically underfunded and unbuilt until the 2000s.¹¹⁴

VII. City Planning for Segregation

Nationally

Anti-Black Zoning Ordinances

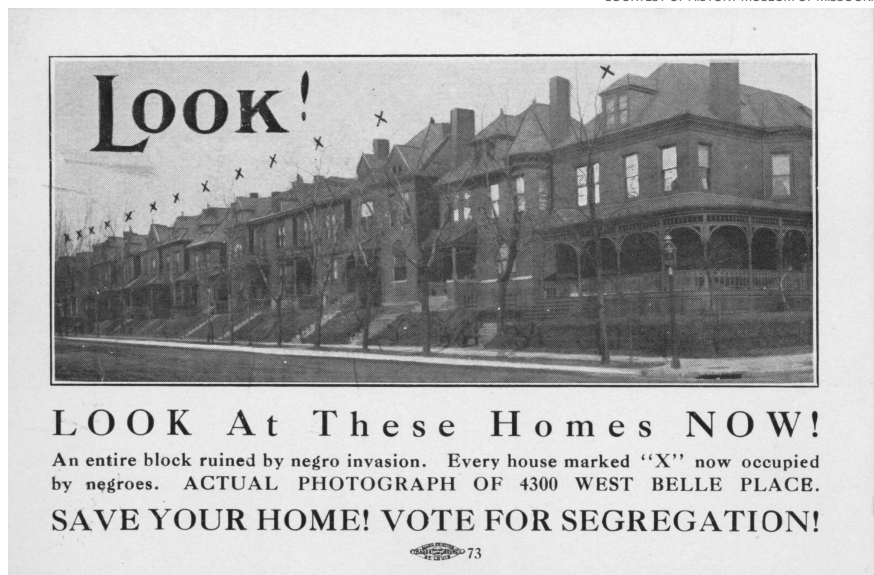
From the Civil War into the 1960s, as local governments planned the layout of their cities, they used planning regulations called zoning ordinances to prevent African Americans from living in certain neighborhoods.¹¹⁵ First, city officials in southern cities in the early 1900s passed Black and white zoning ordinances to ban African Americans from living in white neighborhoods.¹¹⁶ When the U.S. Supreme Court found that these explicitly race-based zoning ordinances violated the federal Constitution in 1917, city officials used other zoning ordinances as proxies for race in order to maintain all-white neighborhoods.¹¹⁷

From the 1860s to 1900s, when African Americans first left the rural South for the urban South, racial violence escalated, leading to a number of large scale race violence and massacres across the South.¹¹⁸ Soon after, anti-Black zoning ordinances were enacted in the South and nearby cities.¹¹⁹ In 1910, Baltimore enacted the city's anti-Black zoning ordinance, making it illegal for Black people to move to blocks that were more than half white, and vice versa.¹²⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, Baltimore's city attorney and grand-nephew of the famous poet, declared that the zoning was constitutional, and the city's mayor stated, "Blacks should be quarantined in isolated slums in order to reduce the incidents of civil disturbance, to prevent the spread of communicable disease into the nearby White neighborhoods, and to protect property values among the White majority."¹²¹

Numerous other southern cities followed Baltimore's example, including Winston-Salem, Atlanta, Oklahoma City, Miami, Birmingham, Dade County (Miami), Charleston, Dallas, Louisville, New Orleans, Richmond, and St. Louis.¹²² Although only about 10 percent of African Americans lived in the North at this time, anti-Black ordinances were popular nationwide.¹²³ In 1915, the *New Republic* argued for residential racial segregation until "Negroes ceased wanting to 'amalgamate' with whites..."¹²⁴

Although the U.S. Supreme Court declared racial zoning ordinances unconstitutional in 1917, states and cities ignored the decision for years.¹²⁵ In 1927, Texas passed a law authorizing cities to pass ordinances segregating Blacks and white.¹²⁶ Other cities, like Atlanta, Austin, Kansas City, and Norfolk, made discriminatory zoning decisions based on official city planning maps that explicitly labeled neighborhoods Black, until as late as 1987.¹²⁷

COURTESY OF HISTORY MUSEUM OF MISSOURI



Leaflet distributed in St. Louis Missouri advocating residents to vote for more stringent racial voting laws. Those homes marked with an "x" represent where Black families lived. (1916)

Company Towns

Beginning in the late 18th century, large corporations planned and built entire towns for their workers and attracted them with benefits including housing and mortgages.¹²⁸ When companies began hiring African Americans after the Great Migration, these companies typically offered Black workers housing that was lower in quality.¹²⁹

In company towns like Gary, Indiana and Sparrows Point in Baltimore County, Maryland, the best housing and jobs were reserved for American-born white managers.¹³⁰ The worst jobs and the smallest, shabbiest housing went to African Americans.¹³¹ In Sparrows Point, Maryland, the site of Bethlehem Steel, Black residents were segregated from white residents.¹³² Two room bungalows with outhouses originally constructed for Black workers, were given to white immigrants when there was a housing shortage.¹³³ Blacks workers were forced to rent bunks in shanties that were originally intended as temporary housing.¹³⁴

Racialized Neighborhood Zoning

After the Supreme Court declared explicit racial zoning unconstitutional in 1917, city officials developed new strategies to segregate Black residents from white residents by neighborhood.

The federal government joined this effort. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's appointment to the National Land Use Planning Committee, Alfred Bettman, explained that cities and states needed to establish planning commissions for zoning to "maintain the nation and the race."¹³⁵ These new zoning strategies included:

- City officials zoned neighborhoods for single family homes, without change for decades.¹³⁶ This prevented apartment complexes from being built, which effectively kept out African Americans who were less likely to afford single family homes.¹³⁷ Influential experts like Columbia Law School professor Ernst Freund stated that "the coming of colored people into a district" was the "more powerful" reason for the use of zoning, rather than the creation of single family neighborhoods.¹³⁸ The United States Supreme Court decided that this type of zoning law was constitutional in 1977.¹³⁹
- City officials relaxed or did not enforce zoning laws against white residents, but strictly enforced them against African Americans and other people of color and effectively chased African Americans out of certain neighborhoods.¹⁴⁰
- City officials zoned Black residential communities as commercial or industrial regardless of their residential character.¹⁴¹ This created a vicious cycle. Black residential communities zoned as commercial or industrial attracted polluting industries and lowered property values.¹⁴² White families would be less likely to move into the industrial zone, as white families generally had more money.¹⁴³ As a result, it became increasingly difficult to remove the commercial or industrial zoning for these Black residential communities.¹⁴⁴
- City officials limited new buildings by banning or imposing large fees on new construction, apartment buildings, mobile homes, or factory-built houses,¹⁴⁵ a practice known as "snob zoning."¹⁴⁶ Cities also demanded development or architectural specifications.¹⁴⁷ These ordinances had the effect of keeping poor people, large families,

older residents, single individuals, and people of color out of particular areas.¹⁴⁸

- City officials used dead-end streets, highways, cemeteries, parks, industrial spaces, and rail lines to create boundaries between Black and white neighborhoods.¹⁴⁹ Black people were even prohibited from burying the dead in white cemeteries¹⁵⁰ and from using parks.¹⁵¹

These strategies were often used in combination to maintain the segregated nature of a neighborhood. For example, in the St. Louis metropolitan area where 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot in 2014, city officials used a planning map that listed the race of each building's occupants to zone Black neighborhoods and the land next to Black neighborhoods for industrial development in 1919.¹⁵² The author of the city planning map explained that the goal was to prevent the movement into "finer residential districts . . . by colored people."¹⁵³ In order to navigate the racial hostility that this segregation caused, African Americans created their own maps, travel guides, and other publications.¹⁵⁴ For more information on this form of counter-mapping, see Chapter 11, An Unjust Legal System.

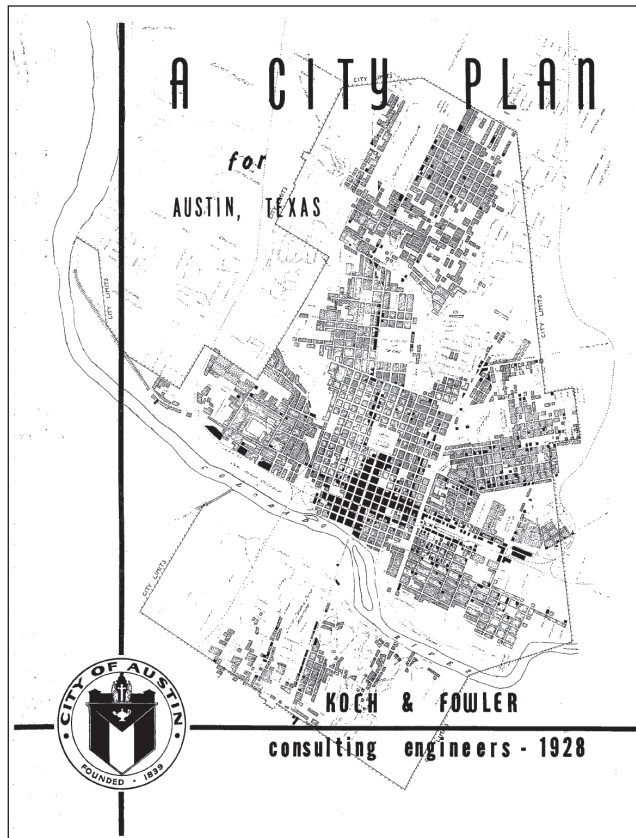
White neighborhoods were zoned as residential, and the single family homes in those neighborhoods used restrictive covenants, as discussed below, to prevent Black residents from moving in.¹⁵⁵ This ensured that the neighborhood stayed white.¹⁵⁶ The Black neighborhoods were zoned to permit polluting industry, liquor stores, and brothels, which were banned in white neighborhoods.¹⁵⁷ Later, the federal government cited the fact that Black neighborhoods were close to industry and vice as a risk to property values.¹⁵⁸ Based on the federal government's analysis, private banks refused mortgages to African Americans in a process called redlining.¹⁵⁹

In 1928, the city of Austin, Texas, adopted a master plan to create a "negro district." The mechanism worked well. In 1930, Wheatsville, a racially mixed community in Austin founded by a formerly enslaved person, was 16 percent Black. In 1950, the Black population of Wheatsville was one percent.

School Siting Policy

City officials used the decision of where to build a school as a way to concentrate African Americans in

poor neighborhoods with underfunded schools.¹⁶⁰ This strategy is referred to as a school siting policy.¹⁶¹ Cities first banned Black families from sending their children to white schools, then moved the only school that Black students were allowed to attend into designated Black neighborhoods and did not pay to transport Black students who lived outside the Black neighborhoods.¹⁶²



The adopted 1928 city plan of Austin, Texas created a “negro district” as “the nearest approach to the solution of the race segregation problem.”

In 1928, the city of Austin, Texas, adopted a master plan to create a “negro district,” in order to implement segregation, which the plan warned “cannot be solved legally under any zoning law known to us at present.”¹⁶³ The mechanism worked well. In 1930, Wheatsville, a racially mixed community in Austin founded by a formerly enslaved person, was 16 percent Black.¹⁶⁴ In 1950, the Black population of Wheatsville was one percent.¹⁶⁵

After city officials segregated Austin, the “negro district”¹⁶⁶ on the east side had more unpaved streets, broken sewers, and fewer public transportation.¹⁶⁷ The city did not enforce the residential zoning ordinances, so the neighborhood became increasingly industrial.¹⁶⁸ City officials in Atlanta used segregation maps to guide the school board’s decisions on which schools to close and where to build new schools.¹⁶⁹

California

Some scholars have argued that the first known attempt by an American city to segregate on the basis of race was in 1890, when the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to move all Chinese people within San Francisco to a neighborhood set apart for Chinese residents and businesses.¹⁷⁰ As African Americans arrived in California during the Great Migration, California used segregation to reinforce the racial hierarchy created by slavery.

Northern California

In 1953, when the Ford Motor Company moved its plant to Milpitas, California, and the labor union tried to build housing for its Black workers, the city rezoned the site for industrial use.¹⁷¹ The city also adopted a zoning ordinance banning apartment buildings.¹⁷² Anaheim, Costa Mesa, Orange, and Santa Ana zoned Black residential communities as industrial to maintain neighborhood segregation.¹⁷³

In 1958, the Palo Alto school district chose not to build two integrated high schools to solve overcrowding problems, but instead built a new school in the heart of the segregated Black East Palo Alto neighborhood, further entrenching segregation in Palo Alto.¹⁷⁴

Southern California

In California, the then-prosperous Los Angeles neighborhood of Sugar Hill is another example of the effects of racialized zoning. Prominent African Americans like Hattie McDaniel, the first African American to win an Oscar for her role as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*, and Norman Houston, co-founder of what became the largest Black owned insurance company in the West lived and singer Ethel Waters lived in the neighborhood.¹⁷⁵ Waters remembered the day she moved into her house: “During the day the moving men had brought my things, and when I saw that they had placed each chair and table exactly where I wanted, I burst into tears[,] ‘My house,’ I told myself. The only place I’ve ever owned all by myself ... I felt I was sitting on top of the world. I had a home at last.”¹⁷⁶

In 1945, the white neighborhood association sued to apply its restrictive covenant and evict the Black families living there.¹⁷⁷ When the white neighbors lost their lawsuit, the Los Angeles City Council stepped in and rezoned the neighborhood for rentals despite the protests of the affluent Black families living there.¹⁷⁸ In 1954, the city built the Interstate 10 Santa Monica Freeway through Sugar Hill and succeeded, finally, in destroying the Black community.¹⁷⁹

When South Central Los Angeles became a Black community in the 1940s, it had a mix of industrial plants and residential homes.¹⁸⁰ The City of Los Angeles rezoned much of the neighborhood for commercial use.¹⁸¹ A plant explosion killed five local residents, 15 white workers,

and destroyed more than 100 homes.¹⁸² When the pastor of a Black church protested the industrial zoning near his church, a city official replied, “Why don’t you people buy a church somewhere else?”¹⁸³

VIII. Eminent Domain

From the 1855 construction of iconic Central Park in New York City to urban renewal in the 1970s, America built parks, highways, and new economic developments that destroyed Black or integrated neighborhoods. Government officials used a legal concept called eminent domain to confiscate private land owned by African Americans for these public uses.¹⁸⁴ The U.S. constitution demands that the government pay the landowner “just compensation,” which is usually fair market value, but often a disputed sum.¹⁸⁵

These government decisions evicted African Americans from their homes and destroyed Black wealth.¹⁸⁶ It shuttered thriving businesses¹⁸⁷ and severed community ties.¹⁸⁸ Alfred Johnson, the executive director of the American Association of State Highway Officials and a lobbyist who worked on the 1956 Highway Act, put it this

of whom were Black.¹⁹¹ African Americans made up only 12 percent of the American population at the time, and so they were five times more likely to be displaced than they should have been when considering their portion of the population.¹⁹²

From 1949 to 1973, compared to white Americans, African Americans were

5x MORE LIKELY **to be displaced by eminent domain**

These government actions destroyed the social, political, cultural, and economic networks created by a neighborhood.¹⁹³ Evicted Black residents struggled to find a new place to live, as the compensation offered by the government was often not high enough to buy or rent in other parts of the city.¹⁹⁴ Evicted Black businesses lost their location and client base and were not usually compensated.¹⁹⁵ Urban renewal displaced cultural centers, and in certain industries like jazz venues, it threatened the entire industry.¹⁹⁶ Forced evictions also are associated with increased risk of stress-related diseases like depression and heart attack.¹⁹⁷

When South Central Los Angeles became a Black community in the 1940s, it had a mix of industrial plants and residential homes. The City of Los Angeles rezoned much of the neighborhood for commercial use. A plant explosion killed five local residents, 15 white workers, and destroyed more than 100 homes. When the pastor of a Black church protested the industrial zoning near his church, a city official replied, “Why don’t you people buy a church somewhere else?”

way: “Some city officials expressed the view in the mid-1950s that the urban Interstates would give them a good opportunity to get rid of the local niggertown.”¹⁸⁹

Scholars disagree over whether federal, state, and local governments racially targeted Black neighborhoods for destruction, or whether these public works projects were situated in the area of least political resistance, which were incidentally Black neighborhoods.¹⁹⁰ Regardless of intention, the effect is clear: one study in 2007 found that between 1949 and 1973, 2,532 eminent domain projects in 992 cities displaced a million people, two-thirds

Park Construction

The construction of parks in the United States has been used to harm Black people in many different ways. Parks have been used to destroy Black or integrated neighborhoods and act as a barrier between Black and white neighborhoods.¹⁹⁸ The residents of these destroyed integrated neighborhoods were then resettled into segregated neighborhoods.¹⁹⁹ Black neighborhoods themselves lacked green spaces, as discussed in Chapter 7, Racism in Environment and Infrastructure,

leading to negative health effects. African Americans were often banned from public spaces, as discussed in Chapter 9, Control over Spiritual, Creative, and Cultural Life.

Central Park in Manhattan was one of the most prominent examples of racial segregation by park construction. Cities across the country copied Central Park's policies, regulations, and design.²⁰⁰ In 1855, about 1,600 people lived in the area in mixed race neighborhoods called Seneca Village, Yorkville, and Pigtown.²⁰¹ Even though state law at the time prevented Black New Yorkers from owning land, more than half the Black households owned their homes in Seneca Village.²⁰² The community included two Black churches and one racially mixed Episcopal church, a cemetery, and a Black school.²⁰³ City officials destroyed all of it by 1857 to build Central Park with an all-white, male workforce.²⁰⁴

In California, at least one current park is on the site of a formerly thriving Black neighborhood. On the land that is currently Belmar Park in Santa Monica, the City of Santa Monica took away and burned down the homes and businesses of people in the Black neighborhood of Belmar Triangle through eminent domain for the construction of the city's expanded civic center, auditorium, and the Los Angeles County Courthouse.²⁰⁵ Now there is a park commemorating the neighborhood.²⁰⁶

The 1938 Underwriting Manual issued by the U.S. Federal Housing Administration (FHA) states: "A location close to a public park or area of similar nature is usually well protected from infiltration of business and lower social occupancy coming from that direction."²⁰⁷

Slum Clearance

Throughout American history and across the country, government officials, who are often white (see discussion in Chapter 4, Political Disenfranchisement), labeled

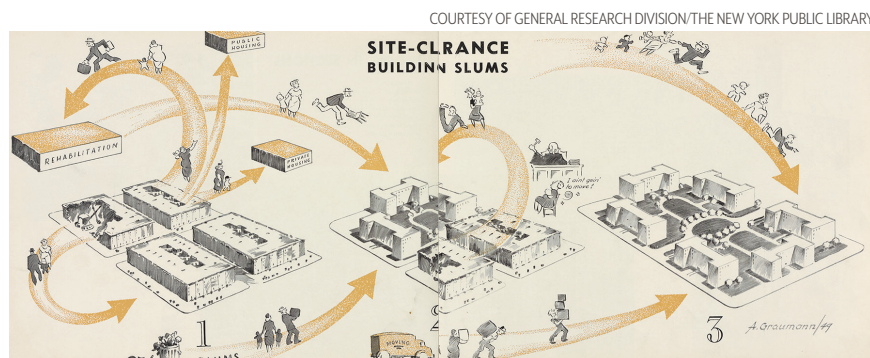
In 1855, about 1,600 people lived in the area in mixed race neighborhoods called Seneca Village, Yorkville, and Pigtown. Even though state law at the time prevented Black New Yorkers from owning land, more than half the Black households owned their homes in Seneca Village. The community included two Black churches and one racially mixed Episcopal church, a cemetery, and a Black school. City officials destroyed all of it by 1857 to build Central Park with an all-white, male workforce.

Black communities as slums, regardless of what the neighborhood was actually like.²⁰⁸ This allowed government officials to demolish so-called "slums" to make way for commercial development, upscale residences, parks, universities, hospitals, and corporate headquarters.²⁰⁹

The federal government funded this strategy with the 1934 Housing Act,²¹⁰ and then again, comprehensively, with the 1949 Housing Act, which provided \$13.5 billion for slum clearance and urban redevelopment between 1953 and 1986.²¹¹ At the height of urban renewal in 1967, the government destroyed 404,000 housing units, but only built 41,580 as replacements.²¹²

For example, in 1953 the Memphis Housing Authority declared that 46 acres of middle-class Black-owned single-family homes was a slum and replaced it with 900 units of public housing.²¹³ Homeowners had paid off their mortgages, improved their homes, and created a neighborhood; "[t]he home owners are sick and distressed beyond measure," pleaded one resident in a letter to city authorities.²¹⁴

In another example, after African Americans rebuilt in Tulsa following the 1921 Tulsa massacre, city officials declared the Greenwood community to be a slum, and destroyed it again.²¹⁵ Highway construction and urban renewal also appear to have compounded the economic collapse of the Greenwood community.²¹⁶



New York City Housing Authority. (January 1946- July 1949)

Freeway Construction

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 built 41,000 miles of interstate highways and was the largest American public works program at the time.²¹⁷ By the 1960s, highway construction was destroying 37,000 urban housing units per year.²¹⁸ From 1956 until 1965, the federal government did not provide any assistance to people whose homes were destroyed.²¹⁹ During the first 20 years of interstate highway construction, more than a million people were displaced.²²⁰

In 2021, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation acknowledged there is “racism physically built into some of our highways” because the federal highway system was built specifically to cut through neighborhoods where property values were lowest.²²¹ In most cities, federal highways were routed through Black neighborhoods.²²² For example, between 1948 and 1956, 86,000 people were displaced in Chicago, 66 percent of whom were Black, even though at the time, Black people only made up approximately 20 percent of the city’s population.²²³

In 1962, Detroit razed Black communities to build the Interstate 75 expressway, a plan that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights warned in advance would displace 4,000 families, 87 percent of whom were Black.²²⁴ U.S.



COURTESY OF ROY H. WILLIAMS/MEDIA NEWS GROUP/OAKLAND TRIBUNE VIA GETTY IMAGES
Interstate 980 severed the predominantly Black neighborhoods of West Oakland from the rest of the city, setting the stage for underfunding of municipal projects in the area. Excavation site of Interstate 980. (1976)

Department of Housing and Urban Development officials knew that they would destroy Black homes and did nothing to help these Black families.²²⁵ The government

did little to help these mostly Black families, businesses, churches, and schools.²²⁶

The formerly-thriving Black neighborhood of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma—infamous for the deadly anti-Black massacre of 1921—is now divided by Interstate Highway 244.²²⁷ Greenwood now has one block of businesses today.²²⁸ Before the highway’s con-

From 1956 until 1965, the federal government did not provide any assistance to people whose homes were destroyed. During the first 20 years of interstate highway construction, more than a million people were displaced.

struction, the neighborhood had 35 blocks of businesses and homes.²²⁹ Whenever affirmative infrastructure of this sort is constructed in Black neighborhoods, the initial construction-related harms created are compounded by the environmental pollution that is created and generated on an ongoing basis.²³⁰

Highway construction not only destroyed Black neighborhoods, government officials also used it to fence African Americans into certain neighborhoods.²³¹ A federal manual recommends that “[a] high-speed traffic artery or a wide street parkway may prevent the expansion of inharmonious uses to a location on the opposite side of the street.”²³² The term “inharmonious racial or nationality groups” was used by the federal government to describe communities of color.²³³

In Chicago, 28 identical 16-story apartment buildings known as the Robert Taylor Homes were a national symbol of failed public housing and concentrated poverty.²³⁴ The project housed 27,000 residents, nearly all of whom were African American.²³⁵

The City of Chicago used the Day Ryan expressway to cut off the Robert Taylor Homes from the surrounding neighborhoods.²³⁶ Studies have shown that interstate highways also fenced in Black neighborhoods in Memphis, Richmond, Kansas City, Atlanta, Tulsa, and Charleston.²³⁷

California

In California, eminent domain was used against Black communities, as well as other communities of color. As in the rest of the country, California used park construction, slum clearance, and freeway construction to destroy Black communities.

On September 23 and 24, 2021, California residents Jonathan Burgess and Dawn Basciano testified before the Task Force that state officials built the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park in Coloma, California on their family's land without just compensation.²³⁸ They also testified that the California Department of Parks and Recreation has not appropriately commemorated the history of the Black families who owned the land.²³⁹

In Southern California, the city of Manhattan Beach destroyed a racially integrated beach front neighborhood.²⁴⁰ Willa Bruce, who was Black, had purchased the beach front property in 1912 to run a lodge, café, and dance hall.²⁴¹ White people in the area tried to push her out by slashing her tires, setting fire to a mattress under her deck, and posting “No Trespassing” signs and fake parking restrictions to chase away Black customers.²⁴²

In 1924, Manhattan Beach city officials confiscated the beach front property of several Black and white families, including the Bruces, citing an urgent need for a public park.²⁴³ The Bruces sued for \$120,000 and received \$14,500.²⁴⁴ The other families, Black and white, received between \$1,200 and \$4,200 per lot.²⁴⁵ According to the Bruce family lawyer, the city did not pay for years and barred them from purchasing new land in the area, forcing the Bruces to leave without any income.²⁴⁶

The land lay vacant for decades until a park was built in the 1950s.²⁴⁷ The family moved to South Los Angeles and eventually left California.²⁴⁸ Having lost their property, Willa and her husband Charles worked for other business owners for the remainder of their lives.²⁴⁹ Estimates of the fair market value today of the Bruce family land is between \$40 million to \$70 million.²⁵⁰ In the fall of 2021, the state of California authorized Los Angeles County to transfer the land back to the Bruce family after nearly 100 years.²⁵¹

African Americans were pushed out of other beach cities, as described by Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson to the Task Force on December 8, 2021.²⁵² Initially, Santa Monica was not only home to a African American community; it was also a tourist destination for African Americans throughout the Los Angeles area.²⁵³ But, in 1922, a Black investment group was blocked from developing a resort and amusement facility along the oceanfront.²⁵⁴ After the Black investors could not build the facility, white developers purchased the land and constructed the Casa del Mar and the Edgewater clubs in the area.²⁵⁵ Black investors were also unable to build a planned

Black membership-based club in Santa Monica in 1958 because the city took over the land through eminent domain proceedings for a purported parking lot.²⁵⁶ These investors asserted racial discrimination and attempted to stop the cities proceedings in court but lost.²⁵⁷ Now, the upscale Viceroy hotel is located at the site.²⁵⁸

In 1945, California passed the Community Redevelopment Act, which allowed for the redevelopment of “blighted areas” in urban and suburban communities.²⁵⁹ The law defined a “blighted area” as a social or economic liability that needed redevelopment for the “health, safety, and general welfare” of the communities in which they existed.²⁶⁰ An area was deemed “blighted” if one of the following conditions was present:²⁶¹

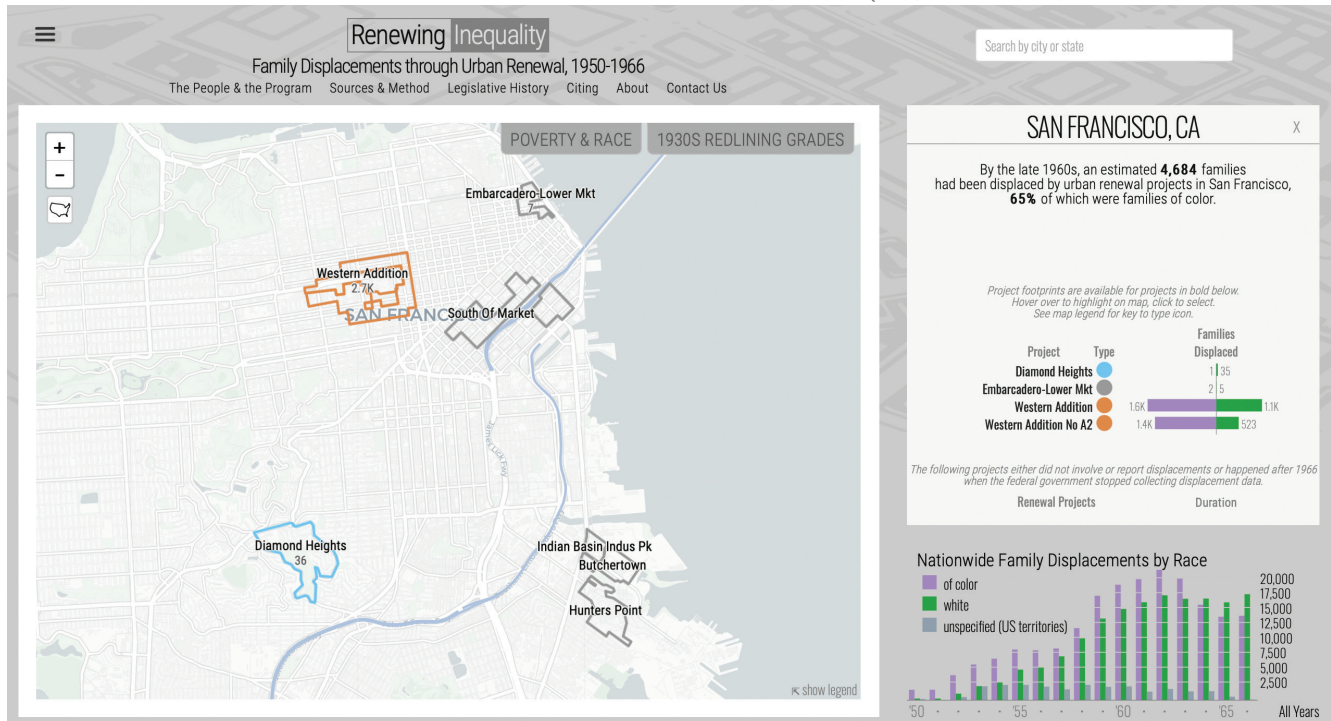
- Areas with buildings that had “faulty interior arrangement and exterior spacing,” or housed a “high density population,” leading to overcrowding and infectious disease outbreaks;²⁶²
- Areas with buildings that had “inadequate provision for ventilation, light, [or] sanitation, open spaces and recreation facilities” or dilapidation;²⁶³
- Areas with economic deterioration or underuse of valuable land;²⁶⁴
- Areas with “depreciated values” that could generate more tax revenue to fund public services for the residents;²⁶⁵ and
- Areas that were “beyond remedy” and contributed “substantially” to problems of crime.²⁶⁶

Each of these conditions described the harms of residential segregation. As discussed above, buildings in Black neighborhoods are generally more likely to be

City agencies declared that the Western Addition was blighted in 1948 and began tearing it down in 1956. The plan was one of the largest projects of urban renewal on the West Coast. The City of San Francisco closed 883 business, displaced 4,729 households, destroyed 2,500 Victorian homes and damaged the lives of nearly 20,000 people.

overcrowded and are in poorer condition. As discussed in Chapter 7, Racism in Environment and Infrastructure, the effects of redlining made land in Black neighborhoods less valuable than they actually were and local

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Map of San Francisco depicting where family displacement occurs due to urban renewal. (Accessed April 2022)

governments intentionally slowed and deprived these communities of services. Redlining concentrated poverty and crime into Black neighborhoods and implicit biases based in racist beliefs created during enslavement have, to this day, led the American public to associate African Americans with crime, and contribute to the over- and under-policing of Black communities.

In Northern California, this law was used to demolish the Fillmore, which was San Francisco's most prominent Black neighborhood and business district.²⁶⁷ Known as the Harlem of the West, the Fillmore was an integrated neighborhood²⁶⁸ that was famous for its jazz venues that hosted Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Charles Mingus, and Louis Armstrong.²⁶⁹

City agencies declared that the Western Addition was blighted in 1948 and began tearing it down in 1956.²⁷⁰ The plan was one of the largest projects of urban renewal on the West Coast.²⁷¹ The City of San Francisco closed 883 business, displaced 4,729 households, destroyed 2,500 Victorian homes²⁷² and damaged the lives of nearly 20,000 people.²⁷³ "The agency would go to a house and give the head of household a certificate that said they would be given preference in housing built in the future," Benjamin Ibarra, a spokesman for the agency, said in 2008. "But there wasn't a lot of housing built for a long time."²⁷⁴ The San Francisco city government left the land empty for many years.²⁷⁵

Another example of a predominantly Black community in Northern California that urban redevelopment destroyed is Russell City. Founded in 1853 along the Hayward shoreline in Alameda County, Danish immigrants initially lived in Russell City.²⁷⁶ By World War II, Russell City became primarily Black and Latino.²⁷⁷

"We were left to fend for ourselves. We had no public sewer system, so you saw many homes with outhouses, we had wells with no running water, the electrical grid was so unstable that many times we were in the dark," said former Russell City resident Marian "Edie" Eddens, who stated that living in Russell City was "the major challenge of [her] life."²⁷⁸

While Russell City lacked basic infrastructure and was economically poor, it was a culturally rich community.²⁷⁹ "Music and literature were my saving graces," recalled Gloria Bratton Sanders Moore, former resident of Russell City.²⁸⁰ Blues legends like Ray Charles and Etta James were known to perform at Russell City clubs when touring the west coast.²⁸¹

By the 1950s, Russell City was declared a "blight" by neighboring Hayward officials.²⁸² In 1963, the local governments of the City of Hayward and Alameda County forcibly relocated all Russell City residents, bulldozed the community, and rezoned the land for industrial use.²⁸³ Descendants of Russell City residents claim that displaced homeowners were forced to sell their land

without fair compensation.²⁸⁴ In 2021, the Hayward City Council passed a resolution formally apologizing to former Russell City residents for its participation in racially discriminatory housing practices such as racial steering and redlining.²⁸⁵

In Southern California, in 1950, the Los Angeles City Planning Commission planned to demolish 11 blighted areas; all but one were majority Mexican American or African American neighborhoods.²⁸⁶

Many of California's freeways were routed through Black neighborhoods. As noted above, the City of Los Angeles destroyed the prosperous Black neighborhood of Sugar Hill in 1954 by building the Interstate 10 freeway.²⁸⁷ Former residents said that the amount that the government paid for their homes was inadequate, and below market value.²⁸⁸ Los Angeles did it again in 1968 by building the Century Freeway through the Black neighborhoods of Watts and Willowbrook, displacing 3,550 families, 117 businesses, parks, schools, and churches.²⁸⁹

IX. Public Housing

The construction of government funded housing, or public housing, has contributed to housing segregation in two major ways throughout American history. First, from World War I until the 1950s, the federal government built high quality housing.²⁹⁷ Generally, federal practices did not allow African Americans to live in these high quality buildings, often building separate, low quality units for African Americans.²⁹⁸

Then, from 1950s, as the federal government subsidized mortgages for white families to move to the suburbs and paid local governments to demolish racially integrated neighborhoods, it also built high-rise apartment buildings in urban neighborhoods that were cut off from the richer, white suburbs.²⁹⁹ These high-rise public housing projects concentrated poverty in Black neighborhoods in the inner city.³⁰⁰

High Quality Public Housing for White Americans

Private real estate development stalled during the Great Depression due to the lack of available credit.³⁰¹ During the world wars, all available raw materials were directed

The Interstate 210 freeway destroyed a Black business district and racially diverse communities in Pasadena in the 1950s.²⁹⁰ The city offered residents \$75,000 for their homes, less than the minimum cost of purchasing a new home in Pasadena.²⁹¹ The freeway forced 4,000 Black and Mexican American residents to move back to inner-city Los Angeles.²⁹²

In Oakland, a total of 503 homes, 22 businesses, four churches, and 155 trees were demolished to construct Interstate 980.²⁹³ Once completed in 1985, the highway severed the predominantly Black neighborhoods of West Oakland from the rest of the city, setting the stage for underfunding of municipal projects in the area.²⁹⁴

In Fresno, the construction of highways 41 and 99 destroyed blocks of homes where Black families lived.²⁹⁵ In San Diego, much like in other parts of the state, the construction of freeways such as Interstate 5 disrupted African American communities.²⁹⁶

towards military use and private housing construction was banned.³⁰² By the end of World War II, these conditions created severe housing shortages for all Americans, regardless of race.³⁰³ In response, the federal govern-

In 1937, the federal government revised its strategy and created the U.S. Housing Authority (USHA), which gave federal money to local governments to build public housing. Although the USHA manual stated that government housing projects should not segregate what were previously integrated neighborhoods, it also warned local officials not to build housing for white families "in areas now occupied by Negroes."

ment built low-rise buildings for middle-class Americans that were scattered throughout the city, but did not subsidize the rent or maintenance.³⁰⁴ Instead, tenants paid full market price and for the building's maintenance, so the quality of public housing was high.³⁰⁵ Federal agencies funded public housing, which either barred African Americans, or the housing available to African Americans was segregated and in worse condition.³⁰⁶

During World War I, the federal government-built housing for white workers in the war industries: 170,000

white workers and their families lived in 83 government-built housing projects across 26 states.³⁰⁷ The federal government did not allow Black workers to live in this federally built housing and forced Black workers into overpopulated slums.³⁰⁸ In 1933, the federal government created the Public Works Administration (PWA), which cleared slums and built houses using its “neighborhood composition rule” to require federal housing projects to maintain the racial make-up of the neighborhood.³⁰⁹

All across the country, in cities like Detroit, Indianapolis, Toledo, New York, Birmingham, and Miami, the PWA segregated Black residents from white residents either by project or by concentrating African Americans into high density, low-income neighborhoods.³¹⁰ Another federal agency, the Tennessee Valley Authority, built 500 comfortable houses and leased them to its employees and construction workers.³¹¹ The federal government banned Black federal workers from the houses who lived in low quality barracks instead.³¹²

In 1984, investigative reporters found that 10 million federally funded public housing residents in 47 states were almost always segregated by race and that every housing project where the residents were mostly white was better maintained, and had decent facilities, amenities, and services

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During World War II, the federal government-built housing for white workers in the defense industry.³¹⁵ Black workers were either left to live in slums or in low-quality segregated housing.³¹⁶

Low Quality Housing for African Americans

Beginning in the 1950s, the government began subsidizing the rent in public housing and allowed only families making less than a certain amount to live in the buildings.³¹⁷ The buildings collected lower maintenance fees as a result and the quality of public housing deteriorated.³¹⁸ The federal government helped white families

move out of the city and purchase single family homes in the suburbs by subsidizing their mortgage.³¹⁹ Black families were prevented from moving into the suburbs due to the racist federal housing policies and restrictive covenants, discussed in the section of this chapter on redlining³²⁰ and racially restrictive covenants.³²¹

The federal government began funding enormous, segregated high rise projects, like the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago;³²² at the same time, a dozen states, including California, required local city approval of public housing projects.³²³ In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled that this approval process did not violate the federal constitution,³²⁴ so middle-class white communities rejected public housing projects.³²⁵

By 1973, President Richard Nixon announced that public housing projects were “monstrous, depressing places—rundown, overcrowded, crime-ridden.”³²⁶ In 1984, investigative reporters from the Dallas Morning News visited federally-funded developments in 47 metropolitan areas.³²⁷ The reporters

found that 10 million public housing residents were almost always segregated by race and that every housing project where the residents were mostly white was better maintained, and had decent facilities, amenities, and services.³²⁸

Although the Supreme Court of the United States decided in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 that seg-

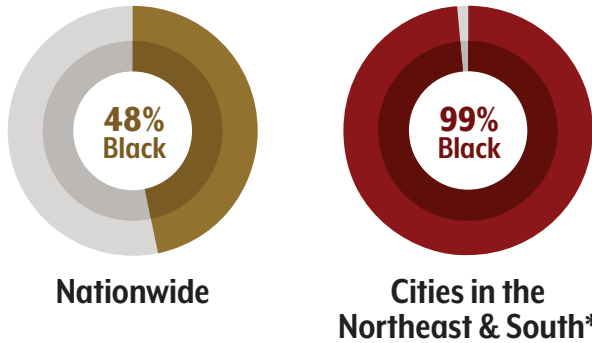
regation was unconstitutional, Berchmans Fitzpatrick, general counsel of the federal housing agency at the time, responded to the decision by saying that the decision did not apply to housing.³²⁹ Civil rights activists tried to bring suits against government segregation in public housing and the federal government announced anti-discrimination policies in name only. In practice, it continued to segregate.³³⁰

President John F. Kennedy tried to prohibit discrimination in housing by issuing Executive Order 11063, but the order only covered less than three percent of the total housing available in the United States.³³¹ Finally, the federal government, outlawed housing discrimination in 1964 with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which was re-enforced by the Fair Housing Act in 1968.³³²

The Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act did not change the reality on the ground, as civil rights advocates continued to file lawsuits over decades alleging that city housing authorities continued to discriminate in cities like Dallas, San Francisco, Yonkers, and

Baltimore.³³³ In opinion after opinion, federal courts recognized that federal and local government created or maintained segregation.³³⁴

Public Housing Residents (2000)



*Birmingham, Detroit, Memphis, New Orleans and Washington D.C.

Following the recession of the 1990s, the government began to demolish these impoverished high rise public housing projects as part of multimillion dollar redevelopment efforts, often specifically choosing projects where Black families lived.³³⁵ In 2000, 48 percent of public housing residents were Black nationwide, but in cities like Birmingham, Detroit, Memphis, New Orleans, and Washington D.C., 99 percent of public housing residents were Black.³³⁶ Cities where housing prices have risen the fastest have been the most aggressive in tearing down public housing.³³⁷

These redevelopments have resulted in mostly white, but sometimes Black middle-class residents moving into and displacing low-income Black neighborhoods.³³⁸ These government funded public housing demolitions not only displace the Black residents in the demolished buildings, but they speed up the gentrification of the surrounding neighborhood, and displace more Black residents.³³⁹ Although scholars are unsure if these government demolitions cause the neighborhood to gentrify, research has shown that they are an important factor in the neighborhood's continued gentrification.³⁴⁰

The redevelopments usually have fewer units of public housing, so residents generally move to other low-income neighborhoods.³⁴¹ This approach has produced mixed results.³⁴² Although former residents report that they are more satisfied with the quality of their new housing and the reduction in crime, their children continue to attend racially and economically segregated

schools, and their health and financial self-sufficiency reportedly did not improve.³⁴³

California

Segregation in California of African Americans intensified during World War II when African Americans arrived to work in the war industries. Unlike on the East Coast and in the Midwest, in California, because the Black population in California had been so small, there were no preset housing segregation patterns: Federal and local governments created segregation from a blank slate.³⁴⁴

Carey McWilliams, who had been California's housing commissioner in the early years of World War II, later wrote that "the federal government [had] in effect been planting the seeds of Jim Crow practices throughout the region under the guise of 'respecting local attitudes.'"³⁴⁵

In Northern California, one of the largest shipbuilders in the country during World War II was located in Richmond.³⁴⁶ From 1940 to 1945, Richmond's population increased from 24,000 to 100,000 with defense industry workers.³⁴⁷ Richmond's Black population increased from 270 in 1940 to 14,000 in 1945.³⁴⁸

As with the rest of the country, the federal government paid for segregated housing to be built for defense work-

While white workers lived in rooms paid for by the federal government, Black war workers lived in cardboard shacks, barns, tents, or open fields. By 1947, half of the 26,000 Black residents of Richmond were living in temporary housing.

ers during World War II.³⁴⁹ Housing available only to white workers was more likely to be better constructed, permanent, and further inland.³⁵⁰ The federal government issued low interest loans for white homeowners to remodel and subdivide their houses, and leased spare rooms for white workers to move in as tenants.³⁵¹

Black housing was close to the shipbuilding site, badly constructed, and there simply was not enough of it.³⁵² While white workers lived in rooms paid for by the federal government, Black war workers lived in cardboard shacks, barns, tents, or open fields.³⁵³ By 1947, half of the 26,000 Black residents of Richmond were living in temporary housing.³⁵⁴

The federal government then helped white families finance suburban homes and leave temporary apartments near the shipyard.³⁵⁵ For example, the federal government contracted with a private developer to build a new suburb called Rollingwood and forbade the developer from selling any of Rollingwood's 700 houses to African Americans.³⁵⁶ In 1952, Wilbur Gary, a Black war veteran bought a house in Rollingwood, angering his white neighbors.³⁵⁷ Three hundred white residents gathered in front of his house, shouted racial slurs, threw a brick through the window, and burned a cross on his front lawn.³⁵⁸

Some Black workers bought land in unincorporated North Richmond, but could not get construction loans because unlike for white Americans, the federal government refused to insure bank loans for African Americans.³⁵⁹ Other Black families moved into the housing projects that white families had left behind.³⁶⁰ By 1950, more than three-quarters of Richmond's Black population lived in the housing projects built during the war.³⁶¹

In 1942, the United States Navy demanded that the San Francisco Housing Authority segregate housing built for the 14,000 workers and their families at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard.³⁶² The San Francisco Housing Authority announced in 1942: "In the selection of tenants . . . [we shall] not insofar as possible enforce the commingling of races, but shall insofar as possible maintain and preserve the same racial composition which exists in the neighborhood where a project is located."³⁶³

San Francisco built five other segregated projects during World War II, four for whites only.³⁶⁴ Apartments

earmarked for white workers only sat empty as Black workers waited on long waiting lists.³⁶⁵

One of the few integrated neighborhoods where African Americans could live was the Western Addition,³⁶⁶ which was torn down later as part of urban renewal, discussed above in the section on condemnation and eminent domain. When the federal government sent Japanese Americans living in the Western Addition to American concentration internment camps, African Americans moved in.³⁶⁷

In 1952, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People sued the San Francisco Housing Authority for continuing to build whites only housing.³⁶⁸ The head of the agency testified that the city agency's intent was to "localize occupancy of Negroes" in the Western Addition and ensure that no African Americans would reside in projects inhabited by whites.³⁶⁹ The NAACP won its legal case, but the city agency continued to build segregated housing in San Francisco.³⁷⁰

In some areas in California, the demolition of public housing occurred without replacement housing for displaced African Americans. For example, in Richmond, the city prioritized developments primarily occupied by Black families in its demolition plans.³⁷¹ The city abandoned plans to build over 4,000 permanent public housing units.³⁷² The demolition displaced 700 Black families from their homes in 1952 and only 16 percent of them could find a home in the private housing market.³⁷³ By 1960, thousands of former public housing residents lost their homes.³⁷⁴

X. Redlining

Redlining refers to a federal and local governmental practice, acting together with private banks, to systematically deny home loans to Black people.³⁷⁵ Redlining was accomplished at the federal level with three agencies: Federal Housing Administration, Veterans Administration (VA), and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC).³⁷⁶ The FHA helped new homeowners buy houses,³⁷⁷ the VA helped veterans (World War II and others),³⁷⁸ and HOLC helped prevent foreclosures as a result of the Great Depression for existing homeowners.³⁷⁹

These three federal agencies helped millions of mostly white Americans buy houses by insuring and subsidizing mortgages, while refusing the same opportunity to African Americans.³⁸⁰ Or, in the words of the federal

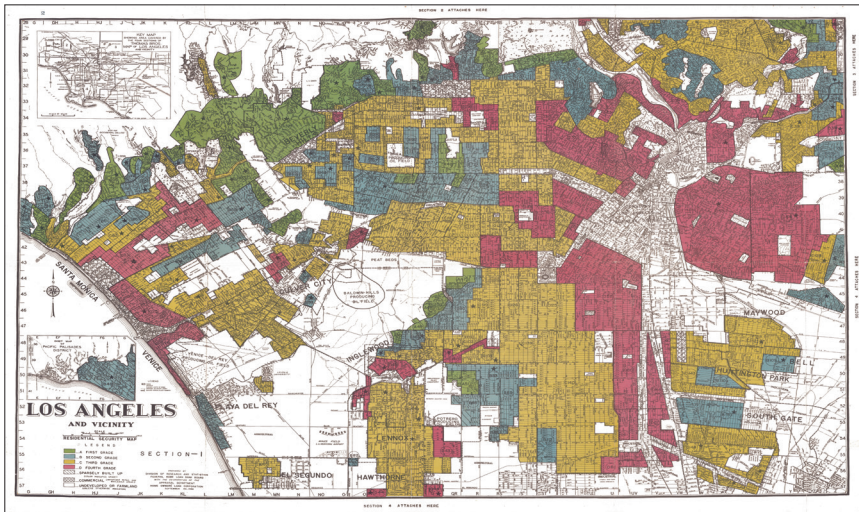
agencies, exclusion was directed at "inharmonious racial group or nationality groups."³⁸¹

With a federally insured mortgage, the federal government protects lenders, like banks, against losing money. If the homeowner stops paying their mortgage, the federal government would step in and pay the bank

African Americans received

2% of federal home loans
between 1934 and 1962

COURTESY OF DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP LAB UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND



A Homeowner's Loan Corporation map of Los Angeles detailing A, B, C and D grade areas of the city. An "A" rating, shaded in green, was for the best neighborhoods that were new and all white. A "D" rating, shaded in red, was the worst category, and reserved for all-Black neighborhoods, even if it was middle class. This process was called "redlining." (1939)

the amount of the unpaid principal in the loan.³⁸² As a result, banks were far more willing and likely to issue an insured mortgage to a white applicant, than an uninsured mortgage to a Black applicant.³⁸³

Enriched with these mortgages, white Americans moved out of America's city centers, taking with them their middle-class tax bases into the suburbs and leaving urban poverty in its wake.³⁸⁴ Unable to access the same mortgages to reach the suburbs, African Americans remained in the impoverished urban centers.³⁸⁵

This practice continued legally until 1962, when President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order prohibiting the use of federal funds to support racial discrimination in newly constructed housing.³⁸⁶ Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government had issued \$120 billion in home loans, 98 percent of which went to white people.³⁸⁷

Although redlining is no longer legal, its effects appear to endure. One study has found associations between historically redlined neighborhoods, air pollution and cancer, asthma, poor mental health, and people without health insurance.³⁸⁸ The same study also found that residents in certain historically redlined areas were close to twice as likely to have poor health when compared to areas that did not have redlining.³⁸⁹

Home Owners' Loan Corporation

The Home Owners' Loan Corporation refinanced tens of thousands of mortgages in danger of default or foreclosure and issued low-interest loans to help homeowners recover homes that were already foreclosed.³⁹⁰ Between

July 1933 and June 1935, HOLC used \$3 billion to finance more than a million mortgages.³⁹¹

HOLC examiners assessed real estate values and mortgage lending risks for 239 mid-sized cities between 1939 and 1945, and developed "Residential Security Maps" for the entire country.³⁹²

These maps rated neighborhoods from "A," for the best neighborhoods, to "D," the worst neighborhoods.³⁹³ Grade "A" was shaded in green on the maps and assigned to blocks in neighborhoods that were new and all white.³⁹⁴ HOLC assigned Grade "B," shaded in blue, to stable, outlying, Jewish and white working-class neighborhoods.³⁹⁵ Grade "C" was for inner-city neighborhoods bordering mostly Black communities or neighborhoods that already had a small Black population and shaded yellow.³⁹⁶ Grade "D" was the worst category, and reserved for all-Black neighborhoods, even if it was middle class, and shaded in red.³⁹⁷ This process was called "redlining."³⁹⁸

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Historians debate the level of direct influence these maps had on how banks made their decisions,³⁹⁹ but generally agree that redlining resulted in the devaluation of Black homes across the entire country, making it difficult for African Americans to buy, build, or renovate their homes.⁴⁰⁰

Along with the 1939 Federal Housing Administration Underwriting manual, the HOLC Residential Security Maps cemented the federal government's support of the routine real estate industry practice of devaluing real estate owned by nonwhite property owners,⁴⁰¹ a practice that continues to this day.⁴⁰²

Californian homeowner Paul Austin testified during the October 13, 2021 Task Force meeting that a home appraiser valued the property of he and his wife at just below \$1 million, which was much less than they expected because of significant improvements they had made to their home. They asked a friend to pretend to be his wife, removed anything in their house that would indicate their race, and hired a different appraiser. The new appraiser valued the property at just less than \$1.5 million, which was nearly half a million more than the previous estimate. Austin also testified his grandparents migrated from the South to the Marin City area during

the 1940s to work in the shipyards, but were trapped in that area because of redlining. He also testified that his paternal grandparents secretly purchased land and built a home in Mill Valley because African Americans were not allowed to buy property in the area.

The 1947 and 1958 versions of the FHA underwriting manual did not directly mention race, but instructed mortgage lenders to consider “physical and social attractiveness[]” and whether the families living in the neighborhoods were “congenial” when evaluating the credit risk. State-regulated insurance companies, like the Equitable Life Insurance Company and the Prudential Life Insurance Company, also declared that their policy was to not issue mortgages to whites in integrated neighborhoods.

Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration

Congress created the Federal Housing Administration in 1934 to insure bank mortgages for first time homeowners.⁴⁰³ Where the Home Owners' Loan Corporation reinforced segregation by creating the Residential Security Maps, the FHA issued the FHA Underwriting Manual.⁴⁰⁴ The 1936 Manual warned of the increased risk that a homeowner would not pay their mortgage in a neighborhood with “inharmonious racial groups.”⁴⁰⁵

The 1947 and 1958 versions of the FHA underwriting manual did not directly mention race, but instructed mortgage lenders to consider “physical and social attractiveness[]” and whether the families living in the neighborhoods were “congenial” when evaluating the credit risk.⁴⁰⁶ State-regulated insurance companies, like the Equitable Life Insurance Company and the Prudential Life Insurance Company, also declared that their policy was to not issue mortgages to whites in integrated neighborhoods.⁴⁰⁷

Because the FHA refused to insure mortgages for African Americans, banks shouldered additional risk if they loaned to Black families rather than white families, so they essentially did not do so.⁴⁰⁸ Between 1935 and 1950, the FHA administered 2,761,000 home mortgages and only about 50,000 were made available to nonwhite Americans.⁴⁰⁹

In addition to encouraging banks to discriminate against African Americans in the credit assessment process, author Richard Rothstein argues that the FHA made its biggest impact when it financed the development of entire suburbs.⁴¹⁰ When the FHA reviewed plans for suburban development projects it demanded that the real estate developer not sell houses to African Americans and sometimes withheld approval of the projects if Black families lived in nearby neighborhoods.⁴¹¹ Once the real estate developer built the housing development to the federal government's specifications, including a prohibition on selling to Black families, qualified white buyers did not need to have their new house appraised for the federal government to guarantee their mortgages.⁴¹² Without FHA or Veterans Administration financing, developers built inferior neighborhoods without community facilities like parks and playgrounds.⁴¹³

Further discussion of the health impact of a lack of green space is discussed in Chapter 7 on the environment. Because African Americans could not access mortgages, many houses in these neighborhoods were rental properties instead. Black families were deprived of this opportunity to build wealth.⁴¹⁴ A 1967 study showed that out of 400,000 housing units in FHA-insured subdivisions, only 3.3 percent had been sold to Black families.⁴¹⁵

After World War II, Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill, offering education, small business and unem-

When the FHA reviewed plans for suburban development projects it demanded that the real estate developer not sell houses to African Americans and sometimes withheld approval of the projects if Black families lived in nearby neighborhoods.

ployment benefits to military veterans. The GI Bill also authorized the VA to insure mortgages for veterans as the FHA did for civilians. It adopted FHA housing policies, and VA appraisers relied on the FHA's Underwriting Manual.⁴¹⁶ The VA guaranteed approximately five million

In Northern California, from 1946 to 1960, 350,000 new homes were built with support from the FHA, but fewer than 100 of these homes went to Black people.⁴³⁶

Not only did federal agencies refused to insure mortgages to African Americans, they also refused mortgages to white Americans who attempted to live alongside African Americans.

In 1954, a resident of the white only neighborhood of East Palo Alto sold his house to a Black family.⁴³⁷ This sparked a phenomenon called blockbusting, in which local real estate agents exploited racial fears and manipulated white residents to sell their houses at a low price, then reselling the houses at a higher price to Black families.⁴³⁸ As white residents fled the neighborhood, other white homeowners became desperate to sell their houses at even lower prices.⁴³⁹

A 1970 report concluded that the average markup Black families paid in blockbusted neighborhoods was 80 to 100 percent higher than neighborhoods not undergoing racial change.⁴⁴⁰ In response to blockbusting in East Palo Alto, the California real estate commissioner stated that the commission did not regulate such “unethical practices.”⁴⁴¹ FHA and Veterans Administration policies discouraged white residents from moving into

neighborhoods in the process of being integrated like East Palo Alto at the time, since the government did not insure mortgages for white families in integrated neighborhoods where Black families lived.⁴⁴² Within six years, the population of East Palo Alto was 82 percent Black, and housing conditions had deteriorated markedly.⁴⁴³

The FHA advised the white homeowner that because he rented his house to a Black colleague, any future application from him “will be rejected on the basis of an Unsatisfactory Risk Determination made by this office on April 30, 1959.”

In another example in 1958, a Black San Francisco schoolteacher named Alfred Simmons rented a house with a FHA-guaranteed mortgage from a fellow white schoolteacher in the Elmwood district of Berkeley.⁴⁴⁴ The Berkeley police chief requested that the Federal Bureau of Investigation investigate how Mr. Simmons came to live in an all-white community, and the FBI referred the case to the U.S. Attorney.⁴⁴⁵ The FHA advised the white homeowner that because he rented his house to a Black colleague, any future application from him “will be rejected on the basis of an Unsatisfactory Risk Determination made by this office on April 30, 1959.”⁴⁴⁶

XI. Racially Restrictive Covenants

Racially restrictive covenants are legally binding contracts, usually written into the deed, that prohibit nonwhite people from living on a property or in a neighborhood.⁴⁴⁷ For example, a deed in 2010, in Fairhaven,

shall be a member, stockholder, officer or director.”⁴⁴⁸ By helping preserve segregation and a system of racial hierarchy, such covenants are yet another example of the enduring effects of slavery.

Between 1923 and 1924, real estate boards in Milwaukee, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, and other cities prohibited their realtors from selling or renting property in white neighborhoods to African Americans.

Massachusetts included the following clause, introduced in 1946: “The said land shall not be sold, leased or rented to any person other than of the Caucasian race or to any entity of which any person other than that of said race

Racially restrictive covenants began appearing in the late nineteenth century and were first directed against Chinese and Punjabi residents in California.⁴⁴⁹ By 1900, developers began inserting them into the deeds of homes built in new subdivisions all across the country.⁴⁵⁰ Minneapolis, Minnesota had racially restrictive covenants as early as 1910 and late as 1955.⁴⁵¹ Further, between 1923 and 1924, real estate boards in Milwaukee, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, and other cities prohibited their realtors from selling or renting property in white neighborhoods to African Americans.⁴⁵²

In 1917, racial zoning, discussed earlier in this chapter, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court,⁴⁵³ but the Supreme Court declared that racially restrictive covenants did not violate the constitution in 1926.⁴⁵⁴ The Supreme Court reasoned that the covenant was a contract between private individuals not subject to state control.⁴⁵⁵

Government officials began promoting racially restrictive covenants as an alternative, constitutional way to maintain segregation.⁴⁵⁶ President Herbert Hoover opened the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership by declaring that single-family homes were "expressions of racial longing" and "[t]hat our people should live in their own homes is a sentiment deep in the heart of our race."⁴⁵⁷ Conference materials then recommended that all new neighborhoods include "appropriate restrictions," such as barring the sale of homes to African Americans.⁴⁵⁸

Federal officials also recommended homeowners form "[r]estricted residential districts' [which] may serve as protection against persons with whom your family won't care to associate, provided the restrictions are enforced and are not merely temporary."⁴⁵⁹ These racially restrictive districts appeared soon afterwards and functioned like bylaws in a neighborhood association and a neighbor could sue to evict a Black family that bought a house in the neighborhood.⁴⁶⁰

Scholars have found that wealthy white communities used restrictive covenants, while white working class communities used a combination of violence and covenants to keep African Americans from moving into their neighborhoods.⁴⁶¹

Simultaneously, government actors and real estate agents often used different mechanisms to segregate a neighborhood. The 1936 Federal Housing Administration Underwriting Manual stated that zoning regulations alone are not enough "to assure a homogeneous and harmonious neighborhood.... Recorded deed restrictions should strengthen and supplement zoning ordinances... Recommended restrictions include . . . [p]rohibition of the occupancy of properties except by the race for which they are intended [and a]ppropriate provisions for enforcement."⁴⁶² The 1938 FHA Underwriting Manual stated clearly: "If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes."⁴⁶³ The Veterans Administration also recommended and frequently demanded that racial covenants be added into the deeds of the mortgages it sponsored.⁴⁶⁴

As a result, racially restrictive covenants appeared all over the country. By 1940, according to news reports quoted in the 1973 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Report, 80 percent of homes in Chicago and Los Angeles contained restrictive covenants barring Black families.⁴⁶⁵ A survey of 300 developments built between 1935 and 1947 in the suburbs of New York City found that 56 percent of the 300 developments and 85 percent of larger subdivisions had racially restrictive covenants.⁴⁶⁶

The University of Chicago subsidized the home owners' associations surrounding its campus. From 1933 to 1947, it spent \$100,000 on legal services to defend racially restrictive covenants and evict African Americans who moved into the neighborhood.⁴⁶⁷

All over the country, white neighbors sued their Black neighbors to prevent them from moving into or to evict them from their legally purchased homes.⁴⁶⁸ In 1942, the Oklahoma Supreme Court not only declared that the property purchased by a Black buyer was void due to a racial covenant, but it also ordered the Black buyer to pay for the court costs and attorney's fees of the white neighbor who sued.⁴⁶⁹ In Westlake in Daly City, California, the total fine of \$16,000 for selling to a Black family was greater than the typical home sale price.⁴⁷⁰



By 1940 **80%** of homes in Los Angeles contained restrictive covenants **barring Black families**

In 1948, the Supreme Court reversed course from its 1926 decision and held that although the government had no control over whether a racially restrictive covenant can be added to a deed, it is unconstitutional for American courts to recognize and enforce the covenants.⁴⁷¹

Racially restrictive covenants were so widespread by then that three of the Supreme Court justices recused themselves from the case because they owned houses covered by racially restrictive covenants.⁴⁷²

Two weeks after the Court announced its decision, FHA commissioner Franklin D. Richards stated that the decision would "in no way affect the programs of this agency," which would make "no change in our basic concepts or procedures."⁴⁷³ In 1952, the FHA commissioner stated that "it was not the purpose of [the FHA] to

forbid segregation or to deny the benefits of the National Housing Act to persons who might be unwilling to disregard race, color, or creed in the selection of their purchasers or tenants.”⁴⁷⁴

Although racially restrictive covenants were declared unconstitutional in 1948, their popularity continued for decades,⁴⁷⁵ and racially homogenous neighborhoods continued after these covenants ceased to be enforced.⁴⁷⁶ John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush all lived in neighborhoods or homes with racially restrictive covenants.⁴⁷⁷ The home that George W. Bush bought in 2008 was located where the neighborhood association enforced a racially restrictive covenant until 2000.⁴⁷⁸

In Myers Park, a neighborhood in Charlotte, North Carolina, the housing association appeared to be enforcing its racially restrictive covenant in 2010, when it added the covenant to its website.⁴⁷⁹

California

Racially restrictive covenants and they were widely used throughout the state.⁴⁸⁰ Like the rest of the country, although racially restrictive covenants were private contracts, they worked in conjunction with federal policy to devalue Black property and prevent African Americans from accessing home loans. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation maps for Pasadena devalued a neighborhood because its restrictive covenants had expired, potentially allowing African Americans to move in: “This district was originally much smaller but constant infiltration into other sections as deed restrictions expired has create[d] [sic] a real menace which is greatly concerning property owners of Pasadena and Altadena.”⁴⁸¹

In southern California, after its founding in 1903, the Los Angeles Realty Board campaigned to attach racially restrictive land covenants on as many new developments

as possible.⁴⁸² Paul R. Williams, a prominent Black Los Angeles architect who designed houses for Frank Sinatra, Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, and Cary Grant, could not legally live in the neighborhoods he designed due to restrictive covenants.⁴⁸³ Williams taught himself to draw upside down because his white clients were uncomfortable sitting next to him and toured construction sites with hands clasped behind his back to avoid the situation where someone would refuse to shake a Black man's hand.⁴⁸⁴

From 1937 to 1948, more than 100 lawsuits attempted to enforce covenants and evict Black families from their homes in Los Angeles.⁴⁸⁵ In one 1947 case, a Black homeowner refused to leave the home he bought in violation of a covenant and he was jailed.⁴⁸⁶ In Whittier, a Los Angeles suburb, the Quaker-affiliated Whittier College participated in a restrictive covenant applied to its neighborhood.⁴⁸⁷

John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush all lived in neighborhoods or homes with racially restrictive covenants. The home that George W. Bush bought in 2008 was located where the neighborhood association enforced a racially restrictive covenant until 2000.

In 1943, the city attorney of Culver City, an all-white suburb of Los Angeles, told a meeting of air raid wardens that when they went door to door to make sure families turned off the lights to avoid helping Japanese bombers find targets to also circulate documents in which homeowners promised not to sell or rent to African Americans.⁴⁸⁸

In 2021, AB 1466 was enacted to require county recorders to identify and redact racially restrictive covenants from California real estate records.⁴⁸⁹

XII. Racial Terrorism

Nationally

As discussed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror, white Americans used racial terror and vigilante violence to prevent African Americans from moving into white

neighborhoods. The police often did not investigate or failed to arrest the perpetrators when crosses were burned on lawns, homes were bombed, and Black homeowners were murdered.⁴⁹⁰

California

Like elsewhere in the country, white Californians used violence to enforce the racial hierarchy created during slavery by preventing African Americans from moving into desirable white neighborhoods.⁴⁹¹ In fact, violent incidents in California rose in the 1950s and 1960s, after courts declared restrictive covenants unenforceable.⁴⁹²

COURTESY OF LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS/UCLA LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS



Los Angeles, CA., William Bailey and Roger Duncan look at the wreckage in Bailey's living room after a bomb exploded in the house. Duncan's house, directly across the street, was also bombed at the same time and a note was left threatening all the Black families on the street if they didn't move out. (1952)

Ku Klux Klan terror and violence reached a peak in the Los Angeles area in the spring of 1946.⁴⁹³ Although KKK meetings were banned in California in May 1946 after the murder of the Short family who had been living in Fontana, California, as discussed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror, the ban had little to no effect because no one enforced it.⁴⁹⁴ Of the 27 KKK actions (e.g., cross-burnings, fires, and threatening letters and phone calls) documented in Los Angeles in 1946, more than half occurred after the issuance of the ban.⁴⁹⁵ In a span of two weeks in May 1946, there were four separate actions, ranging from cross-burnings to severe physical beatings.⁴⁹⁶ One

was targeted at a Black family that lived in an all-white neighborhood, and the others were targeted at other individuals who advocated against restrictive covenants.⁴⁹⁷ Law enforcement and the mayor shrugged off the violence as “prank[s].”⁴⁹⁸ When concerned residents and members of social justice organizations approached the mayor to address the incidents, the mayor accused them of prejudice against the KKK.⁴⁹⁹

Los Angeles continued to be the epicenter of the violence in California, as Black residents who moved into white neighborhoods were met with cross-burnings, bombings, rock throwing, graffiti, and other acts of violence.⁵⁰⁰ Of the over 100 incidents of move-in bombings and vandalism that occurred in Los Angeles between 1950 and 1965, only one led to an arrest and prosecution.⁵⁰¹

Los Angeles was not the only area where the KKK attacked Black homeowners. In 1946, for instance, a home built by a Black war veteran was burned down in Redwood City after threats and move-out demands.⁵⁰² In 1952, in a white Bay Area neighborhood, a Black family became the target of death threats, violence, and intimidation by white residents after the family refused a buyout of their home.⁵⁰³ A KKK cross was placed on their lawn and a 300 to 400 person mob stoned their home and shouted threats.⁵⁰⁴ Though the action happened in front of law enforcement, officers refused to make any arrests.⁵⁰⁵ Even when the Governor, Attorney General, and local district attorney ordered the city police and county sheriff to provide the family with protection, protests and harassment continued for months without any arrests.⁵⁰⁶ And in the 1950s, the weekend home of a San Francisco NAACP leader was mysteriously burned down.⁵⁰⁷ The violence and subsequent silence surrounding the crimes committed against Black Californians demonstrates how white Californians viewed Black presence and homeownership as a threat to white dominance.⁵⁰⁸

XIII. Housing Segregation Today

Housing segregation and its effects have never been eliminated in the United States.⁵⁰⁹ The racist housing policies and practices of the federal, state, and local governments have amplified private action and continue to shape the American landscape today.⁵¹⁰

Although residential segregation between Black and white Americans in the United States peaked between 1960 and 1970,⁵¹¹ America is about as segregated today

for African Americans as it was in 1940.⁵¹² By contrast, in 2010, the typical white person in a metropolitan region lived in a neighborhood that was 75 percent white.⁵¹³ Even though white areas have become less solidly white since 1980, they have not become significantly more Black.⁵¹⁴ Today, 90 percent of African Americans live in cities,⁵¹⁵ and 41 percent of the Black population of American metro areas live in city neighborhoods that are majority Black.⁵¹⁶

Housing segregation is more intractable than other forms of segregation and discrimination.⁵¹⁷ Moving from an urban apartment to a suburban single family home is more difficult than registering to vote, eating at a restaurant, or even being bussed to a nearby school, and requires potentially generations of effort.⁵¹⁸ The Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited future discrimination, but did not fix the structures put in place by 100 years of discriminatory government policies.⁵¹⁹ Richard Rothstein argues that residential desegregation requires a massive effort of social engineering.⁵²⁰

This line of Supreme Court cases has made proving current housing discrimination and erasure of the effects of old government policies of housing segregation very difficult.⁵²⁹ In other words, it very difficult to bring a successful housing discrimination lawsuit.

Continued Housing Discrimination

Mortgage and housing discrimination continues in many forms today. Researchers continue to find that Black residents are charged higher prices for identical units in the same neighborhood as white residents.⁵³⁰ Lenders use predatory lending practices more often in minority neighborhoods than white neighborhoods.⁵³¹ Indeed, homeowners in segregated Black neighborhoods are more likely to have subprime mortgages.⁵³²

Before 2008, Black and Latino borrowers were four times more likely to receive a more expensive mortgage than white borrowers, a practice called reverse redlining.⁵³³ Big banks across the country used reverse redlining to target communities of color with higher interest rates and fees.⁵³⁴ Before 2008, banks specifically targeted Black and Hispanic homeowners to advertise toxic subprime mortgages and other predatory practices that triggered the Great Recession.⁵³⁵ Black homeowners received toxic subprime mortgages at three times the rate of white mortgage lenders.⁵³⁶

America is more segregated today for African Americans than it was in 1940.

No such massive effort has occurred. Instead, the Supreme Court has made private lawsuits fighting housing discrimination more difficult,⁵²¹ and housing discrimination persists in new and different ways.⁵²² Policies that may not seem to discriminate at first glance have reinforced the structures put in place by past racist government actions.⁵²³

The Supreme Court

In 1977, the Supreme Court upheld a city's denial of request to rezone a tract of land in a mostly white suburb of Chicago, which banned the construction of apartment buildings anywhere except next to a commercial area.⁵²⁴ The neighborhood in question had been zoned for single family houses without change since 1959.⁵²⁵ This zoning ordinance had a "disproportionate impact on blacks" by effectively preventing lower income residents, who were more likely to be Black as compared to other Chicago area residents, from moving into the neighborhood.⁵²⁶

Even though the zoning decision meeting included comments from the public about the undesirability of rezoning so as to allow apartments that would "probably be racially integrated," the Supreme Court decided that the city council members themselves had no discriminatory intent when it voted for the zoning ordinance.⁵²⁷ With *Arlington Heights* and the cases that followed, the Supreme Court essentially announced a rule that in order to prove that a law, regulation, or practice is unconstitutional, plaintiffs must prove that the decision makers intended to discriminate.⁵²⁸

**Before 2008, compared to whites,
Black and Latino borrowers were**

4x

MORE LIKELY

to receive a more
expensive mortgage

In Memphis, employees of Wells Fargo Bank referred to these loans as "ghetto loans," and bank supervisors targeted Black zip codes because they believed that residents "weren't savvy enough."⁵³⁷ According to the U.S. Department of Justice in 2010, the more segregated a community, the more likely lenders targeted the homeowners for toxic loans, and the more likely the home was foreclosed.⁵³⁸

From July 2019 to June 2020, compared to whites applicants, Black applicants were

2.5x to be rejected
MORE LIKELY for mortgages

As a result, Black and Latino homeowners, were hit particularly hard by the 2008 crisis.⁵³⁹ From 2001 to 2019, the rate of Black homeownership declined five times as much as the homeownership rate for white families,⁵⁴⁰ erasing all the gains made since the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968.⁵⁴¹ Homes in Black neighborhoods were more likely to be foreclosed than homes in white neighborhoods.⁵⁴² By 2011, a quarter of Black homeowners had either lost their homes to foreclosure or were “seriously delinquent” on their mortgages.⁵⁴³

In settling a lawsuit against the Countrywide mortgage company, the federal Secretary of Housing and Urban Development said that due to Countrywide’s discriminatory practices, “[f]rom Jamaica, Queens, New York, to Oakland, California, strong, middle-class African American neighborhoods saw nearly two decades of gains reversed in a matter of not years—but months.”⁵⁴⁴

Despite multiple lawsuits brought by the U.S. Department of Justice⁵⁴⁵ and by cities like Baltimore,⁵⁴⁶ Memphis,⁵⁴⁷ and Cleveland,⁵⁴⁸ the mortgage industry continues to discriminate against Black home buyers.

From July 2019 to June 2020, Black mortgage applicants were 2.5 times more likely than white applicants to be rejected for mortgages.⁵⁴⁹ Studies continue to show that Black mortgage borrowers pay more in financing fees,⁵⁵⁰ mortgage insurance,⁵⁵¹ and property taxes.⁵⁵²

XIV. Effects

Once federal, state, and local governments, along with private actors, segregated the American landscape, they directed resources to white neighborhoods, and neglected Black neighborhoods. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the National Advisory Commission

on Civil Disorders to investigate the causes of the racial violence in the summer of 1967.⁵⁶² The report concluded that: “[S]egregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans.”⁵⁶³ The subsequent chapters

California

California remains racially segregated,⁵⁵⁷ although Black-white segregation has decreased since 1980 in cities like Los Angeles, Oakland, and Riverside.⁵⁵⁸

There is also evidence that lenders discriminate against African Americans in California. For example, one study found that in 2019, despite making up 5.5 percent of the state’s population, Black Californians received only 3.28 percent of home purchase loans.⁵⁵⁹ The magnitude of this disparity varies across metro areas in the state.⁵⁶⁰ Another study found that in 2013, Black Californians

Before 2008, banks specifically targeted Black and Hispanic homeowners to advertise toxic subprime mortgages that triggered the Great Recession. In Memphis, employees of Wells Fargo Bank referred to these loans as “ghetto loans[,]” and bank supervisors targeted Black zip codes because they believed that residents “weren’t savvy enough[.]”

made up 2.7 percent of all home mortgage loan applicants, received 2.4 percent of all home mortgage loans originated, and received 1.7 percent of all home mortgage loan dollars in the state.⁵⁶¹

on environment and infrastructure, education, health, labor, and wealth will discuss these persisting effects of slavery in detail.

Segregated Black communities have less access to public transit and must deal with longer commute times, which contributes to higher rates of unemployment among African Americans.⁵⁶⁴ In the past, local governments delayed providing public services like water and sewage at first.⁵⁶⁵ Once the services were eventually provided to Black neighborhoods, they were provided less often.⁵⁶⁶ Today, many all-black neighborhoods depend on aging water and sewage infrastructure and unreliable supplies.⁵⁶⁷ Local governments did not invest as much in road and street services in black neighborhoods, and the roads are less safe for pedestrians and cyclists.⁵⁶⁸

Black communities pay more for energy because they live in older, energy-inefficient homes.⁵⁶⁹ Oil and gas extractions are more likely to be in Black neighborhoods, leading to environmental pollution.⁵⁷⁰ Segregated black neighborhoods are less likely to have access to parks and greenspace, and are less likely to have tree cover.⁵⁷¹ Tree cover cools neighborhoods during the summer and absorbs air pollution. Higher temperatures during the summer results in more heat related illnesses and exposure to more air pollution results in respiratory illness, both which occur more often in segregated neighborhoods.⁵⁷² A lack of greenspace also deprives Black communities, and especially poor Black communities, of the benefits of nature, especially beneficial for child development.⁵⁷³

Segregation has concentrated poverty in Black and Latino neighborhoods in America, and is associated with worse outcomes in almost every aspect of life. Neighborhood poverty rates are three times higher in segregated communities of color than in white neighborhoods.⁵⁷⁴ Segregation is associated with lower high school graduation, lower earnings, and single motherhood among African Americans.⁵⁷⁵ Residents of segregated neighborhoods have more illnesses and die younger.⁵⁷⁶ Residential segregation is a major contributing factor to the Black and white wealth gap, as discussed in Chapter 13 on wealth. Homes in segregated black neighborhoods tends to be older, smaller, and on more densely settled lots than in disproportionately white neighborhoods.⁵⁷⁷ According to U.S. Census Bureau, the median home value in majority Black neighborhoods is \$149,217, while the median home value in neighborhoods that are less than one percent Black is \$306,511.⁵⁷⁸

School districts are funded by local tax bases, which are determined by home values, so Black and Latino segregated local districts receive less funds, fewer resources, and less experienced teachers than white school districts. Further, as Joseph Gibbons testified during the December 7, 2021 Task Force meeting, gentrification has many negative effects on African Americans beyond the obvious displacement of African Americans, such as higher rates of stress and other adverse health effects.⁵⁷⁹

In the last decade, Black Californians were less likely to own a home than in the 1960s, when housing discrimination was legal.

Some researchers have argued that segregation plays an important role in the racial disparity among unhoused individuals.⁵⁸⁰ Throughout American history, significant numbers of African Americans have been unhoused,⁵⁸¹ although specific data based on race is not always available.⁵⁸² The story of African Americans experiencing homelessness has often been left out, underreported, or misrepresented.⁵⁸³

Many enslaved people seeking freedom became unhoused after escaping bondage.⁵⁸⁴ After the Civil War, close to four million African Americans were unhoused.⁵⁸⁵ African Americans were hit the hardest during the Great Depression, were excluded from many private agencies offering aid and the benefits of the New Deal, and many became unhoused.⁵⁸⁶ During the Post World War II period, between nine to 40 percent of Skid Row residents were Black men, depending on the city.⁵⁸⁷ However, the number of African Americans who have been unhoused is relatively small when considering the number of impoverished or unemployed African Americans.⁵⁸⁸ Scholars have attributed this to the robust family and neighborhood support systems of Black communities.⁵⁸⁹

In the last 50 years, the number of Black unhoused individuals has risen.⁵⁹⁰ African Americans now make up 39 percent of people experiencing homelessness and 53 percent of families experiencing homelessness with children.⁵⁹¹ Scholars have attributed this to the compounding harms of urban renewal,⁵⁹² loss of blue collar jobs,⁵⁹³ the crack cocaine epidemic,⁵⁹⁴ historical and continued housing discrimination,⁵⁹⁵ mass incarceration,⁵⁹⁶ lack of access to health insurance and mental health services,⁵⁹⁷ and lack of affordable housing.⁵⁹⁸

Due to the effects of government segregation policy, African Americans earn less and are more likely to be renters than white Americans, making them more vulnerable to homelessness.⁵⁹⁹ This risk of homelessness is amplified by the fact that Black households are more likely than white households to be extremely low-income renters.⁶⁰⁰ Because government policies have historically crippled the ability of Black households to purchase houses, they are more likely to be renters than white households.⁶⁰¹ One study found that Black renters continue to pay more than white renters for similar housing in similar neighborhoods.⁶⁰²

Because Black families are more likely to be impoverished, the housing shortage is more likely to affect Black households.⁶⁰³ In the country, there are only 37 rental homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter households, defined as households with incomes at or below the poverty level or 30 percent of the median income of the geographic area.⁶⁰⁴ Twenty percent of Black households are extremely low-income renters, compared with six percent of white non-Hispanic households.⁶⁰⁵

Black families are more likely to be rent burdened, which is generally defined as a household that spends more than 30 percent of pre-tax income on rent.⁶⁰⁶ A majority of Black renter families in 2019 still spent over 30 percent of their income on rent.⁶⁰⁷

California

State and local urban renewal, highway construction, and gentrification have destroyed Black communities throughout the state. In the 1960s, vibrant communities like San Francisco's Fillmore district and Los Angeles's Sugar Hill have been reduced to rubble or an eight lane highway. Today, segregated neighborhoods in California are often populated by a mix of Black and Hispanic residents, and are more vulnerable to be displaced by gentrification.⁶⁰⁸

One study found that five of the 20 most rapidly gentrifying cities from 2013 to 2017 were in California: San Francisco-Oakland (1), San Jose (8), Sacramento (10), San Diego (14), and Los Angeles (15).⁶⁰⁹ In many California cities today, gentrification (characterized by economic and demographic shifts in historically disinvested neighborhoods) is concentrated in formerly redlined neighborhoods.⁶¹⁰ Close to 90 percent of currently gentrifying areas in San Francisco were formerly redlined or rated "definitely declining" by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, as

were 83 percent of gentrifying areas in the East Bay and 87 percent of gentrifying areas in San Jose.⁶¹¹ According to the U.S. census, in the 1970s, 10 percent of San Francisco's population identified as Black, compared to five percent today.⁶¹²

Darrell Owens testified during the December 7, 2021 Task Force meeting that census data shows that African Americans have been displaced from California for decades.⁶¹³ In particular and more recently, Blacks are leaving Alameda County and Los Angeles County.⁶¹⁴ In addition to the residents who leave the state altogether, many are moving inland and many Black Californians are moving away from the more costly coastal cities in search of affordable housing.⁶¹⁵ For example, located just south of Sacramento, Elk Grove has seen a 5,100 percent increase in Black residents since 1990.⁶¹⁶ Similarly, as the population of Black residents plunged 45 percent in Compton, 43 percent in San Francisco, and 40 percent in Oakland, the San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta, Southern California's Inland Empire, and the Central Valley have all seen increases in their Black population.⁶¹⁷ Overall, the Black population in California is projected to increase almost 40 percent between 1999 and 2040, which is slower than the projected total population increase for the state of 72 percent.⁶¹⁸

In writing about the gentrification of her historically Black neighborhood of Inglewood in Los Angeles, Erin Aubry Kaplan says, "Black presence has value — in every sense of the word, and on its own terms. That value should make the casual displacement of Black people untenable, even immoral."⁶¹⁹

California has more individuals experiencing homelessness than any other state in the country.⁶²⁰ Nearly a quarter of all unhoused Americans live in California.⁶²¹



Black Californians experiencing homelessness is a more acute crisis than in the rest of the country. Black people account for 6.5 percent of Californians but nearly 40 percent of the state's unhoused individuals.⁶²² Nationally, Black people account for 13.4 percent of the population and are 39.8 percent of the unhoused population.⁶²³

In addition to experiencing homelessness, as with the rest of the country, Black Californians are more likely to be renters than white Californians.⁶²⁴ By 2019, Black Californians’ homeownership rate was less than in the 1960s, when certain forms of housing discrimination was legal.⁶²⁵ The Black homeownership rate in California has dropped almost 10 percent since 2004 and has not recovered.⁶²⁶ Sixty-eight percent of white Californians own a home, compared with 41 percent of Black Californians.⁶²⁷ One study shows that Proposition 13, which limits property taxes for homeowners by essentially freezing property tax assessment at the last date of purchase, has benefited white homeowners more than Black homeowners in California.⁶²⁸ Fifty-eight percent of the state’s Black renters spent more than 30 percent of their household income on rent.⁶²⁹ In certain neighborhoods like South Los Angeles, over half of Black households pay more than 50 percent of their income on rent.⁶³⁰

As a likely result, despite constituting six percent of the state’s population, Black Californians comprise nearly 40 percent of unhoused Californians. As Brandon

laws exclude African Americans from public spaces—like legal segregation laws—by empowering police to remove unhoused individuals from public spaces.⁶³²

As with the rest of the country, segregated neighborhoods have fewer access to public transportation by design.⁶³³ For example, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) trains run for almost three miles without stopping through Oakland’s San Antonio neighborhood, the most racially diverse and densest part of the Bay Area.⁶³⁴ In contrast, Walnut Creek and Pleasant Hill are less than half as dense in comparison, but the BART stations are only 1.75 miles apart.⁶³⁵ The city designed the BART in the late 1960s to carry white commuters from the suburbs to their urban jobs, bypassing poor Black neighborhoods.⁶³⁶

Segregated communities have less greenspace and are more polluted. Fifty-two percent of Black Californians live in areas deprived of nature, compared to 36 percent of white Californians.⁶³⁷ Their streets and sidewalks are more dangerous.⁶³⁸ Segregated neighborhoods in California are more impoverished⁶³⁹ and the homes are undervalued.



The typical Californian Black-owned home is worth 86 percent as much as the typical U.S. home, while the typical white-owned home is worth 108 percent as much as the typical U.S. home.⁶⁴⁰ And a study has found that in the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim and San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward metropolitan

Greene testified during the December 7, 2021 Task Force meeting, African Americans are disproportionately represented among the unhoused population throughout California.⁶³¹ Further, according to Greene, anti-homeless

areas, houses in majority Black neighborhoods are devalued by 17.1 percent and 27.1 percent, respectively.⁶⁴¹ This makes it particularly vulnerable to gentrification.⁶⁴²

XV. Conclusion

The American government reinforced the effects of slavery by maintaining a racialized caste system and effectuating segregation. Federal, state, and local governments across the country and in California, along with private actors, created separate and unequal cities and neighborhoods for Black and white Americans. Led by the federal government, local governments passed zoning ordinances and state courts enforced racially restrictive covenants to exclude African Americans from neighborhoods. These actions were amplified by federal housing policy.

When white supremacists burned crosses, bombed houses, harassed, and terrorized Black families moving into white neighborhoods, local governments rarely investigated and prosecuted the perpetrators. Funded by the federal government, local governments first built quality public housing exclusively for white Americans, then built and neglected enormous apartment complexes that concentrated poverty in Black neighborhoods. In the last three decades, local governments then chose to demolish these housing projects, intensifying gentrification and once again displacing African Americans.

This gentrification is part of a long history of displacement of African Americans. Erin Aubry Kaplan, a resident of the historically Black neighborhood of Inglewood, California wrote: “I thought about how fragile my feeling of being settled is. It didn’t matter that I own my house, as many of my neighbors do. Generations of racism, Jim Crow, disinvestment and redlining have meant that we don’t really control our own spaces. In that moment, I had been overwhelmed by a kind of fear, one that’s connected to the historical reality of Black people being run off the land they lived on, expelled by force, high prices or some whim of white people.”⁶⁴³

As Kaplan describes, wherever African Americans settled and prospered throughout American history, federal, state, and local governments, along with private actors, used numerous mechanisms: park and highway construction, slum clearance, and urban renewal to destroy those communities. Across the country, the federal government helped white Americans buy single family homes in the suburbs while crippling the ability for African Americans to access home loans and buy houses in the neighborhoods that white families left behind.

Almost 150 years of active, conscious federal, state, and local government action and neglect of duty have resulted in compounded harms that are unique to African Americans.⁶⁴⁴ Housing segregation stole wealth from African Americans, while building the wealth of white Americans (discussed in Chapter 13, The Wealth Gap). Once segregated, government actors turned urban Black neighborhoods into ghettos by depriving them of public services (discussed in Chapter 7, Racism in Environment and Infrastructure), school funding (discussed in Chapter 6, Separate and Unequal Education), and encouraged polluting industries to move in (discussed in Chapter 7, Racism in Environment and Infrastructure). As a result, African Americans suffer higher rates of asthma and other diseases (discussed in Chapter 8, Pathologizing the Black Family). Housing segregation partially created the foundation and exacerbated the over-policing of Black neighborhoods, resulting in the injury and death of African Americans at the hands of police (discussed in Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect).

These harms have never been adequately remedied.

Appendix

Table 1: Racial Disparities in Home Values, 2020 (Studied CA Metros)⁶⁴⁵

Metro Area	Value of the Typical Black-Owned Home as a Percentage of the Value of the Typical US Home (%)	Value of the Typical white-Owned Home as a Percentage of the Value of the Typical US Home (%)
Statewide	86	108
Los Angeles	81	118
Riverside	99	101
Sacramento	93	101
San Diego	81	106
San Francisco	78	107
San Jose	91	108

Table 2: Gap in Black Homeownership Rates (BHR) and white Homeownership Rates (WHR) in Formerly Greenlined Neighborhoods, 1980 vs. 2017 (Studied CA Metros)⁶⁴⁶

Metro Area	1980			2017		
	BHR (%)	WHR (%)	Gap	BHR (%)	WHR (%)	Gap
Fresno	31.4	71.2	39.8 points	2.5	62.6	60.1 points
Los Angeles	49.8	69.1	19.3 points	46.2	67.1	20.9 points
Oakland	76.9	82.6	5.7 points	84.1	85.9	1.8 points
Sacramento	35.7	79.5	43.8 points	16.7	73.4	56.7 points
San Diego	7.9	64.0	56.1 points	17.0	60.9	43.9 points
San Jose	9.9	58.8	48.9 points	41.1	60.5	19.4 points

Table 2c: Gap in Median Home Equity in Formerly Greenlined and Formerly Redlined Neighborhoods, 2019 (Studied CA Metros)⁶⁴⁷

Metro Area	Median Home Equity in Formerly Greenlined Neighborhoods (\$)	Median Home Equity in Formerly Redlined Neighborhoods (\$)	Gap (% difference)
Fresno	282,000	158,000	78
Los Angeles	1,111,000	587,000	89
Oakland	1,300,000	752,000	73
Sacramento	778,000	522,000	49
San Diego	1,058,000	471,000	125
San Jose	1,329,000	854,000	56

Table 3 Sundown Towns identified in California from *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* by James Loewen

- Brea⁶⁴⁸
- Bishop⁶⁴⁹
- Burbank⁶⁵⁰
- Maywood Colony, Corning⁶⁵¹
- Culver City⁶⁵²
- Glendale⁶⁵³
- Hawthorne⁶⁵⁴
- La Jolla⁶⁵⁵
- Numerous suburbs of Los Angeles⁶⁵⁶
- Palos Verdes Estates⁶⁵⁷
- Richmond⁶⁵⁸
- San Marino⁶⁵⁹
- South Pasadena⁶⁶⁰
- Taft⁶⁶¹
- Tarzana⁶⁶²

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& Saf. Code § 33030, et. seq.); (Stats. 1993, Ch 942 (A.B. 1290).); (Stats. 2006, Ch. 113 (A.B. 782, § 1)); (Stats. 2006, Ch. 595, § 2 (S. B. 1206)); (Stats. 2010, Ch. 665, § 1 (A.B. 1641)). Today, the original 1945 set of conditions remains basically the same, but it also includes an anti-discrimination policy regarding the undertaking of community redevelopment projects. Cal. Health & Saf. Code § 33031, subd. (a)(1), (5); subd. (b) (1), (3); Cal. Health & Saf. Code § 33050.

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I. Introduction

Nationally

A quality education is the foundation for a good job, income growth, and, in the words of the Supreme Court of California, “for the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people.”¹ During slavery, the government of the United States of America at all levels, including the government of the State of California, deprived 11 generations of African Americans of the benefits of a quality education.

After slavery, governments in the United States required nearly all Black children to attend segregated schools with far fewer resources and funding than the schools white children attended.² In many schools today, these separate and unequal education conditions continue for Black children. The benefits of a good education—a better job and higher income—build up over generations.³ Just as benefits mount and increase, so too, do the harms. For hundreds of years, governments at all levels in America have inflicted compounding educational harm upon Black children, and they have never made sufficient amends.

During the slavery era, in order to control the Black enslaved people who toiled to build the wealth of this country, enslaving states denied education to nearly all enslaved people.⁴ Free states of the North and Midwest segregated their schools and limited or denied freed Blacks access.⁵ With rare exceptions, African Americans could not go to college.⁶

After the Civil War, southern states and others on the borders denied equal education to free Black people to maintain a servant class and prevent Black people from voting.⁷ Until 1945, state governments legally segregated Black children in principally one room schoolhouses with fewer resources and funding than white schools. White terrorist groups, supported by government officials, destroyed Black schools.⁸ In the rest of the nation, government supported housing segregation and neighborhood-based school assignment policies sent most Black children to schools that were separate from white students and unequal with respect to both funding and resources. Most state-funded and private white colleges and universities refused to admit Black students.



Black children on their way to school pass mothers protesting integration. (1965)

The Supreme Court's landmark 1954 case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed school segregation on paper, did not mark the end of segregation, as some Americans believe.⁹ Many white government actors throughout the country aggressively resisted

time, California law provided state funding only based on the number of white children in each county, and also allowed public school districts to refuse to teach Black children even in a segregated school under certain circumstances.¹² Although California law officially

The Supreme Court's landmark 1954 case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed school segregation on paper, did not mark the end of segregation in reality. Today, in America, the vast majority of Black children remain locked into unequal schools and classrooms, separate from their white peers.

ended segregated schooling for Black students in 1890, as in the rest of the nation, government officials created less obvious, but equally effective policies to keep Black children in mostly Black, underfunded schools.¹³

Today, in California many Black students continue to attend unequally funded, under-resourced, and highly segregated public schools

integration—shutting down public schools, harassing, threatening, and terrorizing Black students and parents who sought to integrate schools, and providing vouchers for white students to attend newly created private schools.¹⁰ In the rest of the country, government actors created and preserved school segregation through housing segregation and neighborhood-based school assignment policies.

due to government policies that continue to segregate many schools and school funding by neighborhood. Recently, California has tried to provide a more equitable funding system by providing more state money to school districts that serve our poorest students. However, the system does not ensure that the money is actually spent on those students, many of whom are Black children, and there is some evidence that this is a reason that Black students continue to be the lowest performing sub-group in California.

Today, in America, the vast majority of Black children remain locked into unequal schools and classrooms, separate from their white peers. With regard to higher education, predominantly white colleges and universities slowly increased the number of Black students attending for about 40 years following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, in more recent years, the overall number of Black students attending college has declined.

Section II of this Chapter describes the laws, policies, and practices during slavery which denied education to African Americans. Section III focuses on the period after the Civil War until the present and the laws, policies, and practices that created the segregated and unequal primary and secondary schooling experienced by the vast majority of Black students to this day. Section IV describes how laws, policies, and practices denied African Americans equal access to higher education. Section V of this Chapter describes how our nation excludes the experience of African Americans when educating our children and the resulting negative impacts. Section VI summarizes the ongoing and compounding harms suffered by African Americans.

California

Before the Civil War, California also denied education to African Americans or forced them to attend segregated schools with far fewer resources and funding than the schools white children attended.¹¹ For a period of

II. Denial of Education During Slavery

Racist pseudo-scientific theories about the false inferiority of African Americans spread in the decades before the Civil War and justified prohibiting their education. Most enslaving states formally outlawed the education of enslaved African Americans, so enslaved people who sought to learn to read and write had no choice but to do so in secret, and at great risk to themselves. While African

Americans were enslaved and banned from schooling in the South, their labor helped pay for public schools in some states in the North. Schooling available to free African Americans in the North was mostly in segregated schools with fewer resources. At several schools that attempted to provide integrated education to African

Americans, white Americans subjected teachers and students to threats, harassment, and terror.

In California, for a period of time, laws intended to enforce segregated schooling also withheld state money from schools that taught Black children and allowed school districts to deny education to Black children altogether, under certain circumstances. Even when local governments provided money and resources to support Black schools, white schools disproportionately received greater funding and resources.

America's Leaders Promote Racist Pseudoscience

In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson “proposed that black inferiority—in the endowment of both body and mind—might be an unchangeable law of nature.”¹⁴ Some scholars argue that Jefferson’s statements became an important first document of racist scientific theories that were popular in the decades before the Civil War.¹⁵ Some of the so-called “race scientists” graduated from elite northern colleges and claimed that Black people were subhuman and not descendants of Adam and Eve to support, as one scholar argues, “the self-image of the nation’s white supremacist majority.”¹⁶

Even Abraham Lincoln also believed that white people were superior to Black people, stating in his famous debate with Stephen Douglas: “I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”¹⁷ Other early leaders of America, including Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Benjamin Rush, a Founding Father who has been called the father of American psychiatry, endorsed these false ideas about the inferiority of African Americans that served to justify education prohibitions.¹⁸ Scientists later proved that these “race scientists” were wrong in the racist theories used by government officials and

private citizens to justify slavery and discrimination.¹⁹ See also Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect, which discusses studies finding no biological difference between Black and white people. A recent 2019 *Education Week* survey suggests that these racist theories live on among America’s teachers today.²⁰ The survey found that more than 40 percent of American teachers incorrectly believe that genetics is “a slight factor” in explaining why white students do better in school than Black students.²¹

The South

During more than 250 years of slavery, state governments prohibited education of African Americans, except for certain religious education.²² In fact, the institution of slavery depended, in part, on enslaved Black people remaining uneducated.²³ Frederick Douglass’ former enslaver forbade him from learning to read, as “[a] nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do.”²⁴

Most enslaving states formally outlawed teaching an enslaved person to read or write as early as 1740.²⁵ Enslaved people caught learning to read or write in states where this was outlawed could face prison, public whipping, or be threatened with having a finger or arm cut off.²⁶ When religious education was permitted, it generally taught enslaved people basic reading but not writing, because learning to write could help an enslaved person escape.²⁷ Some enslaved African Americans sought out instruction provided in secret. For example, Douglass secretly taught other enslaved people how to read, and described “[t]he work of instructing my dear fellow-slaves” as “the sweetest engagement with which I was ever blessed. We loved each other, and to leave them at the close of the Sabbath was a severe cross indeed.”²⁸ As a result of such secret lessons taught by enslaved people, free African Americans, and some white Americans,²⁹ about 10 percent of African Americans in the South learned to read by 1865.³⁰

40%

of American K-12 teachers today



believe that **genetics** is a “slight factor” in explaining why white students do better in school than Black students.

The Rest of the Country

In the North, African Americans were more likely to have basic reading and writing skills. African Americans sometimes attended schools that were mostly segregated, either through government policy or local practice.³¹ In some places, state and local officials prohibited African Americans from opening schools, and white Americans harassed and threatened teachers of Black students until they stopped teaching. In some places, white Americans also vandalized or destroyed schools that permitted Black students to attend.³² For example, in 1832, when

a white school master in Connecticut named Prudence Crandall, began enrolling Black students in the small school that Crandall ran out of her home, white townspeople forced her out of her own home.³³ White parents withdrew their children.³⁴ Crandall eventually enrolled 20 Black students.³⁵

On May 24, 1833, the Connecticut legislature passed a “Black Law,” prohibiting any school from teaching Black students from outside the state without permission.³⁶ Local officials arrested Crandall because she kept her school open. She spent the night in jail and charges were brought against her. Then, in January 1834, vandals set the school on fire.³⁷ Crandall finally closed the school in September 1834 after white townspeople broke 90 panes of glass on her home using iron bars.³⁸ This was the second unsuccessful attempt to establish a school for Black students in the state.³⁹

While African Americans were enslaved and banned from schooling in the South, their labor helped pay for public schools in some states in the North.⁴⁰ Enslaved people worked for free in the South picking cotton, and their labor in the South created great wealth for the textile manufacturers in the North. By the early 1830s, New England mills consumed such large quantities of cotton from the South—78 million pounds of cotton fiber per year—that the United States became the second largest producer of textiles in the world.⁴¹ This textile industry in the North paid taxes. These taxes helped to fund the public schools in New England. During slavery, due to government policies and local practices, very few Black students were permitted to attend these public schools, even though the labor of African Americans enslaved in the South helped fund them. During this time, the federal government also supported enslavers kidnapping African Americans in the North who had escaped from slavery to re-enslave them in the South, where they were again denied education.⁴² See Chapter 2 Enslavement for further discussion of related issues.

During the 1800s, Black students generally could not receive an education beyond high school because it was legal for colleges and universities to refuse to admit Black students.⁴³ In response, free African Americans, often affiliated with Black churches, established the first Black colleges and universities.⁴⁴ Until the early 1900s, these schools mostly offered middle and high school level education to African Americans who had

been prohibited from attending school.⁴⁵ By the eve of the Civil War, only 28 of the nation’s nearly four million newly freed enslaved people had received bachelor’s degrees from American colleges.⁴⁶

California

California became a state in 1850, a decade before the onset of the Civil War. Despite the anti-enslavement clause in California’s constitution, enslavers brought several hundred Black enslaved people to California and generally denied them education.⁴⁷ The early California legislature, dominated by white southerners from enslaving states, revd the school liseaws to enforce segregated schooling.⁴⁸ See Chapter 2 Enslavement for further discussion of related issues. These state lawmakers successfully enforced segregated schools to deter racial intermixing.⁴⁹ California’s State Superintendent of Public Instruction Andrew Jackson Moulder, who served from 1857 to 1862 stated: “[I]f this attempt to force Africans, Chinese, and the Diggers [Native Americans] into our schools is persisted in, it must result in the ruin of our school.”⁵⁰

As early as 1855, California enacted a law calculating how much the State of California would fund a school “in proportion to the number of white children” in each county, so that local governments would not receive any extra money from the state when they taught a Black student.⁵¹ Superintendent Moulder later influenced a California law in 1863 that withheld state funds from schools that taught Black and Chinese children.⁵² So,

While African Americans were enslaved and banned from schooling in the South, their labor helped pay for public schools in some states in the North.

although California taxed Black people to pay for the state’s public schools, Black Californian’s taxes only paid for the education of white children, and they had no right to education for their own children.

Because of both of these laws, local governments, instead of the state, paid to educate nonwhite students. Further, those local governments that ran schools for Black students generally provided less funding and resources for Black schools in comparison to white schools. For example, six years after the first all-Black school was established in 1854 in the basement of a San Francisco

church,⁵³ the San Francisco School Superintendent George Tait stated to his school board that: “[T]he room occupied by this school for the past few years is disgraceful to any civilized community” and was “squalid, dark, and unhealthy.”⁵⁴

In 1864, the state changed the law to allow school districts to provide education to Black students in a segregated classroom or school if requested in writing by “the par-

A California law passed in 1855 withheld state funds from schools that taught Black and Chinese children. So although California taxed African Americans to pay for the state’s public schools, a Black Californian’s taxes only paid for the education of white children, and they had no right to education for their own children.

ents or guardians of 10 or more colored children.”⁵⁵ This meant that if fewer than 10 students lived in the district, California law also allowed public school districts

to refuse to teach Black children at all. In 1866, the state changed the law again to allow white parents to prevent Black students from attending their children’s schools, if a majority of parents objected in writing.⁵⁶

Because of these state laws, Black children were forced into separate public schools or out of the public-school system altogether. In response, Black women in Sacramento, Oakland, and San Francisco led efforts to organize church-based schools, private schools, and separate free-standing public schools.⁵⁷

In the mid-1860s, Black students across California were also generally denied access to public middle and high schools. Few public middle and high schools existed at the time, and California refused to fund and provide separate public middle and high schools for Black students, in part, because of the 1864 state law

that permitted school districts not to provide a school where Black students were few in number.⁵⁸

III. Unequal Primary and Secondary Education

Nationally

Formerly enslaved African Americans had a fundamental belief in the value of literate culture and this belief was expressed through their efforts to secure education for themselves and for their children.⁵⁹ For the first decade after the Civil War, African Americans and the politicians they elected, successfully fought for and built the South’s public-school system, through a series of legislative and constitutional enactments.⁶⁰ Prior to the concerted leadership of freed African American leaders, none of the southern states had a universal public education system.⁶¹ As Black political leaders passed laws and set aside funding to create a public education system for all children, Black students could attend schools in their communities.

However, government expansion of schooling for illiterate African Americans threatened white economic domination.⁶² According to J.L.M. Curry, an Alabama state legislator in 1889, “[e]ducation would spoil a good plow hand.”⁶³ So, even as educational opportunities for Black people in former enslaving states expanded, after

reconstruction, white-led governments and organizations created a web of government-approved policies and tactics, including burning schools down, to continue to deny Black people education and maintain legalized school segregation.⁶⁴ So, even though African Americans led the creation of the public education system in the South, white students ultimately benefited far more than Black students.

Denying education or quality education to African Americans was also critical to denying African Americans political power and maintaining white political supremacy.⁶⁵ For example, most former enslaving states suppressed the Black vote by imposing a “literacy test” for voters and selectively enforcing it against Black people.⁶⁶ See Chapter 4 Political Disenfranchisement for a further discussion of this topic. The vast majority of the policies and practices that created unequal and segregated schools for African Americans in the South lasted another 100 years. Many continue to live on today in different forms.

African Americans Led the Creation of the Southern Public Education System

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the vast majority of Black people lived in the South. Formerly enslaved African Americans identified education as essential. Black-dominated Reconstruction-era legislatures in the South passed laws to create the public education system in the South. “The whites [in the South] had always regarded the public school system of the North with contempt. The [Black] freedman introduced and established it and it stands today a living testimony to his faith that education is necessary to social welfare,” said Colonel Richard P. Hallowell, Union Army and Pennsylvania Freedmen’s Relief Association.⁶⁷

Black men, recently allowed to vote and hold political office, helped draft new state constitutions in the South that mandated public education.⁶⁸ During Reconstruction, they served on federal and state legislatures that passed the bills to provide funding to the new schools.⁶⁹ Black political leaders worked in interracial political coalitions with white Republicans (generally poor whites or Northern transplants) to establish the South’s universal public-school system, what historians have called “the crown of Reconstruction.”⁷⁰ The Freedmen’s Bureau Act of 1865 also helped set-up some schools for Black people who had been newly freed,⁷¹ although the federal government ended the Freedmen’s Bureau Act after just seven years.⁷²

Despite this setback and other obstacles and even after federal troops withdrew from the South in 1877, African Americans who already knew how to read and write, shared their knowledge with others in their communities.⁷³ When, as described further below, Black communities did not receive the necessary funding from post-reconstruction white government officials to afford to pay teacher salaries, African Americans sought financial assistance and teacher recruitment from federal agencies and benevolent organizations in the North.⁷⁴ Given the unwillingness of white property owners to rent or sell to African Americans and the refusal of white-led post-reconstruction governments to properly fund schools, African Americans also struggled to access buildings that they could use as schoolhouses.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, Black communities worked together to overcome these obstacles. Since most African American churches were owned by African American congregations, churches were often utilized as schoolhouses.⁷⁶ Local residents often gathered together to apply liquid slate to the side walls of the church to create chalkboards to also use these buildings for schooling.⁷⁷

From 1908 to 1968, some of one-hundred-plus Black teachers in rural communities in 13 states (whose salaries were funded by a northern philanthropist) utilized their positions not only to teach Black students but to advocate for improvements to their schools, public health, living conditions, and teacher training.⁷⁸ Influential educators such as Nannie Helen Burroughs, a Black woman who was denied a teaching position at a public school in D.C., decided that if she could not get a job as a teacher, she would start her own school.⁷⁹ Burroughs refused to rely on white donors and instead relied on donations from community members, which enabled her to establish the Training School for Women and Girls in D.C. by 1909.⁸⁰ Although Burroughs’ school taught vocational skills as well, her school differed in that she assisted women in becoming politically and financially autonomous in order to empower Black women to be “public thinkers and not just public doers.”⁸¹

The persistence and enthusiasm of African Americans created schools for African Americans within their communities when white-led southern government refused to fund them.

Racial Terror

As discussed in Chapter 3 Racial Terror, after federal troops withdrew from the South in 1877, for the next century, government officials supported private citizens who terrorized African Americans and Black institutions with impunity. White Americans burned a number of Black schools and churches housing Black schools to the ground.⁸² White-American-led post-reconstruction governments closed Black public schools and fired Black teachers.⁸³ A unanimous Supreme Court effectively authorized the elimination of high school for Black students.⁸⁴ Hundreds of thousands of Black youth and adults were essentially re-enslaved on trumped up charges upheld by federal and local judges and police, and forced to labor for white-led U.S. companies and plantation owners under conditions that were as brutal, or even more so, than those endured during slavery.⁸⁵ A number of those re-enslaved were pre-teens and teenagers, some were children under the age of 10.⁸⁶ They were not enrolled in school. The unpaid labor of these re-enslaved African Americans also built wealth for white-led companies and plantation owners.⁸⁷ See Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System for further discussion of related issues.

Segregation by Law

From the mid-1860s to 1954, legal segregation laws operating in 17 former enslaving states forced African Americans into segregated and unequal schools.⁸⁸ By

the 1880s, a series of U.S. Supreme Court cases had severely limited the federal government's power to enforce Reconstruction civil rights legislation intended to protect African Americans, leaving enforcement in the hands of white-led state and local governments.⁸⁹ This cleared the way for the Supreme Court in 1896 to endorse the idea that requiring African Americans to be “separate” from whites in nearly every facet of life could be consistent with equality.⁹⁰ During the long period of segregation, African Americans attended schools that were intentionally under-resourced and structured for the purpose of maintaining a servant class.⁹¹

Double-Taxation for Black Schools

After Reconstruction, white former enslavers created a state tax system designed to underfund education for African Americans. Some states ordered that schools for Black children be paid for exclusively by taxes on Black parents.⁹² In these states, no white taxpayer paid for the education of a Black child, but African Americans paid for the education of both Black and white children.⁹³ This dual-tax system created huge differences in the amount of money spent to educate Black and white children.⁹⁴

In practice, this meant that many African Americans in the early 1900s had to pay double to receive less in education.⁹⁵ In southern states, the disparity could be as high as ten dollars per white student for a single dollar given to fund a Black student's education.⁹⁶ In the 1930s, a local school superintendent in Louisiana reported bluntly: “We have twice as many colored children of school age as we have white, and we use their money. Colored children are mighty profitable to us.”⁹⁷



Schoolhouse for Black students near Summerville, South Carolina. (1938)

COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The same African Americans were forced to donate additional land and money to support Black schools because the state did not send enough money for Black schools.⁹⁸ For example, when in the 1930s a fire destroyed classroom furniture and equipment in a Louisiana school, according to a local newspaper,

In May 1911, after completing a study of the conditions of Black schools across the South, W.E.B. Du Bois concluded that the schools were in “a deplorable condition,” worse off than 20 years prior “with poorer teaching, less supervision and comparatively few facilities.”

the city refused to pay to replace any of the destroyed items. Instead, the tax dollars were given to the white school and Black parents would have to raise the money to repair the school.⁹⁹

Inferior Resources, Funding, and Time

By the late 1890s, African Americans in former slaveholding states had “been shunted into their own inferior . . . schools” through an “unfettered grab by white supremacists,” according to one historian.¹⁰⁰ The schools they attended were often in terrible condition and lacking in basic facilities, such as desks and chairs and working windows.¹⁰¹ These schools generally included fewer grade levels of education.¹⁰² White school authorities intentionally selected the least-qualified teaching applicants and pushed a curriculum focused on “industrial work,” e.g., canning, sewing, and woodworking.¹⁰³ In May 1911, after completing a study of the conditions Black schools across the South, W.E.B. Du Bois concluded that the state of segregated elementary schools for African Americans in the South and in border states is in “a deplorable condition,” worse off than 20 years prior “with poorer teaching, less supervision and comparatively few facilities.”¹⁰⁴

The disparities in funding were also severe. White schools received on average five to eight times more government funding than Black schools in nearly all former enslaving states.¹⁰⁵ In the 1930s in Louisiana, Black teachers and principals made on average only 43% of what white teachers and principals made—\$499 a year compared to \$1,165.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in Mississippi, Black teachers and principals made just \$215 a year, while white teachers and principals made \$630 a year.¹⁰⁷ For Black teachers, as Isabel Wilkerson writes in *The Warmth of Others Suns*, this meant “even the most promising of

colored people, having received next to nothing in material assets from their slave foreparents, had to labor with the knowledge that they were now being underpaid by more than half, that they were so behind it would be all but impossible to accumulate the assets their white counterparts could, and that they would, by definition, have less to leave succeeding generations than similar white families.”¹⁰⁸

During segregation, compared to white students, Black students attended school

3-4 months LESS
than white students every year

In addition, the number of months Black students attended school was generally fewer than white students, e.g., four-to-five months in comparison to six-to-eight months for white students.¹⁰⁹ The causes included lack of sufficient funding for schools in rural communities, where many African Americans lived, white farm owners forcing Black children to work in the fields (or their sharecropping parents needing assistance), and government limits on the number of months that a Black school would be funded in comparison to a white school.¹¹⁰

Despite the inferior quality of Black schools, some prominent thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, suggested that integrated schools would ultimately disadvantage Black students, because the discrimination they would inevitably continue to experience would prevent African Americans from receiving a proper education.¹¹¹ He wrote that separate schools were “necessary for the proper education of the Negro race.”¹¹² Moreover, he believed that race prejudice in the United States was such that “most Negroes cannot receive a proper education in white institutions” because the proper education of any group of people required sympathy, understanding, and social equality between teachers and their students.¹¹³

In his 2014 article in *The Atlantic*, Ta-Nehisi Coates recounts the story of Clyde Ross, a student who was encouraged to attend a more challenging Black school outside of his community built with funds from a philanthropist and resources amassed by Black community members, who also donated physical labor to actually build the schools.¹¹⁴ The school was too far away from

Ross’ home for him to walk there and get back in time to work in the fields. Local white children had a school bus. But Ross and other Black children did not. Thus, Ross lost out on the opportunity for a better education.¹¹⁵ For many Black students, the school that Ross was encouraged to attend was the first ever available to them in their community. In yet another way, African Americans paid twice. They devoted funds and their own labor to build a school for their children while also paying taxes that supported better schools for white students.

In spite of concerted state efforts to deny them equal educational opportunities, Black southerners achieved a literacy rate of 43 percent by 1890, a rate of growth that far surpassed the rise of literacy in Spain and Italy during the same period and that continued to rise in nearly all southern states in the early 1900s.¹¹⁶ Yet, researchers have found that the “legacies of slavery” compounded by the many obstacles that Black children faced in acquiring education show a correlation with high rates of illiteracy among African Americans nearly 80 years after slavery ended.¹¹⁷

Resistance to Integration

In 1951, Black students led the fight for desegregation¹¹⁸ and, in 1954, the Supreme Court declared race-based segregation in public schools unconstitutional in its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.¹¹⁹ Although many Americans believed that the Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision was the end of school segregation, it was not. After the *Brown* decision, all across the country, many white Americans and white state and local governments refused to implement the Court’s order, while the Federal government failed to adequately enforce the order and protect Black teachers, school administrators, and students.

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African American boy watching a group of people, some carrying American flags, march past to protest the admission of the “Little Rock Nine” to Central High School. (c. 1958)

90% of the south's Congressional delegation



Signed the “Southern Manifesto”
pledging to **fight integration**
using any means at their disposal.

In former enslaving states, white-controlled government school boards, and state and municipal governments almost universally refused to comply with *Brown* in what historians have called the “era of massive resistance.”¹²⁰ On May 12, 1956, 90 percent of the south’s Congressional delegation signed the “Southern Manifesto” pledging to fight integration using any means at their disposal.¹²¹ These lawmakers and others in southern states made good on their promise.

Some white Americans in the South used violence, harassment, and threats to stop integration. They attacked Black students and terrorized some Black families who dared to enroll their children in white public schools. For example, in Arkansas, on September 4, 1957, when nine Black students went to enroll in Little Rock’s all-white Central High School, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to form a blockade around the school’s front door to keep the students out. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had to get a federal court order to make the National Guard stand down. But even with the court’s order, the students were still not safe to enter because of the threat of white mob violence. Only after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. sent a plea for protection to President Eisenhower, did the federal government act. The federal government brought in 1,000 Army paratroopers and ordered the National Guard to provide an escort for the students as they entered the school. Twenty-one days after the nine Black students – now known as the “Little Rock Nine” – first tried to attend the high school, they were finally able to enter. As they walked in, angry white crowds of students and adults yelled racial insults and threw objects at them. Rather than allow integration to go forward in other schools, Governor Faubus

then closed all public high schools in Little Rock for the 1958 to 1959 school year.¹²² Throughout their time in the school, the Little Rock Nine reported enduring severe harassment, including physical violence from some white students. Several years later on the eve of graduation, the home of Carlotta Walls, one of the Little Rock Nine was bombed by white supremacists.¹²³

In Mississippi when then-NAACP civil rights attorney Derrick Bell filed a lawsuit to integrate one community’s schools, he described how nightriders came through the community firing guns into Black homes.¹²⁴ African Americans who signed petitions to integrate the schools lost their jobs or had their credit cut off by merchants.¹²⁵ Because of the severe intimidation and harassment by the white community, only one Black family was ultimately willing to send their child to the white school.¹²⁶ When the child, Debra, arrived at school, a large crowd jeered and marshals had to escort her into the school.¹²⁷ Debra’s father lost his job the same day, and white Americans attempted to burn their house down.¹²⁸

Southern states also passed laws to close both white and Black public schools, deny state money for any schools that integrated, and provided vouchers or “freedom-of-choice” to over 3,000 newly created private schools for white students.¹²⁹ For several years, Black students in certain areas in the South had no school to attend at all.¹³⁰ In Georgia, Governor Herman Talmadge, who

Rather than allow integration to go forward in other schools, Governor Faubus then closed all public high schools in Little Rock for the 1958 to 1959 school year.

fiercely opposed public school integration, told the public at a press conference that the only solution to a public school segregation ban was “abolition of the public school system.”¹³¹

The Supreme Court also contributed to the slow progress of desegregation. When asked to decide how quickly school districts across the country must desegregate, the Supreme Court answered that schools could do so with “all deliberate speed.”¹³² One federal judge who heard cases filed by African Americans challenging the failure to desegregate schools for almost 10 years, concluded that the effect of the Supreme Court’s decision was to “sacrifice[] individual and immediate vindication of the newly discovered right of [B]lack to a desegregated education in favor of a remedy more palatable to whites”¹³³

Because of all of these government acts, legal school segregation in many places in the South continued into the 1960s and little desegregation of schools took place.¹³⁴ In five Deep South states, 1.4 million Black school children continued to attend a segregated school until the fall of 1960, when integration efforts finally began.¹³⁵

Mass Firings of Black Educators

Federal government and court failure to adequately enforce the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision had other negative consequences.¹³⁶ Southern states engaged in en masse firing of Black teachers and administrators without cause to prevent a white administrator and teacher with the same or overlapping position as a Black administrator or teacher at the newly integrated school from losing their job.¹³⁷ In 1955, a federal government staff attorney responded to the firing of Black teachers, stating that: “In a war, there must be some casualties, and perhaps the black teachers will be the casualties in the fight for equal education of black students.”¹³⁸

One Black educator affected by the firings, told researchers that in his community, the teachers’ college for African Americans was closed in the name of integration, and many of the professors who taught there were required to go teach in the high schools. The president of the Black college was “given a central office do-nothing position and then someone with a Master’s degree, a [White] high school principal, was named president of [the newly desegregated teachers college].”¹³⁹

Mass firing of Black educators deeply affected the economic, social, and cultural structure of the Black community because many middle-class Black people served in education.¹⁴⁰ It is estimated that Black communities lost millions of dollars as a result. For example, in 1970-71, the Black community in 17 southern states lost an estimated \$240 million in salaries.¹⁴¹

The mass firings also have had long-standing repercussions, as the presence of Black principals and superintendents remain disproportionately low across America in relation to the number of Black public-school students.¹⁴² Studies show that students who have teachers who look like them do better in school than those who do not. Black students with at least one Black teacher by third grade are 13 percent more likely to graduate high school and 19 percent more likely to enroll in college than Black students who had no Black

teachers.¹⁴³ However, about 80 percent of teachers and principals and 90 percent of superintendents nationwide are white.¹⁴⁴ Black teachers represent just seven percent and Black male teachers represent just two percent of the teaching force,¹⁴⁵ yet 15 percent of public school students are Black students.¹⁴⁶ Many Black students will go through their educational careers without having a Black teacher.

Other Government-Implemented Tools to Segregate Schools

Whereas in the South, legal segregation laws prohibited Black students from attending schools with white students, in the rest of the country, government actors largely used different but nearly as effective tools

Black students with at least one Black teacher by third grade are 13 percent more likely to graduate high school and 19 percent more likely to enroll in college than Black students who had no Black teachers.

to create segregated schools for Black students with less funding and resources. First, federal, state and local housing segregation policies, including redlining and restrictive covenants as described in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, forced the vast majority of African Americans to live in separate communities from white Americans.¹⁴⁷ School and government officials then assigned Black and white students to attend different schools based on where they lived. In this way, segregated schools were created and maintained.

The schools that Black students attended then received less funding and resources than the schools that white students attended. This occurred because public schools generally obtained a large portion of money from local property taxes raised within the city where the schools were located. As a result, the amount of funding for the school district and school depended on how much could be raised by taxes in each local, segregated community.

The more expensive the properties in a school district, the more money a school district receives. When the federal government along with private actors devalued Black-owned properties, through redlining, they also locked Black students into schools that received far less funding for their schools than the white families in near-by neighborhoods with a higher property tax base.¹⁴⁸

Some cities' schools outside of the South were also segregated by law for a number of years after the Civil War. For example, segregated schools were not banned until 1920 in New York City.¹⁴⁹ In general, the quality of education received by Black students in these segregated schools was not equal to the quality of education received by white students, because schools largely attended by Black students were underfunded and provided with fewer resources.¹⁵⁰

Even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, highly segregated schools fostered through official actions—government implemented housing segregation and school district boundary and assignment policies—also remained largely the rule.¹⁵¹ White protests against integration, including some that involved violence against African Americans integrating schools, occurred in different places across the country. For example, in February of 1964, after 460,000 Black and Puerto Rican students and their parents called on the New York City Board of Education to integrate majority-student of color schools that were so overcrowded they operated on split shifts—with the school day lasting only four hours for students, and so underfunded that they had inferior facilities and less experienced teachers—15,000 white New York parents staged a counter-protest.¹⁵² Milton Galamison, a civil rights activist and pastor of Siloam Presbyterian Church in Bedford-Stuyvesant, who helped lead the protest to integrate the schools stated: “Nobody can do these children more harm than these children are being done every day in this public school system.”¹⁵³

The United States Commission on Civil Rights 1967 study, *Racial Isolation in Public Schools*, confirmed the nation-wide problem, finding that “violence against [Black

After actively enforcing desegregation from 1965 to 1969, the federal government reduced enforcement of the Civil Rights Act under President Nixon. By the 1980s, roughly half of the nation's children of color resided in the 20 or 30 largest school districts.

people] continues to be a deterrent to school desegregation.”¹⁵⁴ The report also found that Black children suffer serious harm when they must attend racially segregated schools, “whatever the source of that segregation might be.”¹⁵⁵

In 1968, the Kerner Commission warned President Lyndon Johnson that the nation was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal”

as a result of “[w]hite racism” and white supremacist institutions.¹⁵⁶ After a short period of active coordinated federal effort to enforce desegregation rights from 1965 to 1969, the Nixon Administration curtailed enforcement of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.¹⁵⁷ By the 1980s, roughly half of the nation's children of color resided in the 20 or 30 largest school districts.¹⁵⁸ In urban areas, white Americans continued to fight vehemently against integration. For example, in Boston, schools that served Black children were poorly equipped and understaffed, and badly underfunded. They received about two-thirds the amount of funding received by schools in white neighborhoods.¹⁵⁹ In 1974, after Black families filed suit and a court ordered the city to desegregate its schools, white mobs threw bricks, bottles, and eggs at buses carrying Black students to majority-white schools, injuring nine children.¹⁶⁰

As white Americans moved into the suburbs, redlining, restrictive covenants, and even violence prevented many African Americans from doing the same. Suburban school district officials drew their boundaries at the city and suburb line, which ensured that Black students living in the inner city would be required to attend inner-city schools, while white children living in the suburbs attended suburban schools. In larger school districts in cities, unless a court desegregation order was in place, districts continued to assign students to schools based on the schools in their neighborhoods. Because the neighborhoods remained segregated by race, the schools continued to be segregated, too.

Intentional segregation in housing by federal and local government actors and the drawing of school district boundaries to mirror school segregation and funding inequities was well-known and documented. But, in 1974, when Black parents asked the Supreme Court to order 53 suburban school districts to participate in the desegregation of the predominantly Black and very under-resourced Detroit city school system, the Court said no.¹⁶¹ Because the Supreme Court refused to address the government-supported residential segregation that forced

African Americans to attend a small subset of American schools, integration was stopped at the city-suburb line.¹⁶² Today, the Detroit city school system remains segregated—approximately 80 percent Black—and severely underfunded and under-resourced.¹⁶³

Then, in 1977, the Supreme Court made it difficult to challenge neighborhood zoning rules, which made it difficult for African Americans to move into largely

white residential areas.¹⁶⁴ Professor Derrick Bell noted that the federal government and local governments created racially isolated communities, which in turn

extraordinary gains that Black students have made, in spite of remaining in segregated and unequally funded and resourced schools. Before the *Brown* decision, less than a fourth of Black students had graduated from high school; now about nine-tenths of Black students are graduating.¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, for African Americans to ever attain academic justice, emphasis should be placed not just on the number of African Americans receiving an education, but rather on the quality and content of the education received. As stated by Carter G. Woodson, if the education being provided to African Americans is “of

the wrong kind, the increase in numbers [of “educated” African Americans] will be a disadvantage rather than an advantage.”¹⁷⁵

Tracking

After *Brown v. Board of Education*, in districts and schools that were marginally integrated, Black students faced segregation by other means. School officials were more likely to place Black students into special education programs and inferior vocational, non-diploma, and alternative school tracks than white students. And school officials were more likely to place white students into gifted or accelerated programs than Black students. This practice where educators group students by what they view as the student’s abilities is commonly referred to as “tracking.”¹⁷⁶

Studies have shown that tracking, which continues today, is correlated with race,¹⁷⁷ and eliminates the benefits of integration for Black students, like access to college classes and high-quality curriculum.¹⁷⁸

Researchers explain that teachers, the vast majority of whom are white, function as primary gatekeepers in gifted and talented identification, and are less likely to refer Black students for gifted programs than white students with similar levels of academic achievement.¹⁷⁹ Black students tracked out of the mainstream program are often re-segregated in another classroom within the school or in a setting in another school location.¹⁸⁰ Those placed in “lower tracks” do not receive the same quality of education—they often receive less resources and opportunities.¹⁸¹

At the October 12, 2021 Task Force hearing, Professor Rucker Johnson testified to the harms of segregation within schools, including harm to student’s health, mental health, school success, and income growth, telling

On July 17, 2001, Harvard University’s Civil Rights Project published a study concluding that school districts across the nation had re-segregated or were re-segregating at an alarming rate, particularly in the South. The study linked this re-segregation to a series of Supreme Court cases decided in the early 1990s, which made it easier for school districts to remain segregated.

“created single-race schools” and then the Supreme Court “insulated these schools from court challenges.”¹⁶⁵ After these Supreme Court opinions, lower court judges began to declare school districts desegregated even when the percentage of Black students increased after white Americans moved to the suburbs aided by housing policies that continued to discriminate against African Americans.¹⁶⁶ In general, these federal courts would not find that it was against the law for Black students to attend schools that received far less funding and had far fewer resources than those schools attended mostly by white students.¹⁶⁷

By the late 1980s, which was considered the peak of integration, schools remained or were returning to being predominantly white and predominantly non-white.¹⁶⁸ Ten years later things had gotten worse. On July 17, 2001, Harvard University’s Civil Rights Project published a study concluding that school districts across the nation had re-segregated or were re-segregating at an alarming rate, particularly in the South.¹⁶⁹ The study linked this re-segregation to a series of Supreme Court cases decided in the early 1990s, which made it easier for school districts to remain segregated.¹⁷⁰

In 2007, the Supreme Court eliminated school districts’ ability to use certain types of voluntary local desegregation plans.¹⁷¹ Five years later a study found that school segregation across the nation was substantially worse than at the high point of desegregation in 1988, and that the typical Black student was in a school where almost two out of every three classmates (64 percent) are low-income, nearly double the level of schools of the typical white or Asian student.¹⁷²

Studies in the last five years continue to find that segregated and unequally resourced schools remain the reality for the vast majority of Black students and other students of color.¹⁷³ However, they also note the

the panel “[t]oo often even when we see what look like diverse schools there are segregated classrooms” and “racialized tracking.”¹⁸²

Unequal and Segregated Schools Persist

As of the early 2000s and through today, the vast majority of Black children remain locked into schools separate from their white peers, and possibly more unequal than the schools that their grandparents had attended under legal segregation.¹⁸³ The U.S. Government Accountability Office found that, 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black students are increasingly attending segregated, high-poverty schools where they face multiple educational disparities.¹⁸⁴ The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights data between 2014 through 2018 shows the same disparities—large and persistent opportunity gaps and fewer education resources for Black students.¹⁸⁵ Black students are less likely to attend schools that offer advanced coursework and math and science courses,¹⁸⁶ and less likely to be placed in gifted and talented programs. Another found that Black students who had been on an accelerated math track consistent with their white and Asian peers were disproportionately removed from that track, so that in high school they were no longer being placed with the highest achievers—thereby reinforcing racial inequality.¹⁸⁷ Black students are also more likely to attend schools with large class sizes and teachers with the least amount of experience and qualifications, and that employ law enforcement officers but no counselors.¹⁸⁸ This can partially be attributed to the fact that urban school districts often times have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers due to the low pay, substandard working conditions, and socioeconomic factors that affect such work environments.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, although many African American students deal with greater social and environmental pressures, schools mostly attended by African Americans fail to place greater emphasis on family counseling and community empowerment.¹⁹⁰

In addition, because Black students more often have less qualified teachers than their white peers, they fall

further behind in school, and some researchers believe this is one reason for their excess placement in classes that support students with disabilities. In other words, even though they have only fallen behind because they have not received high quality instruction, schools believe incorrectly that they may have a learning or other disability.¹⁹¹ These school placement and resource allocation decisions matter for student achievement and post-K-12 school outcomes.¹⁹²

Severe funding disparities between schools serving white students and those serving Black students persist as well.¹⁹³ Many school districts across the country today continue to be funded primarily by property taxes raised from the school district’s local community, even though

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neighborhoods continue to be segregated by race and income. Federal and state governments have not filled the gaps between high- and low-income districts. According to a study by EdBuild, “[n]ationally, predominantly white school districts get \$23 billion more than their nonwhite peers, despite serving a similar number of children” and there is a “\$1,500 per student gap between white districts . . . and equally disadvantaged nonwhite districts.”¹⁹⁴ This funding differential matters: more school funding improves education quality.¹⁹⁵ In underfunded schools, students also face health and other risks because of the decrepit conditions of their school buildings.¹⁹⁶

Discriminatory Use of Discipline and the School-to-Prison Track

Black students are disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline with devastating consequences, which include significantly higher risk of dropout and juvenile justice involvement.¹⁹⁷ Over the last three decades, research has shown that Black students are far more likely than white students to be suspended, even when controlling for income level.¹⁹⁸ This disproportionate discipline also extends to preschool, where Department of Education data from the 2013-14 school year showed that Black preschoolers made up 18 percent of preschoolers, but nearly half of all out-of-school suspensions.¹⁹⁹ Overall, Black students made up approximately 16 percent of enrollment, yet they accounted for

Nationally, nonwhite school districts get

\$23 Billion LESS
than predominantly white districts

40 percent of suspensions nationally during the 2013-14 school year.²⁰⁰ And Black students were four times more likely to be suspended than their white peers during the 2017-18 school year.²⁰¹ Some researchers have shown that

of students enrolled in America's public schools but 31 percent of referrals and arrests, and they were twice as likely to be referred or arrested than their white peers in 2018-19.²⁰⁷ And Black girls are three times more likely

PUBLIC PRESCHOOL RATE OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS 2013-14



than white girls to receive referrals to law enforcement.²⁰⁸ There is also evidence that Black students are more likely to be subjected to excessive force by officers in schools.²⁰⁹ One arrest during school can have severe consequences for a student's future, as it doubles a high school student's likelihood of dropout and increases their likelihood of incarceration as adults.²¹⁰

even when you control for the type of student misbehavior, Black students are suspended and expelled at far higher rates than their white peers. In short, even when white students and Black students misbehave in the same or similar ways, Black students are more likely to be removed from school for the behavior than their white peers who do the same or similar things.²⁰² Researchers have also found that the difference in suspension rates between white and Black students accounts for as much as one-fifth of the achievement gap between Black and white students, so if Black students were suspended less then achievement levels should go up.²⁰³

Disproportionality in discipline—and the school-to-prison pipeline such disproportionality begets—has

been attributed to biases, implicit or otherwise, that school officials may carry into the schoolhouse. Research shows that these biases about Black students, which can result in discriminatory disciplinary decisions, may also exacerbate the achievement gap by decreasing expectations and opportunities.²¹¹ In addition, when students perceive an unfair distribution of punishment, an environment of anxiety is created, with achievement outcomes decreasing and students reporting less of a sense of belonging.²¹² Consistent research has identified alternatives to exclusionary discipline, such as School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and social emotional learning lessons for students that improve educational outcomes, faculty cohesion, school safety, and teacher morale, but many school districts have not implemented these alternatives.²¹³ Furthermore, intergenerational exposure to trauma related to racism has been linked to higher incidences of depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions

In addition, Black students are more likely to attend schools with law enforcement on campus and significant security measures, such as metal detectors, random security sweeps and searches, security guards, and security cameras.²⁰⁴ Having a large police presence and heightened surveillance measures on campus can cause students to feel less bonded to school adults, less engaged in school, more fearful and less trusting of school officials and police, and left with a feeling of alienation because they perceive that adults on campus inherently distrust them.²⁰⁵

Even when white students and Black students misbehave in similar ways, Black students are more likely to be removed from schools.

That schools serving mostly Black students have more law enforcement and fewer counselors is one reason that Black students have more contact with and are also disproportionately referred by schools to law enforcement. Arrests of Black students are higher in schools with a police officer on campus, even when controlling for school-wide academic achievement, racial/ethnic composition, geography, and student misconduct.²⁰⁶ In the 2015-16 school year, Black students made-up 15 percent

in Black communities compared with other groups, including African immigrants, who have not experienced the same multigenerational slavery and institutionalized racism.²¹⁴ Schools have not consistently provided help, such as mental health services and a trauma-informed approach to education. Instead, schools with large numbers of Black students have increased security and police presence.

The impact of the school-to-prison pipeline is also reflected in data over decades showing that, nationally, Black youth and adults are incarcerated at a disproportionately high rate compared with white youth and adults.²¹⁵ See Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System and Chapter 8 Pathologizing the Black Family for additional discussions of this topic. Once in the system, education provided to Black students in juvenile facilities is often substandard and youth in adult facilities may receive no education at all.²¹⁶ One of the many tragic consequences of the disproportionate incarceration of Black men is reflected in the academic struggles experienced by young Black boys.²¹⁷ The incarceration of Black adult men contributes to the number of young Black students in fatherless homes. Moreover, research suggests that the lack of male models in the home has a significantly higher impact on Black male students than it does on Black female students.²¹⁸

2017-18 Black Students were

4x MORE LIKELY to be **suspended** than their white peers

California

From the Civil War until the present, African Americans attending school in California have been forced to endure the same segregated and unequal education conditions endured by African Americans in the rest of the nation. In the early years, school segregation was required by state law. Later, the methods to maintain segregated and unequal schools—which included housing segregation, how to draw school districts and where to build schools—have largely mirrored the methods employed in other states outside of the South.

Segregated and Unequal Education Systems

In 1866, California law was amended to empower school districts to “allow ‘colored’ children to attend” school with white children in areas where there were not enough children of color to create a separate school, unless the “majority of white parents objected in writing.”²¹⁹ However, this change was short-lived because a California Superintendent of Public Instruction who believed in segregation and a governor who refused to abide by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments won the subsequent election.²²⁰

In 1870, legislators amended California law to provide that every school shall be open for the admission of white children residing within the school district—and that the “education of children of African descent and Indian children shall be provided for in separate schools,” and that schools with “fewer than ten students of color” can “educate them in separate schools or in any other manner.”²²¹ The Oakland School Board interpreted state law as no longer requiring a school for Black children and, in 1871, abruptly closed its “colored school,” which had been operating since 1866.²²²

On September 22, 1872, after the principal of San Francisco’s white-only Broadway public school denied 11-year-old Mary Frances Ward entrance and told her to attend the separate, all-Black public school, she and her parents filed suit in California court.²²³ The California Supreme Court upheld the system of segregated schools with a caveat.²²⁴ Where no separate school existed, the Court concluded that Black children could attend white schools.²²⁵ Soon after, state law was conformed to the *Ward* decision—“children of African descent, and Indian children” must be educated in separate schools but if districts “fail to provide such separate schools, then such children must be admitted into schools for white children.”²²⁶

Records reveal that in 1874, there were 23 “colored schools” in California, but “conditions had worsened for many of the state’s black youths,” because such schools were “poorly equipped.”²²⁷ One year later in 1875, the San Francisco School Board ended school segregation, principally due to the cost of maintaining segregated schools.²²⁸ Soon after, in 1880, the legislature removed school segregation for Black students from state education law. The amended law stated that schools “must be open” for “all children,” except “children of filthy or vicious habits, or children suffering from contagious or infectious diseases.”²²⁹

Nevertheless, 10 years later, in 1890, 12-year-old Arthur Wysinger was denied admission to Visalia’s “Little White” public school on account of race. The school for non-white Americans was manifestly unequal to the school for white Americans as illustrated by the fact that the Visalia School District built a new two-story school for white students and forced Black students to attend school in a barn.²³⁰

Arthur Wysinger’s father, Edmond, both Black and Native American, had been brought to California as an enslaved person during the gold rush and eventually bought his freedom. Edmond became a part-time preacher and laborer and always stressed the value of

education to his six children. Edmond wanted to send his son to Visalia's newly constructed school, however, officials said his son could only attend the one held in the barn. Edmond sued in response and the California Supreme Court ultimately held in favor of Edmond, but he died before he could see his son enroll in the "Little White" school. The Supreme Court found that the 1880

On March 2, 1945, five Mexican-American families on behalf of 5,000 other families sued the Westminster School District in Orange County because the school district forced their children to attend a different set of schools with fewer resources than the children of white families.²³⁶ Two years later, the federal court of appeal in California ruled that California education law did not

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permit separate schools for Mexican children, so creation of segregated schools for Mexican children was arbitrary and not allowed under federal law.²³⁷ This case is called the *Mendez* case after the family who led the filing of the lawsuit. At the time of this lawsuit, most Black students in the state were also attending schools with all Black or nearly all Black children.

education law allowed a Black student to attend any local public school.²³¹ However, the Court also recognized the state legislature's right to re-impose segregated schools whenever it wished.²³²

Because California law also did not permit the creation of separate schools for Black students, this case meant that where a school district had purposefully created a segregated school by, for example, creating school attendance boundaries around a Black neighborhood, this too was illegal. The lawyers who filed *Brown v. Board of Education* relied on the cases filed by Wysinger and Mendez and the other four Mexican-American families to help convince the Supreme Court to hold that separate schooling was unconstitutional. Also, as a result of the *Mendez* decision, on June 14, 1947, the last of California's school segregation laws, which applied to Asian American and Native American children, was repealed.²³⁸

Despite this decision, California continued to have racially segregated schools due to other discriminatory policies in housing and education. Just as education segregation existed in the North because of government-supported housing segregation, so too it existed in California. Government-supported housing discrimination in the form of restrictive covenants on properties, redlining, and white-only housing perpetuated school segregation. The federal government intentionally financed the creation of neighborhoods segregated by race—funding white-only public housing, redlining communities to deny homeownership loans to African Americans, and promoting racially-restrictive housing covenants. See Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, for a more detailed discussion of this topic.

Even after the *Wysinger* and *Mendez* decision, and the *Brown* decision in 1954, local cities and school boards refused to take proactive steps to desegregate schools. For example, they did not change the school-site attendance boundaries that had been drawn to reflect racially segregated neighborhoods and that created racially segregated schools. Many also did not take proactive steps to allow students to attend other schools outside their racially segregated neighborhoods. Moreover, those that did, failed to provide Black students adequate transportation to get them to schools in the white neighborhood.

Racially-restrictive covenants, enforced by California courts until 1948, were inserted into property titles as early as the 1890s and became rampant in the 1910s, “effectively turning neighborhoods across the state white-only.”²³³ Districts then assigned students to schools based on the segregated neighborhood where they lived or gerrymandered district boundaries to create segregated schools. School districts also zoned and constructed schools and drew school attendance boundaries in ways that created schools segregated by race.²³⁴ In addition, in the 1940s and 1950s, when Black homeowners tried to break the color lines, they came under attack by the Ku Klux Klan.²³⁵

In the years after, California leaders and the state's school board acknowledged that local school segregation continued and was illegal, but the problem was not fixed. In 1962, California's Board of Education acknowledged the ongoing problem of highly segregated schools and directed local districts to “exert all effort to avoid and eliminate segregation . . .”²³⁹ In 1964, prominent civil rights attorney, Loren Miller, confirmed that rampant segregation by race existed in California schools when he told an

assembly of western governors, “[M]ore Negro children attend all-Negro schools in Los Angeles than in Jackson, Mississippi and Little Rock, Arkansas, combined.”²⁴⁰

Statewide racial school census data taken in 1966 also confirmed the high levels of segregated schools: 85 percent of African Americans attended predominantly minority schools, whereas only 12 percent of Black students and 39 percent of white students attended racially balanced schools.²⁴¹ To address this segregation, California Attorney General Stanley Mosk advocated for explicit consideration of race in formulating a plan to eliminate it, because to ignore race one would have to “not merely conclude the Constitution is colorblind, but that it is totally blind.”²⁴²

Many local school boards and districts did not take the necessary steps to integrate schools, and so Black and Latino families and their advocates filed lawsuits and asked California courts to order school districts to integrate.²⁴³ In the 1960s and 70s, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pasadena, San Diego, Inglewood, and Richmond school districts, among others, faced court desegregation orders. Berkeley and Riverside initiated busing programs.²⁴⁴

Despite these orders, the passage of Proposition 64 in November 1964 allowed majority-white California to undermine efforts to integrate schools through desegregation of communities. This proposition allowed property sellers, landlords, and agents to continue to segregate communities—and, thereby, schools—on racial grounds when selling or renting accommodations, as they had been permitted to do before 1963.²⁴⁵ The highest courts ultimately struck the law down in 1967, but private racially restrictive covenants continued to be used by private owners to prevent African Americans from moving into white neighborhoods with better funded and resourced schools.²⁴⁶ See Chapter 5, Housing Segregation for further discussion of related issues.

In addition, Californians successfully passed laws to limit the tools courts could use to order schools to desegregate. Because neighborhoods continued to be segregated by race, one of the main tools that courts used to desegregate schools was to have Black and white students attend schools outside of their neighborhoods via bus transportation to the new schools. But many white Californians strongly opposed integration plans, especially court-ordered ones that required Black people or other students of color to be bused to attend their white schools or vice versa. And, in 1979, majority-white Californians passed Proposition 1, a law that stopped

courts from ordering school desegregation plans, unless families or students suing to desegregate the schools could prove that intentional discrimination by school officials caused the segregation or a federal court could impose the same order.²⁴⁷

The law, upheld by the United States Supreme Court, limited the ability of California courts to integrate schools that were segregated in fact, for example due to racially segregated neighborhoods, but not by a California law.²⁴⁸ Then, from the mid- to late-1970s through the 1990s, courts removed or limited desegregation orders in many California districts, as the Supreme Court and Congress further restricted the use of remedies like busing and school reassignment to integrate schools.²⁴⁹ In a few cases, such as in Berkeley, schools remained relatively integrated because school districts continued busing students and using school-selection processes designed to achieve integration, even without a desegregation order.²⁵⁰

COURTESY OF FRANCES BENJAMIN JOHNSTON/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



African American children and teacher in classroom studying corn and cotton, Annie Davis School, near Tuskegee, Alabama. (c. 1902)

But, in the vast majority of California school districts, schools either re-segregated or were never integrated, and so segregated schooling persists today. As of 2003, California was one of the four most segregated states for Black students.²⁵¹ As of 2014, California was identified as the third most segregated state for Black students, and a state where Black and Latino students are strongly concentrated in schools that have far lower quality and resources than their white and Asian peers.²⁵² As of 2020, California remained in the top 10 most segregated states for Black students.²⁵³ Approximately 51 percent of Black students in California attend hyper-segregated, 90- to 100-percent nonwhite schools.²⁵⁴

In a recent case, the state found that the segregation that persisted in a Bay Area school district was by design. For example, the California Attorney General's office found in 2019 that the Sausalito Marin City school board had segregated its schools, leaving the vast majority of Black students in an underfunded and under-resourced school while providing a better-funded and resourced charter school for the majority of white students.²⁵⁵

Separate and Unequal Education Conditions Persist

In California's highly segregated schools, schools mostly attended by white and Asian children receive more funding and resources than schools mostly attended by Black and Latino children. Throughout the 20th century, school districts in California, like those across the nation, financed their operations mainly with local property tax revenue and limited amounts of state and federal funding. This system allowed richer, white neighborhoods to better fund their schools districts than poorer, largely Black neighborhoods.²⁵⁶ In 1971, the California Supreme Court decided that this education funding system was discriminatory because, according to the Supreme Court, it made "the quality of a child's education a function of the wealth of his parents and neighbors."²⁵⁷

In 1978, voters passed Proposition 13, which decreased the amount of local property tax revenues and increased the amount of state funding for K-12 education. In 1988, voters then approved Proposition 98, which requires the state to dedicate at least 40 percent of its General Fund to K-14 education each year.²⁵⁸ These measures still did not solve the issue, and Black parents and students and other parents and students of color have continued to challenge funding inequities in court.

In late April 1991, the Richmond Unified School District, which served a high proportion of Black students, announced that it would close its schools six weeks early on May 1, 1991 due to a budget shortfall. As discussed in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, federal housing policies, and local officials segregated Richmond and made it extremely difficult for Black residents to move to the suburbs after World War II.²⁵⁹ Richmond parents sued, and the state Supreme Court decided that the closure did not meet the minimum level of education required by the state constitution.²⁶⁰ In the late 1990s, in the Compton Unified School District, which served mostly Black and Latino students, a teacher described the deplorable conditions in a temporary school building in Compton where she taught: "Because the wooden

beams across the ceiling were being eaten by termites, a fine layer of wood dust covered the students desks every morning. Maggots crawled in a cracked and collapsing area of the floor near my desk . . . The blue metal window coverings on the outsides of the windows were shut permanently, blocking all sunlight."²⁶¹

In 2000, students were part of a lawsuit, *Williams v. California*, again alleging that schools serving majority Black, Latino, and low-income students across the state failed to provide access to even the most rudimentary learning tools: school books, safe and decent facilities, and qualified teachers.²⁶² The lawsuit ultimately settled

As of 2020, California remained in the top 10 most segregated states in the country for Black students. Approximately 64 percent of Black students in California attend hyper-segregated, 90- to 100-percent nonwhite schools.

in 2004, with \$138 million in state funds to provide instructional materials to schools, \$800 million for facility repairs in low performing schools through establishment of the Emergency Repair Program (ERP), and \$50 million to create a complaint and oversight system to check to see if schools were providing the basics of an education.²⁶³ According to the American Civil Liberties Union, which brought the lawsuit, the state has failed its obligation under the settlement to fund the ERP and, as of 2013, the state's cumulative net contribution to ERP for the five last years had been \$0.²⁶⁴ Further, despite progress made as a result of the *Williams* settlement, persistent challenges remain, such as textbook distribution issues and insufficient monitoring of school districts that are new to the *Williams* process.²⁶⁵ Without county oversight, school districts facing hard fiscal choices are often tempted to give textbooks less of a priority, despite the fact that, under *Williams*, students have a right to sufficient instructional materials.²⁶⁶ California's unequal funding system continues to mean that Black and Latino students, and low-income students have far fewer school resources.

In 2013, the state tried to address the inequalities in school funding by giving more money to schools that have higher numbers of low-income, homeless, and foster youth. This change in the way funding was provided to school districts is referred to as the "equity index" and is part of the state's Local Control Funding Formula that provides approximately 58 percent of the funding that California public schools receive each year.²⁶⁷

The state's funding formula does not focus on Black students specifically or require schools to ensure that the funding is spent on the high-needs students within the district.²⁶⁸ Because about 32 percent of the funding for California schools still comes from local property taxes, and wealthier communities with higher property values can more easily raise additional funds through local bonds and donations, rich and often more predominantly white neighborhoods continue to fund their schools at greater levels.²⁶⁹

At the October 2021 Task Force hearing, Kawika Smith, who graduated from Verbum Dei High School in Watts, a historic Black neighborhood of Los Angeles, testified about two high schools in Los Angeles. In the predominantly Black high school, Black students went without paper for three months simply because the school was underfunded. In contrast, the other school had access to extra funding, which allowed the school to purchase a fountain. Smith told the Task Force, "I strongly believe that we need to revisit the property tax laws and algorithms for how schools are funded . . . I can only imagine if that money was redirected into the Black school where they needed the money—what that could have meant for [those] Black students."²⁷⁰

As in the rest of the country, unequal funding translates to unequal opportunities. Schools with fewer resources mean fewer Advanced Placement and college preparation courses, which means that Black students attending those schools are less competitive for college and university admission and may not have taken the courses

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necessary—called A-G courses in California—to go to a four-year state University. Within districts and schools, Black students continue to be placed in vocational tracks and out of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Advanced Placement programs.²⁷¹ In addition, Black students in California are disproportionately likely to be identified as having a learning disability, at nearly twice the rate of Black students nationwide.²⁷² "Where we failed is discontinuing those efforts to integrate our schools, to invest in them equitably, and to

begin in the pre-K years," Dr. Rucker Johnson, Professor of Public Policy at Berkeley told the Task Force.²⁷³

Recent studies have shown the importance of having at least one teacher who looks like you.²⁷⁴ But the percentage of Black teachers in California declined from 5.1 percent in 1997-98 to four percent in 2017-18, even though Black students made up 5.6 percent of California's student population.²⁷⁵ Black men comprise one percent of California's teaching force.²⁷⁶

Furthermore, in California, while suspensions have decreased significantly statewide since 2013,²⁷⁷ Black students continue to be suspended at three times the rate of white students,²⁷⁸ and lose nearly four times the number of days of instruction to suspensions and expulsions as white students.²⁷⁹ Suspensions for subjective offenses, such as willful defiance or disruption—which can include anything from failing to take a hat off in class to talking in class—are a persistent but declining source of disproportionate discipline due to recent legislation limiting use for these reasons.

In recent stipulated judgments reached with four different California school districts, the California Attorney General's office identified racial disparities in discipline for Black students with harmful negative impacts.²⁸⁰ For example, the Attorney General's investigation of the Barstow Unified School District found that Black middle and high school students were 79 and 78 percent, respectively, more likely, to be suspended out of school than similarly situated white students, and the rate of days Black students were punished was 168 percent greater in elementary, 37.9 percent greater in middle school, and 54.5 percent greater in high school than their white peers.²⁸¹

In California, Black students are also disproportionately referred by schools to law enforcement.²⁸² A case investigated by the California Attorney General's Office found that, since 1991, school resource

officers in the Stockton Unified School District had arrested 34,000 students, including 1,600 under 10 years old, with many minor misbehaviors turned into criminal offenses, disproportionality impacting Black and Latino students, and students with disabilities.²⁸³

A number of high-profile reported cases have also raised concerns that Black children in California face increased risk of invasive searches and excessive use of force in schools. In one reported case, during school hours, a

COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVE/NEWSMAKERS VIA GETTY IMAGES



Demonstrators picket in front of a school board office protesting segregation of students. (1963)

police officer handcuffed a five-year-old Black boy with zip ties and charged him with battery because he “resisted” being arrested.²⁸⁴ The American Civil Liberties Union has also reported a number of incidents. In one, a Black student in a Los Angeles school was partially strip-searched in the presence of a male officer—a vice principal forced an “eighth grade girl to pull her bra away from her body and shake it” and when she “tried to cover her breast for modesty, the vice-principal pulled her hands away.”²⁸⁵ In another filed case, school police were alleged to have handcuffed and placed a 13-year-old Black student on probation after he was playing a makeshift game of soccer with an orange.²⁸⁶ In yet another, the American Civil Liberties Union reported that a school police officer who told a Black high school student that it was wrong to be gay and wear boy’s clothes, subsequently pushed her against the wall and handcuffed her for telling the officer that “it was also wrong that white people like the officer enslaved her people.”²⁸⁷ Subsequent to the incident, the same officer “continued to harass [her], routinely patting her down and demanding that she turn out her bag.”²⁸⁸

IV. Unequal Higher Education

Until *Brown v. Board of Education*, white colleges and universities largely refused to admit African Americans.²⁹⁴ In response, African Americans raised funding to develop Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In the early 1900s, the federal government began to

Jacob “Blacc” Jackson, the Los Angeles Youth Commissioner, explained to the Task Force during its October 2021 hearing how he was placed in an abusive adoptive home and lost his older brother in a police shooting but was focused on “finish[ing] high school [at Crenshaw High] and pass[ing] all of [his classes].”²⁸⁹ When, at school, Jackson made a mistake in dealing with a substitute teacher, instead of the teacher, counselors, and school administrators trying to work with him, he was questioned, threatened, and handcuffed by school police for an incident he had already apologized for. The school police officer told Jackson that “they would always be watching me. They said you’re just like everybody else at this school . . . I felt scared and anxious and unclear about what to

do.” Jackson felt he could not stay at his high school and told the Task Force that, “What I wish the school [had] provided for me when I was there was real counselors, after-school programs, real nurses, Black people history, peace building, and [transformative justice] practice.”

In general, research shows that school officials are more likely to refer Black students like Jackson to law enforcement for minor behavior than white students.²⁹⁰ Such contacts with law enforcement increase a student’s feeling of isolation, and contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline and the disproportionate rates of Black people in our criminal justice system.²⁹¹

Once in the juvenile justice system, Black students face an increased likelihood of dropout due to inconsistent education access and adequacy of instruction.²⁹² See Chapter 11 An Unjust Legal System for a more detailed discussion of this topic. For Black students charged with offenses that result in a transfer to the state prison system, few can access and complete higher education.²⁹³

provide funding and land to open HBCUs, but it had to pass through white-controlled state legislatures. However, these historically Black institutions have been unequally funded in comparison to similar historically white institutions throughout American history.

After World War II, the GI Bill paid for veterans to attend college, graduate school, and go through training programs.²⁹⁵ Although the GI Bill should have helped Black and white veterans equally, due to Black veterans' exclusion from white colleges, the lack of Black Veterans Administration counselors and the tendency of white counselors to steer Black veterans into vocational programs, it actually increased the racial higher education gap between Black and white Americans.²⁹⁶ Even today, Black military veterans continue to face discriminatory barriers that can result in unequal access to education benefits available to veterans. In addition, although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 again promised some relief through a prohibition on discrimination in higher education programs receiving federal funds and some colleges and universities took affirmative action to remedy prior-discrimination in college admissions, gains were short-lived due to Supreme Court decisions and, in California, passage of Proposition 209, which prohibited race from being used as a factor in admissions.

Unequal Funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Prior to the Civil War, a few colleges for free African Americans existed in the north, and none in the south.²⁹⁷ In 1862, the federal government under the first Morrill Act granted federal land and funding to states to open colleges and universities, but African Americans were generally not allowed to attend.²⁹⁸ After the Civil War ended in 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau began establishing Black colleges staffed by Civil War veterans with the support of white and Black religious missionaries.²⁹⁹ White missionaries funded Black education in order to Christianize the "menace" of uneducated enslaved people.³⁰⁰ These colleges were in name only and, like many white colleges at the time, generally provided only primary and secondary education.³⁰¹

In 1890, Congress passed the second Morrill Act and required states to provide higher education to Black students as the states had for white students.³⁰² In the north, where Black students were allowed to attend colleges and universities in extremely limited numbers, they often were not allowed to fully participate in the way that white, male students participated.³⁰³

In order to continue receiving federal funding, former enslaving states, where the majority of African Americans lived, built segregated public Black colleges.³⁰⁴ White-controlled legislatures underfunded Black colleges and universities, provided substandard facilities, and did not provide adequate resources to

train faculty.³⁰⁵ White-controlled southern legislatures limited curriculum to mechanical, agricultural, and industrial arts, helping maintain African Americans as a servant underclass to build white wealth.³⁰⁶

Few graduate programs admitted Black students, although after World War II, the NAACP successfully sued to expand graduate education opportunities for Black students.³⁰⁷ Although a few Black people were allowed to attend predominantly white institutions, 90 percent of all Black degree-holders in the late 1940s had been educated at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. On the eve of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Black people were less than one percent of entering first-year students at predominantly white institutions.³⁰⁸

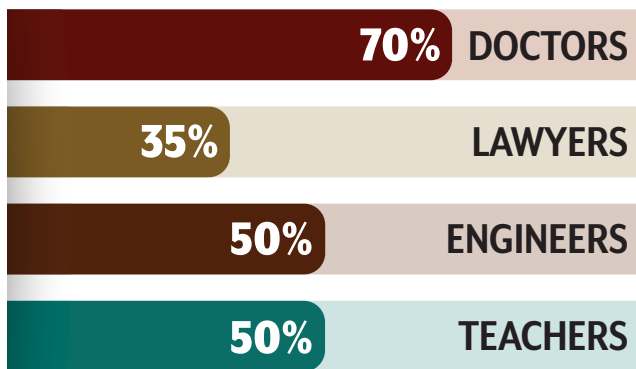
Even after the *Brown* decision, white government officials in the south used state power to prohibit integration efforts, including in Mississippi.³⁰⁹ In 1959, Clyde Kennard, a 31-year-old Black veteran of the Korean War, who ran a small poultry farm, applied to Mississippi Southern College, now the University of Southern Mississippi.³¹⁰ The university president reported Kennard's intention to apply to the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, a state agency led by the governor of Mississippi, which was created in order to preserve segregation.³¹¹ After refusing to back down from applying to the university, even after the Mississippi governor requested that he withdraw his application, Kennard's local cooperative foreclosed on his farm and local government officials arrested and falsely convicted him for stealing \$25 of chicken feed.³¹² Kennard was sentenced to seven years in a chain gang where he picked cotton and was fed white prisoners' leftover food.³¹³ Kennard died of misdiagnosed and untreated colon cancer in 1963.³¹⁴

Segregated higher education continued into the 1970s. In 1969 and 1970, the federal Department of Education concluded that Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Florida, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Maryland, and Virginia operated segregated colleges and universities and, in 1970, the NAACP sued the federal department of education for failing to force these institutions to desegregate.³¹⁵ By the late 1970s, many years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, at least 17 southern states were still operating racially segregated higher education systems.³¹⁶ A number of public HBCUs closed or merged with traditionally white institutions, but most Black college students continued to attend HBCUs.³¹⁷ HBCUs continued to struggle with poorer facilities and budgets compared to traditionally white institutions; some lacked adequate libraries and scientific and research equipment.³¹⁸

Despite the underfunding, through the 1970s, private and public HBCUs educated a large proportion of the African American middle class.³¹⁹ In 2006, HBCUs made up three percent of higher education but enrolled 14 percent of Black undergraduates, and graduated 28 percent of all Black undergraduate students who earned a degree.³²⁰ Seventy percent of America's Black doctors, 35 percent of Black lawyers, and 50 percent of Black engineers and teachers have a degree from an HBCU.³²¹ For Black students, HBCUs can provide an empowering, family-like environment of small classes and close relationships with faculty and students away from racial tensions experienced off campus.³²²

BLACK PROFESSIONALS TODAY

Percent that graduated from HBCUs



Today, increased access for Black students to all colleges and universities has led to a relative decrease in enrollment to HBCUs.³²³ While Black enrollment at HBCUs increased by 17 percent between 1976 and 2018, the total number of Black students enrolled in all degree-granting postsecondary institutions more than doubled during this period.³²⁴ In 2018, there were 101 HBCUs located in 19 states, including one in Los Angeles, the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science.³²⁵ However, funding for HBCUs continues to be uneven and is tied to a state's fiscal health.³²⁶ Reports in 2008 and 2014 concluded that state governments continue to deprioritize funding public HBCUs, leading to predominantly white universities receiving more funding per student than HBCUs.³²⁷ In 2008, for example, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill received about \$15,700 in state funding per student.³²⁸ But students at historically Black North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University received about \$7,800 in state funding per student.³²⁹ In 2020, the federal government increased funding for HBCUs, but many HBCUs have closed in recent years due to financial issues, a trend that has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.³³⁰

Unequal Access to the GI Bill

Due to expanded education opportunities and funding under the GI Bill, between 1950 and 1975, Black student college enrollment increased from 83,000 to 666,000 students.³³¹ However, in comparison to white veterans who used GI Bill benefits to go to college, state officials and the structure of the program generally prevented Black veterans from accessing the full education benefits available to them.³³²

At the end of World War II, the vast majority of Black veterans returned to their residence in the southern states.³³³ Universities in the South did not accept Black students, and white state legislatures did not increase funding to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to meet increased demand from returning veterans.³³⁴ Many HBCUs had huge waiting lists, and applicants might have to wait a year or more to learn whether they had been admitted; during the postwar period, approximately 55 percent of Black veteran applicants to HBCUs were rejected.³³⁵ In the North, where less than a quarter of African Americans lived at the time, although public universities admitted Black students, many private colleges and universities continued to reject Black students, or only admitted them in small numbers.³³⁶ Local Veterans Administration officials in the South were overwhelmingly white, and steered Black people to vocational programs that funneled them to menial jobs or prohibited use of the GI Bill to pay for college.³³⁷ Only 12 percent of Black veterans were able to use the GI bill to enroll in college, compared to 26 percent for veterans as a whole.³³⁸ Although African Americans used the educational benefits of the GI Bill more often than white Americans did, they could not use those benefits for college, like white Americans could, because they were denied entrance to white colleges and universities and often steered away from college degree programs and into vocational tracks.³³⁹ As a result, the educational and economic gap between white and African Americans widened.³⁴⁰ See Chapter 13 The Wealth Gap for further discussion of related issues.

Today, discrimination in access to healthcare, employment, and housing continues to limit access to education benefits in the GI Bill for Black veterans compared to white veterans.³⁴¹ While African Americans make up 16.9 percent of the U.S. active duty force, studies show that Black veterans are not utilizing their benefits as much as white or Asian American veterans due to the aforementioned barriers.³⁴²

Deficiencies of Affirmative Action

The idea of affirmative action began as a concept with President John F. Kennedy issuing an executive order

in 1961 requiring that federal contractors “take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin,” and establishing the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity.³⁴³ Three years later, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to ban discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin not only in employment, but also in education.³⁴⁴ With respect to employment, the federal department of labor ordered all federal contractors to prepare affirmative action plans including goals and timetables to improve the employment standing of specific groups of people, including African Americans.³⁴⁵

In his 1965 commencement address at Howard University, President Lyndon Johnson stated that affirmative action should be approached as a moral and policy response to the material and psychological losses suffered by African Americans during and after the time of slavery.³⁴⁶ He declared, “you do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.”³⁴⁷ Further, he emphasized the importance of African Americans’ humanity and stated that what African Americans sought was “not just freedom but opportunity—not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result.”³⁴⁸

In the late 1960s and 1970s, some colleges and graduate schools began to develop similar affirmative action policies to increase the number of Black and other underrepresented students.³⁴⁹ After the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, civil rights leaders pushed for colleges to admit more Black students.³⁵⁰ In 1969, the next school year, the number of Black students admitted to America’s elite universities rose sharply, some by more than 100 percent.³⁵¹

The lawsuits came quickly. In 1971, two years after schools adopted affirmative action policies, a white student sued the University of Washington Law School, citing reverse racism as the reason for his rejection.³⁵² Because of this case, Harvard alumni believed that “semiliterate blacks are being accepted at the expense of white

geniuses[,]” said David L. Evans, associate dean of admissions at Harvard in 1975.

By 1978, when the former nearly all white colleges and universities were still admitting fewer Black students than Black high school graduates, the Supreme Court decided in the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, to limit states’ and universities’ ability to take race-based affirmative actions to address education discrimination.³⁵³ The Supreme Court declared that the policy of the University of California at Davis’s medical school to set aside 16 of 100 total seats for “minority groups” like African Americans was unconstitutional because it prevented white students from competing for the 16 seats set aside.³⁵⁴ The Supreme Court declared in *Bakke* and subsequent cases that if a college or university wanted to have a more diverse class of students or make up for “societal” discrimination against African Americans in the United States then it could only consider race as a factor, among many other factors, and with limitations.³⁵⁵

In doing so, the Supreme Court rejected affirmative action programs, like Davis’s program, that were intended to compensate Black students (and other racial minority groups) for the ways that federal, state, and local government had discriminated against them in education for more than 200 years, solely on account of their race. Instead, the Supreme Court described the American his-



A photograph taken by the Federal Security Agency, National Youth Administration. The original caption written by the federal agency stated: “Bakersfield, California. These Negro youth are returning to their squalid homes in the Sunset district of Bakersfield.” (1940)

tory of discrimination as “societal discrimination” that is “amorphous and ageless into the past[,]” which colleges and universities could not fix through programs

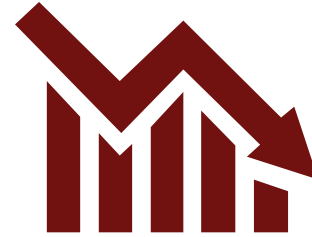
like the one at Davis.³⁵⁶ At the same time, federal courts have not struck down university and college admissions policies, which provide a preference for legacy admissions, students whose parents, grandparents, and great grandparents attended the university or college.³⁵⁷ The argument is that such preferences are not race-based, but this does not grapple with the fact that white legacies may have received a preference in admission because they did not need to compete with Black students who were excluded from the admissions pool for centuries.³⁵⁸ Critics of the current way that colleges and universities practice affirmative action as sanctioned by the Supreme Court argue that using student diversity as a reason to include race as a factor does not address the original intention of desegregation or break down structural barriers for Black students.³⁵⁹

The percentage of Black college students has risen in the past 50 years, but it has fallen recently. The percentage of American college students who are Black increased from 10 percent in 1976 to 14 percent in 2017, but has dropped since from its high of 15 percent in 2011.³⁶⁰ College enrollment rates for Black 18- to 24- year-old Americans still lag behind those for Asian and white Americans of the same age.³⁶¹ A 2020 study found that, since 2000, the percentage of Black students enrolled has decreased at nearly 60 percent of the 101 most selective public colleges and universities.³⁶² Researchers identify that one cause of declining enrollment is a focus on standardized testing as an admissions requirement because the scores from such testing do not reflect the potential or ability of Black students but rather the inequities that Black students experience throughout their education career, from less access to high-quality early education to a greater likelihood of attending schools with less funding, fewer experienced teachers, and fewer rigorous course options.³⁶³ Other causes for declining enrollment include closure of for-profit colleges and declines at two-year public colleges due to unemployment. Black students are overrepresented at both types of colleges.³⁶⁴

California

In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209, which eliminated consideration of race in public education admissions, regardless of long-standing segregation and past discrimination.³⁶⁵ This has had significant impacts on Black and other students of color in California.³⁶⁶ In 2020, a University of California, Berkeley study found that this affirmative action ban has harmed Black and Latino students by significantly reducing enrollment across the University of California campuses and lowering their graduation rates.³⁶⁷

60% decline
in Black student enrollment



at America's **most selective** colleges and universities 2000-2020

An earlier 2006 study found that Black admissions had plummeted since the ban on affirmative action, particularly at the University of California Los Angeles and Berkeley campuses.³⁶⁸ In 2020, the President of the University of California Student Association, Varsha Sarveshwar, commented that, “[t]he exclusion of Black and Latino students from selective colleges and universities is nothing short of a crisis. . . . 7 out of 9 UC undergraduate campuses receive D and F grades in access for Black and Latino students.”³⁶⁹ Sarveshwar called on higher education leaders and policymakers to “move beyond public commitments to diversity – and act decisively to ensure that access is truly equitable.”³⁷⁰

The continued nature of the uneven playing field between Black and white students was highlighted in a recent legal settlement between student and community groups and the University of California.³⁷¹ The lawsuit, leading up to the settlement, was brought by then 19-year-old Kawika Smith, a high school student from South Los Angeles, who asserted that the use of SAT and ACT scores in admissions and university scholarship decisions may be discriminatory because they are proxies for wealth and race, and only exacerbate the gaps that exist due to unequal exam preparation between schools and based on whether parents can pay for private test tutors.³⁷² In addition, research has shown that Black students may perform poorly on standardized tests, not because of genetic or cultural differences, but because negative stereotypes raise doubts and high-pressure anxieties in a test-taker’s mind.³⁷³ Kawika Smith told the Task Force at its October 2021 hearing that when he thought back to the day he took the SAT, he was “immediately met with this memory of feeling that I wasn’t worthy or capable of being in a collegiate environment, and this singular test determined that I would not be eligible for scholarship opportunities despite my academic

achievements and having been in need of financial support to afford college[.]”³⁷⁴ The legal settlement with the University California ensures that SAT and ACT scores

will not be used in admission and scholarship decisions until spring 2025.³⁷⁵

V. Teaching Inaccurate History

Researchers and historians have raised significant concerns that the American K-12 education system is failing to teach a complete and accurate history of slavery and structural racism, along with the significant role that African Americans had in developing this nation’s wealth without compensation. Dr. David Yacovone, a historian at Harvard University’s Hutchins Center for African & African American Research who has been studying United States history textbooks published from 1839 to the 1980s found that many textbooks taught that white people were superior to Black people and downplayed, minimized, or justified slavery based on a racial caste system, with African Americans appearing “only as a problem.”³⁷⁶ Dr. Yacovone explained that in the older history textbooks “[w]hite supremacy is a toxin. . . . injected . . . into the mind of many generations of Americans.”³⁷⁷

In addition, a 2018 study, *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery*, surveyed social studies teachers in K-12 schools across the country and found that 97 percent agreed that learning about slavery is essential, but that there is a lack of deep coverage on the topic; 58 percent reported dissatisfaction with their textbooks; and 39 percent reported their state offered little or no support for teaching about slavery.³⁷⁸ The study gave an average score of 46 percent with respect to whether 10 popular U.S. history textbooks provide comprehensive coverage of slavery and enslaved people. The study also found

Historians have found that United States history textbooks published from 1839 to the 1980s taught that white people were superior to Black people and downplayed, minimized, or justified slavery.

that only eight percent of 1,000 American high school seniors surveyed could identify slavery as the central cause of the Civil War.³⁷⁹ To ensure that schools accurately teach American history, Dr. Yacovone recommends “teach[ing] the truth about slavery as a central institution in America’s origins, as the cause of the Civil War, and about its legacy that still lives on.”³⁸⁰

In Texas, the state that uses the largest amount of textbooks, thereby shaping the K-12 textbook industry, the Board of Education, rather than historians, began changing the history books to refer to formerly enslaved people as workers.³⁸¹ In schools, students of color, including Black students, are less likely to see books with characters that share their cultural background and textbooks that reflect their experiences.³⁸² Many educators recognize that textbooks do not accurately and fully reflect experiences of people of color; only one in five educators, the vast majority of whom were white, in a June 2020 nationwide survey thought so.³⁸³ Educators of color were more likely to find textbooks lacking.³⁸⁴ In 2020, Connecticut became the first state in the nation to require high schools to offer African-American, Black, Puerto Rican, and Latino studies.³⁸⁵

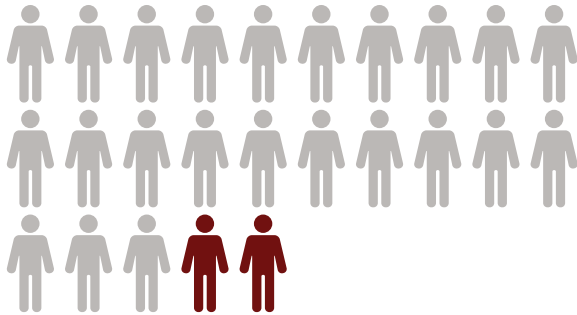
There is continued opposition to discussing the truth about slavery in public K-12 schools. Republicans in multiple states and in Congress have introduced bills to cut funding from schools that choose to use curriculum derived from the New York Times’ Pulitzer Prize-winning *1619* series of essays challenging readers to think about slavery as foundational to the nation’s origin story. They argue inclusion of this history delegitimizes the idea of the U.S. as a nation founded on principles of liberty and freedom and creates racial divisions.³⁸⁶ In addition, the concept that schools may be teaching students critical

race theory—which explains that race is a social construct embedded in legal systems and policies—is under attack across the nation by groups that say it divides Americans and places the blame on white Americans for current and historical harm to African Americans and other nonwhite Americans.³⁸⁷ But Randi Weingarten, the President of the American Federation of

Teachers, one of the nation’s largest teaching unions, has said that teaching critical race theory is really about teaching “the truth” and pledged to defend any teacher “who gets in trouble for teaching honest history . . . Teaching the truth is not radical or wrong. Distorting history and threatening educators for teaching the truth is what is truly radical and wrong.”³⁸⁸ Weingarten

publicly stated that those attacking critical race theory have other motives: “labeling any discussion of race, racism or discrimination as critical race theory to try to make it toxic” and “to deprive students of a robust understanding of our common history.”³⁸⁹

Only **8%** of American
high school seniors



could identify **slavery** as the
central cause of the Civil War

As important as how schools shape their curriculum concerning the history of Black people in America is how schools teach the humanity of Black people before, during, and after enslavement. A curriculum that undoes the harmful narratives of African Americans that have historically been used to justify false conceptions of Black inferiority, requires schools to teach that African Americans’ stories did not begin with enslavement.³⁹⁰ Such a curriculum also requires schools to teach about humanity’s origins in Africa thousands of years before either Arabs or Europeans encountered people of West and Central African ancestry.³⁹¹ Academics have also focused on the importance of teaching about the study of African lives and the African experience for true liberation.³⁹² In order to empower Black communities through the study of Black history, academics discuss the importance of challenging European perspectives of the African experience to prevent others from defining the African experience and to give African people control over the narrative that is told about their experiences.³⁹³ Redefinition of school curriculum discussing Black experiences, including the narrative about the African experience, is particularly important in California, a state which, as of 2015, was home to the fifth largest Black population in the country.³⁹⁴

The dehumanization inscribed in school textbooks causes miseducation and effectively contributes to African Americans’ “cultural and social alienation from identity

and existential belonging.”³⁹⁵ In the 1960s, W.E.B Du Bois spoke out about the dangers posed by the deficiencies in school curriculums with regard to Black history and culture.³⁹⁶ He warned that the intentional omission of these concepts from public school curriculums would ultimately cause Black history and culture to be lost, unless Black families and organizations actively and systematically impressed these fundamental principles upon subsequent generations of African Americans.³⁹⁷

In line with this same notion of education for liberation and cultural preservation, many activists specifically focused their efforts on the establishment and expansion of “Black Studies” on university and college campuses to further the ongoing movement for the liberation of African Americans. The majority of Black Studies programs began at predominantly white institutions and a handful of HBCUs.³⁹⁸ Although the Black Studies Movement was initially faced with stiff opposition, by 1971 an estimated 500 courses and programs had been organized in the United States.³⁹⁹

California

California student groups have long raised concerns that the complete history of racism and segregation in the state and across the nation has been left out of textbooks, and that leaders from diverse backgrounds who helped create this nation and California are not reflected.⁴⁰⁰ “It isn’t just white heroes like Christopher Columbus or folks like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. There was a lot more history behind it and we don’t learn a lot about the other important figures that contributed to making America[] into what it is,” Alvin Lee, President of Generation Up, a 4,000-member California student organization, shared with legislators considering how to change California’s history textbooks to better reflect the contributions of its diverse people. One state legislator who has advocated to ensure that California’s elementary and secondary schools teach a curriculum that reflects the history of African Americans and other people of color, explained that: “Knowledge of our history plays a critical role in showing who we become” and “students [are more engaged] when they [see] themselves reflected in the coursework.”⁴⁰¹

Among other things, California’s approach to teaching about slavery has been critiqued. In 2018, a classroom teacher made headlines for staging a classroom simulation of conditions on a slave ship to provide a “unique learning experience.”⁴⁰² A study by Southern Poverty Law Center found that California did a better job than other states in teaching slavery, but highlighted concerns with the approach of teaching about Harriet Tubman in second grade two years before slavery is taught and

failing to discuss how false ideas of white economic and political supremacy fueled and perpetuated slavery as an institution.⁴⁰³

In addition, research has shown that because school curricula often do not include content that reflects the experience, culture, and history of Black students, they and others students whose experience, culture, and history is not reflected, suffer.⁴⁰⁴ When Black students do not see their experiences and history reflected in the school curricula, this leads to a feeling that they are not important and even invisible and voiceless in the classroom.⁴⁰⁵ And while culturally responsive teacher training is one way to help Black students and other students of color feel welcomed, included, and valued in schools, teacher preparation is inadequate in training teachers to be culturally-responsive and to carry those practices into the classroom in both the way they teach and the materials they use when they teach.⁴⁰⁶

One other way to increase diversity in curriculum is by adding ethnic studies courses. “Ethnic studies” is a term used to encompass Black, Chicano, Latino, Native, and Asian American studies, and was developed in response to lack of representation of people from these groups in curricula taught in U.S. schools, colleges, and universities. Generally, ethnic studies is not taught in California elementary and secondary schools, despite known academic performance and attendance benefits.⁴⁰⁷ In 2016–17, only a small number—17,354 K–12 students statewide—were enrolled in ethnic studies courses.⁴⁰⁸ One reason for this: Only 51 percent of the 777 ethnic studies courses in social science in 2016–17 were approved as meeting A–G state university admissions requirements.⁴⁰⁹

This may be changing. In 2016, California state law mandated creation of a voluntary K–12 ethnic studies curriculum. Recently, on March 18, 2021, the State Board of Education approved the model ethnic studies curriculum.⁴¹⁰ And while in 2019, a California bill to mandate ethnic studies in all K–12 schools was vetoed by Governor Newsom,⁴¹¹ in October 2021, he signed a different bill,

Assembly Bill 101, which will require California high school students to take ethnic studies as a graduation requirement commencing in 2030.⁴¹² In the interim, several districts have recently made completion of a course in ethnic studies a graduation requirement, including Montebello, Sacramento City, and Coachella.⁴¹³ In 2020, San Francisco approved development of a K–12 Black studies curriculum.⁴¹⁴

In California’s public colleges and universities, the movement for Ethnic Studies began in 1968. At that time, the Black Student Union, the Third World Liberation Front, select faculty and staff, and other activists from the larger San Francisco Bay Area, organized and led a series of protests at San Francisco State University.⁴¹⁵ Protestors denounced the deficiencies within the university’s curriculum, which neglected and misrepresented the experiences of people of color, including African Americans and indigenous people.⁴¹⁶ On a mission to define and shape their own educational experiences, students drafted a list of demands for the university and protested for months until a deal was negotiated. Ultimately, the university agreed to establish a College of Ethnic Studies, the first in the nation, with classes geared toward communities of color.⁴¹⁷ Since that time, 22 of 23 CSU campuses have maintained some level of ethnic studies, but a recent legislative analysis suggested that 53 percent of CSU students had not taken a course between 2015 to 2018.⁴¹⁸

In August 2020, Governor Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1460, which, beginning in 2024 to 2025, requires a three credit ethnic studies course for graduation from a CSU—the first change to the CSU’s general education curriculum in over 40 years.⁴¹⁹ Legislative findings in support of the bill’s passage included that white students and students of color benefit from taking ethnic studies courses, which “play an important role in building an inclusive multicultural democracy.”⁴²⁰ In discussing the importance of the bill’s passage, Senator Steven Bradford, the bill’s co-author commented, “Ethnic studies is critical in learning our contributions to America and telling the true story of our rich history.”⁴²¹

VI. Conclusion

During the slavery era, enslaving states denied Black enslaved Americans an education so that they could maintain control over the enslaved people they depended upon to build this nation’s wealth. However, an understanding of how powerful knowledge can be emboldened enslaved African Americans to find ways to educate themselves, despite the great danger

they risked in doing so. Following the Civil War, states adopted many laws and policies continue denying education to free African Americans and to effectively maintain an illiterate servant class. In states where Black children were permitted to attend segregated schools, white-controlled legislatures severely underfunded these schools and subjected Black students to

deplorable conditions. Aside from the inferior quality of these schools, Black communities also suffered from the ongoing racist attacks by white terrorist groups who committed themselves to destroying Black schools. Even after the Supreme Court outlawed school segregation in its 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, white policymakers and school boards adopted other policies to ensure the continued exclusion of Black students from their schools. Such policies and the incidents and effects of enslavement continue to have lasting effects on the educational opportunities and the quality of academic opportunities available to African Americans today.⁴²²

Because government acts have denied the vast majority of African Americans continued access to education and high quality and well-funded schools from enslavement until the present, they have suffered a number of harms, including lower levels of high school graduation, achievement, and college access and completion. These injuries widened the gap between Black and white wealth in America. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the education injuries even worse, because far more Black students than white students live in poverty, and students living in poverty have had less access to the technology needed to participate in remote schooling.⁴²³ California and the nation have not adequately accounted for the harmful intergenerational effects of education discrimination and denial.

In recent years, the academic gap between all student groups has steadily narrowed, except for the gap between Black and white students, which has widened, confirming the ongoing existence of deeply-rooted racial disparities in the nation's education system.⁴²⁴ In California, over the past decade, average math and

reading test scores rose for all student groups, except Black students. In districts where there was the least significant gap between the academic achievements of different student groups, data showed that this could be attributed to less socioeconomic inequality among students, more spending per pupil by the district, and fewer disparities in access to experienced teachers.⁴²⁵ The gap also continues to exist in high school graduation rates, but it has reduced considerably nationwide and in California since the 1960s.⁴²⁶ Nonetheless, the gap in college as well as graduate school admission and graduation rates has remained stagnant, with African Americans half as likely as white Americans to have a college degree.⁴²⁷

Due to intergenerational denials of equal educational opportunity, African Americans have also been denied a number of other benefits, including a positive link between one's own education and the education received by one's children.⁴²⁸ More schooling is associated with higher earnings in one's own life and in subsequent generations.⁴²⁹ However, white and African Americans with the same educational level do not have the same level of wealth.⁴³⁰ White college graduates have seven times more wealth than their Black college graduate counterparts, even when it is assumed that the white and Black college graduates are in jobs making the same amount of money.⁴³¹ African American college graduates also have two-thirds of the net worth of white Americans who never finished high school.⁴³² And Black college graduates continue to suffer higher unemployment rates than white college graduates.⁴³³ Centuries after slavery, white Americans continue to benefit from its effects, and African Americans continue to suffer its compounded harms.

Endnotes

¹ *Piper v. Big Pine Sch. Dist. of Inyo Cty.* (1924) 193 Cal. 664, 668, 673-74.

² Orfield and Jarvie, [Black Segregation Matters: School Resegregation and Black Educational Opportunity](#), UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (Dec. 2020) pp. 4-6 (as of July 1, 2021) (hereafter *Black Segregation Matters*); Ladson-Billings, *From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools* (2006) 35 Ed. Researcher 3, 5 (hereafter *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*).

³ Ladson-Billings, *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*, *supra*; Tamborini et al., *Education and Lifetime Earnings in the United States* (2015) 54 Demography 1383, 1385-1386.

⁴ Sambol-Tosco, [The Slave Experience: Education, Arts & Culture](#), Thirteen (2004) p. 2 (as of Mar. 5, 2021) (hereafter *The Slave Experience*).

⁵ Sambol-Tosco, *The Slave Experience*, *supra*; Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (2004) p. 52 (hereafter *Silent Covenants*).

⁶ Woodson, [The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861](#) (1919) p. 15.

⁷ Burnette II, [Do America's Public Schools Owe Black People Reparations?](#) (Sept. 23, 2020) 40 Education Week 4-7 (as of June 21, 2021) (hereafter *Do America's Public Schools?*); [Jim Crow Laws](#), History (Feb. 21, 2021) (as of June 21, 2021); see also *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* (1966) 383 U.S. 301, 310-13, 311, fn. 10 (noting that Southern states “rapidly instituted racial segregation in their public schools” following the Civil War and discussing the interplay between efforts to restrict literacy and efforts to restrict the vote); Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (2d ed. 1903); Tyack and Lowe, *The Constitutional Moment: Reconstruction and Black Education in the South* (1986), 94 Am. J. Ed. 236, 238-239, 250-252; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (1988) pp. 95-96 (“From the vantage point of the southern white majority,

any system of universal education for blacks, even industrial education, would potentially lead to universal suffrage.”).

⁸ Coates, [The Case for Reparations](#), The Atlantic (Jun. 2014) (as of June 21, 2021); Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School and the Negro American, Report Of A Social Study Made By Atlanta University Under The Patronage Of The Trustees Of The John F. Slater Fund, With The Proceedings Of The 16th Annual Conference For The Study Of The Negro Problems, Held At Atlanta University, On Tuesday, May 30th, 1911* (hereafter *The Common School*) p. 117 (in 1909 in one county in Georgia, “five school houses for colored children, with their contents, have been burned” and over the last few years “burning of Negro school houses . . . by white neighbors had been frequent in the gulf states.”).

⁹ *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) 347 U.S. 483, 495.

¹⁰ Horsford and McKenzie, “Sometimes I feel like the Problems Started with Desegregation”: Exploring Black Superintendent Perspectives on Desegregation Policy (2008) 21 Int. J. of Qualitative Studies in Ed. 443, 444 (hereafter *Exploring Black Superintendent Perspectives*).

¹¹ *Don Wilson Builders v. Superior Ct. for Los Angeles County* (1963) 220 Cal. App. 2d 77, 89 (dis. opn. of Fourt, J.) (“California history indicates that at the time the state was organized in 1849 and for some several years thereafter many southerners were influential in the state government and otherwise and their influence is reflected in many statutes. The statutes of 1850, ch. 140, p. 424, set forth the law against miscegenation and such remained the law in one form or another until 1948 [.]”); Smith, *Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California* (2011) 80 Pacific Historical Rev. 28, 49-50.

¹² Hudson, *West of Jim Crow: The Fight Against California's Color Line* (2020) p. 32 (hereafter *West of Jim Crow*); Hendrick, *The Education of Non-Whites in California, 1849-1970* (1977) p. 7; Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion*

in California Schools, 1855-1975 (1976) p. 12, fn. 10 (hereafter *All Deliberate Speed*); see Stats. 1855, ch. 185, § 12, p. 232.

¹³ One of these tactics was housing segregation, which government enforced in a variety of ways. See, e.g., Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017) (hereafter *The Color of Law*); Orfield and Jarvie, *Black Segregation Matters*, *supra*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁴ Farrow et al., *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (2005) pp. 180-181 (hereafter *Complicity*).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Id.* at pp. 181-182.

¹⁷ *Id.* at p. 191.

¹⁸ Ladson-Billings, *From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*, *supra*, p. 6 (hereafter *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*); Warner, [Psychiatry Confronts its Racist Past, and Tries to Make Amends](#), N.Y. Times (Apr. 30, 2021) (as of Apr. 27, 2022).

¹⁹ Farrow et al., *Complicity*, *supra*, p. 191.

²⁰ Burnette II, *Do America's Public Schools?*, *supra*, fn. 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Sambol-Tosco, *The Slave Experience*, *supra*, p. 2.

²³ Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, *supra*, pp. 7-10, 13; Albanese, *The Plantation School* (1976) pp. 131-138, 255-256 (“Moreover the presence of a large mass of semi-civilized slaves made possible the concentration of large tracts of lands in a few hands, and helped perpetuate a society with aristocratic institutions and tendencies.”).

²⁴ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) Electronic Edition, p. 33.

²⁵ Span, *Learning in Spite of Opposition: African Americans and their History of Educational Exclusion in Antebellum America* (2005) 131 Counterpoints 26, 27-28; Woodson, *The Education of the*

Negro Prior to 1861, *supra*, pp. 151-178; Ladson-Billings, *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*, *supra*, p. 5.

²⁶Span, *supra*, pp. 27-28; Cornelius, “We Slipped and Learned to Read:” *Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865* (1983) 44 *Phylon* 171, 174.

²⁷Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, *supra*, pp. 70-92.

²⁸Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) Electronic Edition, pp. 49.

²⁹Langhorne, *The African American Community: Circumventing the Compulsory Education System* (2000) 33 *Beverly Hills Bar Assn. J.* 12, 13.

³⁰Bracey, *The Significance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the 21st Century: Will Such Institutions of Higher Learning Survive?* (2017) 76 *Am. J. Econ. & Socio.* 670, 671 (hereafter *Significance of HBCUs*).

³¹Sambol-Tosco, *The Slave Experience*, *supra*, p. 2; Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, at p. 52.

³²Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, *supra*, pp. 10-11; Sambol-Tosco, *The Slave Experience*, *supra*, p. 2. In 1857, the Supreme Court held in *Dred Scott* that Black people were not citizens and, as such, gave the states express permission to deny Black people equal rights, including to education. *Scott v. Sandford* (1857) 60 U.S. 393.

³³May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (1869) pp. 52-53 (as of June 24, 2021).

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Id.* at p. 50.

³⁶*Id.* at p. 52.

³⁷*Id.* at pp. 70-71.

³⁸*Id.* at p. 71.

³⁹*Id.* at pp. 71-72.

⁴⁰See Ladson-Billings, *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*, *supra*, p. 6 (noting that by 1860, New England was home to 472 cotton mills and between 1830 and 1840, Northern mills consumed more than 100 million pounds of Southern cotton).

⁴¹Encyclopedia.com, *Impact of Slavery on the Northern Economy* (as of Jan. 26, 2022).

⁴²Farrow et al., *Complicity*, *supra*, p. 141.

⁴³Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, *supra*, p. 15.

⁴⁴Bracey, *Significance of HBCUs*, *supra*, p. 675; Office for Civil Rights, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Higher Education Desegregation*, U.S. Dept. of Ed. (Mar. 1991) (as of June 21, 2021) (hereafter *HBCUs and Desegregation*).

⁴⁵Bracey, *Significance of HBCUs*, *supra*, p. 676; Office for Civil Rights, *HBCUs and Desegregation*, *supra*.

⁴⁶Harper et al., *Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts* (2009) 80 *J. of Higher Ed.* 389, 393 (hereafter *Access and Equity*); Roebuck and Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in American Higher Education* (1993) p. 22 (“[O]nly twenty-eight blacks received baccalaureate degrees . . . prior to the Civil War.”)

⁴⁷Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, pp. 22-23; see, e.g., *In re Perkins* (1852) 2 Cal. 424, 437-441, 454-457 (upholding 1852 Fugitive Slave Act, affirming that enslavers who brought enslaved persons from other states were not affected by the anti-slavery clause in the constitution); *Gold Chains: The Hidden History of Slavery in California*, ACLU (as of June 24, 2021).

⁴⁸E.g., *Don Wilson Builders v. Superior Ct. for Los Angeles County* (1963) 220 Cal.App.2d 77, 89 (dis. opn. of Fourt, J.) (“California history indicates that at the time the state was organized in 1849 and for some several years thereafter many southerners were influential in the state government and otherwise and their influence is reflected in many statutes. The statutes of 1850, ch. 140, p. 424, set forth the law against miscegenation and such remained the law in one form or another until 1948 [.]”); Smith, *Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California* (2011) 80 *Pacific Historical Rev.* 28, 49-50.

⁴⁹Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, pp. 19, 31.

⁵⁰*Id.* at p. 32 (citing Moulder, *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (1858)* S.F. Public Library Archives, p. 14).

⁵¹Hendrick, *The Education of Non-Whites in California*, *supra*, p. 7; see also Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, p. 32; Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, p. 12; see Stats. 1855, ch. 185, § 12, p. 232.

⁵²*Ibid.*; see also Hendrick, *The Education of Non-Whites in California*, *supra*, pp. 7-8; Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, p. 12, fn. 10; see Stats. 1855, ch. 185, § 12, p. 232.

⁵³Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, p. 10.

⁵⁴*Id.* at p. 11.

⁵⁵*Id.* at p. 14.

⁵⁶*Id.* at pp. 14, 17.

⁵⁷Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁸Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, p. 16.

⁵⁹Anderson, *supra*, at p. 5.

⁶⁰Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School*, *supra*, pp. 19-22; John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (2d ed., 1994) pp. 107-113; Burnette II, *Do America’s Public Schools?*, *supra*.

⁶¹See Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, *supra*, pp. 107-113; Tyack and Lowe, *The Constitutional Moment: Reconstruction and Black Education in the South* (1986) 94 *Am. J. Ed.* 236, 238; Gershon, *Bringing Universal Education to the South* (Jan. 24, 2018) JSTOR Daily (as of May 3, 2022).

⁶²Burnette II, *Do America’s Public Schools?*, *supra*; *Jim Crow Laws* (Feb. 21, 2021) History (as of June 21, 2021); see also *South Carolina*, *supra*, 383 U.S. at p. 301, 310-13, 311 (noting that Southern states “rapidly instituted racial segregation in their public schools” following the Civil War and discussing the interplay between efforts to restrict literacy and efforts to restrict the vote).

⁶³Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of African Americans from the Civil War to World War II*

(2008) pp. 105 & fn. 40 (hereafter *Slavery by Another Name*).

⁶⁴ See National Geographic, [The Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws](#) (as of June 24, 2021).

⁶⁵ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (2d ed. 1903); Tyack & Lowe, *supra*, pp. 238-239, 250-252; Anderson, *supra*, at pp. 95-96 (“From the vantage point of the southern white majority, any system of universal education for blacks, even industrial education, would potentially lead to universal suffrage.”).

⁶⁶ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (2017) p. 273; Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name, supra*, at fn. 63, pp. 121-122; Greenblatt, [The Racial History of the ‘Grandfather Clause’](#), NPR (Oct. 22, 2013) (as of July 15, 2020).

⁶⁷ Du Bois, et al., *The Common School and the Negro American: Report of a Social Study*, Atlanta University (May 30, 1911) p. 22.

⁶⁸ Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*, p. 21; Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War, supra*, at fn. 60, pp. 107-113; Burnette II, *Do America’s Public Schools?, supra*.

⁶⁹ Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*, pp. 19-21; Tyack & Lowe, *supra*, at pp. 238-239, 243-249.

⁷⁰ Burnette II, *Do America’s Public Schools?, supra*.

⁷¹ United States Senate, [Freedmen’s Bureau Acts \(1865 And 1868\)](#) (as of June 18, 2021); Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*, p. 19.

⁷² Nat. Archives, [The Freedmen’s Bureau](#) (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁷³ Antietam National Battlefield, [African Americans and Education During Reconstruction: The Tolson’s Chapel Schools](#) (as of Mar. 11, 2022).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ The North Carolina Collection – Durham County Library, [The Women](#)

[Who Ran the Schools: The Jeanes Teachers and Durham County’s Rural Black Schools](#) (As of March 10, 2022).

⁷⁹ McHugh, [Denied a Teaching Job for Being “too Black,” She Started Her Own School – and a Movement](#), The Wash. Post (February 2021).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Coates, [The Case for Reparations](#), The Atlantic (Jun. 2014) (as of June 21, 2021); Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*, p. 117 (in 1909 in one county in Georgia, “five school houses for colored children, with their contents, have been burned” and over the last few years “burning of Negro school houses . . . by white neighbors had been frequent in the gulf states”).

⁸³ Bell, *Silent Covenants, supra*, p. 91; Darity Jr. and Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for African Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (2020) p. 210 (hereafter *From Here to Equality*).

⁸⁴ *Cummings v. Board of Ed. of Richmond County* (1899) 175 U.S. 528, 530, 542 (court will not intervene in case where county closed a Black high school and used the “funds in hand”, including tax dollars from Black residents, to support a white high school to which Black students were denied entry).

⁸⁵ See Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name, supra*, p. 93.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at pp. 93, 97.

⁸⁷ *Id.* at pp. 100-102.

⁸⁸ Orfield and Jarvie, *Black Segregation Matters, supra*, pp. 4-6.

⁸⁹ E.g., *United States v. Stanley (Civil Rights Cases)* (1883) 109 U.S. 3, 13, 25.

⁹⁰ *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) 163 U.S. 537, 546-548, 550-552.

⁹¹ Ladson-Billings, *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt, supra*, p. 5.

⁹² Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (2014 ed.) p. 422.

⁹³ See *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ See *Ibid.*; cf. generally Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*.

⁹⁵ See Foner, *supra*, p. 422; Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, pp. 85-86 (2010) (hereafter *The Warmth of Other Suns*).

⁹⁶ Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns, supra*.

⁹⁷ *Id.* at p. 86.

⁹⁸ Anderson, *supra*, at pp. 183-184; Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*, pp. 7-8 (Black people “themselves have purchased school sites, school houses and school furniture, thus being a peculiar way double taxed” and are “paying into the school fund” in taxes much more than they are receiving in “actual appropriations for school facilities.”).

⁹⁹ Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns, supra*, pp. 84-86.

¹⁰⁰ Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name, supra*, p. 157.

¹⁰¹ See, e.g., Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*, p. 136.

¹⁰² See, e.g., *id.* at pp. 40, 52-53, 57, 59, 63, 65, 78-79.

¹⁰³ *Id.* at pp. 100-107.

¹⁰⁴ *Id.* at p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Bell, *Silent Covenants, supra*, p. 15 (citing Tushnet, *The NAACP’s Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 5-6); Darity Jr. and Mullen, *From Here to Equality, supra*, p. 230 (citing Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, 46); Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*, pp. 29-31; 118 (report that in Mississippi counties draw their share of funding according to the number of white and black children but spend the money almost exclusively on the white children).

¹⁰⁶ Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, p. 88 (2010).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School, supra*, pp. 52; see also *Ibid.* at pp. 57, 59-60, 101 (describing

differences in months of operation for black and white schools in Georgia and South Carolina); Brooker, [The Education of Black Children in the Jim Crow South](#), America's Black Holocaust Museum: Bringing Our History to Light (as of June 18, 2021); Ladson-Billings, *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*, *supra*, p. 5.

¹¹⁰Brooker, *supra*; Ladson-Billings, *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*, *supra*, p. 5; see, e.g., Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School*, *supra*, pp. 52-54, 58, 101.

¹¹¹Du Bois, *Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?* (1935) 4 *The J. of Negro Education*, p. 328.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³*Id.* at pp. 328-329.

¹¹⁴Coates, [The Case for Reparations](#), *The Atlantic* (June 2014) (as of Nov. 19, 2021).

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹¹⁶Compare Du Bois and Dill, *The Common School*, *supra*, p. 16 with Tapia et al., *The Uneven Transition Toward Universal Literacy in Spain, 1860-1930* (2021) 50 *Hist. of Educ.* 605, 609; Nat. Bureau of Economic Research (Working Paper No. 173) p. 26 (Spain's literacy rate was 38.1% in 1887 and 44.8% in 1990); Tapia et al., *Two Stories, One Fate: Age-Heaping and Literacy in Spain, 1877-1930* (2018) National Bureau of Economic Research (Working Paper No. 139) p. 5 (literacy rate in Italy was similarly poor as Spain and was below 50% in the nineteenth century); see also National Center for Education Statistics, [National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait](#) (as of Jan. 26, 2022) (Black literacy rose from 20 percent in 1870 to 70 percent by 1910, close to 80 percent by 1920).

¹¹⁷Bertocchi and Dimico, *The Racial Gap in Education and the Legacy of Slavery* (2012) 40 *J. Comp. Econ.* 581, 581-582. (hereafter *The Racial Gap in Education*)

¹¹⁸Burnette II, *Do America's Public Schools?*, *supra*.

¹¹⁹*Brown*, *supra*, 347 U.S. at p. 495. The idea that segregated schools were "equal" was unfounded—segregated public schools for Black students

provided unequal education in nearly every category when compared to public schools for white students. See Margo, *Race and Schooling in the South 1880-1950: An Economic History* (1990) pp. 18-20.

¹²⁰Horsford and McKenzie, *Exploring Black Superintendent Perspectives*, *supra*, p. 444; see, e.g., *Griffin v. County School Bd.* (1964) 377 U.S. 218, 221 (school districts closed public schools rather than integrate, cut off funding for public schools and instead provided private vouchers for private schools, then delayed adoption of integration plan); *Green v. County School Bd.* (1968) 391 U.S. 430, 433 (*Green*) (school board automatically reassigned children to schools they had attended the prior year, preventing integration); *Goss v. Bd. of Ed. of City of Knoxville* (1963) 373 U.S. 683, 686-687 (school board allowed students to request to be transferred if they had been assigned to a school previously attended only by members of a different race).

¹²¹Driver, *Supremacies and the Southern Manifesto* (2014) 92 *Tex. L. Rev.* 1053, 1054, 1066-1067, 1079 (nineteen out of the twenty-two Southern senators signed the Manifesto and declared their aim to reverse *Brown* using all lawful means); see Ogletree, *Tulsa Reparations: The Survivor's Story* (2004) 24 *B.C. Third World L.J.* 13, 22 (noting that "[s]ince the end of slavery, whites have resisted the challenge of integration and found more or less sophisticated ways by which to resist the efforts of African Americans to participate on equal terms in American society").

¹²²Equal Justice Initiative, [Supreme Court Bans School Segregation, Sparking Massive White Resistance](#) (as of May 5, 2021); Bennett, [Little Rock Nine: Decades-long Battle for School Equity Began with Nine Black Students Facing Angry White Mob](#) (Sept. 25, 2020) Southern Poverty Law Center (as of Nov. 19, 2021); Zinn Education Project, [Sept 12, 1958: Little Rock Public Schools Closed](#), (as of Apr. 27, 2022).

¹²³Ross and Key, [In the Wake of Central High Crisis, Crime and Injustice](#), *Arkansas Times* (Oct. 27, 2020) (as of Nov. 19, 2021).

¹²⁴Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, p. 100.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶*Id.* at pp. 100-102.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

¹²⁹Schofield, *School Desegregation and Intergroup Relations: A Review of the Literature* (1991) 17 *Rev. of Research in Education* 335, 335; Horsford and McKenzie, *Exploring Black Superintendent Perspectives*, *supra*, pp. 448-49; Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, p. 100.

¹³⁰E.g., Equal Justice Initiative, [Georgia Governor Proposes Abolition of Public School System to Avoid Integration](#) (as of Nov. 19, 2021).

¹³¹E.g., *Ibid.*

¹³²*Brown v. Board of Educ. of Topeka, Kan.* (1955) 349 U.S. 294, 300.

¹³³Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, p. 95; see also Carter, *The Warren Court and Desegregation* (1968) 67 *Mich. L. Rev.* 237, 243.

¹³⁴See *Alexander v. Holmes County Bd. of Ed.* (1969) 396 U.S. 19, 20-21.

¹³⁵Equal Justice Initiative, [Supreme Court Bans School Segregation, Sparking Massive White Resistance](#) (as of May 5, 2021).

¹³⁶See Tate et al., *The Brown Decision Revisited: Mathematizing a Social Problem* (1993) 7 *Educational Policy* 255, 259-268; Ladson-Billings, *Landing on the Wrong Note: The Price We Paid for Brown* (2004) 33 *Education Researcher* 3, 6 (noting that one of consequences of *Brown* included the "job loss and demotions for Black teachers and administrators").

¹³⁷Horsford and McKenzie, *Exploring Black Superintendent Perspectives*, *supra*, p. 447; Toppo, [Thousands of Black Teachers Lost Jobs](#), *USA Today* (Apr. 28, 2004) (as of June 21, 2021).

¹³⁸*Ibid.*

¹³⁹Horsford and McKenzie, *Exploring Black Superintendent Perspectives*, *supra*, p. 449.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*; Tillman, *(Un)Intended Consequences?: The Impact of the Brown v. Board of Education Decision on the Employment Status of Black Educators*

(2004) 36 *Educ. & Urban Soc.* 280, 287-288; Will, [65 Years After 'Brown v. Board,' Where Are All the Black Educators?](#), Education Week (May 14, 2019) (as of June 23, 2021); Ethridge, *Impact of the 1954 Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education Decision on Black Educators* (1979) 30 *Negro Ed. Rev.* 217, 223.

¹⁴¹Fultz, *The Displacement of Black Educators Post-Brown: An Overview and Analysis* (2004) 44 *Hist. Ed. Q.* 11, 37; see Tillman, *supra*, p. 288 (noting that firing of Black educators affected their communities economically); Ethridge, *supra*, p. 224.

¹⁴²Fultz, *supra*, pp. 28-29; Tillman, *supra*, p. 294; Toppo, [Thousands of Black Teachers Lost Jobs](#), USA Today (Apr. 28, 2004) (as of June 23, 2021); see Jones-Wilson, *Race, Realities, and American Educators: Two Sides of the Coin* (1990) 59 *J. of Negro Ed.* 119, 121; Walker, *The Architects of Black Schooling in the Segregated South: The Case of One Principal Leader* (2003) 19 *J. of Curriculum & Supervision* 54, 56.

¹⁴³Gershenson et al., *The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers* (Nov. 2018) National Bureau of Economic Research (Working Paper No. 25254) pp. 1-2, 33 (finding that Black students with at least one Black teacher in K-3 are 13% more likely to graduate high school and 19% more likely to enroll in college than their Black peers who had no Black teachers).

¹⁴⁴Will, [Still Mostly White and Female: New Federal Data on the Teaching Profession](#), Education Week (Apr. 14, 2020) (as of June 21, 2021); Gewertz, [Survey of Mostly-White Educators Finds 1 in 5 Think Textbooks Accurately Reflect People of Color](#), Education Week (June 29, 2020) (as of June 22, 2021) (hereafter *Survey of Mostly-White Educators*); U.S. Dept. of Ed., [The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce](#) (2016) pp. 2, 6, 7, 9 (as of June 21, 2021); Modan, *Survey: Superintendents still overwhelmingly white, male*, K-12 Dive (Feb. 11, 2020) (as of May 6, 2022).

¹⁴⁵Will, [Still Mostly White and Female: New Federal Data on the Teaching Profession](#), Education Week (Apr. 14, 2020) (as of June 21, 2021); U.S. Dept. of Ed., [The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce](#) (2016) pp. 2, 6 (as of June 21, 2021).

¹⁴⁶Nat. School Boards Assn., [Black Students in the Condition of Education 2020](#) (June 23, 2020) (as of Jan. 26, 2022).

¹⁴⁷Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, *supra*, at fn. 13, preface.

¹⁴⁸See Burnette II, [As Districts Seek Revenue Due to Pandemic, Black Homeowners May Feel the Biggest Hit](#), Education Week (July 23, 2020) (as of June 22, 2021); Oliver and Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (1995) pp. 8-9, 19-20; Guastafarro, [Why Racial Inequities in America's Schools are Rooted in Housing Policies of the Past](#), USA Today (Nov. 2, 2020) (as of June 23, 2021) (hereafter *Why Racial Inequities are Rooted in Housing Policies*).

¹⁴⁹[Demand for School Integration Leads to Massive 1964 Boycott – in New York City](#), N.Y. Public Radio (Feb. 3, 2016) (as of Nov. 19, 2021).

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*; Ladson-Billings, *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*, *supra*, at fn. 2, p. 5; see generally Du Bois & Dill, *The Common School*, *supra*, at fn. 8.

¹⁵¹Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, at fn. 5, pp. 109-112; Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, at fn. 12, pp. 142, 146.

¹⁵²[Demand for School Integration Leads to Massive 1964 Boycott – in New York City](#), N.Y. Public Radio (Feb. 3, 2016) (as of Nov. 19, 2021).

¹⁵³*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴Equal Justice Initiative, [Resistance to School Desegregation](#) (March 1, 2014) (as of June 21, 2021).

¹⁵⁵Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, at fn. 12, pp. 147-148.

¹⁵⁶Kerner, [Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: Summary of Report](#) (1968) pp. 1, 5-6 (as of June 21, 2021).

¹⁵⁷Graham, *Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma* (1996) 26 *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 93, 94, 101.

¹⁵⁸Orfield and Jarvie, *Black Segregation Matters*, *supra*, at fn. 2, p. 22; see also Orfield, [Schools More Separate: Consequences of A Decade of Resegregation](#), The Civil Rights Project, Harvard

University (July, 2001) p. 25 (as of July 1, 2021) (hereafter *Schools More Separate*) (26 central cities house districts which enroll 1/10 of the nation's students, but only a minute fraction of the nation's white student; five school districts were more than 90% nonwhite, while a large majority of the others had less than one-fifth white students).

¹⁵⁹Boston Research Center, Encyclopedia of Boston, [Desegregation Busing](#) (as of Jan. 26, 2022.)

¹⁶⁰History, This Day in History, [Violence erupts in Boston over Desegregation Busing](#) (as of Jan. 26, 2022); Bubar, [The Jim Crow North](#), Upfront: The N.Y. Times (March 9 2020) (as of Jan. 26, 2022).

¹⁶¹*Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) 418 U.S. 717, 752.

¹⁶²See e.g., Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, at fn. 5, p. 112.

¹⁶³Goldstein, [Detroit Students Have a Constitutional Right to Literacy. Court Rules](#), The N.Y. Times (April 27, 2020) (as of June 22, 2021); see Bell, *supra*, at fn. 5, pp. 111-112;

¹⁶⁴*Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corp.* (1977) 429 U.S. 252.

¹⁶⁵Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, at fn. 5, p. 110.

¹⁶⁶*Id.* at p. 114; Orfield and Jarvie, *Black Segregation Matters*, *supra*, at fn. 2, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶⁷Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, at fn. 5, p. 114.

¹⁶⁸See *id.* at pp. 110-113; Orfield, *Schools More Separate*, *supra*, pp. 1-2; see also Orfield and Jarvie, *Black Segregation Matters*, *supra*, at fn. 2, p. 6 (“Intense segregation, in 90-100% non-White schools, fell very sharply from 78% of Black students in 1968 to 24% in the South states by 1988, but [by 2020] has now risen back to 37%[.]”).

¹⁶⁹Orfield, *Schools More Separate*, *supra*, pp. 15-44.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.* (citing *Board of Education of Oklahoma City vs. Dowell* (1991), *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992), and *Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995)).

¹⁷¹ *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1* (2007) 551 U.S. 701.

¹⁷² Orfield and Siegel-Hawley, [E Pluribus . . . Separation, Deepening Double Segregation for More Students](#), UCLA Civil

Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (Sept. 2012) p. 7 (as of Apr. 29, 2022).

¹⁷³ Meatto, [Still Separate, Still Unequal: Teaching about School Segregation and Educational Inequality](#), N.Y. Times (May 2, 2019) (as of June 21, 2021) (“More than half of the nation’s schoolchildren are in racially concentrated districts, where over 75 percent of students are either white or nonwhite.”); Bracey, *Significance of HBCUs*, *supra*, p. 687; Toppo, [GAO Study: Segregation Worsening in U.S. Schools](#), USA Today (May 17, 2016) (as of June 22, 2021); Guastaferrro, *Why Racial Inequities are Rooted in Housing Policies*, *supra* (discussing study showing that predominantly nonwhite school districts received \$23 billion less in state and local funding than majority white school districts in 2016); Orfield and Jarvie, *Black Segregation Matters*, *supra*, pp. 6, 28.

¹⁷⁴ Orfield and Jarvie, *Black Segregation Matters*, *supra*. at fn. 2, p. 28.

¹⁷⁵ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933).

¹⁷⁶ Ed. Week, [Tracking](#) (Sept. 21, 2004) (as of June 24, 2021); Oakes et al., *Multiplying Inequalities: The Effects of Race, Social Class, and Tracking on Opportunities to Learn Mathematics and Science* (1990) pp. 18-19 & fn. 6 (“[W]e are dealing with teachers’ perceptions of ability—we cannot assume that ability means the same thing from teacher to teacher, or from school to school.”) (hereafter *Multiplying Inequalities*); Anderson and Oakes, *The Truth About Tracking in The Big Lies of School Reform: Finding Better Solutions for the Futile Public Education* (2014) pp. 113-114 (describing the arbitrary nature of tracking) (hereafter *The Truth About Tracking*).

¹⁷⁷ Horsford and McKenzie, *Exploring Black Superintendent Perspectives*, *supra*, at fn. 10, p. 452; Oakes, [Two Cities’ Tracking and Within-School Segregation](#) (1995) 96 Teachers College Record 681 (as of June

24, 2021); Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (2005) pp. 11-12, 40, 64-65; Oakes et al., *Detracking: The Social Construction of Ability, Cultural Politics, and Resistance to Reform* (1997) 98 Teachers College Record 482, 490-491, 496-500; Artiles et al., *Culturally Diverse Students in Special Education: Legacies and Prospects*, in Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education (2d ed. 2004) p. 716 (finding that many students because of factors including race are disproportionately referred and placed in special education programs); Conger, *Within-School Segregation in an Urban School District* (2005) 27 Ed. Eval. & Policy Analysis 225, 237-238; Saddler, *The Impact of Brown on African American Students: A Critical Race Theoretical Perspective* (2005) 37 Ed. Studies 41, 44 (observing that Black students are three times more likely to be placed in special education classes and more likely to be placed in vocational tracks); Oakes et al., *Multiplying Inequalities*, *supra*, pp. 18-25.

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¹⁷⁹ Darity Jr. and Mullen, *From Here to Equality*, *supra*, p. 220; Oakes et al., *Multiplying Inequalities*, *supra*, pp. 18, 23; Anderson & Oakes, *The Truth About Tracking*, *supra*, pp. 118 (discussing their research finding that “African American and Latino students were much less likely than White or Asian students with the same test scores to be placed in high-ability classes”) (hereafter *The Truth About Tracking*).

¹⁸⁰ Horsford and McKenzie, *Exploring Black Superintendent Perspectives*, *supra*, at fn. 10, pp. 451-452.

¹⁸¹ Anderson and Oakes, *The Truth About Tracking*, *supra*, pp. 114-118 (“in every aspect of what makes for a quality education, kids in lower tracks typically

get less than those in higher tracks and gifted programs”); Mathis, *supra*, (“Low-track classes tend to have watered-down curriculum, less experienced teachers, lowered expectations, more discipline problems, and less engaging lessons.”) (as of June 25, 2021); Oakes et al., *Multiplying Inequalities*, *supra*, pp. 104-105 (“Students judged to have low ability may get less because they are thought to need less (they are considered unable to benefit) or deserve less (they are considered unwilling to benefit).”).

¹⁸² California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans (October 12, 2021) [Testimony of Dr. Rucker Johnson](#) (as of Jan. 28, 2022).

¹⁸³ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, *supra*, at fn. 5, pp. 127-129; Ladson-Billings, *Achievement Gap to the Education Debt*, *supra*, at fn. 2, p. 9 (“If we are unwilling to desegregate our schools and unwilling to fund them equitably, we find ourselves not only backing away from the promise of the *Brown* decision but literally refusing even to take *Plessy* seriously. At least a serious consideration of *Plessy* would make us look at funding inequities.”); Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in American Schools* (1991) pp. 3-6; Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (2005) pp. 18-21.

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-20-494, [K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement](#) (June 2020) (as of July 1, 2021).

¹⁸⁵ Shores et al., [Categorical Inequalities Between Black and White Students are Common in US Schools—But They Don’t Have to Be](#), Brookings Institute (Feb. 21, 2020) (as of June 21, 2021).

¹⁸⁶ Bracey, *Significance of HBCUs*, *supra*, pp. 687-688; Kerr, [Report Finds Segregation in Education on the Rise](#), AP News (May 17, 2016) (as of June 23, 2021); Office for Civil Rights, [2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection: Stem Course Taking](#), U.S. Dept. of Ed. (2018) at p. 5 fig.4 (as of July 1, 2021); compare College Board, [AP Cohort Data Report: Graduating Class of 2020](#)

(2020) p. 20 with Handwerk et al., [Access to Success: Patterns of Advanced Placement Participation in U.S. High Schools](#) (July 2008) p. 7 (as of July 1, 2021) (Black students were 14.2% of all public high school seniors in 2020, but only 8.3% of students nationwide who took an AP exam—an increase of only 1.3% since 2006).

¹⁸⁷ Irizarry, [On Track or Derailed? Race, Advanced Math, and the Transition to High School](#) (2021) 7 *Socius* 1, 12-13 (as of Jan. 28, 2022).

¹⁸⁸ Hammond, *Inequality in Teaching and Schooling: How Opportunity is Rationed to Students of Color in America*, in *The Right Thing to Do, The Smart Thing to Do: Enhancing Diversity in Health Professions*, Summary of the Symposium on Diversity in Health Professions in Honor of Herbert W. Nickens, M.D., National Academies Press (2001) pp. 208-209; Grissom and Redding, *Discretion and Disproportionality: Explaining the Underrepresentation of High-Achieving Students of Color in Gifted Programs* (2016) 2 *Aera Open* 1, 1-2; The Education Trust, *Inequities in Advanced Coursework: What's Driving Them and What Leaders Can Do* (2019), at p. 8 (“Our analysis [of the 2015-16 CRDC data] shows that although Black students make up 16% of elementary schoolers, they make up only 9% of students in gifted and talented programs.”); Llahamon, Office for Civil Rights, [Dear Colleague Letter: Resource Comparability](#), U.S. Dept. of Ed. (Oct. 1, 2014), p. 4 (as of July 1, 2021); Office for Civil Rights, [2011-12 Civil Rights Data Collection, Data Snapshot: Teacher Equity](#), U.S. Dept. of Ed. (2014) (as of July 1, 2021); Adamson and Darling-Hammond, *Funding Disparities and the Inequitable Distribution of Teachers: Evaluating Sources and Solutions* (2012) 20 *Ed. Policy Analysis Archives* 1, 30-32; Whitaker et al., [Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students](#), ACLU (2019) p. 7 (finding that students of color are more likely to attend schools with law enforcement officers, be referred to law enforcement, and be arrested, and “students who attend schools with high percentages of Black students . . . are more likely to attend schools with tough security

measures like metal detectors, random ‘contraband’ sweeps, security guards, and security cameras”) (as of June 23, 2021) (hereafter *Cops and No Counselors*).

¹⁸⁹ Toldson, *Breaking Barriers: Plotting the Path to Academic Success for School-Age African American Males*, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. p. 46 (2008).

¹⁹⁰ *Id.* at p. 23.

¹⁹¹ Powers et al., *Twenty-five Years after Larry P.: The California Response to Overrepresentation of African Americans in Special Education* (2004) 9 *The California School Psychologist* 145, 155 (hereafter *Twenty-five Years after Larry P.*).

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²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, at fn. 12, p. 34; An Act to Provide for a

System of Common Schools, Stats. 1866, ch. 342, §§ 57-58, p. 18.

²²⁰Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, at fn. 12, pp. 34-36.

²²¹*Ibid.*; Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, at fn. 12, pp. 14, 18, 20; see also *Don Wilson Builders v. Superior Court of Los Angeles County* (1963) 220 Cal. App.2d 77, 90 (dis. opn. of Fourt, J.) (describing statutes and regulation stating that children of African or Indian descent shall not be admitted into schools for white children).

²²²Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, at fn. 12, p. 17.

²²³Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, at fn. 12, p. 8.

²²⁴*Ward v. Flood* (1874) 48 Cal. 36, 54-57.

²²⁵Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, p. 38; Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, at fn. 12, pp. 23-24.

²²⁶Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, *supra*, at fn. 12, p. 24.

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²³⁰Bailey, [Hidden History: Edmond Wysinger](#), YourCentralValley.com (Feb. 14, 2017) (as of June 22, 2021).

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²³²*Id.* at p. 26. The state legislature did so later in its history to re-create for separates schools for Asians and Native Americans; also some legislators attempted to do so again for Black children, but the legislation failed. *Id.*

²³³Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, p. 61; see also *id.* at p. 168.

²³⁴Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, *supra*, pp. 122, 132-137; Orfield and Jarvie, *Black Segregation Matters*, *supra*, at fn. 2, pp. 12-13.

²³⁵Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, at fn. 12, pp. 167, 199.

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²³⁷*Id.* at pp. 129-130; *Westminster Sch. Dist. of Orange County v. Mendez* (9th Cir. 1947) 161 F.2d 774, 777-781.

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²³⁹*Id.* at p. 143.

²⁴⁰Hudson, *West of Jim Crow*, *supra*, at p. 255 (citing Miller, *Address to Western Governors* (1964) Civil Rights and State's Rights).

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²⁴²*Ibid.*

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COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

I. Introduction

The legacy of slavery, legal segregation, and government policies known as redlining have created environmental impacts that have harmed and continue to harm African Americans. First, government policies forced African Americans to live in poor-quality housing, exposing them to disproportionate amounts of lead poisoning¹ and increasing their risks of disease,² including COVID-19.³ Outside of their homes, African Americans are also exposed to far more pollutants than white Americans, partially because redlining explicitly grouped African Americans and other “inharmonious racial groups” with polluting sources.⁴ Second, government actors developed infrastructure projects, like highways and parks, in ways that destroyed and segregated Black communities, and also failed to provide or repair public services like sewage lines and water pipes.⁵ Finally, African Americans and their homes are more vulnerable than white Americans to the dangerous effects of extreme weather patterns like heat waves, disparities which are made worse by climate change.⁶

Section III of this chapter addresses the substandard housing and overcrowding problems faced by African Americans throughout American history caused by government practices including redlining. Section IV of this chapter addresses discusses the environmental pollutants to which African Americans are exposed as result of similar and related government practices, which disproportionately continues to subject African Americans to hazardous waste management, oil and gas production, automobile and diesel fumes. Section V addresses the discriminatory choices made by government actors in implementing infrastructure development and related public services, which consistently have disadvantaged African Americans. Section VI addresses the discriminatory impacts of climate change, which are experienced disproportionately by African Americans as a result of government actions and policies that have imposed those harms on them.



Housing of Black migrant workers. Florida. (1941)

II. Substandard Housing and Overcrowding

Throughout American history and to this day, African Americans have lived in housing of worse quality than white Americans, and paid more to live in it.⁷

AMERICANS LIVING IN SUBSTANDARD HOUSING



Nationally

Starting in the early 20th century, as African Americans primarily rented housing in urban areas, they were consistently charged higher rents than white people.⁸ Before the federal Fair Housing Act made housing discrimination based on race illegal, landlords would freely admit that they needed to charge Black renters higher rent because white renters did not want to share an apartment building with African Americans.⁹ To pay for the higher rents, Black families often took in lodgers or shared apartments, which created additional overcrowding.¹⁰

As of 2010, about 2.6 million (7.5 percent) non-Hispanic Black people and 5.9 million white people (2.8 percent) live in substandard housing in America, which is defined largely in relation to the housing’s susceptibility to waterborne and airborne communicable diseases.¹¹ Black households are almost twice as likely as white households to lack indoor plumbing nationwide.¹² Black households are more poorly ventilated than white households in general, leading to excess moisture that supports the growth of mold and vermin, which can lead to or exacerbate asthma and other breathing issues.¹³

Black families also still experience overcrowded housing—generally defined as either having more than 1.5 or more than two persons per room living in a household—at three times the rates of white Americans.¹⁴ Overcrowded housing is linked with physical and mental health problems, including higher rates of exposure to household lead poisoning.¹⁵ This association may be correlative rather than causative, since overcrowded housing is more likely to be older housing, and also more likely to house low-income workers in heavy industries that may cause them to bring lead dust and other contaminants into the household.¹⁶ Overcrowding has similarly shown to increase the risk

of spread of infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, diarrhea, and infectious respiratory illnesses.¹⁷ At least one recent study demonstrated that overcrowding and other poor housing conditions correlated with greater rates of COVID-19 infections across the country, as well as increased mortality from COVID-19.¹⁸

Overcrowded housing also is linked with various mental health issues, including psychological distress, alcohol abuse, depression, and sleep disorders.¹⁹ Living in overcrowded housing is also associated with social withdrawal and feelings of helplessness,²⁰ as well as an increase in hostility among household residents due to the lack of privacy and time to oneself.²¹

Overcrowded housing also harms school performance for children, which has lasting impact on their educational attainment.²² Living in a house with too many people makes it difficult to find a quiet place to study,²³ and even a quiet place to sleep.²⁴ Children in crowded houses are more likely to catch infectious diseases from others in their household, making it more likely for the child to stay home from school.²⁵ Children from overcrowded homes are more likely to be held back a grade,²⁶ they show reduced math and reading test scores,²⁷ and they demonstrate higher rates of disruptive behaviors according to teachers.²⁸ Moreover, some international research has found that children and adolescents in overcrowded housing are more likely to engage in violent behavior in the home,²⁹ as well as to be victims of sexual abuse.³⁰

Compared to white households, Black households are

2x

MORE LIKELY to lack indoor plumbing

California

California displays the same racial disparities regarding overcrowded housing as the rest of America. The most recent data provided by the California Department of Public Health reveals that Black Californians are approximately 2.5 times more likely to live in housing considered “overcrowded,” and 2.8 times more likely to live in housing considered “severely overcrowded,” compared to white Californians.³¹

Black Californians have also been forced to live in substandard housing, sometimes as a direct result of government action. One historical example is the federal government's building of public housing in Richmond to accommodate ship workers during World War II, which was officially and explicitly segregated.³² As part of those efforts, the federal government put programs in place that enabled white workers to access permanent, residential housing, but offered Black workers no permanent housing.³³ While some Black workers were able to find low-quality, long-term housing in areas of

the East Bay, others lived in barns, minimal shelter like tents or cardboard shacks, or even without any shelter in open fields.³⁴

In California specifically, the problem of overcrowded housing has been linked to the rapid spread of COVID-19 in neighborhoods with a higher number of Black residents, such as South Los Angeles.³⁵ Neighborhoods with overcrowded housing in California had rates of COVID-19 that were 3.7 times higher than neighborhoods without overcrowded housing.³⁶

III. Environmental Pollutants

U.S. government policies, as discussed in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, penned African Americans into poorer neighborhoods with polluting industries, garbage dumps, and other sources of toxic health harms.³⁷ Local governments zoned Black neighborhoods as industrial instead of residential specifically to segregate Black residents from white residents.³⁸ White neighborhoods frequently were zoned by local entities to explicitly ensure that few industrial or polluting business could locate within them, again pushing environmental pollution into Black neighborhoods.³⁹ Redlined and segregated Black neighborhoods were cheaper for polluting industries to build on.⁴⁰ This became a downward spiral: the more garbage dumps and sewer treatment plants a neighborhood had, the cheaper the land was, and the more likely that other polluting industries would move in.⁴¹ Without access to the mortgages and loans available to white Americans, Black homeowners also had less money to maintain and improve their homes, which made housing conditions worse and prevented African Americans from moving away from polluting sources.⁴²

Black communities across the country still experience higher rates of pollution and the negative health outcomes caused by exposure to pollutants.⁴³

African Americans are exposed to greater pollution from virtually every polluting source when compared to white Americans, including hazardous waste, heavy industry, vehicle traffic, and construction—all of which can be partially attributed to redlining and other historical discrimination.⁴⁴

Hazardous Waste

One source of pollution that has been continuously prevalent in Black communities is hazardous waste sites. This pollution has been shown to correlate with increased rates of asthma, cancer, lung disease, and heart disease.⁴⁵ For example, in 2020, the *New York Times Magazine* profiled the story of Kilynn Johnson, a Black

Redlined and segregated Black neighborhoods were cheaper for polluting industries to build on. This became a downward spiral: the more garbage dumps and sewer treatment plants a neighborhood had, the cheaper the land was, and the more likely that other polluting industries would move in.

resident of Philadelphia, who developed asthma as a child and eventually developed gallbladder cancer after growing up in a largely Black neighborhood proximate to hazardous waste facilities and oil refineries.⁴⁶ After recovering from surgery and chemotherapy, Johnson and a neighbor documented over two dozen close relatives who were diagnosed with some form of cancer, many rare, and many at unusually young ages.⁴⁷

African Americans have long been disproportionately exposed to these harms. As of 1983, approximately three out of every four communities in which hazardous waste landfills were found were predominantly Black.⁴⁸ In 1991, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) acknowledged that a disproportionate number of toxic waste facilities were found in Black neighborhoods throughout the country.⁴⁹ More recently, a study in 2007 analyzed 38 states and found that African Americans disproportionately live in neighborhoods that host

hazardous waste facilities and are twice as likely to live near a hazardous waste facility.⁵⁰ As of 2020, African Americans are still 75 percent more likely to live near facilities that handle hazardous waste.⁵¹

Moreover, studies have shown that the EPA's handling of toxic waste clean-up sites—i.e., so-called “Superfund” sites, or former industrial sites polluted with dangerous levels of hazardous waste—has consistently favored white communities over minority communities, and an external audit of the handling of discrimination complaints by the EPA determined that the agency failed to adequately respond to those complaints.⁵² From 1985 to 1991, fines assessed by the EPA against polluters in minority zip codes were approximately 46 percent lower than in white zip codes.⁵³ The EPA also took longer to address hazardous sites in minority communities than in white ones, and polluters were required to undertake more stringent cleanup measures in white communities.⁵⁴

Oil and Gas Pollution

The oil and gas industry, as permitted by governmental entities, has also imposed disproportionate environmental harms on African Americans. Oil and gas extraction is associated with various carcinogenic pollutants, including benzene.⁵⁵ Studies have shown that living near these sources elevates one's risk of cancer.⁵⁶ Over one million African Americans live within half a mile of oil and gas extraction and refining facilities.⁵⁷ African Americans are also more likely to live near fracking facilities, which create similar pollution to more traditional oil and gas facilities.⁵⁸ The natural gas produced via fracking contains various toxins and carcinogens, including hexane, benzene, and hydrogen sulfide.⁵⁹ These dangerous, cancer-causing chemicals are emitted at the initial facilities that gather natural gas, at points along the systems that move the from those facilities, and at the destination plants at which they are processed, all of which occur disproportionately in Black neighborhoods.⁶⁰ Moreover, as African Americans have grown increasingly involved in the fight against oil and gas pollution in their communities, fossil fuel companies have pushed back by arguing that the fight for environmental justice would particularly *harm* Black communities by robbing them of oil and gas-related jobs, including through a false report that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was opposed to a clean energy plan.⁶¹

Automobile Traffic

Although not specific to one particular industry, African Americans are also subject to disproportionate environmental harms as a result of automobile traffic.

Some African Americans live in areas with more than double the traffic density of white neighborhoods, and experience the highest traffic density of any racial or ethnic group.⁶² As a result, many African Americans are exposed to more on-road sources of carcinogenic pollution than other racial or ethnic groups.⁶³

**Compared to other Americans,
African Americans are**

75% to live near hazardous
waste or refining facilities
MORE LIKELY

Auto pollution includes, among other things, exposure to nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which contributes to asthma and other respiratory ailments.⁶⁴ While exposure to NO₂ is decreasing across all races in the United States, the percentage of increased exposure experienced by African Americans as compared to white Americans has changed little.⁶⁵ Moreover, among all pollution sources nationwide, African Americans are more disproportionately exposed to air pollution attributable to construction than as to any other air pollution source.⁶⁶

Lead Poisoning

Also not specific to any industry, lead pollution is disproportionately high in Black communities that were officially segregated through federal redlining.⁶⁷ Although this has been known for decades, commentators have noted that “surprisingly little research” has examined the extent of the problem.⁶⁸ This toxic lead exposure comes from myriad sources that are found in greater amounts in Black neighborhoods, including toxic industrial sites near to residences.⁶⁹ Exposure to lead from outside the home can be through lead water pipes, gasoline exhaust, and nearby smelting plants.⁷⁰ Even though most smelting plants that created lead pollution have been closed since the 1960s, soil pollution surrounding these facilities remains an active problem.⁷¹ Nationally, Black children are three times as likely to have elevated blood rates of lead, and these patterns have persisted even as lead exposure rates have decreased for children of other races and ethnicities.⁷² These disparities are even more dramatic in some areas with older housing stock. For example, a 2004 report found that in Chicago, Black children were five to 12 times more likely to exhibit lead poisoning than white children.⁷³ This is partially because Black Chicagoans are disproportionately located in older housing stock with deteriorating lead-based paint.⁷⁴

All of these forms of environmental pollution have serious health consequences, resulting in chronic illnesses like diabetes, asthma, and heart disease, and affecting maternal health and educational outcomes.⁷⁵ African Americans suffer disproportionately from these health problems.⁷⁶ Moreover, these health consequences persist long after exposure, with at least one study showing substantial central nervous system deficits 11 years after childhood exposure.⁷⁷ For further discussion of disparities in health outcomes not specific to environmental pollution, see Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect.

California

Historically, federal public housing was explicitly created to segregate Black Californians into areas with greater pollution burdens due to immediately adjacent polluting sources. For example, when the federal government built public housing in Richmond to accommodate ship workers, as discussed above, it placed the temporary housing for Black workers by the railroad tracks and shipbuilding areas, subjecting them to particulate matter (e.g., small cancer-causing particles associated with diesel exhaust) and industrial pollution, but built higher quality housing for white workers further inland.⁷⁸

Many areas within California still demonstrate racial disparities traceable to state and federal government action. Studies throughout the 1990s have found that largely Black and Latino people in Los Angeles are the most heavily impacted by pollution and toxic waste sites.⁷⁹ Neighborhoods that were explicitly redlined by federal agencies in the 1930s—ranging from South Stockton to West Oakland to Wilmington in Los Angeles—continue to have some of the highest average pollution levels in the state.⁸⁰

Black children are

3x MORE LIKELY to have elevated lead levels in their blood

The historically Black area of Bayview-Hunters Point in San Francisco has a long history of environmental racism, with Black residents subjected to myriad environmental harms, including radioactive contamination from a nearby shipyard, not experienced by whiter, wealthier areas within San Francisco.⁸¹ Moreover, recent environmental remediation efforts have come hand-in-hand with a substantial decline in the percentage

of Black residents.⁸² Starting in the 20th century, Black residents of the neighborhood were displaced by Latino and Asian-American residents.⁸³ Although this has largely been attributed to the “dot com” boom and rising housing prices across San Francisco, scholars have offered a variety of discriminatory factors that drove Black residents out.⁸⁴ These include the San Francisco Housing Authority’s demolition of public housing, the San Francisco Police Department’s enforcement of gang injunctions, and the issuance of subprime mortgage loans.⁸⁵ As one long-time Black resident described it, the formerly-polluted community in which she had long lived is now dramatically cleaner, but is no longer meant for “her or for her grandchildren.”⁸⁶

Similarly, the divisions between the wealthier, white “hills” of Oakland, California and the poorer, Black “flats” that were first established by federal redlining have remained today, with Black residents of the low-lying areas still subject to far greater environmental pollutants.⁸⁷ In Oakland’s earlier days, redlining placed Black Californians in these “flats” adjacent to various heavy industries and manufacturing centers, acknowledging that the housing available was of low quality and subject to noticeable industrial “odors.”⁸⁸ From the 1950s through the 1980s, substantial freeway construction projects placed substantial pollution burdens on all of the low-lying areas in Oakland, including in the few parks and other green space available to them.⁸⁹ Residents of these areas continue to experience quantifiably greater health consequences, such as emergency room visits due to asthma.⁹⁰

These patterns exist across California with respect to facilities that handle hazardous waste. Los Angeles has 1.2 million people living near facilities that handle hazardous waste, and 91 percent of them are people of color.⁹¹ African Americans live near hazardous waste facilities at rates higher than other people of color as a whole.⁹² This is true elsewhere in California, leading to increased lifetime cancer risks for Black Californians that correlate with exposure to outdoor air toxins.⁹³

As is the case nationwide, the oil and gas industry disproportionately affects Black Californians. More than two million Californians live within 2,500 feet of an unplugged oil or gas well, with greater percentages of African Americans living near these sources of pollution than the California population as a whole.⁹⁴ Aside from the exposure to carcinogenic chemicals involved with oil and gas production, toxic residues brought up by subterranean drilling can contaminate local aquifers that supply drinking water.⁹⁵ In the greater Los Angeles Area, notable oil production exists in Inglewood and Baldwin Hills areas which have a greater Black population than

Los Angeles generally.⁹⁶ Similar patterns exist in the San Francisco Bay Area, with major oil production facilities in Richmond and Martinez, areas that are disproportionately Black when compared to the broader Bay Area.⁹⁷ Moreover, advocates have argued that public officials are more responsive to oil and gas-related health concerns from residents of whiter, wealthier neighborhoods, noting that the methane leak in the wealthy Porter Ranch neighborhood of Los Angeles elicited a massive, statewide response while hundreds of significant health complaints related to the AllenCo drilling site in the largely Black neighborhood Jefferson Park were ignored for years.⁹⁸

Even for industries that do not inherently involve toxic or carcinogenic materials, increased rates of truck traffic and general industrial activity also lead to higher rates of heavy metal contamination of local soils.⁹⁹ Those soils are disproportionately found in the backyards, playgrounds, and urban gardens of Black Californians.¹⁰⁰ This heavy metal contamination poses a wide array of serious

Residents of Los Angeles who live near a hazardous waste facility are



91% people of color

IV. Climate Change

Research on the concrete and worsening effects of climate change has made clear that harmful health and environment-related effects of climate change will be experienced by all Americans.¹⁰⁹ These effects include increased range and incidence of infectious disease vectors like ticks, mosquitos, and avian-borne pathogens and decreased food quality and security.¹¹⁰ Rising sea levels will damage coastal communities and reduce water quality and availability.¹¹¹ Extreme weather events, like floods, storms, fires, and extreme heat waves are projected to occur more frequently and more severely.¹¹² All Americans will be at risk of these harms, but not all will face that risk equally. Communities that are already socially and economically struggling, including the urban poor, communities of color, the elderly and children, agricultural workers, and rural

Compared to white Californians, Black Californians are exposed to

40% MORE particulate matter from cars, trucks and buses

health consequences, including increased susceptibility to asthma, inflammation, pregnancy complications, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, kidney damage, and even Parkinson’s disease.¹⁰¹ It also can prevent safe urban gardening in neighborhoods that would desperately benefit from it.¹⁰² On average, Black Californians breathe in about 40 percent more particulate matter from cars, trucks, and buses than white Californians.¹⁰³ Black Californians are exposed to a higher amount of PM 2.5—fine particles emitted by diesel engines—at a rate of 43 percent higher than white Californians, the highest rate of any racial or ethnic group.¹⁰⁴ Black Californians also are exposed to disproportionately high levels of air pollution from other infrastructure-related non-mobile sources, such as shipyards, factories, warehouses, and aviation.¹⁰⁵ These sources of air pollution are a primary reason that African Americans have the highest rates of asthma among all groups in California,¹⁰⁶ leading to asthma-related deaths at a rate of two to three times higher than any other racial or ethnic group.¹⁰⁷ Exposure to small particulate matter from cars, trucks, and buses is also tied to increased risk of heart and lung disease.¹⁰⁸

communities will shoulder a disproportionate burden of these hazards.¹¹³

Nationally

Nationally, formerly redlined areas consistently show hotter temperatures than other areas.¹¹⁴ Therefore, climate change is certain to exacerbate existing, historically-codified disparities that track existing housing-related harms experienced by African Americans.¹¹⁵ In particular, so-called “heat islands,” which will worsen due to climate change, exist where built-up urban areas have few trees, vegetation, or parks that serve to dissipate or reflect heat, and instead have pavement and building materials that absorb and retain it.¹¹⁶ Federal Environmental Protection Agency studies have found

that the heat island effect can cause urban areas to be up to seven degrees hotter than outlying areas during the day and up to five degrees hotter at night.¹¹⁷ African Americans disproportionately live in such heat islands, experiencing higher temperatures on extreme heat days due to a lack of adequate tree cover.¹¹⁸ In a study of 108 urban areas nationwide, including several in California, the formerly-redlined neighborhoods of nearly every city studied were hotter than the non-redlined neighborhoods, some by nearly 13 degrees.¹¹⁹ Aside from tree cover, other features of the urban landscape in Black neighborhoods—most notably, roadways and large building complexes—also absorb and slowly release heat, which also exacerbate heat islands and their effects as discussed above.¹²⁰

The greater presence of trees in a community has been shown to correlate with lower asthma rates, fewer hospital visits during heat waves, and improved mental health for the community’s residents.¹²¹

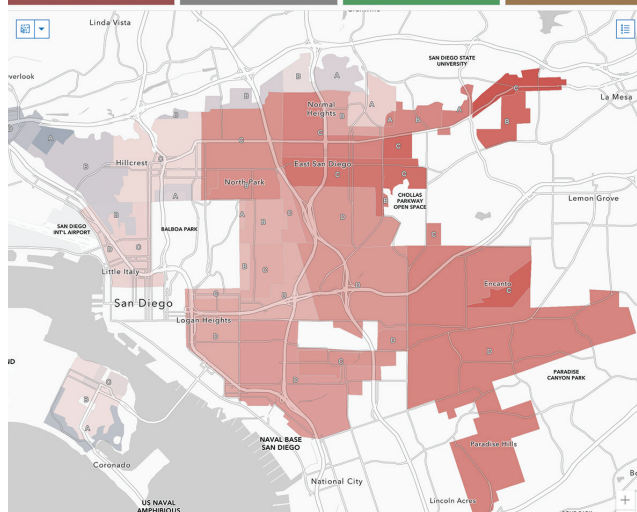
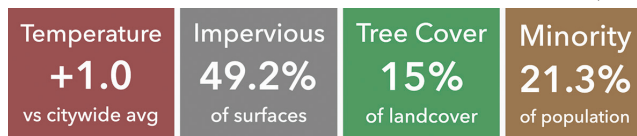
There are a variety of reasons for this, but the most significant is the prevalence of shade that trees create, lowering temperatures and providing a less oppressive environment during particularly hot days.¹²² Conversely, the heightened temperatures in “heat islands” has led to higher rates of heat-related adverse pregnancy consequences for Black women, including premature births

and still births.¹²³ Elected officials have recognized that the issue of shade and heat islands is connected to social justice, with those facing the greatest risk as a result of these disparities often being the most vulnerable members of a community.¹²⁴

The association between parks and green space with wealthier, whiter neighborhoods is so strong that even modern efforts to add green space to largely Black neighborhoods sometimes involve racist narratives, with local efforts portraying green revitalization plans as benefiting primarily white residents even in Black

In a study of 108 urban areas nationwide, including several in California, the formerly-redlined neighborhoods of nearly every city studied were hotter than the non-redlined neighborhoods, some by nearly 13 degrees.

COURTESY OF HOFFMAN, JEREMY S., VIVEK SHANDAS, AND NICHOLAS PENDLETON. 2020. “THE EFFECTS OF HISTORICAL HOUSING POLICIES ON RESIDENT EXPOSURE TO INTRA-URBAN HEAT: A STUDY OF 108 US URBAN AREAS” CLIMATE 8, NO. 1: 12.



Map of San Diego depicting average temperature rises, tree coverage, percentage of impervious surfaces and percentage of minority population affected through color coded map. (2020)

neighborhoods.¹²⁵ Such revitalization plans can also lead to the backlash and suffering of Black residents in these gentrifying neighborhoods. For example, they can be treated as suspicious by local government and new residents when they take advantage of newly-constructed parks and other green space.¹²⁶ Black residents of areas without tree cover have also faced gentrification and unaffordability as a consequence, intentional or inadvertent, of local government efforts to add green space.¹²⁷

California

Black Californians experience these disproportionate harms in many ways, many attributable to the decisions of state and local governments. As is the case nationally, redlining had the effect of clustering Black Californians in urban centers that often constitute heat islands and the worsening heat waves caused by climate change will impose disproportionate health burdens on Black Californians.¹²⁸ A 2009 report published by the University of Southern California, “The Climate Gap,” found that Black residents of Los Angeles are already almost twice as likely to die during a heat wave as other residents because of the “heat islands” attributable to a history of redlining and segregation.¹²⁹

According to the California Department of Public Health, Black Californians are 52 percent more likely than white Californians to live in areas where more than half the ground is covered by impervious surfaces

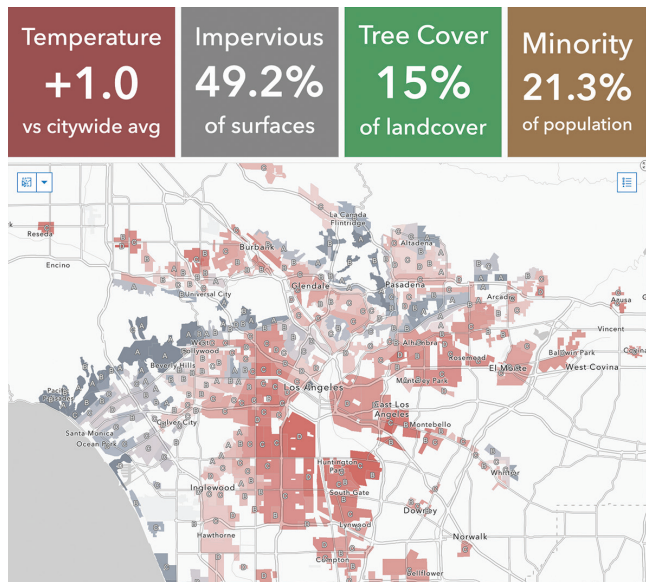
Black residents of Los Angeles were already almost twice as likely to die during a heat wave as other residents because of the “heat islands” attributable to a history of redlining and segregation.

like asphalt and concrete, and where more than half the population lacks tree canopy—by definition, the characteristics of a heat island.¹³⁰ This disparity is particularly pronounced in the Greater Los Angeles Area, where wealthier white areas have triple the amount of tree cover compared to poorer Black neighborhoods.¹³¹ This may be directly attributable to government action, since the City of Los Angeles intentionally kept tree growth to a minimum in Black communities where police officers expressed a concern—realistic or not—that trees could serve as places to hide drugs or weapons.¹³²

The California Department of Public Health has warned that, as heat waves begin earlier in the season and last longer, heat-related deaths are growing disproportionately more common for certain racial or ethnic groups, particularly Black Californians.¹³³ Exacerbating these harms, Black Californians are less likely to have air conditioning, a car to access cooler areas, government-sponsored cooling stations, and are more likely to have one or more chronic health conditions.¹³⁴ For example, in South Los Angeles, a disproportionately Black neighborhood, nearly three-fifths of households

did not have air conditioning in 2020, a number which has not substantially changed over the past decade even as heat waves worsened.¹³⁵ These patterns have been seen across the state during heat waves, in which Black Californians consistently experience heightened rates of emergency medical visits and hospitalizations compared to white Californians.¹³⁶

COURTESY OF HOFFMAN, JEREMY S., VIVEK SHANDAS, AND NICHOLAS PENDLETON. 2020. “THE EFFECTS OF HISTORICAL HOUSING POLICIES ON RESIDENT EXPOSURE TO INTRA-URBAN HEAT: A STUDY OF 108 US URBAN AREAS” CLIMATE 8, NO. 1: 12.



Map of Los Angeles depicting average temperature rises, tree coverage, percentage of impervious surfaces and percentage of minority population affected through color coded map. (2020)

V. Infrastructure and Public Services

Nationally and within California, African Americans have suffered disproportionate harms—both environmental and otherwise—as a result of governmental investment and neglect relating to infrastructure and public services.

Neglected Water Systems

While Black communities across the U.S. face these infrastructure disparities daily, the crisis of water quality and lead poisoning in Flint, Michigan, is an example of governmental neglect that led to the poisoning of a Black community.¹³⁷

Flint, Michigan, in Genesee County, which is now a majority Black city, was originally populated largely by white workers for the General Motors (GM) corporation, which recruited workers in the 1920s and 30s through

housing it built itself and then sold subject to restrictive covenants preventing sale to nonwhite persons.¹³⁸ Private discrimination was cemented and continued through federal redlining in the 1940s, as GM also discriminated in the jobs it offered to the few Black residents of Flint, who generally worked as janitorial staff.¹³⁹ However, starting in the 1960s, as a larger Black population arrived, pockets of Flint experienced “white flight,” which accelerated dramatically across Flint through the 1970s as the automotive industry suffered.¹⁴⁰

In 2014, the entire city of Flint decided to switch its drinking water source from Detroit’s system to the Flint River to save money.¹⁴¹ Residents thereafter complained for months that their water both smelled and appeared worse, but city and state officials continued to maintain the water was safe for human consumption, even as they explicitly chose not to test the water’s safety.¹⁴² After

a leaked internal memo from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported high levels of lead due to the corrosivity of the Flint River water, state officials continued to falsely maintain the levels were safe and called the federal report an “outlier.”¹⁴³ By the time Flint switched back to Detroit’s water system, children were exposed to massive amounts of lead with potentially irreversible health consequences for both young children and those exposed in utero through their mothers.¹⁴⁴ Those consequences include learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and behavioral problems.¹⁴⁵ Again, because Flint had become a majority Black city at the time of the crisis, these impacts were experienced by Black Michiganders far more so than other groups: even in 2017, after years of attention and remediation, Flint’s water still had higher rates of lead than 98 percent of the rest of the state.¹⁴⁶

Studies showed that the amount of children in Flint with lead pollution in their blood almost doubled as a result of the crisis, while both state officials and Michigan Governor Rick Snyder continued to downplay the issue.¹⁴⁷ The Michigan State Attorney General has attributed responsibility for the crisis to all levels of state and local government, filing criminal charges against various state and local officials including former Governor Snyder.¹⁴⁸ The charges range from perjury, related to actions designed to cover up malfeasance, to manslaughter.¹⁴⁹

Inadequate Sewage Systems

Historically, African Americans were subjected to environmental and health consequences as a result of failure to equitably construct sewer and other waste management systems. Originally, U.S. cities relied on private waterworks.¹⁵⁰ By the mid-19th century, cities across America began substantial investment in constructing modern, sanitary sewer and garbage removal systems.¹⁵¹

However, Black neighborhoods were not provided with such systems as early—or at all—as compared to white neighborhoods.¹⁵² In fact, the impetus for provision of such services to Black neighborhoods was sometimes to prevent diseases that resulted from the *lack* of such services from crossing from Black neighborhoods into white ones.¹⁵³

Rates of illness and death resulting from poor sewage disposal dramatically diverged for Black and white Americans as the latter gained access to effective sewage systems while the former did not.¹⁵⁴ For example,

in early 20th century New York, Black residents were forced to live in lowland areas near drainage pools for sewage while white residents lived on higher ground with better drainage.¹⁵⁵ As a result, Black people died from malaria at much higher rates than white people and experienced higher rates of diseases like dysentery and typhoid.¹⁵⁶ Similar patterns existed across the South as well.¹⁵⁷

Across the nation, as residential segregation increased throughout the 20th century, Black neighborhoods actually *lost* access to water and sewer municipal services, since it enabled municipalities to more easily prioritize white over Black neighborhoods for better services.¹⁵⁸ These disparities continue today. As recently as 2019, New York City acknowledged its responsibility for a massive leak caused by a collapsed pipe in a largely Black

In the 19th century, as cities built sewer and garbage systems, they ignored or built them slower for Black neighborhoods. In the 20th century, Black neighborhoods lost access to water and sewage services as cities prioritized white neighborhoods.

neighborhood of Queens, which flooded 127 homes with raw sewage.¹⁵⁹ Many of these houses were destroyed or severely damaged, losses that were not covered by basic homeowners or rental insurance.¹⁶⁰

Energy Burdens

African Americans nationally are subject to disproportionately-higher costs and disproportionately-poorer service with respect to the electrical grid. Black households in America spend more on residential energy bills than white households, even when controlling for income, household size, and other possibly-relevant factors.¹⁶¹ Across the country, African Americans shoulder energy burdens that are disproportionately larger than any other racial group, meaning they spend a larger portion of their income on energy.¹⁶² This is true in major California cities as well, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco.¹⁶³ These disproportionate costs are partially attributable to African Americans living in older, energy-inefficient homes as a result of the legacy of redlining and other discriminatory housing policies.¹⁶⁴ Low-income African Americans are also twice as likely to have their utility service shut off as similarly-low-income white Americans,¹⁶⁵ which advocates have argued are the result of inflexible shut-off regulations and disproportionate energy burdens.¹⁶⁶

Because of lower rates of home ownership in the Black community, African Americans also often cannot take advantage of programs aimed at lessening energy burdens that require home ownership to utilize, such as home solar panels¹⁶⁷ or installation of free charging stations for electric vehicles.¹⁶⁸ As discussed in more detail above, African Americans also suffer disproportionate burdens related to the production of energy, as power plants—including those fired by coal—continue to be disproportionately located in their neighborhoods, producing particulate matter emissions that cause damage to the heart, lungs, and brain.¹⁶⁹

Racist Transportation Systems

Federal, state, and local governments have consistently failed to offer equitable transit options for Black communities throughout American history. The earliest form of transportation discrimination was the trafficking of Black Africans in slave ships, discussed more fully in Chapter 2 Enslavement. The federal government allowed and regulated this form of human trafficking until 1808, when the importation of enslaved people was outlawed.¹⁷⁰ By the late 1700s, the Underground Railroad, an organized effort of safe houses and activists, helped transport enslaved people to freedom.¹⁷¹ Between 1810 and 1850, the Underground Railroad freed an estimated 100,000 enslaved persons.¹⁷²

Around the same time, both the South and the North segregated travelers by race. Frederick Douglass “was often dragged out of [his] seat, beaten, and severely bruised, by conductors and brakemen” when he refused to ride in the Jim Crow car as he rode trains in New England.¹⁷³ The federal government supported these segregation efforts, even as some states attempted to desegregate. For example, in 1877, the U.S. Supreme Court *struck down* a Louisiana civil rights law requiring the desegregation of transport as unconstitutional.¹⁷⁴ Decuir, a Black woman, bought a first class ticket on a steamboat, but was sent to the second class cabin because first class was for whites only.¹⁷⁵ The Court overturned a decision from the Louisiana Supreme Court to award legal damages to Decuir based on a state law requiring desegregated transport, holding that Louisiana had no authority to regulate such transport.¹⁷⁶ In 1896, in contrast, the United States Supreme Court explicitly permitted segregation in public transit when it upheld Louisiana’s law *requiring* transportation segregation.¹⁷⁷ This history of government segregation set the stage for unequal transportation for African Americans that continues to the present.

At the turn of the century, subsidized by government funds, private companies constructed mass transit systems in America’s cities.¹⁷⁸ Until around the 1950s, nearly all transit was built and operated by private companies.¹⁷⁹ Many transit companies struggled to remain profitable in the 1920s, especially after the Depression.¹⁸⁰ The widespread adoption of the automobile combined with white Americans’ move to the suburbs, as described in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, resulted in the companies’ financial failure.¹⁸¹ Public transit systems cut back services as masses of white riders left the system, and never expanded to the suburbs.¹⁸² As government and private actors erected barriers to prevent African Americans from moving to the suburbs, poorer Black workers without cars were left with few public transportation options.¹⁸³ When manufacturing and industrial jobs moved from urban centers to suburban or rural areas, urban Black workers were often unable to follow due to lack of transportation options.¹⁸⁴

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., described how city planning decisions result in transportation systems that failed Black communities: “Urban transit systems in most American cities . . . have become a genuine civil rights issue—and a valid one—because the layout of rapid-transit systems determines the accessibility of jobs to the black community. If transportation systems in American cities could be laid out so as to provide an opportunity for poor people to get meaningful employment, then they could begin to move into the mainstream of American life.”¹⁸⁵

The federal government has been aware of this failure to support transportation for the Black urban workforce, but has not provided a remedy. In 1968, the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission report, studied the causes and effects of riots in U.S. cities.¹⁸⁶ In order to enhance employment opportunities for central-city residents, the report recommended the creation of improved transportation links between Black urban neighborhoods and new job locations in the suburbs.¹⁸⁷

In the 1960s and 70s, the federal government began providing funding for public transit, and many municipalities took control of transit operations.¹⁸⁸ However, scholars argue that these revitalized agencies built a segregated system.¹⁸⁹ The municipal transit agencies that were created throughout the 70s and into the 80s were designed to be responsive to the demands of the local communities, demands which had often grown “re-segregationist” as a backlash to the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁹⁰ This created transit systems that were

unequal by design. Municipal agencies did not cater to urban riders who relied exclusively on public transit, instead channeling greater resources to entice mostly white suburban commuters who could also choose to drive.¹⁹¹ This translated to less comfortable seats, unshaded waiting areas, and bumpier, more unpleasant rides for Black users of public transit.¹⁹²

This system continues to operate today. African Americans still rely on public transit to get to work at much higher rates than white workers. Black workers commute by public transit at nearly four times the rate of white workers.¹⁹³ Moreover, Black workers on average experience higher commute times than white workers, both nationally and in California.¹⁹⁴ Finally, since most fares are usually flat, low income people pay a higher share of their monthly salary on transit, which is more likely to impact African Americans and other people of color.¹⁹⁵ Due to these government actions, workers relying on public transit, who are more often Black than white, often pay comparatively more money and commute for a longer amount of time if they are able to use transit to get to jobs at all.¹⁹⁶

In addition to discrimination in the public transit system, as discussed in Chapter 5, our country's highway system destroyed Black neighborhoods and intensified residential segregation by separating Black neighborhoods from white neighborhoods.

Disparities in Telecom

African Americans also face disproportionate burdens with respect to the national telecommunications network. From 1960 through 2010, African Americans have had significantly lower rates of telephone access than white Americans, though this gap has reduced over

The town of Lanare, founded by Black families fleeing the Dust Bowl, had no running water until the 1970s. After wells were drilled, the water contained dangerous levels of arsenic. The town's residents had no access to clean drinking water until 2019.

time as telephone use became more ubiquitous.¹⁹⁷ More recently, fewer African Americans have access to broadband internet access than white Americans. A 2021 study in Indiana revealed that 56.2 percent of Black residents lacked reliable access to internet service and/or a computer, compared to 34.8 percent of white residents.¹⁹⁸

This lack of telecommunications impacts economic and educational opportunities. Black teens are almost twice as likely to report that they cannot complete all their homework due to lack of access to a computer or reliable internet access.¹⁹⁹

In addition to difficulty accessing the internet, African Americans are disadvantaged by racist structures within it. Dr. Yeshimabeit Milner testified before the California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans that search algorithms, machine learning, automated resource allocation systems, and even credit reporting agencies are all built by software engineers that are overwhelmingly white.²⁰⁰ As a result, the implicit biases of these human software engineers have been built into seemingly neutral algorithms and artificial intelligence, with discriminatory effects.²⁰¹ For example, in 2016, when Amazon Prime same day-delivery services were introduced in Atlanta, Georgia, virtually 100 percent of white residents were given access to the service but less than half of Black residents did.²⁰² Similar patterns existed for Black residents of Boston and Chicago.²⁰³

California

California authorized segregated public transportation at least until 1864.²⁰⁴ The governments of California and its municipalities have chosen infrastructure projects that have harmed Black communities. While California and federal law require state and municipal agencies to consider racially disparate impacts of infrastructure projects today, the historical damage caused by highways in particular has contributed to higher exposure to air pollution among communities of color as discussed above.

As with the federal government, California's government historically neglected water infrastructure as it applied to Black Californians. One example is California's treatment of Black families fleeing the dust bowl. These families left the prairie states and came to farmland across California starting in the 1930s, experiencing widespread

infrastructure discrimination from state and local governments.²⁰⁵ For example, Black Californians in the San Joaquin Valley were excluded from most urban areas with access to clean water as a result of explicit redlining policies, racially-restrictive housing covenants, and even racially-motivated violence.²⁰⁶ In Tulare county, the largely Black community of Teviston had no access to sewer and water infrastructure, while the adjacent

white community of Pixley did.²⁰⁷ Again, this discrimination continued until recently: the town of Lanare, also formed by Black families fleeing the Dust Bowl, had no running water at all until the 1970s, and was subjected to dangerous levels of arsenic in the water even after wells and pipes were drilled.²⁰⁸ The town's residents did not get access to clean drinking until 2019.²⁰⁹

At times, government entities were explicit in weaponizing infrastructure against Black Californians. For example, in the 1950s, a developer in Milpitas, a town north of San Jose, sought to build a large housing development open to both white and Black homebuyers.²¹⁰ He managed to overcome several zoning related obstacles only to discover that the Milpitas City Council had increased the sewer connection fee more than tenfold explicitly to thwart the development.²¹¹

Black neighborhoods in California still suffer extremely high rates of water pollution in the water provided through government infrastructure. In 2019, the *New York Times* reported that as many as 1,000 community water systems in California may be at high risk of failing to deliver potable water, with a disproportionate number of these systems located in low-income areas

that tend to be disproportionately Black.²¹² California's Environmental Protection Agency has also acknowledged that contamination of water sources disproportionately impacts communities of color.²¹³

A UCLA report in 2021 identified 29 failing water systems in Los Angeles County, and these systems largely service communities of color.²¹⁴ For example, in 2019, authorities dissolved the Sativa Los Angeles county Water District for servicing brown water for decades to its customers in Willowbrook and the historically Black neighborhood of Compton.²¹⁵ In Oakland, the majority Black McClymonds High School has had a history of serious water contamination issues in recent years, from lead pollution to dangerously high levels of chemical solvent groundwater pollution that led to the school's temporary closure in 2020.²¹⁶

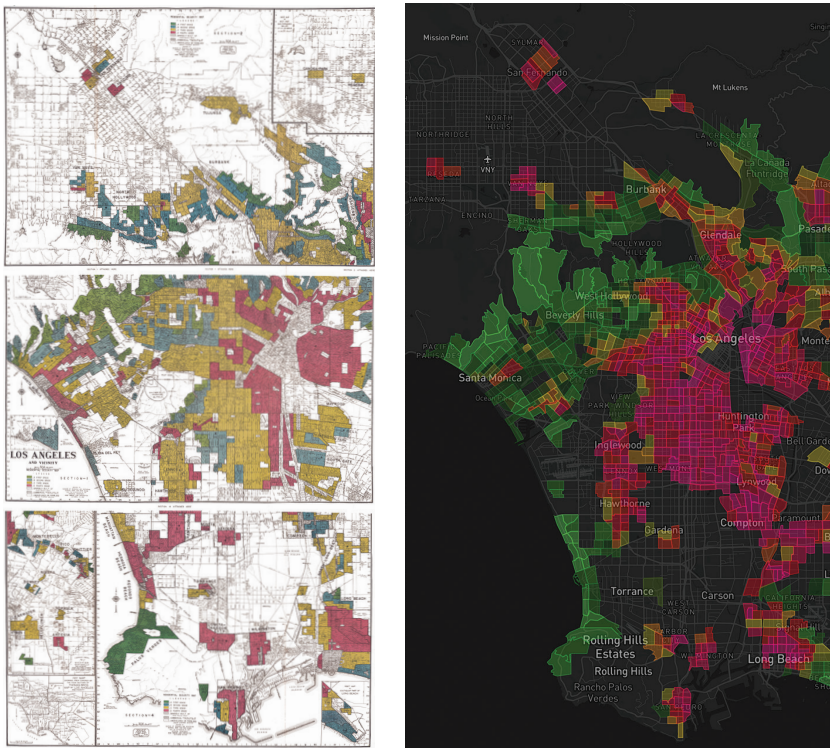
Transportation discrimination impacts Black Californians as well. In 1965, the California Governor created the McCone Commission to examine causes of civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1965, identifying "inadequate and costly" transportation as contributing to high rates of unemployment among the Black urban population. California has not designed its transportation

system to address this need, often favoring rail options catering to suburbs rather than bus lines used by urban areas with greater Black populations.²¹⁷ These choices have led to several high-profile lawsuits, including in Los Angeles and San Francisco in the 1990s and 2000s.²¹⁸

Nevertheless, design of public transit by major municipalities in the state often catered to the largely white suburban residents because they were seen as needing better options in order to "choose" public transit.

For example, Oakland's San Antonio neighborhood, the most racially diverse in the city and one of the densest parts of the Bay Area, sees the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) train travel for nearly three miles without stopping.²¹⁹ By contrast, in suburban Walnut Creek and Pleasant Hill, which are less than half as dense, BART stations are only 1 ¾ miles apart.²²⁰ In the late 1960s, BART was "literally designed" to hurry white suburban commuters past Black

COURTESY OF "NOT EVEN PAST: SOCIAL VULNERABILITY AND THE LEGACY OF REDLINING" / [HTTPS://DSL.RICHMOND.EDU/SOCIALVULNERABILITY](https://dsl.richmond.edu/socialvulnerability)



The image on the left shows a redlining map of Los Angeles, CA made by the Home Owners Loan Corporation during the 1930s. The red portions are non-white neighborhoods deemed by the federal agency to be a credit risk. The map on the right shows the Center for Disease Control's Social Vulnerability Index scores for census tracts today. The Social Vulnerability Index is widely used to assess a community's capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from human and natural disasters. The red portion indicates the highest level of vulnerability to disasters.

inner-city neighborhoods and residents.”²²¹ This purposeful decision by the government left Black residents without the same transit options to reach jobs, and limited economic mobility and opportunity.²²²

In Oakland, a \$484 million elevated “people mover,” which connects BART to the airport, lost federal funding because it was found to have a discriminatory impact; its construction led to the elimination of a bus route in the minority neighborhoods it bypasses.²²³ But, though the project lost federal funding, it still went ahead, and the Oakland neighborhood still lost its bus line.²²⁴

Finally, although the disparities between Black and white residents in terms of raw internet *access* in California is much smaller than nationally,²²⁵ research has shown that Black neighborhoods in both Los Angeles and

VI. Conclusion

The various forms of environment and infrastructure-related discrimination suffered by African Americans in this country are rooted in the badges and incidents of slavery that have never been eliminated in this country. Black enslaved persons were released from bondage and forced into unhealthy, dangerous, and overcrowded housing, located in the most toxic areas in our cities, which also lacked proper water and sewage services. Residential segregation and government



Afton, NC— Black and white protesters march against a toxic waste dump in Warren County. The site was chosen because most of its residents were Black and poor. (1982)

Oakland had the least investment in broadband internet in those cities.²²⁶

decisions regarding modern infrastructure development reinforced these patterns throughout the 20th century. African Americans have been denied equal access to telecommunication services, and are increasingly subjected to “algorithms” and other forms of computerized decision making with racist underpinnings and outcomes. These racist systems have harmed and will continue to harm African Americans.

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I. Introduction

Starting over 400 years ago, the federal and state governments of our country have decimated Black families, both through their own official action and inaction, as well as through creating and supporting systems in which private actors enacted racist policies and practices. After the end of the legal enslavement of African Americans, the apprenticeship system and segregation laws denied African Americans the stability and safety of the family unit.¹ In the past century, both financial assistance and child welfare systems have based decisions on racist beliefs about African Americans.²

As a result, these government-run systems have excluded African Americans from receiving benefits and targeted Black families for investigations of child mistreatment and neglect.³ Further, these structures have placed Black children in foster care systems at much higher rates than white children.⁴ Meanwhile, the criminal and juvenile justice systems have intensified these harms to Black families by imprisoning large numbers of Black children, thereby separating Black families.⁵ All of these actions have systematically worked to deny African Americans the opportunities to form stable, supportive family structures, and have often further stereotyped and blamed African Americans themselves for resulting harms.

Section III of this chapter addresses the treatment—and decimation—of family structure among Black enslaved persons during the slavery era of American history. Section IV discusses the Black family from emancipation until the Civil Rights Era, during which government structures and policies empowered the continued enslavement of Black children, excluded both Black women and Black men from healthy parenting relationships, and continued to deny the legitimacy—both literal and figurative—of Black marriages and children, so as to ensure white wealth was not dispersed to them. Section V addresses the Moynihan Report, which largely blamed the culture of Black families for the injustices faced by African Americans and proposed deeply problematic solutions to remedy them. Section VI addresses direct cash assistance welfare programs, from their overtly racist origins through modern programs that continue to systematically disadvantage impoverished Black families. Section VII lays out the history of the foster care

and other child welfare systems in America, discussing the myriad ways in which that system further attacked the Black family and denied them resources afforded to other Americans. Section VIII addresses the criminalization of Black youth, who are targeted consistently both within

and outside of schools, further breaking families apart. Section IX addresses issues relating to Black victims of domestic violence, who are doubted and excluded from assistance in ways that many white victims are not.

II. Enslavement

Throughout the slavery era of American history, federal and state governments empowered and protected white enslavers in their destruction of Black family structures by treating enslaved people as chattel, unworthy of family love, care, and support.

Enslavers and state governments maintained no records of the origins of enslaved Africans, and replaced their names with those of their new enslavers. This erased their identity, severed them from their family, and made it extremely difficult for them to find each other after emancipation.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade and Reproductive Slavery

As Frederick Douglass observed over 250 years ago, “[g]enealogical trees do not flourish among slaves.”⁶

The vast majority of the nearly 400,000 enslaved persons brought over from Africa were children or young adults, and more than a quarter were children.⁷ Upon the arrival of enslaved people in the United States, private parties and state governments maintained no records of their origins, replacing their names with those of their new enslavers, names by which they were called throughout their lives.⁸ This erased an individual’s identity, severed them from their family, and made it extremely difficult for them to find each other after emancipation.⁹ See Chapter 2, Enslavement, for more detailed information about this process.

Federal and state governments passed laws that protected enslavers’ ability to destroy Black families and use Black women and their children as a way to increase the wealth of enslavers. Before 1662, English law governing the American colonies held that children of enslaved fathers were enslaved, but the child of enslaved women and white male enslavers were free persons upon their birth, thereby entitling them to the full protection of the law.¹⁰ This changed in 1662, when the colonial government of Virginia passed a law stating that all children

born to enslaved mothers were enslaved themselves, regardless of whether or not the father was white, Black, enslaved, or free.¹¹ This law created a new source of wealth as enslavers used these children to settle debts, pass on a larger inheritance, or otherwise enrich themselves.¹² The doctrine underlying this law became known as “partus sequitur ventrem,” Latin for “that which is brought forth follows the womb.”¹³ It was adopted in laws by virtually all other states in which enslavement was legal.¹⁴

The United States outlawed trafficking enslaved people into the country in 1807.¹⁵ The only legal way to increase the number of enslaved

people and free labor for the American economy was therefore through domestic birth of new enslaved persons. This created a financial incentive for impregnating Black women and girls and carrying the pregnancies to term.¹⁶ Historians have found evidence that enslavers raped Black women and forced them to birth children to create more enslaved people and further enrich their enslavers.¹⁷

Professor Daina Ramey Berry has argued that this sexual slavery served to provide great benefits to both government and private actors within both the southern and northern states.¹⁸ The labor of Black enslaved people created wealth for their enslavers, sustained cotton production and other private industries, and paid state and local taxes across the country.¹⁹ In the North, maritime industry, merchants, textile manufacturers, and even consumers of cheap cloth were all dependent on the southern cotton plantation economy, which was based on the sexual slavery of Black women and men²⁰ and the destruction of Black families.²¹ Professor Berry argues that enslavers focused on the fertility of young Black women during slave auctions, and that early childbirth was considered to be a valuable skill, like housekeeping and clothes-mending.²² Enslavers considered the birth of enslaved infants not with humanity, but “appraised” them with a monetary value, one that typically increased as they aged.²³

Marriage Between Enslaved People

American governments prohibited or did not recognize marriage between enslaved people. Across the southern enslaving states, enslaved persons were generally prohibited by law from entering any legally-binding marriage.²⁴ Abolitionist William Goodell described the way that American law treated the families of enslaved people in 1853 as: “The slave has no rights. Of course he, or she, cannot have the rights of a husband, a wife. The slave is a chattel, and chattels do not marry. ‘The slave is not ranked among sentient beings, but among things,’ and things are not married.”²⁵ Tennessee was the only enslaving state that allowed for marriage between enslaved persons, but the law required consent of the enslavers for the marriage to be valid.²⁶ Because enslaved persons were not considered to be human beings under the law, they could not enter into legal contracts.²⁷ Therefore, enslaved people could neither own nor transfer property, which is what American law recognized their husbands, wives, and children to be.²⁸

The North Carolina Supreme Court in 1858 said: “The relation between slaves is essentially different from that of man and wife joined in lawful wedlock,” because “with slaves it may be dissolved at the pleasure of either party, or by the sale of one or both, dependent upon the caprice or necessity of the owners.”²⁹

Their condition was compatible only with a form of concubinage, “voluntary on the part of the slaves, and permissive on that of the master.”³⁰

These attitudes and legal mandates were not limited to the South. One notable example is the case of Basil Campbell, who at the time of his death in 1906 was one of the wealthiest Black men in California.³¹ He arrived to California from Missouri in 1854 as an enslaved person, forcibly removed from his wife and two children, who never saw him again.³² After his death, his two adult sons from his marriage in Missouri sued to seek their inheritance, leading three different courts, including the California Supreme Court, to reject their claims.³³ Indeed, one appellate court held—nearly 50 years after the legal emancipation of enslaved African Americans—that describing Campbell’s marriage to his enslaved wife as a marriage would make a “mockery” of the institution.³⁴

Interracial Marriage

Laws prohibiting interracial marriage, known as anti-miscegenation laws, devalued Black families. The earliest known anti-miscegenation law, passed in 1661 in the Colony of Maryland, stated that a white woman who married a Black man became an enslaved person

The North Carolina Supreme Court in 1858 said: “The relation between slaves is essentially different from that of man and wife joined in lawful wedlock,” because “with slaves it may be dissolved at the pleasure of either party, or by the sale of one or both, dependent upon the caprice or necessity of the owners.”

herself.³⁵ Other colonies followed suit to prohibit interracial marriage during slavery.³⁶ However, from slavery through the era of legal segregation, American society accepted white men having sex with Black women—whether consensual or rape—especially when those women were treated as the property of white men.³⁷ The children of these interracial interactions were typically enslaved and could not inherit their white father’s wealth.³⁸

Fears of interracial marriage often led to violence. In 1834, a false rumor that abolitionist ministers had married an interracial couple led to 11 days of racial terror in New York City.³⁹ Mobs attacked a mixed-race gathering of the American Anti-Slavery Society and destroyed Black churches, homes, schools, and businesses, as well as the homes and churches of leading abolitionists.⁴⁰ A similar incident occurred in Philadelphia in 1838.⁴¹

Punishments for interracial marriage varied by state, but in many states prior to the Civil War, white Americans were punished more often than African Americans, at least within the legal system.⁴² Scholars have argued that this reflects anti-Black racist attitudes that, depending on the circumstance, Black people were sometimes considered “too irresponsible and too inferior to punish” and “it was whites’ responsibility to protect the purity of their own bloodlines.”⁴³ Punishments for African Americans, however, were still severe, including whippings, fines, exile, or even enslavement if they were free at the time of their violation of the law.⁴⁴ Although it is unclear how often anti-miscegenation laws were enforced, evidence suggests that they were used to make examples of high-visibility interracial couples, who were considered a threat to public order.⁴⁵

Parent-Child Relationships

Enslavement treated enslaved African Americans as replaceable property, so enslavers separated children from their parents if it was profitable to do so, and sometimes in order to discourage potential rebellion. This was justified by the enslavers in various ways. For exam-

State law legally entitled enslavers to separate enslaved parents and children at any time, and to relocate them at different plantations at the time of the child's birth. In some southern states, approximately one-third of enslaved children were separated from one or both parents.

ple, Thomas R.R. Cobb, a legal scholar who drafted parts of the Georgia legal code of 1861,⁴⁶ claimed that the Black mother “suffers little” when her children are stolen from her, since she lacked maternal feelings.⁴⁷ Cobb helped write principles of white supremacy into Georgia law, including a provision that presumed African Americans were enslaved unless proven otherwise.⁴⁸

From their birth, enslaved children were considered property of the enslaver, and therefore enslavers controlled a child's life and upbringing.⁴⁹ From the time of birth, enslavers stripped away parental rights, often not allowing the birth parents to choose the newborn's name.⁵⁰ Very soon after giving birth, enslaved mothers were expected to return to work and leave their children with extended family members or an older enslaved woman who was assigned the role to watch over children on the plantation.⁵¹ Even if an enslaved parent had some control over their child's life, the enslaver held the highest authority and could make final decisions as to who would take care of the child, what activities they participated in, or whether they would be separated from their family by selling the parent or child to a different enslaver.⁵² As a result of many children and parents being separated through chattel sales, orphaned children were often adopted and cared for by friends, extended family, or the enslaved community as a whole.⁵³ This approach of allowing white strangers, aided by laws and government actors, to take a Black child from their family

is echoed after enslavement via the apprenticeship system and by the modern foster care system, as discussed further below.

Enslaved children typically received no formal education and were expected to work as soon as they were physically able, forced to work in the fields as young as eight.⁵⁴ They often worked in a similar capacity as the adults, working fields, tending animals, cleaning and serving in their enslavers' houses, and taking care of younger children.⁵⁵ State law legally entitled enslavers to separate enslaved parents and children at any time, and to relocate them at different plantations at the time of the child's birth.⁵⁶ In some southern states, approximately one-third of enslaved children were separated from one or both parents.⁵⁷

Harriet Mason, an enslaved woman forced to separate from her family at age seven, related that she “used to say I wish I'd died when I was little.”⁵⁸ Members of a family could be separately sold as enslavers fell into debt or wanted to raise profits.⁵⁹ In some parts of the South, a Black enslaved person had a 30 percent chance of being sold in his or her lifetime.⁶⁰ A quarter of trades of enslaved persons across state lines destroyed a first marriage, while approximately half destroyed a nuclear family by separating immediate family members.⁶¹

Opponents of slavery, including those in the federal government, recognized how it destroyed the families of



The Separation of Mother and Child. (1852)

African Americans. Advocating for the elimination of slavery, U.S. Senator James Harlan of Iowa stated that slavery effected “the abolition practically of the parental relation, robbing the offspring of the care and attention of his parents[.]”⁶² Scholars argue that the anguish caused by the threat of family separation coerced enslaved people into working without complaint.⁶³ The horrors of family separation during slavery were highlighted by abolitionists as a central strategy to enlist people to their cause.⁶⁴ Near the end of the slavery era, in the 1850s, some southern states responded to public horror at child separation by passing laws prohibiting the taking of infants from their enslaved mothers.⁶⁵ Modern scholars analyzing this development have argued that these laws were not passed out of concern for African Americans, but to assuage public outrage in order to maintain slavery.⁶⁶

Extended Family Kinship Structures

In order to cope with the destruction of their nuclear family, enslaved people created deep, extended supportive relationships with other enslaved people.⁶⁷ Some historians have argued that the extended kinship structures of Black enslaved people mirrored similar structures in their native West African homelands.⁶⁸ The role of Black grandparents, other extended relatives, and older Black caregivers who were not biologically related took on particular importance,⁶⁹ with Black grandmothers often serving as a central figure within a plantation ensuring the care of all children of enslaved parents who were sold to other enslavers, killed, or otherwise removed from their nuclear families.⁷⁰ The reliance of Black mothers and African Americans on extended kinship networks was a necessity for mere survival, beginning in the slavery era and continued through legal segregation and other forms of discrimination.⁷¹

Early Black historians argued that the legacy of slavery created “disorganization and instability” in Black

families for generations.⁷² In 1899 and again in 1909, prominent sociologist and social critic W.E.B. Du Bois published detailed, fact-driven analyses of Black families, demonstrating the many ways in which a lack of economic means and opportunities after the end of slavery harmed Black families in both the North and South.⁷³ In 1932, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier argued that Black families had particular difficulty adapting to the drastic changes of the early 20th century due to the way that enslavement destroyed Black families and traditions.⁷⁴ As discussed further below, these resulting harms have been used throughout American history to claim that the Black family itself was to blame because it was dysfunctional by its nature.

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Red Cross Relief, drought of 1930-31. African American family of 9. (c. 1930)

III. Black Families from Emancipation to the Civil Rights Era, 1865 to 1960

After slavery, states and private actors continued to discriminate against Black families, particularly with respect to the dominant gender norms of the time. Before the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s redefined the role of women in society,⁷⁵ women were expected to take care of children and the home.⁷⁶ Only men were expected to participate in the public sphere.⁷⁷ For Black women, these expectations imposed impossible burdens. Black women were expected to be mothers

and wives, but white society expected Black women to be their servants and workers.⁷⁸ Black women attempted to do both, which took a great emotional and physical toll on Black women and, in turn, their families.⁷⁹

For Black men, traditional gender roles dictated that they must dominate and lead, acting as the head of the family.⁸⁰ Under these norms of masculinity, society expected men to be stoic figures, enduring all injury without emotion

or complaint.⁸¹ These expectations, too, demanded the impossible from Black men, as society expected them to accept the indignities of discrimination without complaint.⁸² When Black men responded to discrimination in anger—one of the few emotions society expected of and allowed for men to exhibit—Black men were criminalized and treated as threats, feeding the stereotypes imposed upon them.⁸³ This, too, has taken a toll on Black men and their families.⁸⁴

Black Parenthood

During this time, prevailing gender norms defined fathers as breadwinners and mothers as caretakers at home.⁸⁵ But racial discrimination combined with these gender expectations to place heavier burdens on Black families and Black parenthood. As described in greater detail in Chapter 10, *Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity*, government and private actors discriminated against Black men seeking employment, restricting them to ill-paid menial jobs and limiting their ability to earn income to support their families.⁸⁶ At times, this required Black men to direct their children to work to

ensure that the family could survive.⁸⁷ Black children, therefore, often could not pursue schooling or their own goals and dreams.⁸⁸

Black women were generally precluded from taking public-facing retail jobs or professional secretarial work with traditional nine-to-five work schedules. Instead, typically they were only given opportunities to serve as domestic caregivers and maids, often living in the homes of their white employers and on call at all hours. These domestic service jobs took the individual work of caring and mothering from Black families and gave it to the children of white families, often preventing Black mothers from even living with their children.

Because discrimination limited Black men's employment opportunities, Black women also had to seek work to supplement the family's income even where white women did not.⁸⁹ This required Black women to play the social roles of both men and women, taking care of children and the household while working jobs at the same time.⁹⁰ The Freedmen's Bureau, a government agency established to aid the transition of enslaved people to freedom, singled out Black women as subset of poor women who were supposed to work rather than remaining at home.⁹¹ For example, South Carolina Freedmen's Bureau agent John de Forest criticized the "myriads of [Black] women who once earned their own living [who] now have aspirations to be like white ladies and, instead of using the hoe, pass the days in dawdling over their trivial housework[.]"⁹²

As a result, a higher percentage of Black married women worked than their white counterparts.⁹³ This systematically denied Black children the care of their mothers when compared to white children whose mothers could more often choose to stay home and provide care.⁹⁴ Later in the 20th century, Black women were generally precluded from taking public-facing retail jobs or professional secretarial work with traditional nine-to-five work schedules.⁹⁵ Instead, typically they were only given opportunities to serve as domestic caregivers and maids, often living in the homes of their white employers and on call at all hours.⁹⁶ These domestic service jobs took the individual work of caring and mothering from Black families and gave it to the children of white families, often preventing Black mothers from even living with their children.⁹⁷

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(1899)

Interracial Marriage

Anti-miscegenation laws continued after the end of enslavement. When the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, it was not considered to prohibit laws banning interracial marriage so long as the laws applied equally to both races.⁹⁸ In 1883, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of laws outlawing interracial marriage, and state courts followed suit through the mid-20th century.⁹⁹ Members of Congress also tried—unsuccessfully—to ban interracial marriage nationwide through legislative proposals made in 1871, 1912, and 1928.¹⁰⁰ Eventually, a total of 38 states established such laws.¹⁰¹

Many scholars argue that the white-dominated state governments passed anti-miscegenation laws to prevent African Americans—enslaved or otherwise—from accumulating wealth, in addition to controlling women's sexuality.¹⁰² In America's earliest days, white colonists were also concerned with possible mixing of African Americans and Native Americans, given that an alliance of both groups might provide sufficient strength to rise against slavery and other forms of economic oppression.¹⁰³

Immediately after emancipation, former enslavers continued to exploit children, both sexually and as a cheap source of labor, through the apprenticeship system. Enslavers refused to free children when their parents were freed, either through apprenticeship laws or through outright kidnapping.

The most direct concern was a passing on of white wealth to interracial offspring through inheritance or probate laws, undermining race-based social stratification.¹⁰⁴ Children of legally-unrecognized interracial marriages were almost always excluded from economic benefits they would have received if their parents were both white.¹⁰⁵ The children were legally considered “bastards,” and had no claim to the estates of their biological fathers, nor could the man or woman in such a “void” marriage claim alimony, child support, death benefits, or any inheritance.¹⁰⁶

White relatives also had a strong motivation to ensure these statutes were strictly and aggressively enforced, since a sibling who might inherit nothing on the death of a married brother or sister could inherit that sibling's wealth by proving that the sibling's spouse was Black, and that the marriage was therefore void.¹⁰⁷ Anti-miscegenation laws continued to deny economic benefits—especially in probate, i.e., a judicial process whereby a will is “proven” in court—to African Americans

who would have otherwise received them, since, by operation of law, assets of those who died without wills would be inherited by spouses.¹⁰⁸

Government officials and white militants enforced bans on sexual intimacy between Black men and white women with particular intensity due to the overlapping aims of maintaining racial hierarchy and policing white women's bodies.¹⁰⁹ The Ku Klux Klan, an all-male group, claimed one of its purposes was to treat white women as the “special objects of [its] regard and protection.”¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, they abused, raped, and mutilated white women who fraternized with Black men.¹¹¹

This also meant that Black men were special targets for violence after any interactions with white women. In Alabama in 1929, for example, Elijah Fields, a 50-year-old Black man, and Ollie Roden, a 25-year-old white woman, were both arrested and tried for violation of the state's anti-miscegenation law, which also prohibited cohabitation.¹¹² An Alabama jury convicted Fields even though Roden's father testified that he had only asked Fields to drive his daughter, who was incontinent and suffering from open sores, from a hospital to a boardinghouse.¹¹³ The state sentenced Fields to two to three years in prison, although it was later reversed on appeal.¹¹⁴

In 1967, in *Loving v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court finally struck down all anti-miscegenation laws as unconstitutional.¹¹⁵

Continued Enslavement of Black Children Through Apprenticeship

The so-called “apprenticeship system” was a system that existed both before and after the Civil War under which state and local governments, through court decisions and agency actions, removed Black children from their families and placed them in the control of white adults who sometimes forced them to work without pay.¹¹⁶ This system had existed in some form since the late 1700s, including when enslavement of Black children was legal.¹¹⁷ However, even during the slavery era, it was used to exploit the labor of *free* Black children, including in enslaving states.¹¹⁸ For example, records reveal that in 1857 a three-year-old free Black boy named Charles Bell was bound to an apprenticeship in Frederick County, Maryland, until the age of 21, through an agreement between local county officials and Nathaniel C. Lupton, which makes no mention of his parents.¹¹⁹

Immediately after emancipation, former enslavers continued to exploit children, both sexually and as a cheap source of labor, through the apprenticeship system.¹²⁰ Enslavers refused to free children when their parents were freed, either through apprenticeship laws or through outright kidnapping.¹²¹ Former enslavers petitioned state courts to remove Black children from their families based on apprenticeship laws.¹²² These laws often allowed former enslavers to gain legal custody of Black children simply by claiming their parents were incapable of financially supporting them.¹²³ In addition to the trauma of losing a child, Black families often suffered substantial economic harm since farming families relied upon children to assist in agricultural work.¹²⁴

This apprenticeship system controlled Black girls until they were 18 and Black boys until they were 21.¹²⁵ Although it is not known precisely how many children were effectively re-enslaved through apprenticeship, scholars estimate that many thousands of children in the South were taken from their recently-freed parents.¹²⁶

Court cases throughout the second half of the 19th century document occasionally-successful attempts of parents to free their children from this form of enslavement, but also reveal the continued success of the system at ensuring that white former enslavers could profit from their continued exploitation of Black children.¹²⁷

Southern white people defended the apprenticeship system as benevolent in nature. One Maryland newspaper, for example, described the system in 1864 as being “prompted by feelings of humanity towards these unfortunate young ones.”¹²⁸ One Texas judge described the Texas apprenticeship system as granting “justice to these children” by placing them in “good comfortable homes” where they would receive “some education.”¹²⁹

In one well-known example, a young Black girl named Elizabeth Turner was apprenticed as a “house servant” at the age of eight, two days after her emancipation.

State and local courts were involved in empowering this injustice. So-called “orphan” courts across the southern states, typically run by pro-slavery judges, bound an estimated 10,000 children of freed Black men and women to these apprenticeships, which for all intents and purposes were an extension of their forced labor under slavery, operating to the benefit of the children’s former enslavers.¹³⁰ Chief Justice of the United States Supreme

Court Salmon Chase noted, in an 1867 case, that under the Maryland apprenticeship system “younger persons were bound as apprentices, usually, if not always, to their late masters.”¹³¹ This legal dispute arose because, under Maryland law, anyone seeking to apprentice a white child was required to provide an education, and could not involuntarily “transfer” the apprenticed child to another.¹³²

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Photograph shows ten African American children of various ages in a field picking berries. (c.1920)

However, Black children subjected to apprenticeship were not provided similar rights, and were described as a “property and interest.”¹³³ In one well-known example, a young Black girl named Elizabeth Turner was apprenticed as a “house servant” at the age of eight, two days after her emancipation.¹³⁴ She challenged her apprenticeship because of the differences between apprenticeship laws for Black and white children.¹³⁵ The Supreme Court held that no Black child could be bound to an apprenticeship without the protections afforded to white children, concluding that “the alleged apprenticeship in the present case is involuntary servitude, within the meaning of...the [thirteenth] amendment.”¹³⁶

Although this decision meant freedom for Elizabeth Turner, many southern trial courts ignored Justice Chase’s observations, and the re-enslavement of Black youth continued in the South.¹³⁷ Since apprenticeship

laws allowed local courts to judge whether Black parents were financially able to raise their children, white former enslavers often easily convinced white judges that the children would be better off placed with them.¹³⁸

Scholars have noted that these attitudes have continued through modern family court and child welfare systems, which continue to apply three presumptions that are

racist in practice: 1) that the state knows how to raise Black children better than their parents; 2) that poverty in and of itself prevents parents from raising their children well; and 3) that menial or vocational work, instead of an academic education, is more appropriate for Black youth.¹³⁹

During the New Deal, the federal government had a chance to remedy these abuses but did not. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, a federal law that generally outlawed child labor explicitly carved out agricultural and domestic work, which was then largely done by Black workers.¹⁴⁰ The United States Congress excluded these industries from labor protections, thereby denying Black children the labor protections given to white children.¹⁴¹ See Chapter 10, *Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity*, for further discussion of related issues.

Impacts of the Great Migration on the Black Family

In the first half of the 20th century, millions of African Americans left the segregated South in search of greater opportunity in urban centers in the North and the West in a phenomenon called the Great Migration, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 1. This was, in part, because these cities already had some existing Black social networks and possibly relatives with whom southern African Americans could connect.¹⁴² Older studies theorized that Black migrants during the Great Migration had disorganized family structures in the South, which they brought with them when they migrated to the North, contributing to higher rates of single parenthood and childbirth outside of marriage.¹⁴³ Many Black families sent one parent, northwards or westwards first, with the rest of the family to follow months or years later.¹⁴⁴

Modern scholarship disputed these conclusions, noting that Black migrants from the South were more likely than African Americans already living in the North to have children living with two parents, married women living with their spouses, and fewer mothers that had never married.¹⁴⁵ They were also less likely than northern African Americans to receive welfare payments,¹⁴⁶ contradicting claims in the Moynihan Report, which is discussed further

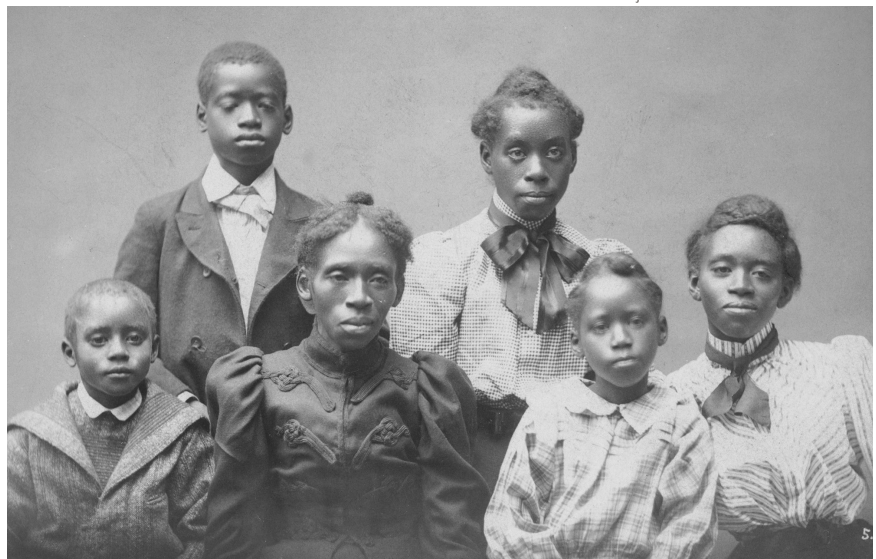
below, that the higher welfare payments in the North drew migrants from the South.

California

California had an anti-miscegenation statute even as other nearby states did not.¹⁴⁷ In fact, California enacted an anti-miscegenation law in its very first legislative session in 1850.¹⁴⁸ It initially singled out “negroes and mulattos” as the sole group which was prohibited from marrying “whites,” following the national trend of disenfranchising Black people from entering into legally-recognized marriages with white Americans.¹⁴⁹ Although the law was based in slavery-era motivations for prohibiting such marriages, other racial groups facing waves of societal discrimination in California were targeted by later amendments to the original law.¹⁵⁰ California legislators exported its ban on interracial marriage to other states: In 1939, California legislators convinced the Utah legislature to add “Malay” to their state’s anti-miscegenation law in order to avoid having to recognize marriages between Filipino Americans and white people performed in Utah.¹⁵¹

It was not until 1948 that the California anti-miscegenation law was struck down by the California Supreme Court.¹⁵² At oral argument, in defense of the law, the attorney for Los Angeles County asserted that “it has been shown that the white race is superior physically and mentally to the black race, and the intermarriage of these races results in a lessening of physical vitality and mentality in their offspring” and that “people who

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Photograph shows Lavinia Russell Baker (also spelled Levina and Levinah in historical records) and her five surviving children after the lynching of her husband, Lake City, South Carolina, Postmaster Frazer or Frazier Baker, and their daughter, Julia, on February 22, 1898. The Post Office and Baker family home was burned and family members were attacked by gunfire as they sought to escape.

enter into miscegenous marriages are usually from the lower walks of both races . . . generally people who are lost to shame.”¹⁵³ Even after the law was struck down as unconstitutional, the California legislature repeatedly

refused to repeal the law.¹⁵⁴ It was not until *11 years* later that the California legislature finally repealed the statute, following consistent pressure from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.¹⁵⁵

IV. The Moynihan Report

Few developments in the past half-century have been as impactful, or arguably as harmful, to America’s perception of Black families as the “Moynihan Report” of 1965.

Drafting and Content of the Moynihan Report

In the midst of the civil rights movement, in 1965, Daniel Moynihan, an Assistant Secretary of Labor researching policies as part of the Johnson Administration’s “War on Poverty,” drafted what was originally an internal Department of Labor Report entitled, “The Negro Family: The Case For National Action.”¹⁵⁶ As described in the introduction of the report, one of its goals was to analyze the African American family structure, which Moynihan saw as the fundamental problem underlying the gap in income, standards of living, and education between African Americans and other groups.¹⁵⁷

The report described numerous ways that the historical legacy of slavery and institutional racism created lasting, harmful effects on African Americans and the Black family.¹⁵⁸ However, while acknowledging the impacts of these historical realities, the report essentially claimed that the high rate of single motherhood in Black families in America was a major reason for the continued failure of African Americans to achieve full and equal access to success in America.¹⁵⁹ It further asserted that such equality could only be achieved by changing the culture of African Americans, and particularly of Black men, who Moynihan claimed had been feminized and rendered inadequate workers through being raised without male role models.¹⁶⁰

Even when advocating for governmental intervention to assist African Americans, the Moynihan Report still portrayed them as helpless but for the intervention of white Americans, describing what Moynihan called the “pathology” of Black America as “capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world.”¹⁶¹ Although the Moynihan Report relied heavily on scholarship previously published by Black scholars, and linked the poverty experienced by African Americans to the historical traumas of slavery, it also argued that the Civil Rights Act and equality of opportunity would not resolve them.¹⁶²

Instead, the Moynihan Report asserted that “[t]he gap between the Negro and other groups in American society is widening. The fundamental problem, in which this is most clearly the case, is that of family structure.”¹⁶³ Moynihan argued, for example, that the prevalence of single motherhood in Black families created “a matriarchal structure which . . . seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole.”¹⁶⁴

The overt sexism and gender-stereotyping of the report also dovetailed with existing hostility towards Black women serving as leaders in the Civil Rights movement.¹⁶⁵ Contemporary Black women leaders were outraged that Moynihan explicitly advocated for improved governmental job opportunities for Black men over Black women to ensure male “breadwinners.”¹⁶⁶

Trailblazing advocate Pauli Murray stated that Moynihan’s criticism of Black women in the workforce was “bitterly ironic,” as criticism “for their efforts to overcome a handicap not of their own making.”¹⁶⁷ Murray and others sharply disputed that traditional gender roles could solve Black poverty and racism.¹⁶⁸ Social scientist Donna Franklin argued that the family instability Moynihan focused on was mostly a result of the fact that Black women were hired as maids and child caregivers, while racial discrimination prevented Black men from finding jobs.¹⁶⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois made a similar observation nearly a half a century before the Moynihan Report.¹⁷⁰

Franklin also noted that the many single mothers in the Black community noted by Moynihan was at least partially due to the fact that adoption services did not accept Black children.¹⁷¹ As a result, single Black women were forced into motherhood when white women had the option of giving their children up for adoption.¹⁷² During the 1950s, 70 percent of white single mothers gave up their children for adoption, but only five percent or fewer of Black single mothers did so.¹⁷³

As Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote, the report helped create “the myth...that fatherhood is the great antidote to all that ails black people.”¹⁷⁴

Ultimately, no national effort resulted from the Moynihan Report. President Johnson called for a White House

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Unidentified African American Civil War veteran in Grand Army of the Republic uniform with two children. (c. 1900)

conference in its wake, which occurred in November of 1965.¹⁷⁵ At that point, the report had engendered so much controversy that Moynihan himself was largely sidelined at the conference, having recently left the administration.¹⁷⁶

The Contemporary Response of Black Leaders to the Moynihan Report

Largely in response to the Moynihan Report, President Johnson acknowledged the legacy of state-sanctioned slavery and discrimination when he publicly stated, “Negro poverty is not white poverty.”¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, his administration followed that announcement with few meaningful efforts to address disparities of African Americans.¹⁷⁸

Johnson did, however, convene a group of well-respected civil rights leaders to address Black poverty, which produced a report proposing that the federal government

spend billions of dollars to ensure jobs, universal health insurance, and a basic minimum income paid to all Americans, regardless of race.¹⁷⁹ Their approach did not acknowledge that the American government has harmed African Americans in a unique way, since they believed proposals aimed at helping all poor Americans, Black and white, were likely to succeed.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, very few of their recommendations ultimately manifested in any federal legislation from the Johnson Administration, or otherwise.¹⁸¹

Impacts on Public Discourse and Social Policy

Scholars have consistently criticized the Moynihan Report for blaming the victim.¹⁸² For some politicians and government actors, the Moynihan Report justified a stance that African Americans were unworthy of public assistance because Black culture was to blame for harms resulting from the enslavement and racial discrimination.¹⁸³

Moynihan also suggested that every young Black man should join the armed forces, which would provide Black men with a much-needed “world away from women, a world

run by strong men of unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly and predictable.”¹⁸⁴ This recommendation was made as American involvement in the Vietnam War was beginning to escalate, at a time in which Black men were underrepresented in the armed forces.¹⁸⁵ Moynihan’s analysis and recommendation lead to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s “Project 100,000,” a program ostensibly designed to allow greater access to the U.S. Military for those who initially failed the qualifications test.¹⁸⁶ Project 100,000 ultimately served as a successful recruitment tool for Black soldiers in the Vietnam War—40 percent of those recruited were Black, a proportion nearly four times the percentage of African Americans in the general population.¹⁸⁷ Regardless, Black men were more likely to be drafted than white men, further devastating Black families when thousands of Black men died in the war.¹⁸⁸

Although the Moynihan Report and its central conclusions were immediately controversial and contested, President Johnson adopted its language and central focus in decrying the “breakdown of the Negro family structure” as fundamental to the challenges faced by African Americans.¹⁸⁹ Several high-profile scholars also used the conclusions of the Moynihan Report to argue against the very social welfare programs for which Moynihan had advocated to help African Americans out of poverty. These included Arthur Jensen and Charles Murray—best known for their deeply controversial book “The Bell Curve”—who argued that the wealth gap between Black and white Americans existed because white Americans were more intelligent, a position Moynihan explicitly rejected.¹⁹⁰

Later scholars argued the Moynihan Report provided grounds for politicians to blame Black single-parent families for their poverty and to deny assistance to African Americans in need.¹⁹¹ Scholars have noted that Ronald Reagan, as California governor, “exploited” the perception of the single Black mother popularized by the Moynihan report when he coined the term “welfare queen” as part of his larger campaign for limited government.¹⁹² Historians have argued that the Moynihan Report, despite arguing for greater interventions to combat Black poverty, nevertheless influenced the political movement within the federal government in the 1990s to cut welfare programs and impose punitive “welfare to work” training or employment requirements on recipients of cash assistance.¹⁹³

V. The Welfare System: Assistance to Families

Despite the consistent arguments of politicians in the 1980s and 1990s stereotyping African Americans as unfairly taking advantage of government welfare policies, the American welfare system throughout history has actually discriminated against Black women and families, both explicitly and implicitly.

1900 to 1935: State “Mothers’ Pensions”

States across America developed centralized welfare systems in the early 1900s to provide economic aid to low-income single mothers taking care of their children.¹⁹⁴ States made support payments every month to ensure a basic standard of living to care for both mother and child.¹⁹⁵ By 1930, all but two of the 48 existing states had created these “mothers’ pensions.”¹⁹⁶

Throughout the era of mothers’ pensions, Southern states consistently avoided giving aid to single Black mothers.¹⁹⁷ These policies discriminated against Black mothers, despite their greater economic need on average.¹⁹⁸ This approach was in line with southern state officials’ administration of federal public works programs; such officials generally argued that African Americans should not need or be given relief so long as menial jobs were available to them.¹⁹⁹ Research has shown that between 1910 and 1920, the states in the South that enacted no “mothers’ pensions” were those with greatest percentage of Black single mothers.²⁰⁰ Similarly, states that had higher Black single motherhood rates were slower to enact such pensions and/or less generous with them when they were enacted.²⁰¹

Both northern and southern states also implemented standards that disproportionately disqualified Black

women, such as barring unmarried mothers from receiving benefits.²⁰² Many states across the nation only gave mothers’ pensions to widows, thereby excluding unmarried mothers who were more often Black women.²⁰³ Even nominally race-neutral programs were often racist in their administration, since discretion in administering these programs was often left to “line officials (judges as well as county agencies)” who made decisions “to separate the worthy mothers from the unworthy” and about whether to provide benefits at all.²⁰⁴

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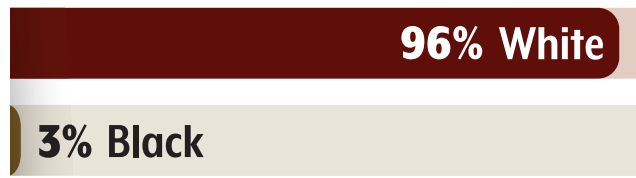


African-American family living in crowded quarters, Chicago, Illinois. (1941)

A welfare field supervisor in the 1930s explained that the withholding of welfare payments from Black mothers was to prevent them from staying at home caring for their children and to instead force them into the work place.²⁰⁵ This reflected the attitude of the white community that Black women should be forced to continue engaging in seasonal labor jobs or domestic service rather than receive any aid.²⁰⁶

MOTHERS' PENSIONS RECIPIENTS 1931 BY RACE A FORM OF GOVERNMENT AID TO NEEDY FAMILIES

Percent receiving funds



A survey of all mothers' pensions across states in 1931 found that 96 percent of recipients were white; only three percent went to Black mothers.²⁰⁷ All the states of the Deep South—Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas—created “mothers' pension” programs, but provided almost no assistance to Black single mothers. Across these seven states in 1931, only 39 Black families received mothers' pensions, compared to 2,957 white families.²⁰⁸

1935 to The Present: Federal Aid to Dependent Children and Modern Welfare

In 1935, the federal government passed the Social Security Act, which created a federal program similar to the state mothers' pensions known as “Aid to Dependent Children,” later renamed “Aid to Families with Dependent Children.”²⁰⁹ In the 1950s, the federal government established payment programs to help poor Americans, but these programs were administered by state government agents who often denied welfare benefits to Black families by claiming that their homes were immoral, typically because children were born out of wedlock.²¹⁰ For example, in 1960 the Louisiana government removed 23,000 children from its state welfare rolls solely because their parents were not married, which was more likely to be the case among Black families.²¹¹

In response, the federal government prohibited states from denying welfare benefits solely because a child was born to unmarried parents, and required them to decide on a case-by-case basis whether a family was “unsuitable” for welfare and to provide service interventions to such families.²¹² Although the intent of this rule, which became known as “Flemming Rule,” was

to prohibit states from excluding families from welfare assistance by applying broad (and often arbitrary) rules to all recipients, the effect was to push more Black children into foster care.²¹³ State welfare officials investigated Black families to consider whether to remove their children, often simply because the family was poor.²¹⁴ Again, scholars have noted that these policies were in many ways a modern day continuation of the apprenticeship process of removing Black children from their low-income families.²¹⁵

For example, in 1960 in Florida, the largely white state welfare worker staff investigated and challenged the “suitability” of approximately 13,000 families already receiving welfare assistance.²¹⁶ Of these 13,000 families, only nine percent were white, even though welfare recipients as a whole were 39 percent white.²¹⁷ The State of Florida forced these 13,000 families to choose between their children or their welfare benefits.²¹⁸ Based on the racist beliefs that Black women had little maternal connection to their children, state workers expressed surprise that only 168 families agreed to place their children in state care.²¹⁹

In modern times, the welfare system of cash assistance has remained biased against African Americans. In 1996, as part of a public movement against so-called “welfare moms,” Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which created the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, a system of federal funds sent to the states.²²⁰ This system awards fixed dollar amounts to each state, but allows them to spend that money how they see fit to achieve federal goals.²²¹ Those goals include, but are not limited to, providing cash assistance to needy families and ending the dependence of needy parents on government benefits.²²²

This system has allowed states to craft policies that determine who is eligible for assistance, and these state policies tend to disqualify Black families from receiving cash assistance at a higher rate than other racial and ethnic groups.²²³ For example, seven states have policies that completely ban individuals with any drug-related convictions from eligibility for cash assistance.²²⁴ As discussed in Chapter 11, An Unjust Legal System, Black individuals are much more likely than white individuals to be convicted of drug offenses due to discrimination in the criminal justice system.²²⁵ Therefore, these restrictions are more likely to burden poor African Americans.²²⁶ Similarly, 11 states still maintain “family cap” policies that originated in “welfare mom” stereotypes, which deny benefit increases when welfare recipients have another child, and which have disproportionate impacts on Black families that tend to be larger than white families.²²⁷

One other notable change has emerged in very recent times. Because the law gives states the power to spend federal money on programs other than direct cash assistance, states are motivated to minimize cash assistance so they can spend more on other programs that might otherwise drain state coffers.²²⁸ Over the past 20 years there has been a dramatic reduction in the percentage of federal money spent on cash assistance. In 1997, 71

states with larger percentages of Black residents have tended to spend the least percentage of their federal funds on welfare benefits.²³⁰

California

Historically, California provided “mother’s pensions” solely to widows, and was thus more likely to give these benefits to white single mothers because of the greater percentage of unwed Black mothers.²³¹ Moreover, the racist stereotype of “Welfare Queen” was arguably popularized by then-California Governor Ronald Reagan in 1976, who ran for President in part on a promise to cut welfare benefits, as he had done as Governor of California.²³²

Currently, California spends a greater percentage of its federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families funds on basic assistance than most other states in the nation.²³³ However, that percentage has reduced from 51 percent in 2009 to 39 percent in 2020.²³⁴ Advocates and academics note that these reductions disproportionately harm Black families.²³⁵

Both during and for many decades after the slavery era, Black children were systematically excluded from orphanages and other resources designed to care for poor children. Instead, some free Black children were placed in charitable housing for homeless or very low-income adults, where they faced abuse and were sometimes “indentured” into forced labor, effectively re-enslaving them.

percent of federal money was spent on welfare benefits nationwide, whereas in 2019 states spent only 21 percent of their federal money on such benefits.²²⁹ Again, African Americans are more likely to suffer from this change, as

VI. Foster Care Systems and Other Forms of Child Welfare

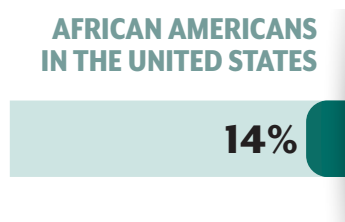
Historically and through today, Black families have faced racism in the child welfare system. After the Civil War, government agencies excluded Black orphans from government care and have consistently been more likely to investigate Black families. As of 2019, Black children “accounted for roughly 14 percent of the child population [but] 23 percent of the foster care population.”²³⁶

slightly higher rates of mistreatment within Black families, but scholars have observed that these higher rates are due to the fact that Black families are more likely to be poor, and the stresses of poverty correlate with child mistreatment.²³⁹

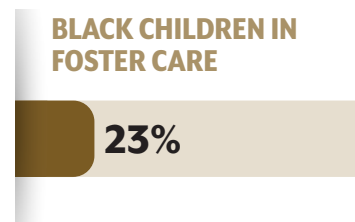
The fact that child welfare agencies are more likely to investigate Black families is not because Black parents are more likely to mistreat their children, but rather due to many other factors.²³⁷ An official study of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found in 1996 that the disproportionality of Black children being taken from their parents and placed in foster care “does not derive from inherent differences in the rates at which they are abused or neglected,” but rather reflects the “differential attention” received by Black children “along the child welfare service pathway.”²³⁸ Since then, some studies have found

Foster Care and Adoption Throughout American History

Both during and for many decades after the slavery era, Black children were systematically excluded from orphanages and other resources designed to care for poor children.²⁴⁰ Instead, some free Black children



2019



were placed in charitable housing for unhoused or very low-income adults, where they faced abuse and were sometimes “indentured” into forced labor, effectively re-enslaving them.²⁴¹ Non-governmental Black child welfare organizations were sometimes established to help some Black children rejected from private and public entities that only assisted white children.²⁴² For example, Pittsburgh’s Home for Colored Children was founded after a young Black girl, Nellie Grant, wandered the streets after being rejected from the city’s childcare institutions because she was Black.²⁴³

Scholars have argued that more Black children end up in foster care because adoption services believed that Black children were “unadoptable” due to the preferences of the white families which they served to adopt white children.²⁴⁴ After governmental child adoption services were officially open to Black children, most were not still given the same opportunities as white families because adoption agencies catered to the preferences of white families.²⁴⁵ Non-governmental agencies similarly excluded Black children by catering to the private adoption market, which was largely affluent and white.²⁴⁶ When these adoption institutions failed to place Black children with families, they blamed the children and stigmatized them as “unadoptable.”²⁴⁷

State government systems that take children from caregivers believed to be unfit and place them in other environments designed to ensure their safety developed after World War II.²⁴⁸ From the start, state agencies re-

From 1945 to 1982, the percentage of nonwhite children in foster care rose from 17 percent to 47 percent, with 80 percent of nonwhite children being Black. Scholars have found that racial discrimination exists at every stage of the child welfare process.

moved Black children from their families and placed them into foster care far more often than white children. Between the years of 1945 and 1961, the number of nonwhite children in child welfare caseloads almost doubled, increasing from 14 percent to 27 percent.²⁴⁹

As the modern foster care system developed, various governmental policies have placed Black youth at greater risk of being taken from their families. As discussed above, until the 1950s, poor Black families continued to be denied benefits available to other poor Americans based on federal policies, and then were faced with potential removal of their children into foster care because of “unsuitable” home conditions.²⁵⁰

In 2008, compared to white children, similarly-situated Black children were

77% MORE LIKELY to be removed from their homes

The criminalization of African Americans through the “War on Drugs” also contributed to increasing numbers of Black children being removed from families and placed into the foster care system, as Black men in particular were disproportionately arrested for minor crimes, breaking apart families and often leaving children in the care of extended relatives or strangers.²⁵¹ Child welfare agencies tasked with ensuring child safety also often pay particular attention to families experiencing homelessness and housing instability, which African Americans are more likely to experience.²⁵² Housing instability can also delay the return of a child who has been removed to their family.²⁵³ From 1945 to 1982, the percentage of nonwhite children in foster care rose from 17 percent to 47 percent, with 80 percent of nonwhite children being Black.²⁵⁴

Scholars have found that racial discrimination exists at every stage of the child welfare process. State agencies are more likely to be involved with Black families than with white families.²⁵⁵ Black parents are more likely to be investigated than other families, because neighbors, teachers, and bystanders are more likely to report Black families than white families, likely due to their own racial biases.²⁵⁶

When equally poor Black and white families are compared, even where the families are considered to be at equal risk for future abuse, state agencies are more likely to remove Black than white children from their families.²⁵⁷ A 2008 study found that Black children were *77 percent more likely* than similarly-situated white children to be removed from their homes as opposed to receiving in-home services.²⁵⁸ Black children placed in foster care spend more time there, and are less likely to reunify with their families.²⁵⁹ All other factors being equal, Black parents are more likely than white parents to have their parental rights terminated.²⁶⁰

In 2017, the *New York Times* published evidence of racist foster care interventions in New York City in which Black mothers not only had their children taken away, but also faced unfair criminal consequences.²⁶¹ One

Black woman, who remained anonymous in the article, called emergency services when she went into premature labor, but then realized her boyfriend could not be reached unless she walked to his location.²⁶² She left her six-year-old-daughter alone at her apartment and walked to get her boyfriend, returning 40 minutes later to find emergency services and police.²⁶³ Immediately after giving birth, she was handcuffed and placed under arrest for child endangerment, and both of her children—including her newborn baby—were placed in foster care.²⁶⁴ Scholars argue that the refusal of some academics to consider the narrative experiences of Black parents facing foster care interventions such as these echo the arguments of the Moynihan Report.²⁶⁵

Consequences of Foster Care Disparities

As a group, children in the foster care system are often subjected to harms as a result of the experience. These children are more likely to be Black.²⁶⁶ For example, Brittany Clark spent 12 years in state care.²⁶⁷ At age seven, she was placed as the only girl in a long-term home, during which she experienced physical and sexual abuse.²⁶⁸ After five years, Clark was relocated and spent the remainder of her time in foster care moving from home to home, encountering individuals who cared more about receiving foster care payments than caring for her.²⁶⁹ This instability, lack of control over circumstances, and repeated loss of connection harms foster children in compounding and lasting ways.²⁷⁰

Foster children as a group—in which Black children are greatly overrepresented—demonstrate various long term negative outcomes when compared to children not involved in the foster care system. Compared to youth nationally, children who age out of foster care are less likely to be employed or employed regularly, and earn far less, than young adults who were not in the foster care system.²⁷¹ By age 26, only three to four percent of young adults who aged out of foster care earn a college degree.²⁷² One in five of these youth will experience homelessness after turning 18.²⁷³ Only *half* will obtain any employment by 24.²⁷⁴ Over 70 percent of female foster youth will become pregnant by 21, and one in four former foster youth will experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.²⁷⁵

Children in foster care are also far more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system. Some children taken from their families are placed in correctional facilities, and within this group, Black children were placed in various penal facilities at rates much higher than white children.²⁷⁶ Approximately 25 percent of children in foster care will become involved with

the criminal justice system within two years of leaving foster care, and over half of youth currently in foster care experience an arrest, conviction, or stay at a correctional facility by the age of 17.²⁷⁷ For children who have been moved through multiple foster care placements, the risk is even higher, with one study indicating that over *90 percent* of foster youth who move five or more times will end up in the juvenile justice system.²⁷⁸ Foster youth, particularly girls, are targeted by sex traffickers, and the criminalization of sex work can funnel these victims of modern-day slavery into the criminal justice system.²⁷⁹

As a result of these severe disadvantages faced by foster youth, some modern scholars have advocated for the abolition of the modern “Child Protective Services” agency, arguing that it is inherently racist and should be replaced with a child protection model that implements policies and procedures designed from the ground-up to exclude racist presumptions.²⁸⁰

California

California’s Child Welfare system historically exhibited, and continues to exhibit, the same disparities between Black and white families that are discussed above at the national level, generally in even more extreme forms. For example, Black children in California make up approximately 22 percent of the foster population, while only *six percent* of the general child population.²⁸¹ Nationally, these percentages are 24 percent and 15 percent, meaning that, in California, Black children are more than twice as overrepresented in foster care when compared to the national average.²⁸²

Compared to white children in California, Black children are

2x MORE LIKELY to experience a Child Protective Services Event

A 2015 study ranked California among the five worst states in foster care racial disparities.²⁸³ Some counties in California—both urban and rural—have much higher disparities compared to the statewide average. In San Francisco County, which is largely urban and has nearly 900,000 residents, the percentage of Black children in foster care in 2018 was over *25 times* the rate of white children.²⁸⁴ In Yolo County, which is largely rural and has approximately 200,000 residents, the percentage of

Black children in foster care in 2018 was over *8 times* the rate of white children.²⁸⁵ In 2014, Los Angeles County’s Commission on Child Protection issued a detailed report noting widespread failures and shortcomings across the county’s child welfare system—failures that fall disproportionately on the overrepresented Black population within that system.²⁸⁶

Compared to white children in California, Black children are



to spend time in **foster care** or experience a **termination in parental rights**

Similar to national statistics, a 2003 study showed that, even when normalizing for other relevant factors like poverty, Black children in California are more likely to be removed from their caretakers and placed in foster care than white children.²⁸⁷ Black children in California are approximately twice as likely as white children to experience a Child Protective Services investigation, and approximately three times as likely to spend some time in foster care or experience a termination in parental rights.²⁸⁸

California youth who enter foster care also consistently exhibit various achievement gaps compared to children

not involved with foster care, further worsening disparities for African Americans. By age 24, California foster youth who age out of foster care earn less than half what an average 24-year-old earns nationally.²⁸⁹ Only 53 percent of foster youth in California graduate high school on time, compared with 83 percent of all youth in California.²⁹⁰

California has made some recent attempts to address these dramatic disparities between foster youth and those not in the foster system, though little has been done to specifically target the racial disparities discussed above. In September 2021, California Assembly Bill 12 was passed into law, enabling foster youth to remain in care through age 21 as a tool to help increase foster youth college attendance rates and address some of the negative consequences of youth aging out of care at 18 with no sources of support.²⁹¹ In July 2021, California lawmakers approved the first ever state-funded plan to guarantee monthly cash payments to youth leaving the foster system.²⁹² All University of California, California State University, and California Community College campuses now have foster youth programs designed to provide help and support to former foster youth on their campuses.²⁹³ Explicitly addressing the racial disparity in Los Angeles County’s foster care system, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors created an “office of equity” within the agency administering the foster care system.²⁹⁴ It was created, however, with “no proposed budget or more specific mandates on the office in terms of actual services it will provide.”²⁹⁵

VII. Criminalization of Black Youth

Black youth are more likely to be exposed to the criminal legal system as a result of racism and over-policing.²⁹⁶ In recent years, these disparities have often gotten worse.²⁹⁷ In 2018, while Black youth made up 16 percent of the youth population, the rate of arrest of Black youth was 2.6 times that of white youth, and Black youth accounted for 50 percent of all youth arrests for violent crimes.²⁹⁸

Once charged with a crime, Black youth are at risk of harsher prosecution, detention, and punishment.²⁹⁹ Black youth are transferred to adult court at a much higher rate than white youth. In 2018, while Black youth only accounted for 35 percent of all cases, they made up more than 51 percent of transfers from the juvenile court system to adult court.³⁰⁰ Black girls are 3.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers.³⁰¹ Black girls also comprise 34 percent of girls in residential placements, but accounted for 15 percent of the

COURTESY OF CHARLOTTE BROOKS/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Photograph shows children of William and Daisy Myers, the first black residents of Levittown, Pennsylvania riding bicycles on the sidewalk. (1957)

female youth population.³⁰² A 2016 study found that for youth serving life without parole sentences in the United States, twice as many individuals were Black as white.³⁰³

Law enforcement and other government agencies across America often treat Black youth as adults, or as less than human, in myriad ways. Research confirms that law enforcement often overestimates the age of Black youth when they are suspected of a felony based on contact with police.³⁰⁴ One study found that Black boys are perceived as older than they are and less innocent than their white peers.³⁰⁵

School Policing

In all 50 states, public schools, including elementary schools, employ student resource officers, which often do not go by the title of police.³⁰⁶ Proponents of school policing have long tied this practice to fears after deadly mass shootings in places like Columbine High School, while some scholars have argued its prevalence is linked to white fear of Black youth under the guise of protecting school children.³⁰⁷ In either case, over the past several decades the number of law enforcement officers on school campuses throughout the United States has skyrocketed.

In 1975, the number of U.S. schools with police presence on campus was only one percent.³⁰⁸ By 2016, there were 27,000 school resource officers patrolling U.S. schools, up from about 9,400 in 1997.³⁰⁹ This equated to sworn officers in approximately 36 percent of elementary schools, 67.6 percent of middle schools, and 72 percent of high schools in the 2017-18 school year.³¹⁰ This is at least partially due to a dramatic increase in federal funding for school police.³¹¹ Congress passed

In the 2015-16 school year, Black students were arrested at three times the rate of white students, while only comprising 15 percent of the population in schools. This is at least partially explained by findings that Black girls are seen by authorities and teachers as “disobedient” or “disruptive” for similar but accepted behaviors from white children.

the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994 to increase federal involvement in school policing and safety.³¹² The law provided massive federal aid for policing at the state and local level and in schools.³¹³

COURTESY OF NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION/NATIONAL ARCHIVES



A photograph taken by the Federal Security Agency, National Youth Administration. The original caption stated: “Oakland, California. High School Youth. Two Negro youngsters look over the shoulders of a couple of fortunate enough to own a model plane. The white boys can hope to become aviators” (1940)

In the 2015-16 school year, Black students were arrested at three times the rate of white students, while only comprising 15 percent of the population in schools.³¹⁴ This disparity widens for Black girls, who make up 17 percent of the school population, but are arrested at 3.3 times the rate of white girls.³¹⁵ This is at least partially explained by findings that Black girls are seen by authorities and teachers as “disobedient” or “disruptive” for similar but accepted behaviors from white children.³¹⁶

Moreover, schools have historically disciplined clothing trends popular among Black youth, including “sagging,” oversized, and baggy clothes.³¹⁷ Police played a role in creating a narrative in schools that sagging was a symbol of gang activity, and school officials proceeded to ban sagging as a way to prevent gang violence, graffiti, and create “safe” environments for kids, thereby further targeting Black youth.³¹⁸ See Chapter 6, *Separate and Unequal Education*, for more information on the so-called “school to prison pipeline.”

One in five students in the U.S. will develop mental health challenges that rise to the level of a diagnosis.³¹⁹ Yet, around the country, schools are more likely to employ law enforcement than mental health counselors, and Black students are three times more likely than their white peers to have police in their school but no psychologist.³²⁰ Black male youth with disabilities in the 2015-16 school year had an arrest rate of five times the rate of the whole population.³²¹

The Juvenile Justice System

Outside of schools, Black youth face disproportionate harms through various aspects of the juvenile justice system. A 2021 study by researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, found that Black youth in the 10 to 14 age group are injured in police-related incidents at 5.3 times the rate for boys, and 6.7 times the rate for girls, compared to their white peers.³²² The study suggested that especially among Black girls, this disparity could be due to how Black girls are “adultified” compared to white girls and perceived of as older.³²³ Scholars have noted similar “adultification” of Black Boys, who at 10 years old are perceived as less childlike, less innocent, and four and a half years older than their white counterparts.³²⁴ Because of this perception of Black children as older and less innocent, they are seen as more responsible for their actions than white children who engage in the same behaviors.³²⁵ Both black boys and girls are also perceived as more dangerous than their white peers, though the magnitude of the bias has been shown to be stronger for boys than girls.³²⁶

More broadly, as discussed in Chapter 11, An Unjust Legal System of this report, African American youth are more than four times as likely to be detained or committed in juvenile facilities as their white peers.³²⁷ Youth who are stopped more frequently by police are more likely to report feelings such as anger, fear, and stigma, and shame.³²⁸ More invasive stops led to increased feelings of emotional distress and trauma, including post-traumatic stress after the stop.³²⁹ Stress among youth involved in police stops is not contingent on whether they were engaging in any misconduct.³³⁰

The “War on Drugs” in the 1980s and 90s had an outsized impact on Black youth. White youth use drugs at the same or higher rate as Black youth, but Black youth are disproportionately prosecuted though drug cases in juvenile courts.³³¹ Again, this was largely enabled by the federal government. In 1990, Congress passed legislation authorizing Department of Defense resources to be used to combat drug activity by state and local agencies, including public schools.³³² In 2014, schools in states such as California, Florida, and Texas reported receiving military-grade equipment through the department’s program.³³³

Black youth facing mental health problems or crises are also funneled into the juvenile justice system in ways white children facing similar issues are not.³³⁴ Even when Black youth receive mental health treatment

instead of or in addition to incarceration, they are more likely to be inappropriately diagnosed and medicated than their white peers.³³⁵

Once in the juvenile justice system, outreach to families is inadequate.³³⁶ Police and facility outreach to parents is usually limited to notice that their child has an upcoming court appearance, without more information such as why an arrest was made or the circumstances of their child’s confinement.³³⁷ The bail system for youth in the criminal legal system is also deeply flawed. Courts rarely consider what a family can actually afford when setting bail, and bail is regularly set between \$100 to \$500 for children.³³⁸

California

The issues discussed above apply to California’s history and present treatment of Black youth, although there has been some modern pushback to these approaches.

Recent California Attorney General investigations and settlements with California school districts, e.g., the Barstow Unified School District, the Oroville City

White youth use drugs at the same or higher rate as Black youth, but Black youth are more likely to be prosecuted.

Elementary School District, and the Oroville Union High School District are all representative of continued targeting of Black youth.³³⁹ Investigations at these districts showed that Black students were more likely to be punished and/or suspended, and were subjected to greater punishments, than similarly-situated peers of other races.³⁴⁰

Other districts have taken proactive steps to change outdated approaches. For example, the Oakland school board voted to remove security officers from schools in June 2020.³⁴¹ Before this vote, school officer practices were governed by a policy and procedure manual that described them as having a “calming presence” in the school.³⁴² The manual also included authorization for officers to restrain students, search students and their property, and even detain individuals if they had reason to believe a crime had been committed.³⁴³ All of these powers, and the school police enforcing them, have disproportionate harmful impacts on Black students. California-specific research has determined that schools with larger police presences lead to decreased

instruction for Black students, likely because police discipline and monitoring contributes to a climate that is incompatible with learning.³⁴⁴

Nevertheless, California still allows law enforcement discretion to add youth over the age of 12 to a gang database as long as two of the following factors—under certain limitations and requirements—are found: admission of gang activity, identification of a gang tattoo, frequent identification in a “gang area,” any known association with gang members, clothing associated with a gang, arrest for typical gang activity, or display of gang signals.³⁴⁵ In California, public defenders and youth advocates estimate that police have tracked children as young as 10 for suspected gang activity.³⁴⁶

In one high-profile incident related to the policing of Black children, in May 2019, police in Sacramento chased down a Black 12-year-old child who they claimed was asking people to buy goods he was selling, and forcefully detained him while he was calling for his mom.³⁴⁷ One police officer covered his face with a mesh sack and forced him on the ground with a knee on his back while an officer put a knee on his thigh.³⁴⁸

Although African Americans experience intimate partner violence at greater rates, very little academic or practical attention has been paid towards specific interventions or assistance models that are explicitly catered to Black victims.

VIII. Domestic Violence in Black Families

Domestic violence, also termed intimate partner violence, is a significant problem within Black families and communities across the country, and that problem is linked to many of the issues already discussed in this chapter.

Elevated Rates of Domestic Violence

Black women experience intimate partner violence at greater rates, and in more traumatic ways, than other women on average.³⁴⁹ The U.S. Department of Justice estimated that, in 2000, Black females experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35 percent higher than that of white women.³⁵⁰ In 2007, data indicated that Black women victims of intimate partner violence were twice as likely to be murdered by a spouse and *four* times as likely to be murdered by an unmarried partner when compared to white women.³⁵¹ Even among victims of intimate partner violence, Black women experience more traumatic forms of violence on average as compared to white women.³⁵² Moreover, Black men also experience elevated rates of intimate partner violence when compared to white men.³⁵³ Similar patterns exist for Black LGBTQ+ victims of both genders, who experience intimate partner violence at greater rates than white LGBTQ+ victims.³⁵⁴ Despite these disparities, very little academic or practical attention has been paid towards specific interventions or assistance models that are explicitly catered to Black victims.³⁵⁵

Causal Factors

The higher rates of domestic violence in Black families cannot be explained by a single cause. Some scholars have noted that, aside from greater rates of poverty, overcrowding, and other domestic violence risk factors experienced by Black families, Black men have experienced systemic racism throughout American history that, when compounded with traditional gender roles, may contribute to displaced anger, hatred, and frustration toward family members.³⁵⁶ Throughout American history, Black men have been subjected to racial discrimination in employment (as further detailed in Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity) while society simultaneously tells them that their role is to provide for their families.³⁵⁷ Scholars have argued that these pressures, which are impossible to reconcile, may lead to expressions of physical violence.³⁵⁸

Regardless of the causes of domestic violence, Black women are less likely to seek assistance from social services agencies because of distrust based on the racially discriminatory history described earlier in this chapter.³⁵⁹

Evidence shows that this distrust is not misplaced. Government actors in social services agencies and the judicial system have unfairly disregarded Black victims as angry “welfare queens” who are immune to violence, or violent themselves.³⁶⁰ These perceptions are further cemented by media portrayals of Black women as aggressive or emasculating.³⁶¹ Similarly, Black women

already involved with the justice system are less likely to seek help from police because they expect to be disbelieved, based on the extensive histories of racist government actions in supporting violence against Black women as detailed in Chapters 3, Racial Terror, 11, An Unjust Legal System and 12, Harm and Neglect: Mental, Physical and Public Health.³⁶² Black female victims of abuse are sometimes reluctant to report abuse by Black men to the “white legal system” even when police intervention is appropriate, given their long exposure to inequities within that system for African Americans.³⁶³ As explained by Cecily Johnson, director of strategic initiatives at the Domestic Violence Network, I have been told personally [by a survivor] they can’t get help because they don’t want their partner to become a statistic There’s a genuine and legitimate fear that if they call the police, their partner could be killed or they, as the survivor, could be killed.³⁶⁴

Black transgender women are similarly hesitant to report abuse to the police because they fear being falsely or illegitimately arrested, are particularly likely to be physically or sexually assaulted in prison,³⁶⁵ and because

A lack of understanding of the real and well-founded concerns of Black victims of domestic violence, and the distrust of Black victims of police and social services, has consistently been a major challenge among those tasked with helping victims of intimate partner violence, both within California and nationally.

they are more than three times as likely to experience police violence compared to non-transgender people.³⁶⁶ High-profile instances of violence against transgender

women, especially when transgender women defend themselves, legitimize these fears, .³⁶⁷

A lack of understanding of the real and well-founded concerns of Black victims of domestic violence, and the distrust of Black victims of police and social services, has consistently been a major challenge among those tasked with helping victims of intimate partner violence, both within California and nationally.³⁶⁸

California

The patterns discussed above exist in California as well as nationally. California has the largest number of domestic violence survivors in the country, and Black women in California are approximately 25 percent more likely than women generally to experience such violence during their lifetimes.³⁶⁹ Moreover, a report from Blue Shield of California concluded that “Black women in particular . . . experience a significant resource gap after instances of intimate partner violence.”³⁷⁰ These disparities have likely been exacerbated by the COVID-19 epidemic, with significant majorities

of Black Californians surveyed saying that they believe the epidemic and its stay-at-home orders both made domestic violence more likely to occur and made it harder for victims of such violence to reach out for help.³⁷¹

Qualitative studies within California have also confirmed that Black Californians perceive poverty, prior trauma, and systemic racism

as root causes of domestic violence in Black families.³⁷² Black female victims in California are also less likely to seek police assistance because they fear police will falsely believe them to be aggressors and arrest them as well.³⁷³

IX. Conclusion

The destruction, commodification, and exploitation of the Black family has occurred throughout American history, and enriched both private and government actors for generations of white Americans.

The racist and sexist stereotypes created during enslavement to sustain the cotton economy and enrich the entire nation are woven throughout American laws, policies, and government agencies. These racist beliefs

tore apart Black families on the auction block during enslavement, justified re-enslaving children through the apprenticeship system, and underlie the continued removal of Black children from their parents in the foster care system. This reality has rarely been recognized, let alone remedied. To the contrary, in the past half-century government actors have blamed African Americans for the harms that have resulted from racist government actions.

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¹⁴⁷Pascoe, *supra*, at p. 193.

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³²³Ibid.

³²⁴California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans (Jan. 28, 2022), Testimony of Dr. Howard Stevenson <<https://oag.ca.gov/ab3121/meetings/012022>> (as of Apr. 15, 2022).

³²⁵Goff et al., *supra*.

³²⁶Thiem, et al., *Are Black Women and Girls Associated With Danger? Implicit Racial Bias at the Intersection of Target Age and Gender* (2019) 45 Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 1427, 1427–1439.

³²⁷See, e.g., Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, *supra*, at pp. 21, 26–27.

³²⁸Henning, *supra*, at p. 214.

³²⁹Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ *Id.* at p. 14; Hockenberry & Puzanchera, *supra*, at p. 24.

³³² Henning, *supra*, at pp. 124-125.

³³³ *Id.*

³³⁴ Marrast et al., *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Mental Health Care for Children and Young Adults: A National Study* (2016) 46 *Internat. J. of Health Services* 810, 810-824.

³³⁵ Cancio et al., [The Color of Justice: The Landscape of Traumatic Justice: Youth of Color in Conflict with the Law](#) (2019) The Alliance of Nat. Psychological Assns. For Racial and Ethnic Equity, p. 17.

³³⁶ Henning, *supra*, at p. 247.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ *Id.* at p. 275.

³³⁹ Cal. Dept. of Justice, [Attorney General Becerra Secures Settlements with Barstow and Oroville School Districts to Address Discriminatory Treatment of Students Based on Race and Disability Status](#) (Aug. 25, 2020) (as of Apr. 15, 2022).

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Henning, *supra*, at p. 134.

³⁴² Ibid.; Wilson & Godown, *School Security Officer Policy and Procedures Manual* (June 29, 2016) Oakland School District.

³⁴³ Henning, *supra*, at p. 134.

³⁴⁴ *Id.* at p. 141; Losen & Martinez, *Is California Doing Enough to Close the School Discipline Gap?* (Los Angeles: Civil Rights Project, 2020); Losen & Martinez, *Lost Opportunities: How Disparate School Discipline Continues to Drive Differences in the Opportunity to Learn* (Los Angeles: Civil Rights Project, 2020), pp. 33-34; Fisher & Hennessy, *School Resource Officers and Exclusionary Discipline in U.S. High Schools: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis* (Aug. 2016) *Adolescent Research Review* 1, no. 3; Weisburst, *Patrolling Public Schools: The Impact of Funding for School Police on Student Discipline and Long-term Education Outcomes*

(2019) *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 38 (2), pp. 338-365.

³⁴⁵ Henning, *supra*, at p. 78.

³⁴⁶ *Id.* at p. 79.

³⁴⁷ *Id.* at p. 220

³⁴⁸ *Id.*

³⁴⁹ Taft et al., *Intimate Partner Violence Against African American Women: An Examination of the Socio-Cultural Context* (2019) 14 *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 50, 50-58.

³⁵⁰ Rennison & Welchans, *Intimate Partner Violence* (Sept. 2009) U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 3.

³⁵¹ Catalano & Snyder, [Female Victims of Violence](#) (Jan. 2014) Violence Policy Center (as of Mar. 10, 2022).

³⁵² Seng et al., *Disparity in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Diagnosis among African American Pregnant Women* (2011) 14 *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 295, 295-306.

³⁵³ Palmetto et al., *Predictors of Physical Intimate Partner Violence in the Lives of Young Women: Victimization, Perpetration, and Bidirectional Violence* (2013) 28 *Violence and Victims* 103, 103-121; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., *Rates of Bi-directional versus Uni-directional Intimate Partner Violence across Samples, Sexual Orientations, and Race/Ethnicities: A Comprehensive Review* (2012) 3 *Partner Abuse* 199, 199-230.

³⁵⁴ See generally Nat. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, [Domestic Violence and the LGBTQ Community](#) (June 6, 2018) (as of Mar. 10, 2022); Waters, [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Intimate Partner Violence in 2015](#) (2016) Nat. Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (as of Mar. 10, 2022).

³⁵⁵ Jones & Thorpe, [Domestic Violence and the Impacts on African American Women: A Brief Overview on Race, Class, and Root Causes in the United States](#) (2016) 7 *OMNES: The J. of Multicultural Society* 22, 22-36 (as of Mar. 10, 2022).

³⁵⁶ See generally, e.g., Hampton et al., *Domestic Violence in the African-American Community* (2009) 9 *Violence Against Women* 533, 539; Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (Oxford University Press 1972); Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (Oxford University Press 1977).

³⁵⁷ Hampton et al., *supra*, at p. 539; see generally Madhubuti, *Black Men—Single, Dangerous, and Obsolete* (Third World Press 1990); Staples, *Black Masculinity: The Black Man's Role in American Society* (Black Scholar Press 1982).

³⁵⁸ Hampton et al., *supra*, at p. 539; see generally Madhubuti, *Black Men—Single, Dangerous, and Obsolete* (Third World Press 1990); Staples, *Black Masculinity: The Black Man's Role in American Society* (Black Scholar Press 1982).

³⁵⁹ Sumter, *Domestic Violence and Diversity: A Call for Multicultural Services* (2006) 29 *J. of Health and Human Services Administration* 173, 175-176, 178-179.

³⁶⁰ Sokoloff & Dupont, *Domestic Violence at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender Challenges: Contributions to Understanding Violence against Marginalized Women in Diverse Communities* (2005) 11 *Violence against Women* 38, 38-64.

³⁶¹ Young et al., *Does African American Women's Racial Identity Mediate Gendered Racism on Anticipated Relationship Threat?* (2021) 36 *J. of Interpersonal Violence* 9749, 9752.

³⁶² See, e.g., Carbone-Lopez et al., *"Police Wouldn't Give You No Help" Female Offenders on Reporting Sexual Assault to Police* (2015) 22 *Violence against Women* 1, 1-31.

³⁶³ Manetta, *Interpersonal Violence and Suicidal Behavior in Midlife African American Women* (1999) 29 *J. of Black Studies* 510, 518; see generally Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation* (New York University Press 2012).

³⁶⁴ Coburn Place, [A Layered Look at Domestic Violence in the Black Community](#) (as of Mar. 10, 2022).

³⁶⁵Harrison-Quintana et al., [*Injustice at Every Turn: A Look at Black Respondents in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*](#) (as of Mar. 10, 2022).

³⁶⁶Nat. Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, [*National Report on Hate Violence Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV-Affected Communities Released Today*](#) (May 29, 2014) (as of Mar. 10, 2022).

³⁶⁷See, e.g., Finoh & Sankofa, [*The Legal System Has Failed Black Girls, Women, and Non-Binary Survivors of Violence*](#)

(Jan. 28, 2019) Am. Civil Liberties Union (as of Mar. 10, 2022).

³⁶⁸Asbury, *African-American Women in Violent Relationships: An Exploration of Cultural Differences*, in Hampton, *Violence in the Black Family: Correlates and Consequences* (1987) pp. 86-106; Hampton & Yung, *Violence in Communities of Color: Where We Were, Where We Are, and Where We Need to Be*, in Jenkins & Gullotta, *Preventing Violence in America* (1996) pp. 53-86.

³⁶⁹Blue Shield of California Foundation [*Perceptions of Domestic Violence in California's African American*](#)

[*Communities: Roots, Prevalence and Resources*](#) (Feb. 2019), p. 11 (as of Apr. 15, 2022) (hereinafter “Blue Shield of California Foundation 2019”).

³⁷⁰*Id.* at p. 12.

³⁷¹Blue Shield of California Foundation, [*Key Insights into the Experiences of Black Californians from a Statewide Survey about COVID-19, Equity, and Domestic Violence*](#) (Apr. 2021) (as of Mar. 25, 2022).

³⁷²Blue Shield of California Foundation 2019, *supra*, at p. 17.

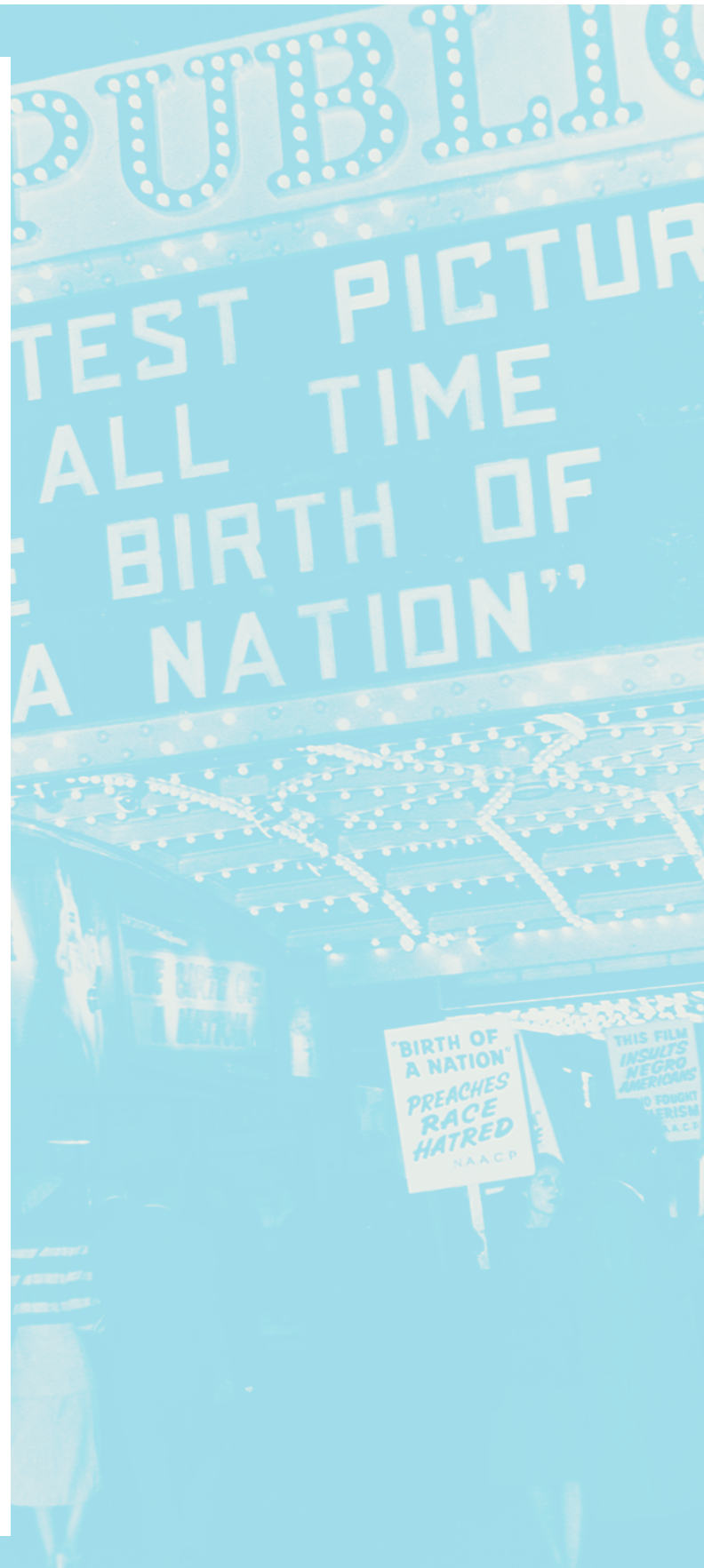
³⁷³*Id.* at p. 20.

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I. Introduction

At its inception, the United States created a series of laws and policies that denied African Americans the ability to create and own art and engage in sports and leisure activities.¹ During the period of enslavement, state governments controlled and dictated the forms and content of African American artistic and cultural production.² Following the end of the enslavement period, governments and politicians embraced minstrelsy, which was the popular racist and stereotypical depiction of African Americans through song, dance, and film.³ Government support of minstrelsy, which was enormously profitable, encouraged white Americans to laugh at, disregard, and reimagine the enslavement of African Americans as harmless and entertaining.⁴

Federal and state governments failed to protect Black artists, culture-makers, and media-makers from discrimination and simultaneously promoted discriminatory narratives. State governments forced Black artists to perform in segregated venues.⁵ The federal government actively discriminated against African Americans during wars, and projected a false image of respect for Black soldiers in propaganda.⁶ Federal and state governments allowed white Americans to steal African American art and culture with impunity—depriving Black creators of valuable copyright and patent protections.⁷ State governments encouraged segregation and discrimination against African American athletes.⁸ State governments denied African American entrepreneurs and culture-makers access to leisure sites, business licenses, and funding for leisure activities.⁹ State governments memorialized the Confederacy as just and heroic through monument building, while suppressing the nation's actual history.¹⁰ States censored cinematic depictions of discrimination against and integration of Black people into white society.¹¹ Today, African American artists, culture-makers, presenters, and entrepreneurs must contend with the legacy of enslavement and racial discrimination as they attempt to pursue creative endeavors that empower and uplift Black communities.



People picketing under the marquee of the Republic Movie Theatre against race discrimination featured in the movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. (1917)

Section III describes discrimination against Black artists. Section IV discusses the anti-Black narratives in American culture. Sections V and VI discuss government censorship and deprivation of intellectual

property. Sections VII and VIII discuss discrimination against Black athletes and restraints on recreation by African Americans.

II. Discrimination Against Black Artists and Culture

Black artists have faced intense discrimination and restriction in the United States since the era of slavery. During the period of enslavement, enslaved people faced legal restrictions from many state governments while creating arts, crafts, and engaging in education.¹² Many enslaved people were highly talented craftspeople and artists, including seamstresses and tailors, blacksmiths, woodcutters, and musicians of all types.¹³ They fabricated architectural materials, furnishings, musical instruments, such as banjos, and handicrafts, like baskets and rugs.¹⁴ Free African American artists did engage in self-expression during the period of enslavement, however they had to rely on outside resources or wealthy white patrons to support their careers.¹⁵

prohibited from employment in city symphonies, radio stations, and clubs outside of segregated Black neighborhoods—due to racist employers, unions, and police enforcement of segregation.²⁴ Concert venues were often segregated due to racist customs.²⁵

Black musicians were subject to arbitrary, racist rules.²⁶ They could not make eye contact with white Americans who were usually standing right in front of the stage, while African Americans were confined to balconies.²⁷ Black musicians also could not stay at many hotels, were banned from restaurants, and were often served rotten food at others.²⁸ Such customs were enforced by state and local police.²⁹ Black artists who challenged segregation were met with violence—for

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example, a musician in Georgia was brutally beaten for refusing to say “sir” in response to a white man’s question at a concert in 1951.³⁰ Black artists were driven from white towns in the south, barred from performing, and chased by white people brandishing guns.³¹ An interracial

Many white enslavers were suspicious of the subversive potential of Black art.¹⁶ After 1730, South Carolina outlawed dancing, drumming, and playing loud instruments by enslaved people for fear that it would incite rebellions—other states enacted similar laws.¹⁷ Concerned that literate enslaved people would incite insurrections, some southern enslavers banned enslaved people from learning to read or write.¹⁸ Enslaved people who were not allowed to read or write, instead, developed traditions of song and dance to pass along subversive messages and resist slavery—and to share routes for escape.¹⁹ Enslaved people created music during the period of enslavement, but they could not capitalize on their creative efforts the way that white people could.²⁰ Yet, through work songs, call and response, cries, and hollering, enslaved people coordinated labor, communicated with one another, and commented on the oppression they suffered.²¹

all-woman jazz group performed at some integrated concerts, but were occasionally turned away and even jailed.³² Consequently, governments failed to investigate or prosecute racist violence against African American artists.

Black sacred spirituals, hymns, gospel music, and freedom songs deeply influenced 20th-century American popular music.³³ Many acclaimed and influential American musical artists began their careers in Black church choirs.³⁴ Black churches birthed gospel music—sound rooted in spirituals sung during slavery, integrated with chanting, clapping, and group participation.³⁵ Gospel choirs began broadcasting on public radio stations and church memberships grew to thousands.³⁶ Much of the music of the civil rights movement was inspired by gospel and congregational hymns.³⁷

Black artists were subject to segregation by custom and by law, enforced by state and local governments.²² Black musicians were forced to join segregated local chapters of professional musician associations, which were segregated due to racism in the music industry.²³ They were

Despite creating and innovating styles of music, such as blues, gospel, rhythm and blues, soul, jazz, rock and roll, and disco, Black musicians and artists suffered from limited opportunities for financial success.³⁸ White artists appropriated and profited from Black music.³⁹ For example, under the 1909 copyright act, a record could

be covered only after obtaining a license from the original artist.⁴⁰ However, many Black musicians' contracts robbed them of these copyright protections.⁴¹ This led to a licensing regime that prevented Black musicians from gaining financial success.⁴² Black musicians recorded music on "race records," which were played on segregated radio stations and marketed only to African Americans.⁴³ During the 1920s and 1930s, Black musicians were subjected to contracts where the copyright for their work would be assigned to their employer, while being paid less than white musicians who had similar contracts.⁴⁴ For example, Elvis Presley imitated Black blues and R&B singers, and due to these exploitative contracts, the original song creators whose work he appropriated were not even paid for the use of their music.⁴⁵ One of Elvis' hit songs, "That's All Right Mama," was originally written and recorded by Arthur Crudup, a Black man who was paid so little for his recordings that he had to work as a laborer selling sweet potatoes.⁴⁶ This type of appropriation was so pervasive that many Americans did not understand that these art forms were invented by Black artists.⁴⁷ The federal

government neglected to take action to protect African American artists from financial exploitation.

African Americans have historically been discriminated against by governments and employers for their fashion, hair, and appearance through criminalization and

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finances.⁴⁸ The United States Army did not allow African Americans to wear their hair in locs (locks, dreads, or dreadlocks) until 2017.⁴⁹ Black women in the army had been forced to straighten their hair with chemicals or hot irons, wear expensive and uncomfortable wigs, or cut their hair off to abide by the army's hair regulations.⁵⁰ Many states passed laws that prohibited sagging clothes in public places, and instituted a significant fine or jail sentence if an individual was caught sagging pants.⁵¹ Sagging originated from hip-hop culture, and sagging laws target Black boys and criminalize Black adolescent fashion, inviting police to intrude in Black life.⁵² In 2007, Shreveport, Louisiana passed a law banning sagging, resulting in Black men accounting for 96 percent of those arrested for sagging.⁵³ Schools have removed African American students for hairstyles that have violated their dress codes.⁵⁴ A Black student at a Texas school was told that he could not attend his prom because his locs were too long.⁵⁵ The CROWN Act, which stands for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, would prohibit discrimination based on hair texture or hairstyle.⁵⁶ While this act has been introduced in Congress, as of March 2022, it has not been passed.⁵⁷ As of 2021, only 13 states have passed versions of the CROWN Act.⁵⁸

Many African American fashion designers who were influential in American fashion history, whose clients included first ladies and government officials, suffered from racism that was supported by federal and state governments.⁵⁹ Elizabeth Keckley was a Black woman and fashion designer who dressed the first lady, Mary Todd Lincoln.⁶⁰ Keckley was born an enslaved person and suffered violence and sexual assault from white enslavers.⁶¹ Keckley worked as a seamstress for several years, attempting to raise money to pay back the loans she used to purchase her freedom.⁶² She faced legal restrictions in establishing her business—including the requirement that a white man vouch for her freedom.⁶³ Ann Lowe was a Black woman and fashion designer, who designed

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Black fashion designer, Ann Lowe, adjusting the bodice of a gown she designed, worn by Alice Baker. (1962)

the wedding dress Jacqueline Bouvier wore when she married Senator John. F. Kennedy along with many other gowns for an exclusive clientele.⁶⁴ Lowe worked as a seamstress with her mother on a plantation in Alabama and later made dresses for wealthy white women in the South.⁶⁵ She could not get credit or rent a workspace in the business district in the South, and was forced to operate out of a segregated neighborhood.⁶⁶ Ann Lowe did not receive recognition in the fashion industry, despite her well-loved designs.⁶⁷

Rap music, one of the most culturally potent and commercially successful forms of Black expression in the latter half of the 20th century, has been criminalized by federal, state, and local governments.⁶⁸ By the late 1980s, rappers were unable to book performances and were being subjected to intrusive searches and surveillance.⁶⁹ Rap lyrics and videos have been used in criminal trials to associate Black artists with crimes and to prove the substance of threats or incitements to violence during trial and sentencing.⁷⁰ One scholar found hundreds of cases in which rap lyrics have been used as evidence in

Law enforcement agencies and local governments have attempted to chill or criminalize the sale of rap albums based on their content, sometimes cancelling rap performances outright.⁷⁴ For example, law enforcement agencies attempted to suppress the music of Compton rap group N.W.A.'s 1988 debut album, “*Straight Outta Compton*,” and particularly their song “*Fuck Tha Police*.”⁷⁵ In 1989, the Assistant Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Office of Public Affairs sent a letter to the distributor of the album, criticizing the group’s lyrics regarding law enforcement and making the record label “aware of the FBI’s position relative to this song and its message.”⁷⁶ Law enforcement officials have attempted to prohibit record stores from selling rap albums to minors.⁷⁷ During a 1989 N.W.A. concert in Detroit, law enforcement in the crowd, which reportedly contained 200 police officers, rushed the stage and ended the concert early.⁷⁸

California

In California, city governments decimated thriving Black neighborhoods with vibrant artistic communities.⁷⁹ California theaters denied entry to Black patrons.⁸⁰ In 1876, Charles Green, a African American man, was explicitly denied entry into the Maguire’s New Theater in San Francisco.⁸¹ The theater owner was sued by the U.S. Attorney but a jury acquitted him after the judge excluded evidence.⁸² Decades later, from the 1930s to 1960s, Black projectionists and other movie house workers fought for employment and equal wages at movie houses—striking, negotiating, and picketing in the face of violent confrontations with local police.⁸³ In San Francisco, African American artists had limited opportunities due to segregation.⁸⁴ The bassist, Vernon Alley, described “the time in San Francisco when black bands couldn’t play east of Van Ness Avenue, and that’s true. I was a part of it.”⁸⁵ Alley stated that white musicians’ unions fought against Black musicians who attempted to play in downtown San Francisco.⁸⁶ Many Black musicians struggled to make a living by playing behind curtains for tourists or out of sight at strip clubs.⁸⁷ Consequently, the state openly allowed segregation and discrimination against Black musicians, workers, and artists.



Hattie McDaniel with her Academy Award. At the awards ceremony she was forced to sit at a separate table because the hotel in which it was held did not allow Black people into the building. (1940)

criminal prosecutions.⁷¹ Writing rap lyrics and making rap music videos has led to Black students being disciplined.⁷² In *Bell v. Itawamba County Sch. Bd.* (2015), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit stated that a school could discipline a student for a rap music video he made off-campus, after learning that two white teachers allegedly sexually harassed several Black students.⁷³

Black Californians continue to face discrimination in the television and film industries in California. In 1940,

when Hattie McDaniel became the first Black actor to receive an Academy Award, she was forced to sit at a separate table because the hotel in which the awards ceremony was held did not allow Black people into the building.⁸⁸ Today, research has shown that Hollywood studio executives associate casting Black actors with financial risk.⁸⁹ In a vicious cycle, Black-led projects are

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characterized as economically inviable; therefore, they are underfunded, despite earning higher returns.⁹⁰ Black actors face a lack of opportunity and Black people are underrepresented in top management in the film and television industries, as well as in off-screen talent in Hollywood.⁹¹ The state has failed, overall, to adequately engage in civil rights enforcement in the motion picture industry.

For a brief period in the 1940s and 1950s, the Fillmore neighborhood in San Francisco was home to a vibrant African American community and referred to by locals as “the Harlem of the West.”⁹² The Fillmore was home to a vibrant Black jazz scene, social clubs, and was an important cultural hub.⁹³ In the 1950s and 1960s, the City of San Francisco tore down Black-owned jazz clubs and businesses and built an expressway through the district in the name of “redevelopment.”⁹⁴ (See Chapter 5 on housing.)

In the 1930s and 1940s, the zoot suit, a particular style of suit with a long coat and loose pants, became an icon of resistance against assimilation for communities of color.⁹⁵ The increase in migration of Mexican Americans and African Americans to Los Angeles resulted in the growth of interracial communities of color, which were targeted by the Los Angeles Police Department.⁹⁶ To confront the dehumanizing social and economic conditions imposed by the wartime political economy, local officials, and the mainstream press, the zoot suit became a symbol of resistance for those who wore it.⁹⁷ However, in the eyes of state officials and law enforcement, the zoot suit and those who wore it were labelled as criminal and hypersexual.⁹⁸

African Americans in Los Angeles were victims of the mob violence and criminalization by local police that preceded and followed the Zoot Suit Riots of Los Angeles.⁹⁹ In June 1943, the Zoot Suit Riots of Los

Angeles stemmed from tensions between white servicemen at the new Naval Reserve Armory and local Mexican American youth.¹⁰⁰ Violence broke out as gangs of white sailors attacked brown and Black youth in zoot suits.¹⁰¹ On the worst day of the violence, white soldiers and civilians poured into Los Angeles and attacked the Black neighborhoods of Watts, as well as other neighborhoods around Los Angeles.¹⁰² All 94 nonwhite civilians who were seriously injured were arrested by the Los Angeles Police Department, compared to only two of the 18 white servicemen who participated.¹⁰³ The police arrested and jailed Mexican American and African American victims of the mobs rather than the white sailors.¹⁰⁴ The Los

Angeles Police Department engaged in preventative enforcement based on racial profiling, targeting African Americans among other communities in Los Angeles.¹⁰⁵ Law enforcement efforts to publicize crackdowns on youth resulted in hundreds of arrests in the summer of 1942.¹⁰⁶ This show of force was designed to reassure white middle classes that wartime police forces could maintain law and order by rounding up innocent youth of color, many of whom were Black.¹⁰⁷

Local governments in California have discriminated against, punished, and penalized Black students for their fashion, hairstyle, and appearance. In March 2018, at Tenaya Middle School in Fresno, school officials pulled a Black student out of class for a haircut with shaved-in designs.¹⁰⁸ They cited a dress code policy and separated him from other students.¹⁰⁹ They also prevented him

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Watts, California- Armed with clubs, pipes and bottles, this self-appointed posse of uniformed men was all set to settle the Zoot Suit War when the Navy Shore Patrol stepped in and broke it up. All 94 nonwhite civilians who were seriously injured were arrested by the Los Angeles Police Department, compared to only two of the 18 white servicemen who participated. (1943)

from going to lunch and gave him extra work to complete.¹¹⁰ In 2015, a Black biracial student was not allowed to attend school in Clovis because his hair was too long, in violation of the school dress code.¹¹¹ The student was given a warning, a subsequent lunch detention, two hours of after school detention, a four-hour after school detention, and three additional unofficial violations.¹¹²

Historically, state-funded California museums have excluded Black art from their institutions. In 2019, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art began an informal audit of its collection to increase the representation of Black Artists.¹¹³ In 2020, the museum announced a list of new acquisitions that included Black artists such as Lauren Halsey, LaToya Ruby Frazier, and Senga Nengudi.¹¹⁴ The University of California, Los Angeles's Hammer Museum engaged in a similar audit. In July

2020, the longest tenured curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art resigned after stating that he did not believe in discrimination.¹¹⁵ The resignation was related to a larger problem at the museum with respect to racial equality.¹¹⁶ The museum's staff is only four percent Black and employees report that key leadership positions are dominated by white Americans.¹¹⁷

California has also criminalized Black rap artists. Law Angeles law enforcement leaders had been targeting rapper Nipsey Hussle's businesses, before and after his death in 2019—alleging gang activity and stopping hundreds of people in a predominantly Black neighborhood, while making very few arrests.¹¹⁸ For over 20 years, California courts allowed rap lyrics to be used as evidence related to street gang activity.¹¹⁹

III. Anti-Black Narratives in Arts and Culture

The federal government has produced and promoted anti-Black narratives through a series of racist and white supremacist cultural projects across time, beginning with minstrelsy. Minstrelsy was a performance of “Blackness” by white Americans in exaggerated costumes and black make-up, known as blackface.¹²⁰ White Americans distorted the hair and facial features of African Americans and demeaned their language, accents, mannerisms, and character.¹²¹ The first minstrel shows were performed in the 1830s in New York by white people with blackened faces and torn clothing.¹²² These performances depicted African Americans as lazy, ignorant, superstitious, hypersexual, and criminal.¹²³

character in minstrel shows.¹²⁶ Minstrel performances eventually expanded beyond the stage and entered radio and television airwaves, as well as movie theaters.¹²⁷ The minstrel performance became a cross-generational racial parody and stereotype made for white amusement.¹²⁸ The performance of minstrelsy relied on racist stereotypes that dehumanized African Americans.¹²⁹ This dehumanizing allowed white Americans to secure their own positive identity.¹³⁰ Minstrelsy repeated and entrenched this dehumanization into national and local American culture.¹³¹ Watching and engaging in demeaning depictions of African Americans, like blackface performances, was even a common pastime for U.S. presidents.¹³²

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The federal government endorsed dehumanizing narratives of African Americans as violent and propagated white supremacist narratives of the Ku Klux Klan as saviors of the nation through the medium of cinema. *The Birth of a Nation*, which bore its origin title *The Clansman*, for its first month of screenings, is an unapologetically racist 1915 silent film directed by D.W. Griffith.¹³³ The film,

In 1830, Thomas Dartmouth Rice created the popular blackface character, “Jim Crow.”¹²⁴ By 1845, the minstrel show led to the creation of a whole entertainment industry that thrived on prejudicial stereotypes against African Americans.¹²⁵ Blackface minstrelsy grew after the end of the Civil War alongside racial hatred, and the legal segregation laws that proliferated across the country after the end of the war took their name from this primary

which premiered in Los Angeles at Clune's Auditorium, takes place between the Civil War and Reconstruction.¹³⁴ Essentially a powerful propaganda tool, it glorifies the rise of the KKK, the white supremacist terrorist group, and depicts them as white saviors attempting to “restore order” to the nation.¹³⁵ Woodrow Wilson had the film shown at the White House—a federal government endorsement of white supremacy and anti-Blackness.¹³⁶

From the silent film era through the 1950s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was an important filmmaking agency in the federal government.¹³⁷ The films produced by the USDA reinforced problematic racial stereotypes against Black communities.¹³⁸ USDA motion pictures supported separate-but-equal laws and customs.¹³⁹

Government war propaganda during World War II employed the strategic use of motion pictures as war propaganda.¹⁴⁰ This propaganda achieved two intertwined objectives, a false image of American democracy and the reinforcement of racist stereotypes about Black people.¹⁴¹ The Office of War Information, a government censorship agency, blocked racial depictions of discrimination against nonwhite people to show a falsely ideal racial democracy.¹⁴² The Office of War Information also approved blackface and jokes perpetuating and relying upon Black stereotypes.¹⁴³

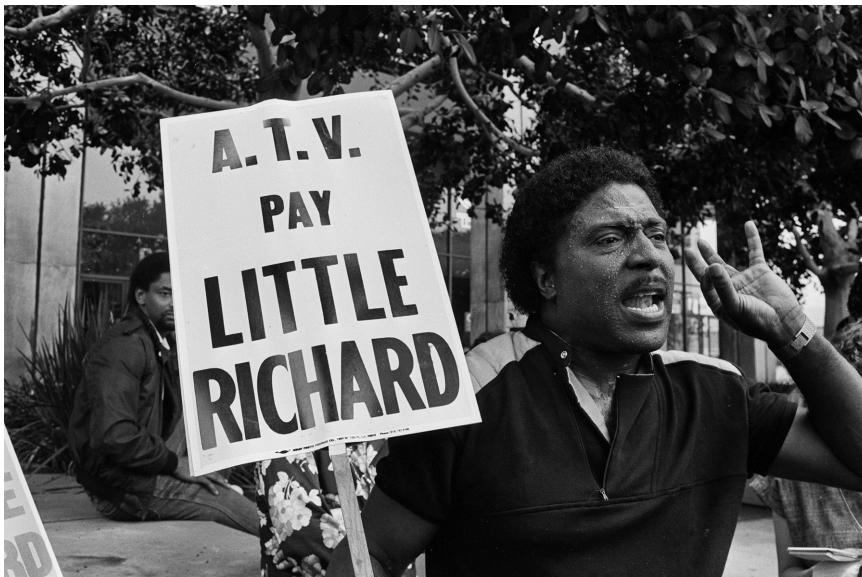
Federal and state governments have constructed racist monuments on state property and altered school curriculum—glorifying slavery and white supremacy, perpetuating the “Lost Cause” myth, and erasing Black history.¹⁴⁴ State and local governments have collaborated with the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which seeks to memorialize and preserve Confederate culture

for future generations,¹⁴⁵ to memorialize the “Lost Cause” myth—that the rebels were patriots and not traitors to the nation.¹⁴⁶ Organized and systematic efforts to manipulate and distort the nation’s history—began immediately after the end of the Civil War.¹⁴⁷ These included erecting Confederate monuments, many of them placed on courthouse grounds; naming schools, streets, and military bases after Confederate officers; and lobbying Congress

The Office of War Information, a government censorship agency, blocked racial depictions of discrimination against nonwhite people to show a falsely ideal racial democracy. The Office of War Information also approved blackface and jokes perpetuating and relying upon Black stereotypes.

for holidays.¹⁴⁸ The construction of these monuments coincided with a historical period in which increased racial terror through lynching and violence against Black people was at an all-time high.¹⁴⁹ (See Chapter 3 on racial terror for more information.) Monument construction has coincided with moments in which Black communities seem to gain some political power or voice.¹⁵⁰ The Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregation unconstitutional, and the civil rights movement triggered another wave of Confederate monuments across the country.¹⁵¹

COURTESY OF BETTMANN ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES



Little Richard protesting record companies over royalties. Little Richard sold the rights to the song “Tutti Frutti” for a reported \$50, and received half a cent for each record sold. “I was a dumb black kid and my mama had 12 kids and my daddy was dead,” Little Richard reportedly said, “I wanted to help them, so I took whatever was offered.” (1984)

Federal and state governments have enacted laws to protect Confederate monuments and other monuments to white supremacy.¹⁵² Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia recently enacted these laws between 2012 to 2017.¹⁵³ In 2009, the U.S. Supreme Court also protected government monuments from free speech challenges in *Pleasant Grove City v. Summum*—a protection that includes Confederate monuments.¹⁵⁴

African Americans were denied access to the mainstream media for much of American history, due to segregation and racism.¹⁵⁵ Since the 2000s, many newspapers have apologized for blatantly racist news coverage that they have engaged in

for over a century-long period that encompasses the slavery era to today.¹⁵⁶ Consequently, African Americans formed their own media—the Black press.

Freedom's Journal was one of the first of many subsequent Black newspapers and publications that would be formed throughout the United States.¹⁵⁷ These publications advocated for community cohesiveness, demonstrated racial pride, and challenged legislation.¹⁵⁸ The staff members of small, struggling Black publications often risked their lives to refute white supremacy in the news.¹⁵⁹ Ida B. Wells was a journalist for the Memphis weekly known as *The Free Speech*.¹⁶⁰ She conducted investigations, finding that mobs regularly lynched innocent victims as part of a racial terror regime.¹⁶¹ This was work that should have been done by federal and state law enforcement agencies. She found that the Black men who were charged with raping white women were often involved in consensual relationships with them.¹⁶² After she published her findings in an editorial, a white mob destroyed *The Free Speech*, suffering no legal consequences.¹⁶³ Black newspapers like *The Baltimore Afro-American*, *The Chicago Defender*, and *The Pittsburgh Courier* served as a corrective to the lies of the white press, and advanced the early civil rights movement.¹⁶⁴

African Americans were often invisible in white press and mainstream media, unless they were alleged to have committed crimes.¹⁶⁵ They were often denied courtesy titles such as Mrs. and Mr., which were given to white Americans.¹⁶⁶ When African Americans were cast in television shows, they acted out narratives crafted by white Americans that pigeonholed them in roles as domestics, criminals, brutes, or lazy and deceitful.¹⁶⁷ In 1945, John H. Johnson established *Ebony* magazine—one of the first magazines to be founded by and operated for African Americans.¹⁶⁸ *Ebony* highlighted historical figures who had been left out of textbooks.¹⁶⁹ The magazine also worked with corporations who sought to advertise to African American communities.¹⁷⁰ In 1979, Robert Johnson (no relation to John H. Johnson), a cable industry lobbyist, started a television channel called Black Entertainment Television (BET).¹⁷¹ By the 1990s, he sold BET to Viacom for \$2.3 billion, making him the first African American billionaire in U.S. history.¹⁷²

American television has a sordid history of creating television shows and series that reinforce racism against African Americans and are written, conceived, and produced by

white Americans.¹⁷³ White Hollywood has been complicit in the racist practices that thwarted Black freedom struggles.¹⁷⁴ The first Black sitcom originated from a radio program called Amos 'n' Andy, in the 1940s, in which two white men portrayed Black characters.¹⁷⁵ According to testimony by Dr. Darnell Hunt before the California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, “[C]rime procedurals were found to routinely glamourize policing and to legitimize the criminal justice system, while downplaying the degree to which African Americans are racially profiled and victimized by both.” This finding is particularly alarming given what we know about the normalizing effects of media, about the potential for media, in this case, to condition police officers, prosecutors, juries, judges, and/or vigilantes to perceive Black bodies as a threat, and police violence against them as justified.¹⁷⁶ This is important because, as Erika Alexander stated in her testimony, “[s]tory is the conduit to our mind, but once the seed is planted, it is the quickest way to our heart.”¹⁷⁷

The television industry was almost entirely white for many of its initial decades.¹⁷⁸ Black writers and actors in the 1970s faced exclusion at nearly every turn.¹⁷⁹ Television executives held the racist presumption that white writers could write for any audience, but Black writers only could contribute to Black shows.¹⁸⁰ The Black screenwriters who are employed by mainstream television networks are often tasked with crafting stereotypical narratives of Black people and story lines that are acceptable to white producers, studio executives,

Ida B. Wells was a journalist for the Memphis weekly known as *The Free Speech*. She conducted investigations, finding that mobs regularly lynched innocent victims as part of a racial terror regime. This was work that should have been done by federal and state law enforcement agencies. She found that the Black men who were charged with raping white women were often involved in consensual relationships with them. After she published her findings in an editorial, a white mob destroyed *The Free Speech*, suffering no legal consequences.

and viewers.¹⁸¹ In 2005, the gap in median annual salary between white and Black writers in the television industry was nearly \$15,000.¹⁸² According to a 2017 survey of the television industry, 91 percent of shows are led by white creators and producers.¹⁸³ Only 1.3 percent of U.S. full-power commercial TV stations were Black-owned in 2019.¹⁸⁴ African Americans are largely underrepresented

in the entertainment industry.¹⁸⁵ While they comprise 12.4% of the general population in 2020, African Americans only constituted 3.9% of major studio heads, 6.8% of network CEOs.¹⁸⁶ They comprised 4.5% of broadcast show creators, and 7.4 % of digital show creators for the 2019-2020 season.¹⁸⁷ Federal and state governments have neglected to address the anti-Black discrimination in the entertainment industry.

The buying practices of radio advertisers in the U.S. have been characterized by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as racially discriminatory—minority broadcasting stations earn 63 percent less than other stations with comparable market shares.¹⁸⁸ Despite this, the FCC has failed to enact regulations to protect Black radio stations and media businesses.¹⁸⁹ Of the 11,000 commercial radio stations across the country, fewer than 180 are owned by African Americans—about 1.6 percent of the total.¹⁹⁰ Carole Cutting is a Black radio station owner who started a jazz station in 1999 in Springfield, Massachusetts—where there were no Black-owned radio stations.¹⁹¹ She went through a 15-year legal battle to be able to finally get her broadcast license and is the only African American to own a commercial radio station, AM or FM, in New England.¹⁹²

In 2020, the National Association of Black-Owned Broadcasters called on Congress to pass a bill that would reinstate a tax incentive to encourage people to sell radio stations to members of minority communities and women.¹⁹³ The legislation would bring back a tax break enacted in 1978 to account for the history of racism in broadcast licensing.¹⁹⁴ In the years it was in effect, minority ownership increased, however, in 1995, the tax incentive was overturned by Congress.¹⁹⁵ African Americans have proposed that the FCC approve a new technology called radio geo-targeting—that would allow radio stations to provide geographic-specific traffic, weather, public interest information, and advertising to their local communities.¹⁹⁶ Geo-targeting would allow Black radio stations to better engage listeners, allow for more Black ownership, and more effectively reach African American communities.¹⁹⁷ As of September 2021, the proposal was pending FCC approval.¹⁹⁸ Consequently, the federal government has engaged in discriminatory regulation of the media, which has harmed Black media professionals and business owners.

Black women face excessive racism and discrimination on social media today. In 2018, Amnesty International and Element AI found that Black women on Twitter were 84 percent more likely than white women to receive hateful tweets.¹⁹⁹ Despite this harassment, Black women online are innovators who contribute greatly to digital

cultural spaces.²⁰⁰ Black activists say that their remarks on racism are disproportionately stifled on Facebook.²⁰¹

California

In the 1850s, blackface minstrelsy dominated entertainment in San Francisco.²⁰² Minstrel songs were played during a banquet for the new University of California president in 1899.²⁰³

COURTESY OF PAUL BERSEBACH/MEDIANEWS GROUP/ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER VIA GETTY IMAGES



Cemetery workers cover a confederate monument at Santa Ana Cemetery after it was defaced with orange paint. The monument honored confederate soldiers who fought for the Confederate States of America during the Civil War. (2019)

California has been home to racist monument and memorial construction for centuries. The Native Sons of the Golden West is a California organization that has erected racist monuments throughout the state.²⁰⁴ It was formed on July 11, 1865 with the goal of honoring the Forty Niners, the first white people to settle in California and take advantage of the gold rush and has erected monuments through the state.²⁰⁵ In the 1920s, the Native Sons of the Golden West Grand President wrote that “California was given by God to a white people, and with God’s strength we want to keep it as He gave it to us.”²⁰⁶ The United Daughters of the Confederacy had 14 chapters across California²⁰⁷ and erected plaques, monuments, and other memorials dedicated to Confederate generals and soldiers across California, such as in Monterey and San Diego, throughout the 1940s and 1950.²⁰⁸

California has erected a great number of Confederate monuments, including a dozen or more state markers and cemetery memorials.²⁰⁹ Some of these monuments were erected by southern veterans of the Confederacy who moved to southern California after the Civil War and sought to memorialize their service through the creation of monuments.²¹⁰ The Mendocino coastal town of Fort Bragg is named after a Confederate army general

and enslaver, as of March 2021, the town has not yet changed its names despite numerous requests.²¹¹

The *Los Angeles Times* apologized for being “an institution deeply rooted in white supremacy” for most of its history and admitted to a record that included indifference and “outright hostility” toward the city’s nonwhite population—acknowledging the underrepresentation of Black journalists in the newsroom.

In the radio, film, and television industries, California has neglected to adequately address widespread discrimination. Out of the hundreds of radio stations in California, only two are Black owned.²¹² The State of California has, overall, neglected to enforce the civil rights of Black people or address the widespread practice of anti-Black discrimination in Hollywood.²¹³ African Americans have been depicted in crude stereotypical film roles in Hollywood: as servants, rapists, and enslaved people—or they were barred from roles in films altogether.²¹⁴

The *Los Angeles Times* apologized for being “an institution deeply rooted in white supremacy” for most of its history and admitted to a record that included indifference and “outright hostility” toward the city’s nonwhite population—acknowledging the underrepresentation of Black journalists in the newsroom.²¹⁵ For instance, the *Times* won a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the August 1965 civil unrest in Watts. While much of the Watts story’s content was reported by a 24-year-old Black advertising messenger, Robert Richardson, the reporters and editors of record were nearly all white.²¹⁶ Richardson covered the disturbances, driving to the scene and phoning in his reports.²¹⁷ He was designated a “reporter trainee” after the uprisings but was only provided minimal mentorship or opportunities to enhance his skills. He left the paper the following year.²¹⁸

IV. Racist Censorship

State censorship of depictions of African Americans in movies, art, and books was constitutional until 1952.²²⁶ The institutions that regulated cinema, including the Production Code Administration, state censorship boards, and film studios themselves, produced a warped and racist view of African American life in cinema.²²⁷ State government censorship was strongest from 1915 to 1952.²²⁸ States with active censorship boards focused

In contrast, California’s Black newspapers hired Black reporters and writers and invested in them. From 1850 to 1870, the earliest Black newspapers published in California included *The Mirror of the Times*, *The Pacific Appeal*, and *The Elevator*.²¹⁹ These newspapers emphasized civil rights, community, and racial politics.²²⁰ Writers and editors were free to be activists and journalists.²²¹ *The California Eagle* was founded in 1879 and helped ease African Americans’ transition to the west—providing them with housing and job information, and other information essential to surviving in a new environment.²²² With Charlotta Spears Bass at the helm, over the years, the *Eagle* protested racism in the motion picture industry, in the military, and successfully waged battles against discriminatory hiring in Los Angeles—work that should have been done by the state government.²²³ The state government has failed to prevent discrimination in mainstream media in California.

California’s Social Media Transparency and Accountability Act of 2021, Assembly Bill 587, would require social media platforms to publicly disclose their corporate policies regarding online hate, disinformation, extremism, harassment, and foreign interference, as well as key metrics and data regarding the enforcement of those policies.²²⁴ However, the bill only applies to social media companies that have at least \$100 million in revenue—which would exclude many websites where racist commentary and discourse is highly prevalent, such as Parler.²²⁵ As a result, California’s attempts to address white supremacy and racism targeted at African Americans online may still leave many vulnerable to abuse. In conclusion, the State of California has promoted blackface minstrelsy, funded confederate monuments, and neglected to enforce the civil rights of African American artists, culture makers, and media makers.

on censoring miscegenation, the depiction of Black women’s sexuality, depictions of racial discrimination and lynching, and depictions of integration.²²⁹ States engaged in censorship to generate cultural narratives that upheld white supremacy, and rendered it invisible to the public—erasing depictions of Black power, humanity, and anti-Black state violence.²³⁰ After the U.S. Supreme Court banned state censorship in 1952,

Hollywood began to casually depict violence against African Americans on screen.²³¹ Scholars argue that the proliferation of these scenes has helped normalize anti-Black violence in society.²³²

States and local governments have engaged in racist censorship of books written by Black authors, primarily in public schools and in prisons. Many public high schools across the nation have banned acclaimed novels written by Black authors.²³³ Toni Morrison's acclaimed novels have been banned for "depicting the inappropriate topic of...racism," and for being "filthy," in 1998 in Florida, and 2007 in Kentucky.²³⁴ Texas law prohibits teachers from portraying slavery and racism as "anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States,"—explicitly prohibiting the *New York Times's* 1619 Project, which places African Americans and the consequences of slavery at the center of American history.²³⁵ In 2021, in York, Pennsylvania, an all-white school board banned books related to racial justice, which mentioned key Black civil rights leaders, such as Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—stating that they "may lean more toward indoctrination rather than age-appropriate academic content."²³⁶ After sustained protests from community members, students, and teachers, the school board reversed the ban.²³⁷

State officials across the country have banned books on the enslavement of Black people, civil rights, and novels by Black authors in prisons and carceral settings.²³⁸ For example, as of 2021, Wisconsin bans Ralph Ginzburg's *100 Years of Lynching*, but allows incarcerated people to read Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*—presumably the first was banned for obscenity and yet the latter was deemed to be acceptable.²³⁹ Florida banned the Equal Justice Initiative's *Lynching in America* report—one of the most comprehensive reports available on the lynching of African Americans—because it was supposedly a threat to

prison security.²⁴⁰ To maintain the lie of white cultural supremacy, state governments have therefore participated in censoring African American artistic work that was critical of American institutions, deemed subversive, or threatened white supremacy.

California

In the 1930s, Black activists protested pro-lynching films at movie theaters, fought against Hollywood's depictions of Black people, and tried to use film to promote the fight for civil rights.²⁴¹ Early films that depicted lynching scenes included *Frisco Kid* (1935), *Barbary Coast* (1935), *Fury* (1936), and *They Won't Forget* (1937).²⁴² These films made African Americans "nauseous" because they glorified and applauded lynching—even when the person being lynched was not Black.²⁴³ These films encouraged and justified lynching at a time when the lynching of African Americans was still highly prevalent.²⁴⁴

Many public schools and prisons in California have censored the literature of Black authors. The Oakland Board of Education banned Alice Walker's book *The Color Purple* in 1984, due to "troubling ideas about race relations, man's relationship to God, African history, and

The Oakland Board of Education banned Alice Walker's book *The Color Purple* in 1984, due to "troubling ideas about race relations, man's relationship to God, African history, and human sexuality"—approving it only after nine months of community advocacy.

human sexuality"—approving it only after nine months of community advocacy.²⁴⁵ At Irvington High School in Fremont, Richard Wright's novel *Native Son*, was banned for being "unnecessarily violent" in 1998.²⁴⁶ At the state level, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation still maintains a list of banned books for its prisons.²⁴⁷

V. Deprivation of Black Intellectual Property

The federal government's copyright laws routinely deprived African American artists of legal protection because this regime allowed art created by Black artists to be appropriated and stolen by white artists.²⁴⁸ As a result of complex and convoluted requirements of the 1909 Copyright Act, artists unfamiliar with legal requirements could easily find their works injected into the public domain.²⁴⁹ This resulted in the loss of economic rights and

copyright protection—which resulted in generations of lost wealth for African Americans.²⁵⁰ Additionally, the federal and state governments have not legally allowed descendants of enslaved people to own art made by their enslaved ancestors or photographs taken of their enslaved ancestors—depriving them of rightful earnings.²⁵¹

Only **3%** of U.S. patents



went to **African American** inventors from 1970 to 2006

Even though Black people were leaders in invention, they could not access patent protections due to institutional racism and state-sanctioned anti-Black discrimination and violence.²⁵² There are estimates that racial violence accounts for 1,100 missing patents won by African Americans.²⁵³ Cyrus McCormick received a patent for the mechanical reaper, even though it was actually invented by Jo Anderson, a man who was enslaved by the McCormick family.²⁵⁴ Obtaining a patent was difficult and expensive, and some Black inventors could not afford a lawyer.²⁵⁵ Some patent applications may have been rejected due to racial discrimination.²⁵⁶ To avoid discrimination, some African Americans relied on white partners to apply for patents under the white person's name.²⁵⁷ One inventor, Henry Boyd, invented a new type of bed frame and partnered with a white man who applied for the patent in his name.²⁵⁸

Obtaining a patent was more difficult for Black artists and innovators because it often involved working with white lawyers who engaged in racist and unfair dealings—and the federal government took no action to ensure that Black innovators' patents were properly documented and preserved.²⁵⁹ Black innovators faced additional professional and financial barriers, in addition to racism, that white innovators did not face.²⁶⁰ In 1913, the U.S. Patent Office surveyed approximately 8,000 registered patent attorneys and found 1,200

inventions attributed to people of African American ancestry.²⁶¹ However, the Office was only able to confirm 800 of them—a large undercount because attorneys reported failing to recall the names or inventions of some of their Black clients.²⁶² This failure to recall the names of Black inventors and their inventions resulted in African American inventors being cheated out of profits for their creative work.²⁶³

Government-enforced racial segregation and disinvestment in Black communities resulted in a dearth of resources that crippled Black invention.²⁶⁴ These racist practices suppressed the ability of African Americans to receive patents for their inventions.²⁶⁵ Today, Black patentees are underrepresented in America.²⁶⁶ There are wide disparities between the number of U.S. patents issued to Black inventors and the total number of patents issued in general.²⁶⁷ For example, one 2010 study found that from 1970 to 2006, African American inventors received six patents per million people, compared to 235 patents per million for all U.S. inventors.²⁶⁸ According to Professor Kevin J. Greene's testimony before the California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, American copyright law disadvantages African American creators because it enables appropriation and under-compensation.²⁶⁹ There are significant disparities in how Black and white music performers have been compensated for copyright use.²⁷⁰ Professor Greene stated, "It's not just some problem that happened 200 years ago, it's a problem that's ongoing and happening today."²⁷¹ Throughout American history, the federal government historically deprived African American artists and innovators of intellectual property rights, copyright protections, and patent protections resulting in intellectual and cultural theft and exploitation.

There are estimates that racial violence accounts for 1,100 missing patents that should have been given to African Americans. Cyrus McCormick received a patent for the mechanical reaper, even though it was actually invented by Jo Anderson, a man who was enslaved by the McCormick family.

VI. Discrimination Against Black Athletes

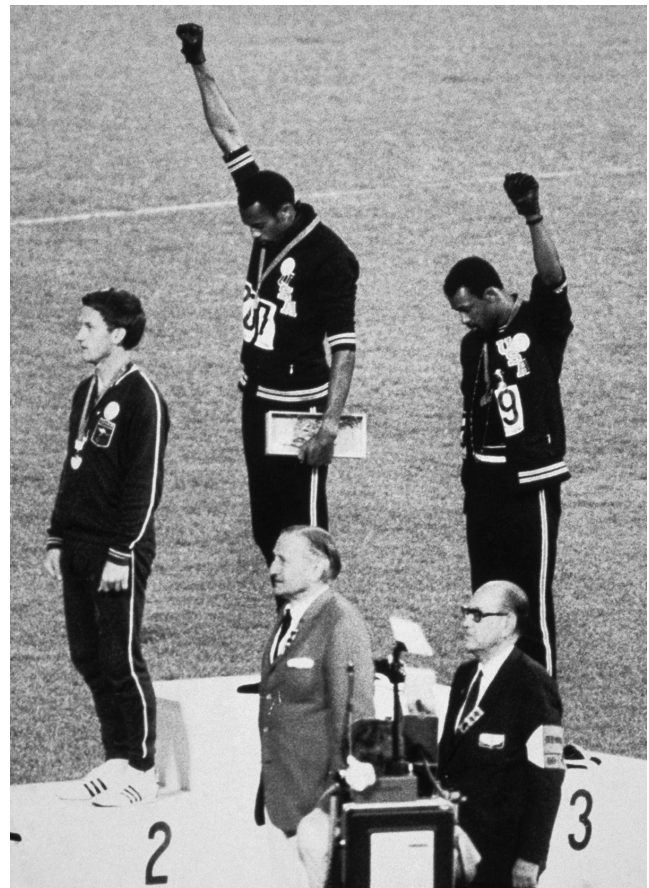
Following the end of slavery, most Black athletes were forced to compete in segregated teams, sports, and organizations.²⁷² Prior to World War II, some African Americans played sports at white universities—where they were picked for their talent, yet ridiculed and mistreated by white students.²⁷³ Despite the inherent inequality of segregation, Black colleges and their football programs thrived in the mid-20th century.²⁷⁴ Many Americans believed Historically Black Colleges and Universities were of lower quality than white higher education institutions, so athletic achievement was a way to dispute this narrative.²⁷⁵ HBCUs had fewer material resources but produced high numbers of professional athletes—particularly in football.²⁷⁶

The reintegration of sports was a long and slow process because white Americans who held positions of power were hesitant to break the tradition of segregation.²⁷⁷ Most major college athletics programs did not allow Black players until 1947.²⁷⁸ The ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ was a standard, unwritten rule that allowed coaches to bench Black athletes during intercollegiate contests with all-white colleges and universities.²⁷⁹ In 1955, Georgia’s Governor asked the State Board of Regents to prohibit Georgia’s all-white football teams from playing against teams with Black players.²⁸⁰

During the 1960s, the government and the sports industry punished Black athletes who engaged in racial justice and political protests, or resisted racial oppression.²⁸¹ Muhammad Ali, a African American Muslim boxing champion, was stripped of his world heavyweight title for refusing to be drafted into the U.S. armed forces.²⁸² When explaining why he would not join the army, he pointed out the irony of being drafted to fight on behalf a nation in which he was subjected to racial oppression.²⁸³ “My conscience won’t let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people...for big powerful America,” he said.²⁸⁴ “They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn’t put no dogs on me, they didn’t rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father... Shoot them for what?”²⁸⁵ Ali was charged with a felony, fined, and banned from boxing.²⁸⁶ Later the Supreme Court would overturn his conviction. Justice John Harlan stated that the government had misinterpreted the doctrine of Black Muslims by not recognizing Ali as a conscientious objector.²⁸⁷ Ali experienced racial and religious discrimination by the government—which refused to recognize his religious beliefs and punished him for his resistance to racism.

African American Olympic athletes have faced racial discrimination in athletics.²⁸⁸ The Amateur Sports Act of 1978, gave the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee, a private organization, exclusive jurisdiction over all matters related to the Olympics.²⁸⁹ The federal government has provided funding for the Olympics when they are held in the United States.²⁹⁰ In 1968, Black Californian track athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, protested the lack of African Americans on the United States Olympic Committee, as well as the stripping of Muhammad Ali’s heavyweight belt at the Olympics.²⁹¹ They raised their black gloved fists in a Black power salute during the National Anthem, while standing on the victory podiums of the Olympic Games.²⁹² Subsequently, the International Olympic Committee kicked them out of the Olympic Village and banned protest during the Olympics.²⁹³ When Smith and Carlos returned to America, their

COURTESY OF BETTMANN ARCHIVE VIA GETTY IMAGES



Tommie Smith and John Carlos protested the lack of African Americans on the United States Olympic Committee, as well as the stripping of Muhammad Ali’s heavyweight belt at the Olympics. They raised their black gloved fists in a Black power salute during the National Anthem, while standing on the victory podiums of the Olympic Games. (1968)

families received death threats.²⁹⁴ Today, many African American Olympic athletes are discriminated against—from being suspended for legal marijuana use to being forbidden from wearing swimming caps designed for natural Black hair.²⁹⁵ Most Olympic athletes, many of whom are African Americans, live in poverty and receive little compensation for their hard work—while high-ranking Olympic committee executives and organizers are compensated generously, due to the billions of dollars in profit from sponsorships, donations, and broadcasting rights.²⁹⁶

Similarly, studies have shown that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has profited from the labor of poor Black students, many of whom live below the federal poverty line—and the United States Supreme Court has supported this through caselaw.²⁹⁷ The NCAA prohibits college athletes from being compensated for their labor.²⁹⁸ Many public universities, which are government funded, generate millions of dollars in revenue due to football and basketball teams that are part of the NCAA.²⁹⁹ Black students constitute nearly 60 percent of the rosters of football and basketball teams, and just 11 percent of the rosters of all other sports.³⁰⁰ African American athletes who risk their health and safety to play these sports while in school do not receive any compensation.³⁰¹ Much of the money generated by football and basketball athletes is spent on salaries for coaches and administrators and on the construction of lavish facilities.³⁰²

African Americans began to play baseball in the late 1800s and historically joined professional teams with white players.³⁰³ However, due to racism and legal segregation laws, they were forced to leave these teams by 1900.³⁰⁴ In 1920, an organized league structure, called the National Negro League, was formed by Black businesspeople and athletes in Kansas City, Missouri.³⁰⁵ The leagues were professional and became central to economic development in many Black communities.³⁰⁶ In 1945, the segregation policies of baseball changed when Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson of the Negro League's Kansas City Monarchs to a contract that would bring Robinson into the major leagues in 1947.³⁰⁷

Football has a history of racial discrimination in the United States, sanctioned by state and federal governments.³⁰⁸ Recently, the NFL has engaged in racist practices against Black athletes—many of whom suffered brain injuries while playing professional football.³⁰⁹ The NFL used “race-norming”—a racist medical practice where Black players were assumed to have lower cognitive function than white players as part of a dementia test to determine payouts in a brain injury settlement.³¹⁰ As of January 2022, there was only one Black head coach in the NFL.³¹¹

Tennis, like football, was originally a sport for elite white men.³¹² Due to segregation laws, most tennis clubs explicitly or implicitly prohibited African Americans from participation.³¹³ Public courts were not fairly distributed in Black neighborhoods or accessible to Black players.³¹⁴ Today, prominent African American women tennis players, like Serena Williams, are more likely to be disciplined, fined, and criticized while playing.³¹⁵

In the early 1950s, the National Basketball Association (NBA) had an unspoken rule that there could not be more than two Black players on a team, later that number was expanded to three.³¹⁶ More recently, in 2020, African American women in the Women's National Basketball Association went on strike to protest anti-Black police violence—building upon a long history of protests for racial justice.³¹⁷ Following the lead of Black women, Black male professional basketball players in the NBA protested

COURTESY OF BETTMANN ARCHIVE VIA GETTY IMAGES



U.S. women's team for the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The two African American women pictured, Louise Stokes and Tidy Pickett, qualified three years earlier for the 1932 Olympics in track and field but were not allowed to participate due to their race.

anti-Black police violence in a historic strike—refusing to play games and talk to journalists.³¹⁸ Due to their efforts, sports arenas in areas with large African American communities were turned into voting locations for the 2020 general election to allow for safe, in-person voting—work that should have been done by federal and state governments.³¹⁹ (See Chapter 4 on political disenfranchisement.) There is consequently a history of racism in basketball, like in many other sports, which has harmed African American athletes.³²⁰

There have long been inequalities between men's and women's sports—however, for African American women, this is compounded by race.³²¹ One of the first women's track teams in the United States began at the all-Black Tuskegee Institute in 1929.³²² Three years later, two African American women, Louise Stokes and Tidye Pickett, qualified for the 1932 Olympics in track and field but were not allowed to participate due to their race.³²³ Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) changed the landscape for women's sports. It requires any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance, including sports, to provide equal opportunities to all genders.³²⁴ Title IX resulted in a significant increase in women athletes, however, the percentage of women in coaching positions greatly declined.³²⁵ Today, Black women represent 88 percent of professional women's basketball, but there are no Black women in head coaching positions.³²⁶ Despite Title IX's legal guarantee of equal opportunity, Black parents have reported more sports programs for boys than girls in their communities.³²⁷ Fifty-three percent of white girls are most likely to be involved with sports at age six or younger, while only 29 percent of Black girls are.³²⁸ Due to the lack of Title IX enforcement that centers African American women, they have suffered the consequences of both racism and sexism in the sports industry—including underrepresentation in sports leadership and limited access to sports in general. The history of sports in the United States is one of racial discrimination, segregation, and the exploitation of Black male and female athletes—a history in which governments have played a significant role.

California

Many Black football players experienced discrimination in California's colleges and universities. The University of Southern California did not permit Black athletes to play until the 1920s.³²⁹ While the University of California, Los Angeles did allow Black players to play in starting positions on its football team, the Los Angeles community was not as accepting of Black athletes.³³⁰ At San Jose

State College, Black athletes reportedly faced discrimination in athletics, such as overbearing coaches, a lack of academic assistance, exploitative demands made on Black participants, prejudice outside of the sport, and hostility in the campus Greek system and the local community.³³¹ Professor Harry Edwards, a sociologist who helped organize Black athletes against discrimination was called “unfit to teach” by California governor and later president, Ronald Reagan.³³²

Black athletes have often protested discrimination in sports in California. Take for instance Colin Kaepernick, a Black Californian who was the quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers.³³³ In 2016, he knelt during the National Anthem in protest of anti-Black police violence.³³⁴ Subsequently, the President of the United States, said that he should, “find a country that works better for him.”³³⁵ The National Football League then stated that it would fine teams whose players did not stand for the National Anthem.³³⁶ Kaepernick was ultimately told he would be released from his contract by the general manager and coach of the 49ers.³³⁷ Since then, all NFL teams have refused to sign Kaepernick on as a player, despite his clear record of success and athleticism.³³⁸

The University of California system has also reproduced racial inequities in its revenue-generating athletic programs.³³⁹ It has some of the lowest graduation rates for Black male student athletes, who comprise a large majority of the male student athlete population, in comparison to overall graduation rates.³⁴⁰ As of 2018, the Black male student-athlete graduation rate for the University of California, Berkeley was 39 percent, much lower than the 91 percent graduation rate for students overall.³⁴¹ The graduation rate for Black male student-athletes at the University of California, Los Angeles was 57 percent, while the overall graduation rate was 91 percent.³⁴² Black male student-athletes rarely accrue the benefits of higher education, beyond athletics.³⁴³ Black athletes report that coaches prioritize athletic accomplishment over academic engagement and discouraged participation in activities beyond their sport.³⁴⁴ Though many Black athletes aspire to become professional players, the NFL and National Basketball Association draft fewer than two percent of student athletes each year.³⁴⁵ The University of California system pressures Black student-athletes to labor for its highly profitable athletic programs while they receive no compensation, risk damage to their health, and divert their focus from their education—all for the unlikely chance at being drafted into professional sports.

VII. Restraints on Black Leisure and Recreation

Across the United States, state and local governments have prohibited African Americans from participating in leisure.³⁴⁶ Public parks, recreation centers, and pools³⁴⁷ and the passageways to access them³⁴⁸ are located away from Black communities, restricted, or closed. Further, various government statutes, including anti-cruising, anti-gathering, and curfew laws, have often targeted African Americans' ability to enjoy leisure time.³⁴⁹

California

The State of California engaged in racist restrictions on Black business owners through zoning ordinances, licensing laws, fire and safety codes, and anti-nuisance provisions, which discriminated against Black business owners and their Black customers. Racist state actions against predominantly Black leisure sites, included denying liquor or food licenses and heightened police surveillance at Black-owned bars and restaurants.³⁵⁰ In *Shaw v. California Dept of Alcoholic Beverage Control*, Black tavern owners brought a civil rights action against the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control and the City of San Jose in 1986.³⁵¹ The Black tavern owners sued for violation of their civil rights based upon improper revocation of their liquor license and discriminatory enforcement of the law.³⁵² The court agreed that the loss of the bar's liquor license was due to racially discriminatory harassment by the San Jose police force.³⁵³

Cities in California also used eminent domain to seize the land of Black business owners who sought to establish leisure enterprises. The Manhattan Beach authorities in Southern California, prohibited the growth and development of Black-owned leisure businesses, such as Bruce's Beach.³⁵⁴ In 1912, Ms. Willa "Willie" Bruce purchased two lots near Manhattan Beach from white real estate brokers for \$1,225. She developed the land with a cottage, food establishment, and store—called Bruce's Lodge.³⁵⁵ The lodge was popular with Black Los Angeles residents.³⁵⁶ By 1926, six other Black families had bought property near the lodge for vacation homes.³⁵⁷ This caused many white neighbors and beachgoers to complain, harass, and attack the Black beachgoers, their families, and their establishments.³⁵⁸ The Manhattan Beach Board of Trustees and a white Manhattan Beach resident threatened to report Bruce's Beach for allegedly selling liquor during the prohibition, so that all the people on Bruce's property could be arrested.³⁵⁹

In 1924, Manhattan Beach authorities enacted new laws with fines and penalties for violations of parking and zoning laws to discourage Black visitors.³⁶⁰ For example,

"10 minute only" parking signage was put up to prevent visitors from staying because parking would be extremely limited.³⁶¹ Ordinance 273 prevented "bathhouses" in same area as Bruce's, so there could be no further bathhouse developments or expansions at the beach.³⁶² In 1924, Manhattan Beach authorities used eminent domain to condemn the beach as a public park under the Park and Playground Act of 1909.³⁶³ This action was petitioned for by white citizens in the area, and backed by Ku Klux Klan members, including those who befriended Board of Trustee members.³⁶⁴ Today, the two parcels of land that were part of Bruce's Beach are worth an estimated \$75 million.³⁶⁵ In 2021, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed Senate Bill 796, authorizing the county to transfer the land back to the Bruce family after nearly 100 years.³⁶⁶ The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to begin the process of transferring the land.³⁶⁷

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Louise and Byron Kenner in bathing suits at Bruce's Beach, with a beach house visible behind them. Bruce's Beach, in the city of Manhattan Beach, was purchased by Willa and Charles Bruce in 1912. They built a beach resort. The city closed down the resort in the 1920s by proposing to build a park and imposing eminent domain. (c. 1920)

Local governments in the State of California restricted access to public pools for Black Californians. The Brookside Plunge was a public pool in Pasadena, which opened on July 4, 1914.³⁶⁸ It was initially only open to nonwhite individuals on Wednesday afternoons and evenings.³⁶⁹ Eventually, it only opened for a shorter

time—on Tuesdays between 2pm and 5pm—in retaliation to a legal challenge from Black taxpayers in the area.³⁷⁰ The Los Angeles branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People sued the city fol-

City and county police departments in California engaged in targeted harassment of Black owned businesses that provided leisure opportunities to Black Californians. In 1927, the Parkridge Country Club was sold to a group of Black entrepreneurs. After the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on the front lawn and white club members sued the previous owner for the sale, the Black entrepreneurs were forced to withdraw their bid.

lowing the denial of six Black men to the pool.³⁷¹ Though they won, Pasadena closed the pool until the NAACP secured an injunction forcing the pool to reopen in 1947

with no racial restrictions.³⁷² The pool site suffered from a lack of financial support and closed in 1983, leading a local swim coach and several donors to form the AAF Rose Bowl Aquatic Center.³⁷³ This center was supposed to be open to all, but discouraged access for Black people due to the “country club” atmosphere.³⁷⁴ The Pasadena city council ignored this issue and allowed the formation of the center with public funds.³⁷⁵

City and county police departments in California engaged in targeted harassment of Black owned businesses that provided leisure opportunities to Black Californians. In 1927, the Parkridge Country Club was sold to a group of Black entrepreneurs.³⁷⁶ After the Ku Klux Klan

burned a cross on the front lawn and white club members sued the previous owner for the sale, the Black entrepreneurs were forced to withdraw their bid.³⁷⁷

VIII. Conclusion

African Americans have suffered from discrimination in almost every type of cultural and artistic pursuit, including arts, sports, leisure, fashion, literature, media, and music. The United States has historically denied African Americans to own their intellectual and artistic property, engage in leisure activities without restriction, and receive fair compensation for their athletic talent. State and federal governments have endorsed blackface minstrelsy, promoted racist cinematic depictions of African Americans, allowed segregation in arts and culture, denied patents to Black inventors, and punished African Americans for protesting racial injustice. Federal and state governments failed to protect Black artists, culture-makers, and media-makers from discrimination while simultaneously promoting discriminatory narratives.

Today, African American artists, culture-makers, presenters, and entrepreneurs must contend with the legacy of enslavement, as they continue to be deprived of rightful profits from their intellectual, artistic, athletic, and creative labors. African Americans continue to face racial discrimination, difficulties in obtaining patents and copyrights, and at times, are not even compensated at all for their creative and physical labors. African Americans are weighed down by the legacy of enslavement, echoing the impacts felt by their ancestors, even as they attempt to pursue creative endeavors that empower and uplift Black communities.

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I. Introduction

During enslavement, American government at all levels enabled and benefitted from the direct theft of African Americans' labor. Since then, federal, state, and local government actions have directly segregated and discriminated against African Americans and also paved the way for private discrimination in labor and employment. Federal, state, and local laws and policies, including those of California, have expressly and in practice limited what work African Americans can do and suppressed African Americans' wages and opportunities for professional advancement. Federal laws have also protected white workers while denying the same protections to Black workers, setting up and allowing private discrimination. Government and private discrimination have contributed to the inability of African Americans to build wealth over generations. Although progress has been made, Black workers continue to face serious discrimination today. The badges and incidents of slavery have carried forward. The devaluation of African Americans, their abilities, and their labor did not end. It simply took on different forms.

Around the time of the Civil War, state and local governments passed laws known as the Black Codes and "Jim Crow" laws. While these laws touched all aspects of life, one of their main goals was to control how African Americans earned a living in order to maintain African Americans as a servant class for white Americans. These laws limited African Americans' job opportunities and salaries and their ability to provide for their families.

The federal government itself directly discriminated against Black workers. Black workers were routinely excluded from federal employment until 1861 and, in 1913, President Woodrow Wilson allowed for the federal workforce be segregated. The segregated federal government demoted and relegated Black workers to lower paid jobs, and, for instance, forced Black workers to use separate toilets in the Treasury and Interior Departments. Although the military offered an opportunity for upward mobility for African Americans, its ranks remained segregated until 1960, with lower pay and rank for Black service members. Even as the overall proportion of Black service members has grown, military leadership has remained overwhelmingly white, with only two Black officials out of 41 total holding four-star rank in 2020.

COURTESY OF GEORGE RINHART/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES



Railway workers with pneumatic drill. Undated photograph.

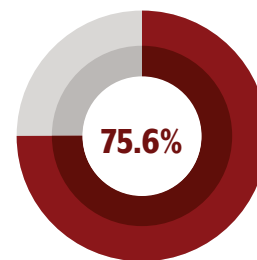
Although the federal government throughout history has passed laws, implemented policies, and made progress in protecting workers, its efforts were often limited in time and impact, and often left out Black workers due to compromises with racist southern legislators. After the Civil War, the Freedmen's Bureau provided for the welfare of previously enslaved African Americans, but it did so in a manner that reinforced racist notions, and lasted only seven years before being dismantled by Congress under pressure from white southerners. The federal government failed to prevent white Americans from using violence and terror to limit African Americans' ability to earn a living, and certified unions that excluded Black workers. Federal labor protections under the New Deal, which aimed to help American workers' economic prospects, excluded or harmed African Americans.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 included Title VII, which largely banned discrimination on the basis of race in employment. However, it did not remedy the discriminatory workplace structures that have accumulated for hundreds of years. In 1977, the Supreme Court limited these federal protections to only instances where an employee can prove that their employer intended to discriminate against them, an extremely high standard. Federal government affirmative action plans created in the 1970s did lead to an increase in the rate of minority employment in businesses that contracted with the federal government in those years, but an organized backlash has narrowed the scope and impact of these programs since in the early 1980s. Despite some progress in preventing labor discrimination against Black workers, the federal government has made little to no effort to address the harms of past government action.

Research has produced evidence that, as a result of the legacy of enslavement and subsequent and ongoing discrimination, white workers are paid more than Black workers, and Black and white workers are concentrated in different types of jobs.¹ As of 2019, median Black wages were equivalent to only 75.6 percent of white wages, falling from a height of 79.2 percent in 2000. Researchers estimate that between one-quarter to one-third of the wage gap between Black and white workers is due to racial discrimination.² Without a safety net of savings, African Americans can be more vulnerable to upheavals in the labor market and less able to advocate for higher wages or other benefits. As of 2020, 19.5 percent of African Americans were living in poverty compared to 8.2 percent of non-Hispanic white Americans.³ Out of the 2021 S&P 500 and Fortune 500 companies, only six of the chief executive officers of those companies were African Americans.⁴ In 2020, African Americans held only 8.7 percent of the board seats in Fortune 500 companies.⁵

Similar patterns of government neglect and discrimination exist in California. Black workers did not hold many government jobs in the state until World War II. When Bay Area Rapid Transit was built in 1967, no skilled Black workers were hired because the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)-certified unions did not admit Black members. BART, though a government agency, refused to use its power to insist on non-discrimination policies by the unions. In 1996, California changed its constitution to ban the use of affirmative action in government employment and education with Proposition 209. Persistent discrimination and limited affirmative action have prevented African Americans from receiving the same wages and career opportunities as white Americans received with government support.

African American Wages in 2019 were



of white American wages

This chapter recounts this long history and the continuing impact of discrimination in labor and employment. Section III provides a brief summary of enslavement, a subject explored in greater detail in Chapter 2. Section IV discusses discrimination in the laws enacted and government programs carried out from the Civil War forward as well as government support of private

discrimination in labor and employment. Section IV also includes discussion of the advances and limitations of civil rights laws. Section V outlines the history of discrimination in government employment. The effects still seen today from centuries of discrimination are summarized in Section VI.

II. Enslavement

The story of African Americans in the United States begins with stolen labor. The purpose of enslavement was to exploit the fruits of Black labor for the benefit of mostly white Americans. For a full discussion of enslavement, please see Chapter 2. The labor of enslaved African Americans built the infrastructure of the nation, filled the nation's coffers, and produced its main agricultural products for domestic consumption and export.⁶

Federal and state law treated African Americans themselves as commodities to be sold by enslavers.⁷ This system exploited the labor and love of Black mothers to recreate and grow the enslaved labor force.⁸

Over the 200-plus years of slavery's existence in this country, enslavers extracted an estimated \$14 trillion of labor from the human beings they enslaved.⁹ One recent study estimated that "enslaved workers were responsible for somewhere between 18.7 and 24.3 percent of the increase in commodity output per capita nationally between 1839 and 1859."¹⁰ Through various forms of taxes and tariffs—often structured to protect the interests of enslavers—federal, state, and local governments all reaped financial benefit from this condoned economic activity.¹¹

Enslavement effectively led to separate labor markets for Black and white Americans.¹² White workers had access to a larger and more desirable selection of jobs, while free Black workers were relegated to menial labor.¹³ Frederick Douglass observed, "Finding my trade of no immediate benefit, I threw off my calking habiliments, and prepared myself to do any kind of work I could get to do."¹⁴

Although there were fewer legal limitations on African Americans in the North, white workers were more motivated to reduce competition from African Americans.¹⁵ Less threatened by free Black workers in the South, white employers were more likely to employ Black workers in

skilled jobs than free Black wage earners in the North.¹⁶ In 1860, for example, approximately 10 percent of Black men in New York City worked in a skilled trade, while in Richmond the figure was 32 percent, and in Charleston,

Federal and state law exploited the labor and love of Black mothers to create and grow the enslaved labor force. Between 1619 and 1808, 300,000 enslaved people were trafficked to the United States. By 1860, approximately 3.9 million enslaved African Americans lived in the United States. Over the 200-plus years of slavery, enslavers extracted an estimated \$14 trillion of free labor from enslaved people.

where one third of the population was Black, 76 of Black men worked in a skilled trade.¹⁷ A few years earlier, in 1856, nearly 40 percent of Black artisans in Philadelphia reported that unrelenting racial prejudice had compelled them to abandon their trades.¹⁸

California

As discussed in Chapter 2, enslavement existed in California into the mid-1860s.¹⁹ Enslavers brought enslaved African Americans with them when they moved west.²⁰ Additionally, California passed its own fugitive slave law in 1852 and, for the three years that it was in force, it prevented courts from recognizing the freedom of those fleeing to California.²¹ California at the time strongly discouraged free African Americans from entering its territories.²² The relatively few free African Americans who resided in California in the late 1700s and the decades that followed tended to work as fur traders, scouts, cowboys, and miners.²³

California's lack of government oversight allowed slavery to take hold in certain regions, including where enslavers brought African Americans to mine for gold.²⁴

By 1852, 300 enslaved persons were involved in gold mining, with other enslaved persons forced to work in other capacities.²⁵ The California Fugitive Slave Act, coupled with California's law prohibiting the taking of testimony from a Black person against a white person, posed a threat to the lives of both free and enslaved Black residents.²⁶

One enslaver from Mississippi, Charles Perkins, brought three enslaved men, Robert Perkins, Carter Perkins, and Sandy Jones to California in 1849.²⁷ Perkins later left the men behind with a friend who released them in 1951.²⁸ The three freed men then set up a freight hauling business that earned them over \$3,000 in personal property, worth around \$98,000 in 2020 dollars, but in 1852, the California Supreme Court ordered the three back to slavery in Mississippi.²⁹

III. Government Support of Private Discrimination

Following the Civil War, Congress created programs to benefit African Americans and passed statutes to protect their rights. But fierce opposition from white government officials undermined these programs and led to their premature end—while the Supreme Court undermined statutory protections, allowing state and local legislatures to impose segregation.

Throughout American history and as discussed in the preceding chapters, local and state governments with the tacit approval of the federal government passed

in the South, and the majority of southern Black families did not own land and were exploited by white landowners in the sharecropping system.³¹ Black women were mostly relegated to domestic service jobs until well into the 20th century.³²

When the federal government aimed to improve labor conditions in the 1930s with the New Deal, federal policies and programs often failed to benefit, or even harmed African Americans, often by design. New Deal programs purposefully linked benefits like healthcare, paid vacations, pensions, tuition benefits, social security, and unemployment benefits to employment with large corporations, which at the time, generally did not hire Black workers.³³ Southern members of the House and Senate from states that passed laws to prevent Black workers from voting were instrumental in structuring the New Deal to exclude industries in which most Black workers were employed, like agriculture, domestic services, and casual labor.³⁴

When the federal government tried to remedy the racism faced by Black workers, the actions often lacked power to enact real change and often lasted only a short time.



COURTESY OF CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

The United States government established Freedmen's Villages to house, clothe, and educate freed enslaved people. (c. 1863-1865)

many laws restricting Black conduct. The Black Codes and Jim Crow laws aimed to consolidate and maintain economic and political power generally in the hands of white Americans by controlling the type of work available to African Americans, and how that work has been performed.³⁰ This governmental discrimination against African Americans supported private employment discrimination. Until the Great Migration, as discussed in Chapter 1 and 5, the majority of African Americans lived

Freedmen's Bureau: Short-Lived Paternalism

In the wake of the Civil War, the federal government created programs to aid African Americans and statutes to protect their rights. However, both failed to live up to their promise to give African Americans equal access to economic and labor opportunities or remedy the harms of slavery.

Immediately before the end of the Civil War, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands to provide for the welfare of formerly enslaved African Americans, including through “issues of provisions, clothing, and fuel, as [necessary] for the immediate and temporary shelter and supply of destitute and suffering refugees and freedmen and their wives and children,” according to the statute.³⁵

Federal Freedmen’s Bureau withheld services and food in order to force African Americans into labor contracts, prosecuted Black workers, and enforced vagrancy laws to prevent African Americans from moving.

Commonly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau, the agency had the authority to supervise labor relations in the South, with the mandate to provide education, medical care, and legal protections for formerly enslaved African Americans, along with the authority to rent out and eventually sell allotments of abandoned or confiscated land to free African Americans.³⁶

The original goal of the Freedmen’s Bureau Act was the more radical notion of allowing African Americans the means to become self-sufficient.³⁷ In the closing days of the Civil War, Union General William Tecumseh Sherman issued Special Field Order No. 15, setting aside 400,000 acres of confiscated land for those who had been freed, and two months later, the Freedman Bureau’s Act formalized the field order, “providing that each negro might have forty acres at a low price on long credit.”³⁸ Many free African Americans and northern Republicans believed that land reform in the South—granting formerly enslaved African Americans access to their own land—was the true way that formerly enslaved people would be free from their enslavers.³⁹ The resulting independent Black farmers would provide a power base for a new social and political order in the postwar South.⁴⁰

This new vision of social relations in the South was opposed by southerners as well as northerners who opposed enslavement but whose commitment was more to notions of free labor and capitalism than racial equality.⁴¹ A large number of Black landowners would threaten plantations and disrupt the southern economy and social system.⁴² White capitalists in the North and South believed that Black freedom should mean Black workers continuing to work on a plantation, although they would now be paid.⁴³ They did not believe that African Americans should be able to support themselves

independently through subsistence farming, which would have led to less cotton being grown and posed a threat to the interests of cotton merchants and other capitalists in the South, elsewhere in the United States, and in Europe.⁴⁴ After the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, who had wished to give freed persons “an interest in the soil,”⁴⁵ Andrew Johnson became president and repudiated Lincoln’s promises.⁴⁶ Proclaimed Johnson, “This is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am president, it shall be a government for white men.”⁴⁷ In less than a full harvest season, the land that Sherman had given to freed persons was returned to the prior owners.⁴⁸

Although the Freedmen’s Bureau tried to assert and protect the rights of the formerly enslaved, the Bureau under President Johnson perpetuated racist stereotypes, paternalistic attitudes, and continued to limit African Americans’ economic and social power. Bureau agents often viewed formerly enslaved African Americans as children, unprepared for freedom, and needing to be taught the importance of work and wages.⁴⁹ The Freedmen’s Bureau abandoned the possibility of land reform in the South, and focused on labor relations between Black and white southerners instead.⁵⁰

Bureau agents did protect Black workers’ rights by invalidating enslavement-like labor contracts, and they enforced contracts and settled wage disputes at the end of the harvest season.⁵¹ However, the Bureau also harmed African Americans by acting on the racist belief that African Americans avoided work, and it was the Bureau’s responsibility to reform such laziness.⁵² One commander noted that emancipation only meant “liberty to work, *work or starve*.”⁵³ General O.O. Howard, director of the Freedmen’s Bureau, stated that African Americans must enter into labor contracts regardless of the contract terms because any Black man “who can work has no right to support by the government.”⁵⁴ To this end, Bureau agents withheld social services and food in order to force African Americans into labor contracts,⁵⁵ prosecuted Black workers who broke labor contracts, enforced vagrancy laws, and imposed other restrictions on African Americans’ mobility.⁵⁶ The Bureau allowed plantation owners to deduct unfairly large sums for supplies and rations, until many workers would receive little wages at all.⁵⁷ The wage guidelines for Black workers provided less pay for Black women regardless of their productive capacity.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, the Freedmen’s Bureau met severe resistance from southern politicians. In 1866, President

Andrew Johnson vetoed the bill extending its existence past one year, and it was only enacted once Congress overrode the veto.⁵⁹ Six years later, in 1872, Congress bowed to pressure from white southerners and dismantled the Bureau.⁶⁰

An 1865 Mississippi law required African Americans to enter into a labor contract with white employers by January 1 of every year or risk being in violation. The punishment for violation was a criminal conviction allowing the state or locality to force the African American to work without pay.

Black Codes and Other Laws Controlled Black Workers

Immediately after the Civil War, “Black Codes,” passed by state and local governments in both the North and the South, governed the conduct of free African Americans. Free African Americans posed a threat to the racial hierarchy of slavery, and Black Codes were a range of laws to maintain the lower status of African Americans through restrictions on movement and activity, often in order to compel them to work in menial jobs for low pay.⁶¹

The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution outlawed the institution of slavery, but it allowed involuntary servitude as a punishment for a crime. Mostly southern state and local governments used this loophole to develop a system of laws, often built around vagrancy laws, that turned African Americans into criminals, and then allowed the government to turn those labeled “criminals” into de facto enslaved persons, forced to labor without pay or freedom of movement.⁶² For an in depth discussion of convict leasing, please see Chapter 11.

Vagrancy laws, passed by numerous states, criminalized unemployment.⁶³ An 1865 Mississippi law required African Americans to enter into a labor contract with white farmers by January 1 of every year or risk being in violation.⁶⁴ Violating such laws risked a criminal conviction that allowed the state or locality to force the African American to work without pay.⁶⁵ Means of compelling the labor of African Americans persisted even after some forced labor provisions were repealed. Other states “used open-ended fraud and false-pretenses laws to punish [workers] who had received advances and then breached contracts without repayment.”⁶⁶

Some jurisdictions used Black Codes to limit opportunities available to African Americans. Some laws prohibited employers from hiring workers who were already under contract; contract labor law gave employers nearly unlimited power over workers and often

their family members as well; and individuals who quit jobs could be arrested and returned to their employers.⁶⁷ South Carolina enacted a statute in 1869 that criminalized simple breaches of labor contracts.⁶⁸ Probate courts could order that Black children be “apprenticed” to their former enslavers.⁶⁹ For an in-depth discussion of apprenticeship, please see Chapter 8. In South Carolina, African Americans were

required to apply for a permit to do work that was not agriculture.⁷⁰ These codes often reinforced enslavement, even after it had been outlawed.

Later, as the Great Migration began, states also enacted laws that discouraged African Americans from migrating to places elsewhere in the country that offered better work opportunities with improved conditions and higher pay. After the Civil War, interstate labor recruiters known as emigrant agents helped Black workers leave the South towards better jobs in the North.⁷¹ The Southern states lost large numbers of workers and even when workers did not move, the possibility of leaving improved Black workers’ bargaining power.⁷² The Southern states responded by passing laws that required emigrant agents to pay high license taxes.⁷³ The Supreme Court in 1900 ruled that one such law was constitutional, and allowed Southern states to hinder the ability of poor and rural Black laborers to move towards better jobs elsewhere.⁷⁴

The Supreme Court Announces “Separate but Equal”

In 1866, Congress overrode President Johnson’s veto to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the first federal legislation banning discrimination on the basis of race.⁷⁵ As discussed in other chapters, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 was aimed at ensuring that African Americans had the same legal rights as white Americans. However, while criminalizing violations committed under color of law, the Act did not provide any civil remedy.⁷⁶

The Civil Rights Act of 1875 allowed individuals to pursue a monetary penalty against businesses and other public accommodations that discriminated against African

Americans.⁷⁷ This protection lasted only eight years, however, before the Supreme Court in 1883 decided in the *Civil Rights Cases* that the Fourteenth Amendment did not apply to private parties.⁷⁸

The decision allowed private employers and other businesses to discriminate openly against African Americans with no repercussions.⁷⁹ Together with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which condoned the doctrine of “separate but equal,” the Supreme Court’s decisions created the ability for both private and public employers to entrench an inferior labor market for Black workers, with lower wages, fewer protections, and limited opportunities for advancement for the next 100 years.

Lack of Government Protection from Violence

In both the North and the South, federal, state, and local governments neglected their duty to protect Black workers from violence as a tactic to limit their job opportunities. White land owners, employers, vigilante groups, and others used violence and terror, more closely examined in Chapter 3, to deter African Americans from earning fair wages for their labor and achieving economic success.⁸⁰ For decades following Emancipation, lynchings targeted African Americans who attempted to wield some political and economic influence or even take steps as limited as demanding pay for their work.⁸¹ While private actors often were the perpetrators of these brutal killings, federal, state, and local governments, in failing to prosecute racial violence, accepted its use to limit economic and political opportunities of African Americans.⁸²



African-American engineers, working in an apparently segregated office, located in Newport News, Virginia. (1936)

Legal Segregation

During the brief period of Reconstruction following the end of the Civil War until the 1870s, radical Republicans in the federal government passed laws increasing African Americans’ economic and labor freedom. This included rights to change employers, keep a portion of crops grown through cooperative labor, and change locations.⁸³ But this progress was temporary.

After the Union army withdrew from the South, as discussed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 on enslavement, political disenfranchisement, and racial terror, respectively, southern states passed laws and white Americans used racial terror and violence to prevent African Americans from voting. The southern Democrats took back control of state and local governments across much of the South and built a power base in the federal government.⁸⁴ In the South, state and local governments passed laws that created a formal, legally enforced system of segregation.⁸⁵ The federal government supported this system

To comply with Jim Crow laws, businesses would need to pay to erect segregated workspaces for Blacks, thus many employers simply refused to hire any Black workers. As a result, most of the jobs available to African Americans were menial service jobs.

with a series of Supreme Court decisions culminating with *Plessy v. Ferguson*’s official acceptance of “separate but equal” Jim Crow segregation regimes in 1896.⁸⁶

Segregation affected all aspects of African Americans’ lives, including voting, marriage, education, transportation, access to public accommodations, and labor and working conditions.⁸⁷ For example, South Carolina passed a statute that essentially required employers to create two separate work spaces, as it forbid white textile workers from working in the same room or using the same entrances, exits, pay windows, doorways, stairways, or windows at the same time as Black workers.⁸⁸ Black textile workers in South Carolina could not use the same “water bucket, pails, cups, dippers or glasses” as white workers.⁸⁹ Not only did such laws directly regulate the labor of African Americans, they also made it more expensive to hire Black workers when such additional facilities were required.⁹⁰ In order to be compliant with state law, an employer would need to pay twice for compliant facilities if they hired any Black workers.⁹¹ Many employers simply refused to hire any Black workers.⁹² As a result, most of the jobs available to African Americans were menial and service jobs.⁹³



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Photograph shows Sam Williams (center, holding dog), his wife Diccie Williams (center in white), their youngest son Sidney Williams (in front of Sam), and other men, women, and children in a cotton field. (c. 1908)

State and local governments' refusal to enforce the economic and civil rights of African Americans in contract and employment disputes allowed white Americans to exploit and discriminate against African Americans. African Americans in the South mostly remained in agriculture, in a sharecropping or tenant farming system.⁹⁴ Sharecropping and tenant farming emerged in the late 1860s and lasted into the 1940s, tying Black workers to agricultural work and rendering them unable to pursue other opportunity.⁹⁵ A sharecropping or tenancy arrangement typically involved Black workers and tenants paying rent to a white farmer while living and working on the rented land. The tenant farmers purchased supplies—including seed, fertilizer, and tools—on credit from plantation stores that then attached significant markups to the supplies and charged high interest rates, often locking the tenant farmers into a permanent state of debt.⁹⁶ Tenants were required to pay off all debts before leaving the farm, and landlords enforced these requirements with threats of violence.⁹⁷ For decades, federal authorities did little to limit peonage, even after the Supreme Court declared the practice unconstitutional.⁹⁸

Although the sharecropping system also exploited poor white farmers, an added layer of racial terror plagued Black sharecroppers, with no hope of government or legal protection. In the South, a African American challenged a white American at the risk of severe violence, or death.⁹⁹ For example, in 1948, two white Americans beat a Black tenant farmer in Louise, Mississippi, because the Black farmer had asked for a receipt after paying for his water bill.¹⁰⁰ If a Black farmer tried to sell extra agricultural product without the landlord's permission, he could be whipped or killed.¹⁰¹ "They could never leave as long as they owed the master, That made the planter as much master as any master during slavery, because the sharecropper was bound to him, belonged to him, almost like a slave," the grandson of a sharecropper told Isabel Wilkerson, the Pulitzer

Prize-winning journalist and author of both *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* and *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*.¹⁰²

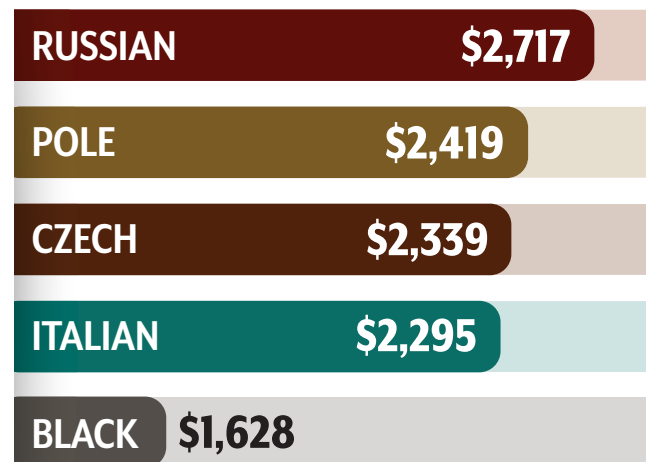
"One reason for preferring Negro to white labor on plantations is the inability of the Negro to make or enforce demands for a just statement or any statement at all. He may hope for protection, justice, honesty from his landlord, but he cannot demand them. There is no force to back up a

demand, neither the law, the vote nor public opinion... Even the most fair and most just of the Whites are prone to accept the dishonest landlord as part of the system," wrote anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker.¹⁰³

Elsewhere in the country, the Great Migration, as discussed in detail in Chapter 1 and 5, brought African Americans from the South to the North, Midwest, and West. "Blacks, though native born, were arriving as the poorest people from the poorest section of the country with the least access to the worst education[.]" wrote Wilkerson.¹⁰⁴ Largely excluded even from the better paying jobs in even the menial occupations, Black workers in the North and West earned the least money when compared with white recent immigrants at the time.¹⁰⁵ In 1950, African Americans in these regions had an annual income of \$1,628.¹⁰⁶ Italian immigrants made \$2,295, Czechs made \$2,339, Poles made \$2,419, and Russians made \$2,717.¹⁰⁷

ANNUAL INCOME DURING GREAT MIGRATION

White immigrant workers verses Black workers



Until well into the 20th century, Black women could mostly only find work as domestic servants for white employers.¹⁰⁸ Following the Civil War, new career opportunities opened up for women in the fields of teaching and nursing.¹⁰⁹ Black women who entered these professions could only work in segregated facilities.¹¹⁰ A few decades later, private employers hired mostly white women as receptionists, department store clerks, and telephone and machine operators.¹¹¹ Black women took over household work as white women, including white immigrant women, moved into these better paying jobs with set work hours.¹¹²

In both the North and the South, Black female labor participation rates were double those of American-born white women and triple those of immigrant women. During the first half of the 20th century, the number of white female domestic workers fell from 1.3 million to 542,000, while Black women went from accounting for

During the first half of the 20th century, the number of white female domestic workers fell from 1.3 million to 542,000, while Black women went from accounting for 30 percent of household workers around 1900 to about 60 percent of household workers at the end of World War II. Some Black women working as servants lived in their employer's homes and were on call 24 hours a day.

30 percent of household workers around 1900 to about 60 percent of household workers at the end of World War II.¹¹³ Some Black women working as servants lived in their employer's homes and were on call 24 hours a day.¹¹⁴ Other Black women resorted to what was colloquially referred to as “slave markets,” where they gathered on street corners early in the morning to wait for white housewives to bid on them for as little as fifteen cents an hour.¹¹⁵ One woman at a Chicago “slave market” reported that she made 50 cents a day—the same money as she would earned for picking cotton in the field.¹¹⁶

In each of these eras, and through to the present, civil courts did not protect African Americans to the same degree as white Americans. However, there were exceptions. One scholar has found evidence that African Americans used civil courts in one district in Mississippi before the Civil War to vindicate their rights in claims over contracts and wages, and found that in many instances these litigants won their cases.¹¹⁷

But discrimination remained built into the law. Several states, including California, prohibited Black persons from testifying against those who were white.¹¹⁸ African

Americans additionally faced *de jure* and then *de facto* exclusion from juries.¹¹⁹ Some states explicitly banned African Americans from jury service, while others tied jury service to voting, which was then limited to white men.¹²⁰ Exclusion continued by other means after the Supreme Court in 1879 ruled that a West Virginia statute limiting jury service to white men violated the Fourteenth Amendment.¹²¹ Other forms of discrimination, including segregation, also limited access to justice.¹²²

Over time, in addition to the racial terror discussed in Chapter 3 and the political disenfranchisement discussed in Chapter 4, the civil court system also contributed to a failure to protect African Americans against the theft or government taking of property, which often has been a source of income and sustenance. For example, in 1856, an enslaver, Thomas Howlett, directed that his plantation be sold and the proceeds given to his enslaved African American workers, who were to be freed upon his death.¹²³ Two courts upheld Howlett's will over the challenges of Howlett's white relatives, but the formerly enslaved workers never received the proceeds from the plantation sale.¹²⁴

In another example, in 1964, Alabama sued two cousins, Lemon Williams and Lawrence Hudson, claiming that the 40-acre farm that the family had owned and operated since 1874 belonged to the state.¹²⁵ A state court judge ordered Lemon Williams and Lawrence Hudson off the land, though, in the same courthouse, investigating journalists found tax and property records showing that the family owned the farm.¹²⁶

Barriers to justice, including those outlined above and in Chapter 11, continue for African Americans today. While the relationship between race and the civil justice system is under-researched, studies thus far indicate that African Americans under-utilize the civil justice system, including in the area of labor and employment. In a 2016 study conducted by legal scholar and professor Sara Sternberg Greene of low-income minority group attitudes toward the civil justice system, African American respondents were less likely than white American respondents to have considered seeking help for their civil legal issues, largely because of distrust in the legal system.¹²⁷ This lack of trust often stems from prior negative experiences.¹²⁸ Black people are more likely than white people to experience biased treatment in the judicial system, and individuals who experience discrimination are more likely to anticipate and perceive discrimination across institutional contexts.¹²⁹ There is also evidence

that African Americans are reluctant to complain when they perceive discrimination or experience other grievances.¹³⁰ Additionally, social science research shows that litigants may find their attorneys through their professional networks, and African Americans have more limited professional networks.¹³¹

Underutilization of the civil justice system and lack of access to justice have particular impact in the area of labor and employment. African Americans hold a significant share of low-wage jobs, in sectors in which wage theft is prevalent, and yet the available evidence indicates that African Americans rarely bring wage theft claims.¹³² African Americans are more likely than white Americans to file a discrimination lawsuit without a lawyer.¹³³ A 2010 study found that African Americans are half as likely as white Americans to have a lawyer.¹³⁴ In general, less than five percent of worker discrimination claims go to trial and result in a ruling for the plaintiff,¹³⁵ and self-represented litigants are significantly less likely to achieve a favorable outcome in a discrimination suit.¹³⁶

Exclusion from Unions

Legal segregation laws not only confined Black workers in the South, but also impacted the economy of the entire country.¹³⁷ Segregation pitted workers of different races against one another, resulting in continued

around World War II, as unions grew at the rate of approximately one million workers per year.¹⁴¹

Prior to World War II, many unions refused to accept Black people as members.¹⁴² Since before the Civil War, white workers have claimed that Black workers were not suited to skilled labor in order to avoid competition for jobs.¹⁴³ In the North, companies and unions did not hire Black workers because white workers refused to work beside them, and for the sake of morale, the companies and unions would not force the issue.¹⁴⁴ White workers sometimes walked off the job to force their employers to rid their workplace of Black employees.¹⁴⁵

Throughout the nineteenth century trade unions organized by white workers typically excluded Black workers; in 1902, Black workers scarcely made up three percent of members in unions.¹⁴⁶ In response to exclusion, Black workers sometimes formed their own unions.¹⁴⁷ For example, in 1869, Black delegates attended the Colored National Labor Union convention in Washington, D.C., which was a counterpart to the white National Labor Union.¹⁴⁸

Government action sometimes supported labor unions' discrimination against Black workers.¹⁴⁹ For example, when the city of St. Louis built a segregated hospital for Black patients, white union members protested the hiring of a single Black tile setter.¹⁵⁰ The city fired the contractor and committed not to hire any contractor that employed Black workers.¹⁵¹

Legal segregation both reflected and intensified racial tension between workers. Segregation made contact between Black and white workers almost impossible, ensuring that Black and white workers would inhabit different worlds and making labor organizing across racial lines more dangerous and less likely to occur.¹⁵² Legal segregation not only held down the wages of Black working-class Americans, it also

prevented working class white workers from demanding higher pay, as long as Black workers could always be forced to work for less.¹⁵³

The American Federation of Labor, founded in 1886 and survived today by the AFL-CIO, initially strived for racial equality¹⁵⁴ as leaders recognized the value of a united working class¹⁵⁵ However, legal segregation in the South

Prior to World War II, many unions refused to accept Black people as members. Since before the Civil War, white workers have claimed that Black workers were not suited to skilled labor in order to avoid competition for jobs. In the North, companies and unions did not hire Black workers because white workers refused to work beside them, and for the sake of morale, the companies and unions would not force the issue. White workers sometimes walked off the job to force their employers to rid their workplace of Black employees.

suppression of opportunity for Black workers and less collective power for workers of all races.¹³⁸ Unions have a lengthy history in the United States as craftsmen have long joined together to solve problems related to their craft.¹³⁹ In the 18th century, strikes, labor organizing, and collective bargaining developed at the same time, and the first authenticated strike was called in 1786 by Philadelphia printers.¹⁴⁰ Unions reached their peak

proved to be too influential and federation leadership allowed local affiliates to exclude Black workers.¹⁵⁶

Black workers protested exclusion throughout the 1920s¹⁵⁷ and 1930s.¹⁵⁸ Federation's leaders' formal response was that the Federation did not discriminate, "human nature cannot be altered," and Black individuals ought to be grateful for what the Federation had done for them.¹⁵⁹

Scholars have argued that legal segregation discouraged white and Black workers from working together for better working conditions and fostered a racial division that served the interests of southern planters and industrialists.¹⁶⁰ For example, beginning in the 1880s, Black and white tenant farmers and sharecroppers began to join biracial political parties to challenge the political and business elite of the South.¹⁶¹ Scholars such as Jacqueline Jones, who testified before the Task Force, have argued that legal segregation and private racial discrimination were used to disrupt this burgeoning biracial political force.¹⁶²

For example, before the Civil War, Black women, men, and children worked in the South. After the war, southern textile-mill owners reserved those jobs for white families, and advertised hazardous mill work as a welcome escape from sharecropping.¹⁶³ This drove a wedge between the Black and white rural poor.¹⁶⁴

Exclusion from Occupational Licenses

Unions also played a part in how states excluded Black workers from skilled, higher paying jobs through what eventually became state licensure laws. A license from a state entity is required to practice some professions and trades, like electricians and doctors.¹⁶⁵ State, and sometimes local, governments, have designed these licensing requirements so that Black workers are less likely to qualify, which has intensified the impact of discrimination by private employers and unions.¹⁶⁶

State licensure systems worked in parallel to exclusion by unions and professional societies¹⁶⁷ in a way that has been described by scholars as "particularly effective" in excluding Black workers from skilled, higher paid jobs.¹⁶⁸ White craft unions implemented unfair tests, conducted exclusively by white examiners to exclude qualified Black workers.¹⁶⁹

For example, across the country from the late 1890s through the late 1930s, state laws allowed local mayors or city councils to appoint the members of the licensing board for plumbers.¹⁷⁰ This meant that the local plumbers' unions could exert significant influence over who sat on the licensing board.¹⁷¹ From there, the boards

erected barriers to avoid licensing Black plumbers, such as requiring a union apprenticeship—from which Black individuals were banned—before an applicant could even qualify to take a licensing exam.¹⁷² Other barriers included a high school diploma, which was more difficult for Black workers due to education discrimination (as discussed in Chapter 6, *Separate and Unequal Education*), passing a personal interview conducted by a white person, or sometimes, even false test scores.¹⁷³

COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES



"Housekeeper Pushing Young Girl on Toy Cart on Sidewalk, Port Gibson, Mississippi" (1940)

These methods, which were used by other professions as well,¹⁷⁴ did not ban Black workers outright. Because these statutes were outwardly neutral, courts have repeatedly found that they were constitutional without questioning the discriminatory motives and impact.¹⁷⁵ A few courts recognized the dangers of allowing licensing boards to control entry into the profession, but not enough to stem the tide.¹⁷⁶

Government support made the discrimination worse. In Virginia, a white plumber explained his state's law requiring members of the plumber's union be part of the licensing board: [T]he Negro is a factor in this section, and I believe the enclosed Virginia state plumbing law will entirely eliminate him and the impostor from following our craft."¹⁷⁷ By 1924, 24 states and Puerto Rico had similar laws in place.¹⁷⁸

And these laws were effective.¹⁷⁹ In 1973, Montgomery County, Alabama had only one licensed Black plumber, who, despite having spent four years studying the trade, was told he failed the local exam each time he took it. He was not allowed to see his exam papers or told what his score was. He was finally able to obtain a local license after passing the state master plumber's exam.¹⁸⁰

Charlotte, North Carolina, similarly had only one Black plumber in 1968, and in Maryland in 1953, only two of

the 3,200 licensed plumbers were Black.¹⁸¹ The impact of these exclusionary efforts is still felt today: In 2021, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that 87.2 percent of plumbers are white and only 7.1 percent are Black.¹⁸²

The use of licensure to regulate jobs increased dramatically after the 1950s, when only five percent of professions required licensure in the United States.¹⁸³ In 2018, roughly 21.8 percent of professions required licensure.¹⁸⁴ Some of the reasons for this increase include trying to professionalize and legitimize certain jobs and an overall growth of fields that have historically required licensure.¹⁸⁵

Regardless of the reason, one result of the growth is that discriminatory licensing standards have become more widespread. Even if these standards did not intend to exclude Black workers, the result was exclusion. One such method today is the bans on licensure for people with criminal records.

As discussed in Chapter 12, Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect, state and federal governments have criminalized African Americans throughout our nation's history, resulting in African Americans being more likely to have criminal records without necessarily committing crimes at higher rates than other races or ethnicities.¹⁸⁶ Race discrimination and disproportionality in the criminal justice system thus combine with laws like those excluding persons with criminal justice system involvement from licensure to close off avenues for work.

It is difficult for people with criminal records, who are disproportionately Black, to find jobs, even if their records are old or have little to do with the job, or if they have demonstrated rehabilitation.¹⁸⁷ When a license is required those challenges can become insurmountable. One 2016 study showed that there were 27,254 state occupational licensing restrictions against people with criminal records nationwide, 12,669 of which involve restrictions on licensure for people with any type of felony conviction and 6,372 of which involve restrictions for people with misdemeanor convictions.¹⁸⁸ 19,786 licensure restrictions were lifetime bans and 11,338 were mandatory and allowed no discretion by the board.¹⁸⁹ In some instances, upon release, formerly incarcerated persons cannot work in the very professions for which prison job rehabilitation programs trained them.¹⁹⁰ For example, while many prisons provide training programs

on barbering, laws in every state prevent a formerly incarcerated person from working as a barber.¹⁹¹

Recently, efforts have begun to reform these criminal record exclusions.¹⁹² Several states have now passed laws to revise licensing restrictions related to people's criminal records.¹⁹³ But thousands of restrictions still remain. A database funded by the United States Department of Justice shows that there are currently 12,989 consequences of having a criminal record for various licenses nationwide.¹⁹⁴

Discrimination in Promotion and Pay

During World War I, Black workers began to make headway in previously white workplaces and industries. Black men took blue collar jobs previously held by immigrants who had shifted employment to the war effort; Black women took jobs previously held by white women and boys.¹⁹⁵ Black workers might earn 300 percent more doing industrial labor in the North than they earned doing agricultural labor in the South.¹⁹⁶ As discussed in Chapters 1 and 5, these job opportunities in the North and West led approximately three million African Americans to migrate from the South between World War I and World War II, and another five million to move between 1940 and 1980.¹⁹⁷

Wherever they landed in the North, the Midwest, or the West, African Americans found more discrimination, which translated into racial job ceilings, pay differentials, and segregation by job type.¹⁹⁸ For example, Ford Motor Company refused to employ Black workers at a level above general labor outside of the Detroit area, and in the Chicago stockyards Black workers were excluded from jobs as foremen, as they were not permitted to supervise white workers.¹⁹⁹

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In the urban industrial South, Black workers were categorized in lower-level jobs “helping” white workers, who would simply supervise work while taking home the higher wage.²⁰⁰ One Black employee at the Firestone Company's Memphis plant described how: “You'd be classified as a ‘helper,’ but you'd be doing all the work.

COURTESY OF KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GAMMA-KEYSTONE VIA GETTY IMAGES



Building site with whites on one side and African Americans on the other. (c. 1950)

The white man would get the high wage ...[but] he'd just be sittin' there watchin'."²⁰¹ As a result, Black workers were penalized both with lower wages and fewer advancement opportunities.

Black workers were often only hired in jobs that were far more physically dangerous.²⁰² For example, Ford Motor Company's foundry, where many Black workers were employed, had a lack of safety equipment, poor ventilation, and management-induced speed-ups that lead to worker injury and death.²⁰³ One foundry worker described others finished a shift "so matted and covered with oil and dirt that no skin showed...we could [only] tell a friend by his voice."²⁰⁴

This pattern continued across manufacturing sectors for decades. Black workers were limited to lower-paying categories, barred from supervisory roles, and denied opportunities for advancement. For example, by 1970, one-fifth of autoworkers in Detroit were Black, but Black workers remained all but completely excluded from higher-level positions.²⁰⁵

In 1968, Black autoworkers formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement to protest racism at the plant. A writer in the organization's newsletter laid out the stark segregation and discrimination then present at the plant:

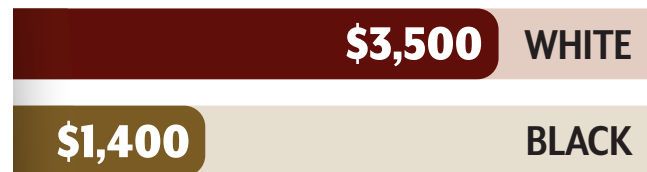
1. "95% of all foremen in the plants are white;
2. 99% of all the general foremen are white;
3. 100% of all plant superintendents are white;
4. 90% of all skilled tradesmen are white;

5. 90% of all apprentices are white; (6)...systematically all of the easier jobs are held by whites;
6. Whenever whites are on harder jobs they have helpers;
7. When Black workers miss a day they are required to bring 2 doctors' excuses as to why they missed work;
8. ...seniority is also a racist concept, since Black workers were systematically denied employment for years at the plant."²⁰⁶

This trend was not limited to manufacturing. In 1950, salaries of college-educated workers, in both the North and South, were significantly lower for African Americans across industries. For example, Black managers averaged an annual salary of around \$1,400, while white managers averaged closer to \$3,500.²⁰⁷ In today's dollars, this translates to a monthly salary of approximately \$1,396 for Black managers and \$3,489 for white managers.²⁰⁸ Discrepancies like this existed in professional, teaching, farming, clerical, sales, and skilled technician occupations as well.²⁰⁹

SALARY OF COLLEGE EDUCATED WORKERS

By Race in 1950



Exclusion from New Deal Protections

In the 1930s, the federal government under President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to remake the relationship between employer and employees.²¹⁰ The New Deal transformed American society and set in motion the creation of the middle class²¹¹—but for white Americans.²¹² The New Deal reshaped the role of the federal government in providing for American citizens.²¹³ Programs funded under the New Deal infused a huge amount of capital into the economy. Two researchers have estimated that the federal government spent almost \$27 billion on various New Deal public works programs between 1933 and 1943.²¹⁴

Southern Democrats, who rose to power by preventing African Americans from voting through a combination of violence and voter suppression laws, forced President Roosevelt essentially to exclude African Americans from New Deal programs and legislation.²¹⁵ While northern liberals at the time would not support explicitly racist language in the programs and statutes, the Southern

Democrats' racist aim was accomplished in the structure of the programs themselves.²¹⁶ In order to pass numerous New Deal laws, President Roosevelt compromised with the Southern Democrats to ensure their votes by largely excluding jobs mostly held by African Americans from the New Deal's protections like unemployment insurance, minimum wages, equalized bargaining power, or anti-child labor laws.²¹⁷ Agricultural and domestic-service workers, and anyone with seasonal or part-time jobs, were excluded from these benefits.²¹⁸ Approximately 85 percent of all Black workers in the United States at the time were excluded,²¹⁹ although some historians disagree that federal lawmakers intended to discriminate against African Americans.²²⁰

~85% of African American workers



were **excluded** from New Deal programs

Congress also compromised to allow New Deal programs to be administered at the local level.²²¹ By the design of the Southern Democrats in Congress, southern local white government officials were in control of local relief efforts—individuals who held the view that African Americans should not receive relief of any kind if white southerners had laundry to be done or cotton to be picked.²²² While Black northerners received some governmental jobs and assistance, Black southerners did not.²²³

The following is a non-exhaustive list of labor-related New Deal laws and programs and the ways in which they have discriminated against African Americans. Many of the New Deal laws created the foundational structures that continue to provide Americans with a social safety net today.

National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933

The National Industrial Recovery Act created the National Recovery Agency, which established industry-specific minimum wages and employment protections. The National Recovery Agency eventually enacted over 540 codes providing for minimum wages and maximum hours in different industries.²²⁴

Many employers advocated for explicitly racist codes before the agency—one argued that Black workers made “a much better workman and a much better citizen,

insofar as the South is concerned, when he is not paid the highest wage.”²²⁵ While explicit race-based codes were not adopted, the structure of geographic and occupational classifications in the codes often accomplished the same goal. An industry code would classify a state as either “Northern” or “Southern” for the purpose of setting a minimum wage, with “Southern” states often having a lower minimum.²²⁶ And different occupations, governed by different codes, had different minimum wages. One example demonstrates how the government used both geographic and occupational classifications and exclusions to pay Black workers less and provide them fewer protections. Delaware was classified as being “Northern”—and thus subject to a higher minimum wage—for 449 industry codes, but was classified as being “Southern”—and thus subject to a lower minimum wage—for the fertilizer industry, where Black workers made up 90 percent of the industry.²²⁷ John P. Davis, in a speech to the 25th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1934 stated: “[T]he one common denominator in all these variations is the presence or absence of Negro labor. Where most workers in a given industry are Negro, that section is called South and inflicted with low wage rates. Where Negroes are negligible, the procedure is reversed.”²²⁸

The purpose of the occupational and geographic differentials in the wage codes was clear to those involved in implementing the National Industrial Recovery Act at the time. The Executive Director of the National Recovery Agency's Labor Advisory Board wrote in 1934: “[T]o the degree the Southern rate is a rate for Negroes, it is a relic of slavery and should be eliminated.”²²⁹ That same year, Ira De A. Reid, of the National Urban League, wrote in the newspaper the Chicago Defender: “the Negro's initial attitude towards the national recovery act is best reflected in the interpretation of initials given by one observer who called it ‘Negro Riddance Act.’”²³⁰

National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Wagner Act)

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA or Wagner Act), proposed by Senator Robert Wagner, dramatically increased the power of organized labor by allowing officially certified unions in certain sectors the right to negotiate on behalf of *all* employees, if supported by a majority of workers.²³¹ The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the agency designated to administer the law, was able to hold hearings and resolve disputes involving union representation.

The NLRA harmed African Americans by purposefully allowing unions to discriminate based on race and by failing to cover sectors of the economy that mostly

employed African Americans.²³² This undermined the bargaining power of Black workers and their ability to participate in the newly-recovering economy for decades.²³³

Labor unions have played a critical role in the development of American society and the day-to-day experience of the American worker. During and after the New Deal, workers' and employers' power was uniquely balanced, which enabled an unprecedented improvement in the condition of the working class in America, the benefits of which continue to be seen today.²³⁴ For example, workers with strong unions have been able to set industry standards for wages and benefits that help all workers, both union and nonunion.²³⁵ "Union workers are more likely to be covered by employer-provided health insurance. More than nine in 10 workers covered by a union contract (94%) have access to employer-sponsored health benefits, compared with just 68 percent of nonunion workers."²³⁶ As another example, union workers also have greater access to paid sick days. Nine in 10 workers covered by a union contract (91 percent) have access to paid sick days, compared with 73 percent of nonunion workers.²³⁷

While Black leaders proposed amendments to the NLRA to prohibit government certification of a union that did not allow Black workers to join and have all rights, the American Federation of Labor, the principal white-dominated federation of craft unions, opposed this protection due to its desire to eliminate competition from Black workers.²³⁸ The American Federation of Labor and Southern Democrats won, and the final law protected the bargaining rights of unions with racist membership policies. This gave white labor organizers the power to exclude Black workers from contract negotiations and implement their racist views in the union contracts, protected by the federal government.²³⁹

The final law also excluded agricultural and domestic workers, another compromise to the Southern Democrats.²⁴⁰

Federal law essentially allowed unions to ignore and discriminate against Black workers by protecting segregated unions. Unions refused to admit Black workers or afford them the privileges of membership, segregated Black workers into less-skilled jobs, and used collective bargaining rights to force employers to replace Black workers with white workers, while the NLRB, the

federal agency charged with administering the NLRA, stood out of the way.²⁴¹ For example, the NLRB-certified Building Service Employees Union in New York forced Manhattan hotels, restaurants, and offices to replace Black elevator operators and restaurant workers with white employees, and the federal agency took no action in response.²⁴²

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court held that unions were obligated to represent their members without discriminating on the basis of race, but did not require them to eliminate racial segregation in their membership or provide Black union members with a mechanism for enforcing their civil rights.²⁴³

Only in 1964 did the federal agency finally decide that it could revoke a union's government certificate due to its racial segregation.²⁴⁴ Even then, individual Black workers still had limited recourse against racist union leadership. Employees subject to a racist union could not deal directly with their employer instead.²⁴⁵ Additionally, even after the NLRB stopped certifying whites-only unions, seniority rules meant that Black workers would need years to secure wages comparable to those of white workers.²⁴⁶

Federal law essentially allowed unions to ignore Black workers by maintaining segregated unions, segregating Black workers into less-skilled jobs, locking them out of contract negotiations, and using collective bargaining rights to force employers to replace Black workers with white workers.

Social Security Act of 1935

The Social Security Act of 1935 created old-age and unemployment benefits to help seniors and those out of work. This landmark law followed the same pattern as the rest of the New Deal legislation in limiting how its benefits applied to African Americans through occupational carve outs for agricultural and domestic labor, and allowing local rather than federal administration,²⁴⁷ although some historians dispute the allegation that Congress acted with racist intent in making these carve outs.²⁴⁸ The Social Security Act created several programs that remain central to the government's efforts to ensure some minimal level of financial stability, including retirement insurance, unemployment insurance, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children programs.²⁴⁹

During the debate over the Social Security Act, Congress acknowledged the preponderance of Black workers in the agricultural and domestic labor sectors, but excluded these occupations despite accusations of racism.²⁵⁰ Charles H. Houston testified on behalf of the NAACP: “In these States, where your Negro population is heaviest, you will find the majority of Negroes engaged either in farming or else in domestic service, so that, unless we have some provisions which will expressly extend the provisions of the bill to include domestic servants and agricultural workers, I submit that the bill is inadequate . . .”²⁵¹

African Americans advocated for a nondiscrimination provision in the statute as protection from the racist local administration of previous New Deal relief statutes. For example, one activist pointed out that in the local administration of past emergency measures “there ha[d] been repeated, wide-spread, and continued discrimination on account of race or color as a result of which Negro men, women, and children did not share equitably and fairly in the distribution of the benefits accruing from the expenditure of such Federal Funds.”²⁵² Congress did not include any such provision in order to secure the support of Southern Democrats.

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Nine-year-old Boy receiving twenty-cents for Hamper of Beans he picked for Contract Farmer, Homestead, Florida. (1939)

Charles H. Houston expressed the view of many African Americans: “If we follow the history of the workmen’s compensation acts, we know that two great classes of workers who will be excluded from the benefit of unemployment insurance; they are agricultural workers and

domestic workers. Again, 3 out of every 5 Negro workers drop through the holes of the sieve.”²⁵³

Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938

The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA), which is still in force today, provides the federal minimum

Like other New Deal laws, the Fair Labor Standards Act excluded agriculture and domestic services from its labor protections. Because of these exclusions, the FLSA essentially outlawed white child labor and continued to allow Black child labor, because most white children worked in industrial settings and most Black children in agricultural worked.

wage, the maximum number of working hours before overtime pay is required, and the limits on child labor. Like other New Deal laws, in order to appease Southern Democrats, the law purposefully excluded certain occupational categories, like agriculture and domestic services, preventing the majority of African Americans from benefiting from the law’s protections.²⁵⁴ Because of these exclusions, the FLSA essentially outlawed child labor in industrial settings, where most white children worked at the time, and allowed child labor in agricultural and domestic work, where most Black children worked.²⁵⁵

Members of Congress were clear about the racist intent. For example, Florida Representative J. Mark Wilcox explicitly stated: “You cannot put the Negro and the white man on the same basis and get away with it. Not only would such a situation result in grave social and racial conflicts but it would also result in throwing the Negro out of employment and in making him a public charge. There just is not any sense in intensifying this racial problem in the South, and this bill cannot help but produce such a result.”²⁵⁶

Congressman Cox of Georgia specifically objected to the possibility of equal wages because of the impact it would have on relieving the economic subjugation of African Americans central to the social organization of the South, stating the FLSA “will, in destroying State sovereignty and local self-determination, render easier the elimination and disappearance of racial and social distinctions.”²⁵⁷ As with other New Deal legislation, Congress included the agricultural and domestic service exemptions in order to secure the support from Southern Democrats needed to pass the legislation at all.²⁵⁸

Thus, when the FLSA passed without applying to agricultural or domestic workers, or to employers engaged in intrastate commerce such as service workers, it achieved the explicit aims of the drafting Congress. Like the other New Deal legislation, it accomplished the withholding of protections from many African Americans through these “race-neutral” occupational exclusions. These carve outs remained until the 1970s, and agricultural workers are still excluded from overtime protections.²⁵⁹

As originally enacted, the FLSA did not address pay for tipped workers.²⁶⁰ While tipping prior to the Civil War had been frowned upon by many as an aristocratic, European practice incompatible with American democracy, after the war many restaurants and rail operators embraced tipping as a means of hiring newly freed African Americans without actually paying them—these workers were forced to labor for tips alone.²⁶¹ Tipping thus kept Black workers in an economically and socially subordinate position.²⁶²

Later the Supreme Court held that employers could count workers’ tips toward their wages when calculating whether a worker was receiving minimum wage.²⁶³ Employers did not need to pay their employees at all as long as workers’ income from tips met or exceeded the established federal minimum wage.²⁶⁴ Congress did not require a base wage for tipped employees until 1966.²⁶⁵ Set then as fifty percent of the federal minimum wage,

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) provided funding for state and local government programs in public works and the arts, and provided more than 20 million jobs. From 1935 to 1941 fewer than 20 percent of all WPA workers were women and only about three percent were Black women. Projects to train women in domestic skills were often explicitly limited to only white women.

the tipped federal hourly minimum cash wage stands today at \$2.13, where it has been for more than a quarter century.²⁶⁶ The employer must make up the difference between this amount and the federal minimum hourly wage of \$7.25 only if the employee’s tips combined with the direct wages of at least \$2.13 per hour do not equal the federal minimum hourly wage.²⁶⁷

Today’s tipped wage system carries the legacy of slavery. While Black workers no longer are over-represented in the tipped workforce, studies of the restaurant industry have revealed that diners consistently tip Black servers less than white servers, regardless of service quality.²⁶⁸ And 17

percent of tipped working people of color live in poverty, compared to less than 13 percent of all tip workers.²⁶⁹

Federal Emergency Relief Administration (1933 to 1935) and Works Progress Administration (1935 to 1941)

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) provided funding for state and local government programs in public works and the arts, and provided more than 20 million jobs.²⁷⁰ But the program disproportionately spent its funds on unemployed white workers, frequently refusing to hire Black workers for anything except unskilled work, and paying less than the officially stipulated wage.²⁷¹ One local administrator stated that “he had to tailor relief ...to accommodate the demands of southern plantation owners for cheap farm labor by curtailing [the level of] relief payments to agricultural laborers and sharecroppers.”²⁷²

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) replaced FERA in 1935, but continued its racist and often sexist practices. For example, driven by the presumption that men were the primary earners and most in need of jobs among needy families, most projects created heavy construction-type work for men, ignoring women’s wage needs and limiting their opportunities.²⁷³ From 1935 to 1941 fewer than 20 percent of all WPA workers were women and only about three percent were Black women.²⁷⁴ Projects to train women in domestic skills were

often explicitly limited to only white women.²⁷⁵ Government officials specifically pushed Black workers out of WPA jobs when local conditions required cheap agricultural labor. In Oklahoma, a WPA official closed a Black women’s work project when there was a large cotton crop, writing to Washington, D.C.: “these women are perfectly able to do this kind of work and there is plenty of work to do.”²⁷⁶

Civilian Conservation Corps (1933 to 1942)

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a public works program focused on conservation projects, employed over 2.5 million men during its tenure—Black and white women were completely excluded—just 10 percent of whom were Black men.²⁷⁷ While this was somewhat similar to the percentage of African Americans in the population at large, the conditions of the CCC replicated the racist government intervention seen in other programs, with explicitly limited participation numbers, official segregation at work camps, and with Black workers restricted to the least-desirable unskilled jobs.²⁷⁸ For example, in Georgia, local selection agents refused to

enroll a single Black applicant for almost a year, and only relented and enrolled a token number of African Americans after federal agents threatened to withhold the state's entire allotment of funds.²⁷⁹

Tennessee Valley Authority

The Tennessee Valley Authority was a public utility created by the federal government to bring jobs and development to an area hit especially hard in the Depression. The project included construction, conservation, and social service jobs, and it remains one of the largest utilities in the country today.²⁸⁰ It too continued the pattern of the other government works programs. Black workers were assigned to work separately on construction projects, and were only allowed to work at all if there were enough Black workers to make up a full segregated crew.²⁸¹ Black workers were also denied foreman or supervisory roles.²⁸²

COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES



Tennessee Valley Authority, Fontana Dam, North Carolina. "Negro tent camp." (1942)

Agricultural Adjustment Administration

The federal government created the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) in 1933 to increase agricultural prices by paying farmers to grow fewer crops.²⁸³ The administration of the AAA harmed Black workers in three specific ways.

First, the program reduced crop planting. For example, the agency limited the amount of land dedicated to cotton farming, but allowed each white landowner to decide *which* acres to stop cultivating, and most often they chose those worked by Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers.²⁸⁴

Second, landowners received federal payments, but the federal administration allowed white landowners to act as "trustees" for their Black tenants without oversight from the AAA.²⁸⁵ Often, landowners never paid their Black tenants.²⁸⁶

Third, the AAA allowed disputes over payments to be brought to local elected county committees, and not

a single Black farmer served on a county committee throughout the South.²⁸⁷ The county committees, composed of white landlords and white tenants, ruled against Black tenants and directed the vast majority of benefits for the program to white farm owners.²⁸⁸ In 1934, Ira De A. Reid of the National Urban League said that "[s]o far as the Negroes in the South are concerned the AAA [and other New Deal Agencies] might just as well be administered by the Ku Klux Klan."²⁸⁹

Fair Employment Practices Committee

Faced with enormous activist pressure, President Roosevelt during World War II attempted to protect Black workers, but these actions were temporary and did not have serious enforcement powers. In the lead up to World War II, civil rights activists demanded desegregation of the defense industry. Following a 1941 meeting of civil rights groups from across the country, activists formed the March on Washington Movement with the aim of using mass protest to desegregate the military and industrial workplaces that were central to the war effort.²⁹⁰ Soon the movement had spread across the country, with local chapters from San Francisco to Washington, D.C.²⁹¹

By June 1941, 100,000 or more Black workers from across the country were expected to march on the nation's capital, alarming President Roosevelt at the prospect of a mass protest in Washington, D.C. on the eve of the country's entry into war.²⁹² In response, he issued Executive Order 8802, which both banned discrimination on the basis of race in government employment, defense industries, and training programs and created the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to investigate and address complaints of race discrimination.²⁹³ While a step forward, FEPC had power over only public-financed wartime industries, and it did not have any real enforcement power. It was only able to issue recommendations, including the cancellation of defense contracts in cases of persistent discrimination.²⁹⁴

FEPC's impact varied around the country. From March 1942 to 1944, Black employment in war-production jobs rose from under three percent to over eight percent, and some Black workers found jobs as skilled labor in manufacturing and minor managerial roles.²⁹⁵ The most progress was made in places where Black activists, progressive unions, and local civil rights organizations worked together with FEPC investigations to pressure for change. In St. Louis, a large March on Washington Movement chapter agitated to reinstate Black workers at a local arms plant, raise wages, and increase hiring of Black women. The organization used its resources to file and pursue FEPC complaints, justifying the

establishment of a regional office to address the concerns of Black workers, but pursued this official action hand-in-hand with mass rallies to general grassroots support.²⁹⁶

Under the weak enforcement system, other geographic areas were less successful. Both public officials and private employers in several southern cities refused to provide integrated defense employment, and the federal government did not force action.²⁹⁷ FEPC had no mechanism to act against Alabama Governor Frank Dixon, who supported employment of Black war workers only within the bounds of the segregationist system already in place in the southern states.²⁹⁸ FEPC disbanded in 1946 as the war ended, thus ending a temporary attempt of limited effectiveness to address labor discrimination.²⁹⁹

Gains and Limitations of the Civil Rights Acts

Congress passed a series of civil rights laws in the 1960s prohibiting discrimination in employment, voting, and housing. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.³⁰⁰

Title VII created strong protection for Black workers throughout the country, making it illegal for an employer to (1) fail to hire or discriminate against a worker, or (2) limit job opportunities because of that worker's "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin."³⁰¹

The law protects workers against current racial discrimination and segregation practices, but does not provide a way to right past wrongs.³⁰² It exempts "bona fide" seniority systems and professionally developed ability tests.³⁰³ The former are also known as "last hired, first fired" systems, and the latter include tests developed as part of an application process, such as for firefighters, even though these can be employed in a discriminatory manner.³⁰⁴ Strict adherence to a seniority system means that "last hired" Black workers, who more recently moved into positions now that racist discrimination is outlawed, will be "first fired," under the systems allowed by the law.³⁰⁵ In 1977, the Supreme Court held that Title VII did not outlaw these seniority systems even when they discriminate against Black workers, stating that a seniority policy "does not become unlawful under Title VII simply because it may perpetuate pre-Act discrimination."³⁰⁶

Title VII is limited in other ways as well. The Supreme Court also drew a line between intentional and unintentional discrimination.³⁰⁷ Currently, Title VII protects an employee if they can show that their employer intended to discriminate against them,³⁰⁸ which can be difficult to prove. If the employee cannot prove their employer's racist intentions, Title VII protects them only if the challenged employment practice is not "job related" or not "consistent with business necessity."³⁰⁹ For example, in *Griggs v. Duke Power Company*, the defendant company re-

Between 1964 and the late 1970s, the federal government enacted affirmative action programs which increased the number of minority groups in government contracting work until the Supreme Court and the Reagan Administration effectively ended federal affirmative action in the 1980s.

quired a high school diploma or passing an intelligence test for certain jobs. Neither requirement was related to successful job performance, and both requirements disqualified Black applicants at a substantially higher rate than white applicants.³¹⁰ The requirements did not fulfill a genuine business need and was thus prohibited by the Act.³¹¹ In 1965, Congress formed a federal agency called the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission to enforce Title VII and other employment statutes and regulations. The commission, which continues today, covers all industries, and not just wartime industries, like its predecessor, the Fair Employment Practices Committee.³¹² It also has enforcement powers to assess penalties and issue orders, instead of only making recommendations.³¹³ However, the agency has been chronically underfunded, which has limited its ability to widely enforce federal protections against racial discrimination in a large number of cases.³¹⁴ The agency's staff numbers decreased from 3,390 to 1,968 between 1980 and 2018 despite the U.S. population increasing by more than 44 percent in that time.³¹⁵

Limits of Affirmative Action

As the Civil Rights Acts were only forward-looking, between 1964 and the late 1970s, the federal government enacted affirmative action programs intended to address the effects of past racist discrimination and segregation.³¹⁶ These programs increased the number of underrepresented groups in government contracting work until the Supreme Court and the Reagan

Administration in the 1980s effectively brought many federal affirmative action programs to an end.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11246, which required government contractors to employ affirmative action to expand opportunities for underrepresented groups and established the Office of Federal Contract Compliance to enforce the order.³¹⁷ In 1972, the Nixon Administration approved the “Philadelphia Plan,” which instituted numerical goals and timetables for the integration of Black and other racial minority workers into federal contracts.³¹⁸ In the late 1970s, President Jimmy Carter extended affirmative action requirements to state and local governments, educational institutions, and contractors—nearly every entity that did business with the federal government.³¹⁹ These executive actions, along with anti-discrimination laws improved labor market conditions for African Americans.³²⁰ Between 1974 and 1980, the rate of minority employment in businesses that contracted with the federal government rose by 20 percent.³²¹ Local government set-aside programs also had impact. A 2014 study found that these programs led to a 35 to 40 percent reduction in the Black-white gap in self-employment, which is a proxy for small business ownership, though it appeared that the gains mostly benefited those who were better educated.³²²

By the late 1970s, an organized backlash had developed and a number of lawsuits challenged the constitutionality of affirmative action.³²³ In response, the U.S. Supreme Court began narrowing the scope of affirmative action programs. The Court has not held that affirmative action is permissible as redress for past harms. The Court, however, did reject explicit race-based quota systems in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* in 1978. There, the Court held that it was permissible for government affirmative action programs—in this case, a state school—to consider an applicant’s race in order to advance the interest of diversity, but that it was unconstitutional for an affirmative action program to employ race-based quotas.³²⁴

By the early 1980s, under President Ronald Reagan, the federal government began to restrict its enforcement of affirmative action requirements, halting the progress made during the preceding administrations.³²⁵

Housing Segregation Limits Black Job Opportunities

Despite the unquestionable progress made in civil and workers’ rights since the Civil Rights Acts, numerous systemic issues continue to harm Black workers.

The government and private actions described in Chapter 5 created a segregated American landscape across the country. This residential segregation created an entrenched type of employment discrimination in the second half of the 20th century.

Following World War II, white workers followed the government incentives described in Chapter 5 and moved to the suburbs. Large industrial employers closed facilities in urban centers and followed the white workers. Black workers, who could not move to the suburbs due to the barriers erected by federal and local governments, were left behind in urban centers.

Following World War II, white workers followed the government incentives described in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, and moved to the suburbs.³²⁶ Large industrial employers closed facilities in urban centers and followed the white workers.³²⁷ Black workers, who could not move to the suburbs due to the barriers erected by federal and local governments, were left behind in urban centers.³²⁸ These barriers included discriminatory and inequitable government transportation policy decisions that limited urban African Americans’ access to jobs,³²⁹ like the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system, designed in the 1960s. In an Oakland neighborhood that is one of the most diverse in the city and one of the densest parts of the region, BART trains run nearly 3 miles without stopping, whereas BART stations are only 1.75 miles apart in suburban areas that are less than half as dense.³³⁰ As one transportation expert explained, “BART was literally designed ... to speed white suburban commuters past Black inner-city residents.”³³¹ For an in depth discussion of transportation discrimination, please see Chapter 7.

Research has produced evidence that the phenomenon of “job suburbanization” caused significant decline in Black employment and increased Black-white labor inequality.³³² Examples of the movement of jobs to the suburbs abound. For instance, the Ford Motor Company moved all engine production sited at its River Rouge plant—at the time, the largest employer of Black workers in the Detroit region—to facilities in suburban

Brook Park, near Cleveland and Dearborn, outside of Detroit.³³³ Michigan's *Labor Market Letter* observed the "creation of a very large and alarmingly consistent list of long-term unemployed" Black workers in the region.³³⁴

This exodus of major employers to the suburbs also prevented African Americans from fully taking advantage of benefits provided by unions. For example, the Communication Workers of America lost thousands of Black members when customer service call centers moved out of New York City and reopened in areas not easily accessible to African Americans living in the city.³³⁵

Between 1967 and 1987, the number of industrial jobs dropped precipitously in cities with large Black populations: by 64 percent in Philadelphia, by 60 percent in Chicago, by 58 percent in New York, and by 51 percent in Detroit.³³⁶ Oakland and Los Angeles also experienced a decline in manufacturing.³³⁷ Automobile and tire companies that had been prevalent in Los Angeles shuttered or moved to the suburbs as early as the 1950s.³³⁸ An analysis of census data for the 15 largest metropolitan areas of the time found that between 1960 and 1970, the suburbs of these areas saw a 44 percent increase in jobs while central cities saw a seven percent decline.³³⁹ Whereas nearly two thirds of jobs were in urban centers in 1960, by 1970, only 52 percent of jobs were in urban centers and in some cities, the majority of jobs were suburban.³⁴⁰ Corporate executives occasionally admitted that avoiding Black communities "sometimes" motivated their decisions about where to locate.³⁴¹ Federal jobs in urban centers also dropped by more than 41,000 between 1966 and 1973.³⁴²

Corporate executives occasionally admitted that avoiding Black communities "sometimes" motivated their decisions about where to locate. Between 1970 and 1993, African Americans lost ground in nearly every economic category, with unemployment among African Americans rising from 5.6 percent to 12.9 percent.

By the early 1990s, the Black urban industrial working class had nearly disappeared nationwide. The impact was broad. Between 1970 and 1993, African Americans lost ground in nearly every economic category, with unemployment among African Americans rising from 5.6 percent to 12.9 percent.³⁴³ If new manufacturing was built, for example, by American auto companies, studies have shown a consistent pattern of rural

and suburban locations about thirty miles from the Black neighborhood.³⁴⁴

COURTESY OF H. ARMSTRONG ROBERTS/CLASSICSTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES



African American settlement near steel foundry. Workers homes in east St. Louis, Illinois. (c. 1920)

More recently, U.S. trade policy added to the negative impact of automation and changing technology on jobs for African Americans.³⁴⁵ Free trade policies and the resulting job losses in the manufacturing sector hit Black men especially hard, as this sector has offered relatively higher-paying jobs for those with lower levels of educational attainment.³⁴⁶ These jobs were also more likely to be unionized and afford a range of attendant benefits, from health care to pensions.³⁴⁷ Black workers were also disproportionately among those whose call center and customer service jobs were subject to offshoring. One study found that African Americans lost 646,500 good manufacturing jobs between 1998 and 2020, a 30.4 percent decline in total Black manufacturing employment, as part of the overall loss of more than 5 million manufacturing jobs during that time period.³⁴⁸

Black workers who have lost their jobs have been less likely than their white counterparts to find a replacement job, and when they found new jobs, they more likely to experience pay cuts.³⁴⁹ The loss of jobs to free trade also depressed

wages in the long term and intensified wealth inequality.³⁵⁰ The impact has been far reaching. One researcher found that manufacturing decline between 1960 and 2010 had disproportionately harmed Black communities in the areas of wages, employment, marriage rates, house values, poverty rates, death rates, single parenthood, teen motherhood, child poverty, and child mortality.³⁵¹ These harms may continue. More than a

quarter of all Black workers are concentrated in 30 jobs at high risk of automation, according to a 2017 finding of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.³⁵²

According to one meta-study, from 1989 to 2014, employment discrimination against African Americans had not decreased.

Ongoing Discrimination

Legal segregation resulted in social separation between Black and white Americans, with lasting consequences. Employers often hire new employees by relying on their social networks, ethnic loyalties, apprenticeships, and union relationships. Legal segregation prevented Black workers from building these necessary formal and informal networks with white Americans, effectively barring Black workers from entering into new, mostly white workplaces or industries.³⁵³

African Americans continue to experience labor discrimination today. One meta-analysis examining a 25-year period starting in 1989 found that discrimination against African Americans in the labor force had not decreased.³⁵⁴ African Americans receive interview callbacks for jobs at lower rates than white people. In a study where equally qualified resumes with white-sounding and Black-sounding names were sent out, white applicants received 36 percent more callbacks than Black applicants.³⁵⁵

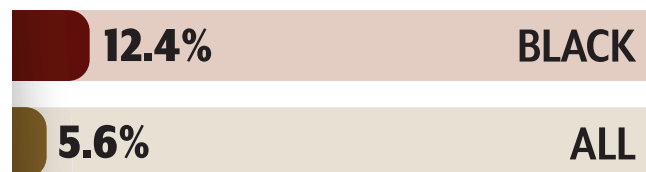
Even when researchers enhanced the resumes associated with Black-sounding names to make them stronger, white candidates still received more callbacks.³⁵⁶ Another study found that Black candidates had stronger odds of being called for an interview when their resumes were stripped of information conveying racial or ethnic background.³⁵⁷

Discrimination against job applicants with criminal history is another factor limiting work opportunities for African Americans. As discussed above in the licensure section, this discrimination is mandated in some instances and permitted in others.³⁵⁸ As mass incarceration has disproportionately impacted African Americans, they have disproportionately suffered post incarceration challenges. By 2010, people with felony convictions accounted for eight percent of all adults and 33 percent of Black adult males.³⁵⁹ Having a felony conviction is worse for formerly incarcerated Black job applicants than white applicants.³⁶⁰ One study found that Black men with no criminal history applying for entry-level jobs were less likely to receive a call back than

white male applicants who had recently been incarcerated.³⁶¹ Research has shown that even in jurisdictions with “ban the box” policies barring employers from asking about a candidate’s criminal history on a job application, Black applicants receive significantly fewer callbacks than white job applicants because employers may assume the Black applicants have a criminal history.³⁶²

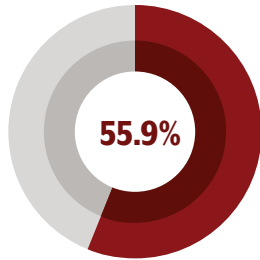
While Black women have endured both racism and sexism and persistently had their labor devalued,³⁶³ Black men experience discrimination in the labor market in unique ways. This is in part due to the criminalization of Black men and boys, examined in Chapter 11, which results in societal distrust and isolation of Black men and boys.³⁶⁴ Growing emphasis on “soft skills” particularly disadvantages Black male job applicants, as many employers wrongly perceive Black men as lacking in these skills that are viewed as increasingly important.³⁶⁵ Researchers have found that employers hold false negative beliefs about the dependability, motivation, and attitude of Black men, and are unlikely to change these racist beliefs during a written application or interview.³⁶⁶

UNEMPLOYED COLLEGE GRADUATES IN 2013



Racial employment gaps are worse among educated workers.³⁶⁷ A 2014 study revealed that 12.4 percent of black college graduates aged 22 to 27 were unemployed in 2013, compared to a rate of 5.6 percent for all college graduates in the same age range. 55.9 percent of employed Black recent college graduates worked in an occupation that typically does not require a four-year college degree.³⁶⁸ Graduates in areas such as science, technology, math, and engineering fared better, but still experienced high unemployment and underemployment rates.³⁶⁹ In 2013, Black recent college graduates majoring in nine of 12 broad categories had less than a 50 percent chance of holding a job that required their degree.³⁷⁰ Another study found that Black individuals who received MBAs from Harvard between 2007 and 2009 began their careers earning approximately \$5,000 less their white peers, and by 2015, the racial pay gap had increased to just under \$100,000 annually.³⁷¹

Black recent college graduates with a job that does **not** require a college degree (2013)



California

The historic gap in employment between Black and white individuals is seen in California. By every measure, Black Californians continue to lack access to labor markets available to white Californians and as a result continue to suffer harms that have compounded since before the founding of our country. In March 2022, for example, the most recent data available, the unemployment rate was 10.5 percent for Black Californians and 5.9 percent for white Californians.³⁷²

Lack of Government Protection

From its earliest days of statehood, California enacted a series of laws limiting the ability of African Americans to participate as full citizens of the state, as discussed in other chapters. These laws limited African American's voting rights, property rights, interracial marriage, and testimony in court or serve on a jury.³⁷³ California barred the testimony of Black individuals in both civil and criminal proceedings.³⁷⁴ These laws left Black Californians with little protection under the law, undermining their ability to advocate for themselves in the workplace, vindicate property rights, or even bear witness to the crimes they suffered.³⁷⁵

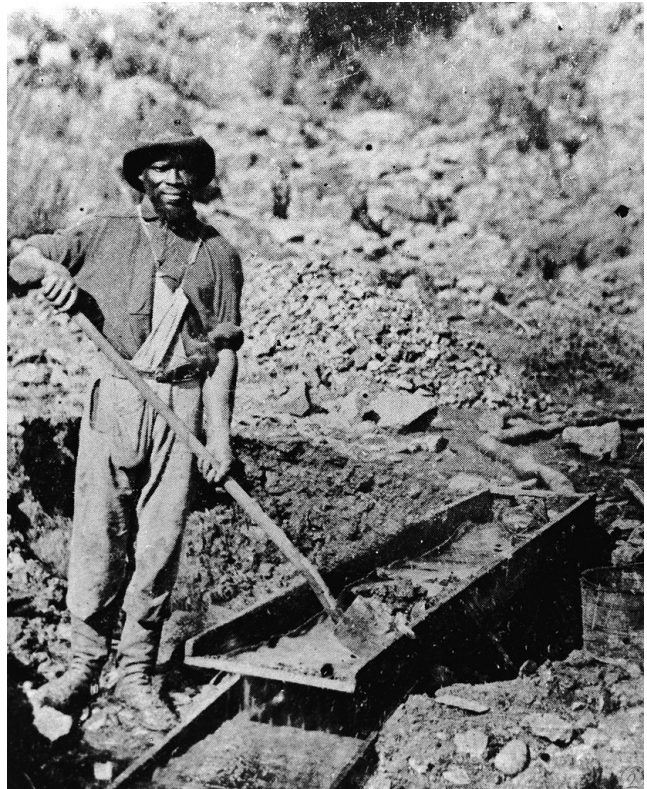
The discovery of gold in California 1848 drew migrants from across the country and beyond.³⁷⁶ African Americans were among them. A small group of Black individuals established one of the earliest mining claims in Sacramento County, at "Negro Bar," near what is now Folsom, on property once owned by William Leidesdorff, an Afro-Caribbean businessman.³⁷⁷ African Americans operated several successful mines, including Horncut Mine, a prosperous quartz mine in Yuba County, and the Washington Mine, a gold mine established in 1869.³⁷⁸

Black miners faced a hostile environment. Because African Americans lacked the right to testify in court during this period, Black miners were vulnerable to legal challenges and encroachments on their mining

claims.³⁷⁹ Frustrated by the discrimination they faced in California, including the state's discriminatory testimony and suffrage laws in particular, many Black miners left in the late 1850s for gold fields discovered in British Columbia, though some returned to the United States after the Civil War.³⁸⁰ To this day, derogatory names like Negro Bar and Negro Flat are still used for locales in the mining region of California.³⁸¹ The California Department of Parks and Recreation currently operates the Negro Bar, Folsom Lake State Recreation Area.³⁸² However, the department is working with local community and stakeholders to change the name.³⁸³

Black mill workers played a significant role in the lumber industry from 1920 to 1960.³⁸⁴ Experienced Black workers were actively recruited from the South to staff California mills.³⁸⁵ Although vital to their employers, Black workers were paid less than their white counterparts and prohibited from undertaking supervisory duties.³⁸⁶

COURTESY OF HULTON ARCHIVE VIA GETTY IMAGES



An African-American miner poses with a shovel in Auburn Ravine during the Gold Rush, California. (1852)

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, Black workers were recruited from the South to work farms in the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys.³⁸⁷ Many Black farmworkers resisted the racist treatment they faced in California, and used contracted field work as a way to establish themselves as entrepreneurs, skilled workers, or yeoman farmers.³⁸⁸ As a result, Californian farmers

preferred to hire Mexican nationals and other nonwhite immigrants instead of Black workers.³⁸⁹ Additionally, growing towns and settlements during the time often explicitly discriminated against and worked to exclude African Americans from living or working there. For example, fliers for the Maywood Colony, a huge development entirely surrounding the town of Corning, California, trumpeted:

GOOD PEOPLE

In most communities in California you'll find Chinese, Japs, Dagoes, Mexicans, and Negroes mixing up and working in competition with the white folks. Not so at Maywood Colony. Employment is not given to this element.³⁹⁰

In the early 1900s, Black workers were less likely to work in higher paying industrial jobs in the West than in the North.³⁹¹ By 1930, over 50 percent of Black men were working in the industrial sectors of the Northeast and Midwest, but no more than 30 percent in the West.³⁹² While industrial jobs often had significant downsides for Black workers, they offered better pay than unskilled positions.³⁹³ Still, many California companies refused to hire Black workers.³⁹⁴ For example, in 1940, aviation official W. Gerald Tuttle of the Vultee Aircraft Company in southern California announced, "I regret to say that it is not the policy of this company to employ people other than the Caucasian race."³⁹⁵

The interwar period saw a significant influx of Black workers and residents to California. As the number of Black residents increased in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, Black workers not only increased in number, but also began to move into professions from which they had previously been completely excluded.

The New Deal in California

As it did across the country, the Great Depression brought significant unemployment to the state. For example, manufacturing employment fell by 30 percent from 1929 to its lowest level in 1932, while payrolls fell by 50 percent, and unemployment among unionized workers rose to 33 percent.³⁹⁶ The New Deal provided an influx of funding to the state.³⁹⁷ For example, the Works Progress Administration employed over 100,000 workers in California.³⁹⁸ Between 1933 and 1939, the federal government sent \$2.2 billion to California in the form of grants and loans.³⁹⁹

California governments engaged in discriminatory practices as the rest of the country did in disbursing this federal money. Burbank and Glendale invoked city ordinances to exclude a company of Black workers organized

under the Civilian Conservation Corps.⁴⁰⁰ White residents of Richmond objected to an interracial Civilian Conservation Corps camp in 1935, until it was eventually replaced with an all-white company.⁴⁰¹

Labor organizing has a long history in California⁴⁰² that over time has led to some of the nation's most worker protective laws.⁴⁰³ The state enacted first enacted its labor code in 1937, consolidating provisions then in existence.⁴⁰⁴ California has repeatedly amended its labor and employment laws since then. Like the government, however, California for decades exempted both agricultural and domestic workers from various protections. Assembly Bill 1066, signed into law in 2016, removed exemptions for agricultural employees that had been in place for hours, meal breaks, and other working conditions, including specified wage requirements, and it created phased-in overtime requirements for such workers.⁴⁰⁵ California enacted a "bill of rights" for domestic workers in 2013, extending overtime pay rights to some,⁴⁰⁶ but these workers remain without certain other protections.⁴⁰⁷

Wartime Integration and Exclusion from Unions

Black workers made large advancements in the Bay Area during World War II, moving into manufacturing and industrial work in large numbers. By 1944, Black workers were employed widely in wartime industries, especially in the shipyards.⁴⁰⁸ For example, the City of Richmond saw a massive influx of war workers from 1940-45, when its population grew from 24,000 to 100,000, with the Black population increasing from 270 to 14,000 in those years.⁴⁰⁹

The Federal Employment Practices Committee, the federal anti-discrimination agency active during World War

COURTESY OF E. F. JOSEPH/ANTHONY POTTER COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES



African-American trainee welder Josie Lucille Owens working on the construction of the Liberty ship SS George Washington Carver at Kaiser shipyards in Richmond, California. (1943)

II, was largely ineffectual in California.⁴¹⁰ In 1945, FEPC reported: “More than twenty-six percent of the Negro working force were engaged in shipbuilding or ship repair. Another twenty-five percent were employed in servicing water transportation, which was largely gov-

Federal agency hearings in 1941 concluded that “there were only ten black employees in Douglas Aircraft’s workforce of 33,000, only two among Bethlehem Shipbuilding’s nearly 3,000 Los Angeles employees, and only 54 among Lockheed Aircraft and Vega Airplane’s 48,000 workers.”

ernment work; these two industries alone, the report concluded, accounted for approximately “12,000 Negro workers.”⁴¹¹ Even so, the boilermakers union, representing shipbuilders, allowed only white workers to join the main branch of the union, and relegated Black workers to an “auxiliary union” where they were not permitted to vote or file grievances, received limited benefits compared to white members, could not be promoted to foreman if the job involved supervising white workers, and were classified and paid as trainees even when qualified for skilled work.⁴¹² In Los Angeles, the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union, Local 13, for example, excluded Black workers,⁴¹³ even though Black workers and organizations sued the boilermakers’ union for discrimination.⁴¹⁴

FEPC helped reveal racist hiring practices at Los Angeles airline manufacturing plants. Hearings in 1941 demonstrated that “there were only ten Black employees in Douglas Aircraft’s workforce of 33,000, only two among Bethlehem Shipbuilding’s nearly 3,000 Los Angeles employees, and only 54 among Lockheed Aircraft and Vega Airplane’s 48,000 workers.”⁴¹⁵ Black workers’ organizations helped push against this racist hiring to open more of these jobs for African Americans.⁴¹⁶

Ultimately, FEPC never recommended the cancellation of any defense contracts in California.⁴¹⁷ During and after the war, areas of California continued to experience job segregation.⁴¹⁸ For example, Oakland’s employment patterns continued to have Black men and women in separate, lower-skilled, and lower-paid work.⁴¹⁹ When the end of the war brought layoffs, Black workers were disproportionately impacted. By the end of 1946, one third of all Black residents in the Bay Area and 40 percent of Black women were unemployed.⁴²⁰

Many African Americans also migrated to California during this period to pursue farming, though they encountered setbacks similar to those in other labor sectors. Approximately 30,000 to 40,000 African Americans travelled to the San Joaquin Valley after World War II. The majority settled in cities such as Fresno and Bakersfield, and about 7,000 settled in the Tulare Lake Basin, farmland owned by J.G. Boswell.⁴²¹ Still, Black field workers faced discrimination. Unlike their white counterparts, they were rarely promoted to operate machinery for higher pay, and were instead relegated to more demanding physical work for lower pay.⁴²² Moreover, like in factories,

Black workers also experienced greater injury and danger from farm work.⁴²³

Fair Employment and Housing and Short Lived Affirmative Action

Several years before the federal government enacted its version of the law, California in 1959 passed the Fair Employment Practices Act, prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of race by employers.⁴²⁴ The present day version of the law is the California Fair Employment and Housing Act.⁴²⁵ The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing currently enforces the Fair EHA, which also prohibits harassment based on several different protected categories, including race.⁴²⁶ The state agency investigates, prosecutes, and mediates complaints of discrimination.⁴²⁷

California’s support of the Department of Fair Employment and Housing has not been sufficient to meet the level of need. In 2013, the California Senate Office of Oversight and Outcomes reported that even though California had the strongest antidiscrimination law in the nation, the agency was funded with a “relatively miniscule allotment of resources[,]” which left the Department unable to fully enforce the law and protect workers.⁴²⁸ The agency’s investigations of employment discrimination claims “suffer[ed] from understaffing, poor quality, intake confusion, and premature case grading.”⁴²⁹ The oversight Office also unearthed a secret policy that had given the Governor’s Office final say as to whether the discrimination law would be enforced against another California state agency, making it more difficult for government workers to bring a discrimination claim.⁴³⁰ In the years since this report issued, the Department’s budget has grown, but the number of complaints it receives each year has also risen.⁴³¹

Like the federal government, government agencies in California also implemented affirmative action programs in employment. These programs produced mixed

28 percent in 1994.⁴³⁸ By 1998, awards had fallen to less than 10 percent, and they never recovered despite the increasing diversity in California.⁴³⁹

In 2013, a California government watchdog office reported that even though California had the strongest antidiscrimination law in the nation, the state agency tasked with investigating complaints was funded with a “relatively miniscule allotment of resources[,]” which left the Department unable to fully enforce the law and protect workers. The agency’s investigations of employment discrimination claims “suffer[ed] from understaffing, poor quality, intake confusion, and premature case grading.”

results. For example, between 1977 and 1995, the representation of Black tenured faculty members at the University of California system—which implemented affirmative action in its hiring—grew from 1.8 percent to only 2.5 percent, and for community colleges’ faculty between 1984 and 1991, the proportion of Black faculty only grew from 4.9 percent to 5.7 percent.⁴³²

California’s affirmative action programs were banned in 1996, after voters passed Proposition 209.⁴³³ Proposition 209 amended the California Constitution to prohibit state institutions from considering race in hiring, contracting, and education.⁴³⁴ According to polling data, Proposition 209 was supported by a majority of white and male voters, but opposed by a majority of African American, Latino, Asian American, and female voters.⁴³⁵

The evidence regarding Proposition 209’s impact on employment opportunities is complex. In the 15-year period that followed Proposition 209 going into effect, the representation of African Americans, Latinos, and women in public sector relative to the private sector did not dramatically increase or decrease.⁴³⁶ Men and women of color working for the State of California continued to earn less than their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts, and remained under-represented in high-level positions.⁴³⁷

Proposition 209’s impact on the procurement process was more severe, as state and local governments were forced to abandon race-conscious contracting programs. Prior to Proposition 209’s passage, awards of public contracts to businesses owned by people of color and women had been rising, reaching a high of

One study, published in 2006, found that only 32 percent of certified “minority business enterprises” in California’s 1996 transportation construction industry were still in business 10 years later, and among those that had survived, businesses owned by African Americans had fared less well than others.⁴⁴⁰ Another study published in 2015 found that Proposition 209 had led to a loss of between \$1 billion and \$1.1 billion annually for businesses owned by people of color or women.⁴⁴¹ As Black employers are more

likely than their white counterparts to hire Black job applicants,⁴⁴² the closing of Black businesses may have also hurt Black employment.

Activists in California have worked to overturn Proposition 209, but have not been successful. In 2020, voters rejected Proposition 16, which would have repealed Proposition 209.⁴⁴³

Occupational Licensure in California

Nearly 21 percent of workers in California must obtain a license to work in their jobs. California required workers to obtain a license for 61 percent of lower-income occupations, ranking it the third most restrictive state nationwide, following only Louisiana and Arizona.⁴⁴⁴

California withholds or restricts access to licenses from persons with certain criminal convictions, which is more likely to harm Black residents. For example, as discussed in Chapter 11, some incarcerated Californians participate in a program to help battle wildfires.⁴⁴⁵ Upon release, however, program participants would not be eligible to for jobs in many fire departments, because they cannot obtain an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification.⁴⁴⁶ California law specifically prohibits EMT certification for anyone who has been incarcerated for a felony within the past ten years, effectively disqualifying many people who participated in fire camp.⁴⁴⁷ In 2020, recent attempts to remediate these issues related to firefighting have had limited success.⁴⁴⁸

California has made some strides in lifting restrictions on occupational licensure in recent years, with the

passage of AB 2138, which prohibits California licensing boards from denying a license for, among other things, many convictions older than seven years and dismissed

or expunged convictions.⁴⁴⁹ While AB 2138 represents progress, other schemes remain in California which continue to have a racially discriminatory impact.⁴⁵⁰

IV. Discrimination in Government Employment

In addition to supporting legal segregation and enabling private discrimination, the federal and California governments discriminated against Black workers as employers. The federal government in civil and military service has refused to employ Black workers, segregated an integrated workforce, and relegated Black workers to lower paid, less-skilled occupations. The state and local governments in California have had similar patterns of discrimination.

federal employment until 1861—the year a Black man was appointed as a clerk with the United States Postal Service in Boston.⁴⁵³

In 1913, President Wilson officially segregated much of the federal workforce, including the Treasury, the Post Office, the Bureau of Engraving and Prints, the Navy, the Interior, the Marine Hospital, the War Department, and the Government Printing Office. The federal government created separate offices, lunchrooms, and bathrooms for white and Black workers.

Segregation in the Federal Civilian Service

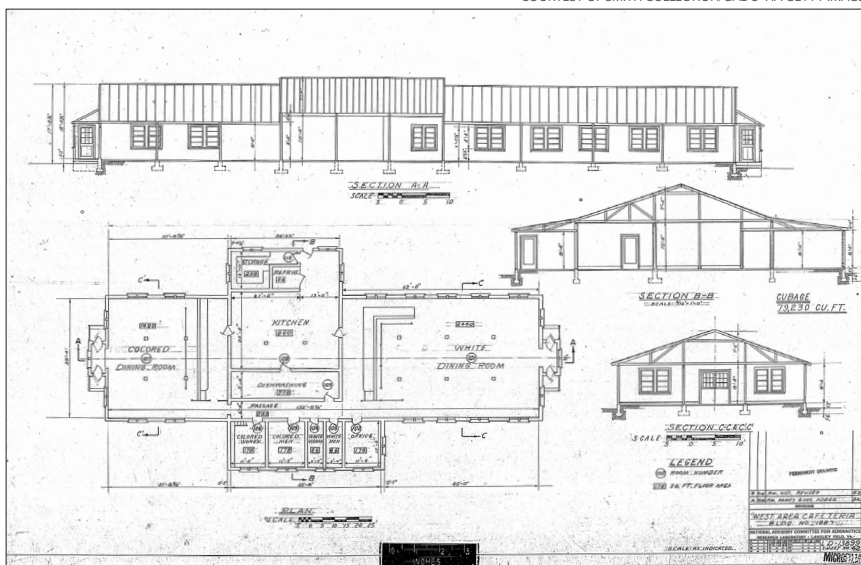
The federal civilian service reflected and shaped the racist labor environment of private employers. For much of the federal government's history, it was almost totally white or segregated. During the 19th century, there was no blanket ban on Black workers, but different officials were allowed to create a patchwork of regulations forbidding employment of African Americans.⁴⁵¹ The United States Postal Service was a striking example—in 1802, Black workers were banned from carrying mail.⁴⁵² Black workers were almost completely excluded from

At the turn of the century, African Americans made up about 10 percent of the federal workforce.⁴⁵⁴ Many Black workers found steady, valuable jobs in urban post offices, but there was little possibility for advancement.⁴⁵⁵ President Roosevelt provided some support for threatened Black workers. In 1903, he refused to allow the town of Indianola, Mississippi, to drive out its Black postmaster, instead suspending service at the Indianola Post Office rather than accept the resignation of Postmaster Minnie Cox.⁴⁵⁶ But this lasted only until the next year,

when a white Postmaster was appointed.⁴⁵⁷ And the tide turned with the election of President William Howard Taft in 1908, who stated in his inaugural address: “[I]t is not the disposition or within the province of the Federal Government to interfere with the regulation by Southern States of their domestic affairs,” and that appointing African Americans to federal offices in prejudiced southern communities would do more harm than good.⁴⁵⁸

In 1913, President Wilson officially segregated much of the federal workforce, including the Treasury, the Post Office, the Bureau of Engraving and Prints, the Navy, the Interior, the Marine Hospital,

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Blueprint for NASA/NACA's West Area Cafeteria at the Langley Research Center, showing a "White Dining Room" and a smaller, segregated "Colored Dining Room" for use by African American staff, including "human computers." (1948)

the War Department, and the Government Printing Office.⁴⁵⁹ The federal government created separate offices, lunchrooms, and bathrooms for white and Black workers.⁴⁶⁰ William McAdoo, Secretary of the Treasury, argued that segregation was necessary “to remove the causes of complaint and irritation where white women have been forced unnecessarily to sit at desks with colored men.”⁴⁶¹ The federal government fired Black supervisors, and cut off Black employees’ access to promotions and better-paying jobs, and it reserved those jobs for white employees.⁴⁶²

Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson segregated, demoted, or fired Black workers.⁴⁶³ Though no official government records have been found that indicate how many Black postal workers were driven from their jobs, there was a clear pattern to segregate, reclassify, and discharge Black workers.⁴⁶⁴

President Wilson’s decision to segregate an integrated federal workforce resulted in lower pay for Black workers cut off from better-paying jobs,⁴⁶⁵ and created separate toilets in the Treasury and Interior Departments.⁴⁶⁶ This damaged the ability of African Americans to build economic security. For example, in Washington, D.C., home of many federal jobs, Black homeownership fell after President Wilson’s actions, in part because Black federal employees no longer had access to those better jobs and salaries.⁴⁶⁷

In 1979, the U.S. General Accounting Office found that exams administered by the Office of Personnel Management to screen applicants for federal jobs disqualified Black candidates at higher rates than white candidates, “offer[ing] no real opportunity for Black job seekers to be fairly assessed for federal jobs.”⁴⁶⁸ Few Black applicants received scores high enough to have a “realistic chance” of being considered for employment.⁴⁶⁹

A later study, commissioned by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, examined the cases of all 11,920 federal workers fired in 1992, excluding the Postal Service and uniformed military services, and found that 39 percent of those fired were Black, even though Black workers comprised only 17 percent of the workforce at the time.⁴⁷⁰ While federal personnel officials believed that Black employees were fired more often because they tended to be less experienced, less educated, and concentrated in lower-level jobs that experienced more turnover, the study found that, after every measurable factor was discounted, Black workers were still more

likely to be fired at nearly every pay grade, from the lower rungs to the senior executive level.⁴⁷¹

Despite the federal government’s history of racism against Black workers, Black workers currently make up more of the federal civil service at over 18 percent than in the general population at 14 percent.⁴⁷² However, for the Senior Executive Service, the elite corps of experienced civil servants responsible for leading the federal workforce, only 10 percent are Black.⁴⁷³

Segregation in Military Service

The military reflected the rest of the federal government and American society in enacting racist and segregationist policies for much of its history. While African Americans have consistently served in the military since the very beginning of the country, the military has historically paid Black soldiers less than white soldiers and often deemed African Americans unfit for service until the military needed them to fight.⁴⁷⁴ The military officially remained segregated until 1950.⁴⁷⁵ Black soldiers consistently failed to be recognized for their contributions, and the government failed to follow through on promises of greater opportunities in exchange for service. While military service has provided an avenue for African Americans to achieve a measure of economic stability, it has consistently been a place of racial discrimination and segregation, particularly in the highest ranks. Today, there continues to be a limited number of African Americans in leadership roles.

President Woodrow Wilson’s order to segregate the federal workforce damaged Black economic security. In Washington, D.C., home of many federal jobs, Black homeownership fell after President Wilson’s actions.

The Revolution and the War of 1812

African Americans’ military service predates the republic itself, as do the government’s actions discriminating against Black soldiers and failing to honor promises in exchange for their service. Both free and enslaved Black soldiers, from all 13 colonies, fought with the Continental Army and state militias in the American Revolution.⁴⁷⁶ During the American siege of Yorktown in 1781, British troops, in order to extend dwindling food supplies, expelled all Black volunteer soldiers they had recruited with promises of freedom.⁴⁷⁷ One British officer, admitting the betrayal, stated: “We had used them to good advantage, and set them free, and now, with

fear and trembling, they had to face the reward of their cruel masters.”⁴⁷⁸ While Joseph Ranger, a free Black man from Virginia served in the Navy of Virginia and received wages, a land grant, and later a life pension from the U.S. Government, David Baker, an enslaved man on the Isle of Wight, was forced to join the American navy as a substitute for his enslaver, and was re-enslaved after the war.⁴⁷⁹

After the republic was established, the Second U.S. Congress passed the Militia Law of 1792 allowing only “free able-bodied white male citizen[s]” to serve in the national militia, which became the National Guard.⁴⁸⁰

During the Civil War, Black soldiers took home net pay of \$7 per month, compared to \$13 per month for white soldiers. And Black soldiers faced a higher mortality rate than their white counterparts, largely due to racist differences in medical care on the battlefield.

In 1796, James McHenry, the Secretary of War, declared, “No Negro, Mulatto, or Indian is to be recruited [in the Marine Corps].”⁴⁸¹ The U.S. Marine Corps continued this ban on African Americans for the next 167 years.

During the War of 1812, regardless of the fact that Black soldiers were legally not allowed to serve, Black soldiers made up a significant portion of U.S. Navy forces, and approximately one-quarter of U.S. soldiers at the Battle of Lake Erie were Black.⁴⁸² While many volunteer Black soldiers were explicitly promised freedom or equal opportunities in the future in exchange for their service by the state or federal government, these promises never fully materialized.⁴⁸³

Like they had done during the Revolutionary War, British troops recruited Black soldiers by promising freedom and land in exchange for service, but they largely failed to deliver. In fact, Francis Scott Key’s “The Star-Spangled Banner”—the national anthem—contains a little-known but controversial verse understood by some scholars to have been intended as a threat or admonition to Black soldiers who

might have escaped slavery and joined the British cause in a bid for freedom and the means for self-support:

No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.⁴⁸⁴

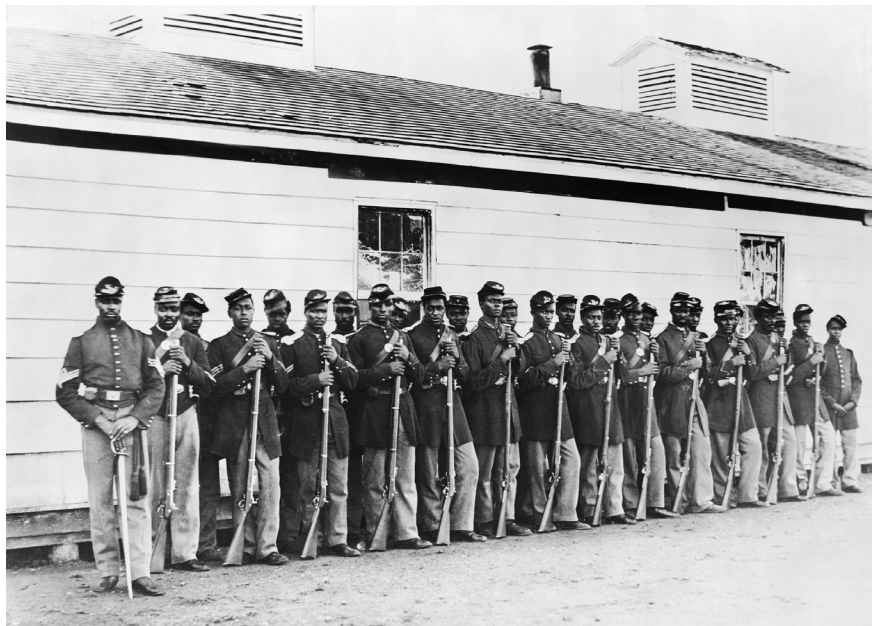
The Civil War

In the time of the Civil War, African Americans again attempted to join the war effort, notwithstanding the army’s racist treatment and failures to follow through on promises. In 1862, Congress amended the law to permit African Americans to enlist in the Union Army, but initially, only in menial construction and camp services roles.⁴⁸⁵ Black women labored in refugee camps as servants for Union officers and as laundresses for Union troops.⁴⁸⁶ African Americans were finally admitted to military service in the Union following the Emancipation Proclamation

in 1863.⁴⁸⁷ Eventually, nearly 200,000 Black soldiers, roughly half of whom were formerly enslaved southerners, served in the Union Army.⁴⁸⁸

Once again, Black soldiers were afforded lesser treatment in their military service. Black soldiers were segregated, assigned lowly positions, had few opportunities for

COURTESY OF WILLIAM MORRIS SMITH / BETTMANN VIA GETTY IMAGES



Company E, Fourth Colored Infantry, at Fort Lincoln. African Americans have consistently served in the military since the very beginning of the country, but the military has historically paid Black soldiers less than white soldiers and often deemed African Americans unfit for service until the military needed them to fight. The military officially remained segregated until 1950. (1865)

advancement to officer rank, received lower pay, and faced far more severe disciplinary measures.⁴⁸⁹ Second Lieutenant R. H. Isabelle, the target during a purge of Black officers, resigned in disillusionment in 1863, stating that he “joined the [U]nited States army ...with the sole object of laboring for the good of the union supposing that all past prejudice would be suspended for the good of our Country and that all native born [A]mericans would unite together to sacrifice their blood for the cause as our fathers did in 1812 & 15,” but he found that “the same prejudice still exist[s].”⁴⁹⁰

During the Civil War, Black soldiers took home net pay of \$7 per month, compared to \$13 per month for white soldiers.⁴⁹¹ And Black soldiers faced a higher mortality rate than their white counterparts, largely due to racist differences in medical care on the battlefield.⁴⁹² One soldier lamented: “Wee [sic] are said to be U.S. Soldiers and behold wee [sic] are U.S. Slaves.”⁴⁹³

In fact, a small number of Black soldiers did not serve willingly in the Civil War.⁴⁹⁴ Starting in 1863, some Union officials used tactics similar to enslavers, press gangs, and man-stealers to grow the ranks of the Union Army.⁴⁹⁵ One army engineer in 1863 stated that of men forced into service: “My men, Colonel, have not been drafted. They have been kidnapped in the night.”⁴⁹⁶ Despite President Lincoln declaring in 1865 that “without the military help of the Black freedmen, the war against the south could not have been won,”⁴⁹⁷ Black soldiers were not treated on equal footing, and suffered economic and social hardship as a direct result of the government’s actions during the war.

World Wars I and II

Following the Civil War, Black soldiers in the 9th and 10th Cavalries and the 24th and 25th Infantries became known as “Buffalo Soldiers.”⁴⁹⁸ With a few exceptions—West Point graduates Henry O. Flipper, John Hanks Alexander, and Charles Young—these all-Black regiments were led by white U.S. Army officers.⁴⁹⁹ Buffalo Soldiers

aided in the nation’s westward expansion by building roads and participating in military actions that included the Red River War (1874–1875) and the Battle of San Juan Hill during the Spanish American War (1898).⁵⁰⁰ These men were also some of the first national park rangers.⁵⁰¹

However, the legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers is complex. These Black soldiers fought for their rightful citizenship rights by fighting for a white-led government in government in wars to take the Southwest and Great Plains from Native Americans.⁵⁰² Between 1870 and 1890, 18 Black Buffalo Soldiers earned Medals of Honor while fighting Native Americans.⁵⁰³ Despite their service, Buffalo Soldiers faced discrimination.⁵⁰⁴ Some were able to access higher education, secure better jobs, and own property, but others returned from service only to be lynched.⁵⁰⁵

While opportunity expanded in the military during the period after the Civil War and more African Americans joined the service, Black soldiers continued to serve in the armed forces under segregated and unequal conditions. But increased military needs prevailed and, by World War I, there were 380,000 Black soldiers out of the four million total soldiers, a proportion similar to that of Black men in the general population.⁵⁰⁶

During World War I, Black men volunteered to serve in eight all-Black army regiments but remained strictly segregated from white soldiers.⁵⁰⁷ Black soldiers were subject to humiliations including wearing discarded Civil War uniforms, or performing for the amusement of white soldiers.⁵⁰⁸ One Black soldier at the time lamented that “The spirit of Saint-Nazaire [Army station in France] is the spirit of the South.”⁵⁰⁹ This played out in the numbers: only 11 percent of Black soldiers saw combat in World War I, while the vast majority were relegated to menial labor.⁵¹⁰ This segregation reflected the larger condition of the American economy in that Black soldiers were prevented from moving up in ranks to supervisory positions, and positions in some specialized corps were blocked altogether.⁵¹¹



15th Regiment Infantry New York National Guard. (c. 1919)

This pattern continued in the interwar years and in World War II, when African Americans continued to serve in the military service despite segregation and other racist policies.⁵¹² For example, in 1941, the U.S. Army established the 78th Tank Battalion, the first Black armor unit. It was made up of Black enlisted men and white officers, but without opportunity for the Black soldiers to advance.⁵¹³

Author James Baldwin remarked that the “treatment accorded the Negro during the Second World War [marked] a turning point in the Negro’s relation to America...A certain hope died.”⁵¹⁴

This pattern extended to the Congressional actions aimed at helping soldiers returning from fighting in World War II. In 1944, the Congress passed the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the “GI Bill.” The GI Bill included provisions to provide financial assistance for homeownership, opening small businesses, and education, but, like the New Deal legislation before it, it left implementation largely to racist state and local governments and contributed to housing discrimination.⁵¹⁵ As a result, its benefits were not fully realized for returning Black soldiers. For discussion of the role of the Veterans Administration in implementing and maintaining housing segregation, see Chapter 5. For a discussion of the VA’s role in education discrimination, see the Chapter 6.

Post-World War II to the Present

In 1941, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 stating, “I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin...” The Marine Corps received its first Black recruits, but continued to segregate. “Even though we were all Marines we were kept separate. We didn’t have barracks, we lived in huts, built from cardboard, painted green. Camp Lejeune had barracks but we had huts. It was located in the back woods, amid water snakes and bears,” said Marine Sergeant Carrel Reavis.⁵¹⁶

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 to desegregate the military.⁵¹⁷ But, while the military formally integrated, serious racial discrimination persisted. For example, the army did not begin in earnest to integrate its forces until the Korean War, when demand for additional troops meant that the army had no choice but to send Black troops to replace white troops killed or injured in battle. Segregated all-Black army units persisted until 1954. In the Marines, full integration did not occur until 1960.⁵¹⁸

Despite discrimination by the federal government, Black soldiers served and died for their country and have historically used it as a mode of upward mobility out of the South.⁵¹⁹

The highest proportion of Black individuals ever to serve in an American war came in the Vietnam War.⁵²⁰

During the Vietnam War, Black men were much more likely to die on the frontlines. In 1965, 25% of soldiers killed in action were African American.

Young Black men were disproportionately drafted during the Vietnam War years due to education and occupation deferments that were unavailable to Black men due to a centuries of education segregation and discrimination.⁵²¹

In the Vietnam War, the American military no longer believed that Black men were not fit for combat.⁵²² Black men had a much greater chance of being on the front-line and suffered a much higher casualty rate.⁵²³ In 1965 alone, Black soldiers were almost 25 percent of those killed in action.⁵²⁴

As the United States moved to an all-volunteer military following the Vietnam War and the end to conscription, Black soldiers enlisted at a much higher rate than white individuals, leading Black representation in the military to be roughly twice their representation in the U.S. population at large.⁵²⁵

In 2020, only 2 of 41 four star military officials were



African American

Today, racial disparities in the military continue. Even as lower-level troops were integrated, leadership remained almost exclusively white. As late as 2020, of the 41 officials holding four-star rank, only two were African Americans.⁵²⁶ Based on government data received through the Freedom of information Act, researchers have found evidence that Black service members have been substantially more likely than white service members to face military justice or disciplinary action.⁵²⁷ Anecdotal news reports have presented a deep-rooted culture of racism and discrimination in all branches of the armed services.⁵²⁸ On January 6, 2021, insurgents stormed the U.S. Capitol, carried a confederate

flag inside the Capitol building,⁵²⁹ and displayed a noose and gallows in front of it.⁵³⁰ Of the more than 700 individuals charged in the January 6 insurrection, 81 people have ties to the military.⁵³¹

California

Although African Americans were present in California going back to the Spanish conquest era, they made up only around one percent or less of the population of California until 1920, and under two percent until the 1940s.⁵³² Still, the pattern seen in the federal civilian service and military service persisted in California at both the state and local levels. Black workers faced segregation and racial discrimination in state and local employment. Even when progress was made, governments failed to meaningfully address past discrimination, and Black workers remained largely shut out of the higher-paid leadership roles—a trend that still exists in the present.

Up until World War II, Black workers were absent from many public and private sector jobs in San Francisco. For example, no Black worker was employed as a public school teacher, police officer, firefighter, or streetcar conductor nor as a bank teller or bus or cab driver in the city before 1940.⁵³³ There were no Black streetcar workers until 1942—with poet Maya Angelou being one of the first—though this was not due to a lack of available skilled workforce in the area, as evidenced by the fact that within two years there were over 700 Black platform operators.⁵³⁴

When Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system was built in 1967, no skilled Black workers were hired.⁵³⁵ The National Labor Relations Board-certified unions did not admit Black members, and BART, though a government agency, refused to use its power to insist on non-discrimination policies by the unions.⁵³⁶ And it was a similar story when Oakland built a new central post office during the same period—not a single Black plumber, operating engineer, sheet metal worker, iron worker, electrician, or steamfitter was hired for construction of the federally funded government building.⁵³⁷

The City of Pasadena in Southern California similarly employed almost no African Americans in government jobs prior to World War II. “In Pasadena they told me they don’t hire Black teachers,” said Ruby McKnight Williams, the first Black woman to be employed by the city in a professional capacity in the 1940s. When Ms. Williams was hired “I found out...that no [Black] men

were employed by the city except garbage men and two or three men who swept City Hall. As for [Black] women, even the attendants in the restrooms at the Rose Bowl had never been colored.”⁵³⁸

Other types of government actions enforced racist and segregationist policies on Black Californians in different parts of the state. For example, in 1970 Pasadena became the first city outside of the South under a federal court order to desegregate its schools. In its ruling on the matter, the district court concluded that the Pasadena school district had discriminated both in its placement of students and in its allocation of teachers. As the court observed, the district’s failures to comply with its own integration policies had occurred “in connection with

When Bay Area Rapid Transit system was built in 1967, no skilled Black workers were hired. When Oakland built a new central post office during the same period—not a single Black plumber, operating engineer, sheet metal worker, or other skilled laborer was hired.

the teacher assignment, hiring, and promotion policies and practices of the District, its construction policies and practices, and its assignment of students.”⁵³⁹

Some segments of the public sector like law enforcement and firefighting continued to discriminate against Black Californians. When they hired Black Californians, hostile work environments sometimes followed.⁵⁴⁰ The San Francisco Fire Department, for example, had no Black firefighters before 1955, and by 1970, when Black residents made up 14 percent of the city’s population, only four of the Department’s 1,800 uniformed firefighters were Black.⁵⁴¹

Public-sector employers have provided significant opportunities to Black workers, as compared to their private-sector counterparts—including in California. Even still, Black workers continue to encounter barriers to career advancement and higher pay.⁵⁴² As of 2018, Black workers account for 9.8 percent of California’s state civil service, compared to 5.3 percent of the state’s labor force and 5.5 percent of the population. However, that 9.8 percent share has been disproportionately concentrated in lower salary ranges; Black civil servants represented 12.6 percent of employees earning \$40,000 or less but only 5.7 percent of workers earning more than \$130,000.⁵⁴³

V. Effects Today

The cumulative impacts of the federal, state, and local governments' racial discrimination and segregation continue to harm African Americans today. In 2019, the median Black household earned 61 cents for every dollar earned by the median white household.⁵⁴⁴ This is a slight increase from 2016, when Black households earned 56 cents to the dollar, a figure *lower* than it had been in 1968, after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.⁵⁴⁵

As a result of their higher unemployment rate and the persistent wage gap, African Americans experience higher levels of poverty.⁵⁴⁶ In 2020, 19.8 percent of African Americans were living in poverty, compared to 8.3 percent of white Americans.⁵⁴⁷ Due to a combination of racism and sexism, women have always had a higher rate of poverty than men.⁵⁴⁸ Twelve percent of white women are impoverished, compared to 23 percent of Black women.⁵⁴⁹ Black families are more likely than white families to have family members who are impoverished.⁵⁵⁰ This has a destabilizing effect during periods of emergency. A 2020 study found that 36 percent of white families had enough savings to cover six months of expenses, versus 14 percent of Black families.⁵⁵¹ Another recent survey also found that 36 percent of Black respondents said that they had no money at all set aside for emergencies, compared to 24 percent of white respondents.⁵⁵² Without a safety net

While African Americans have made significant advances into occupations and job categories that used to be subject to explicit segregation, or kept Black workers at the margins, there has been a limit to this progress. In 2021, an analysis of the 50 most valuable public companies demonstrated that only eight percent of “C-suite” executives—the highest corporate leaders, usually those that report to the Chief Executive Officer—are Black.⁵⁵⁴ At least eight companies list no Black executives among their leadership team, as of December 2021.⁵⁵⁵ Moreover, much of the gains that African Americans have made in employment and wages have been offset by the intensifying income inequality in the country as a whole.⁵⁵⁶

California

The numbers are similar for California. In 2019, the Public Policy Institute of California reported that about 17.4 percent of Black Californians were poor or near poor, compared to 12.1 percent of white people.⁵⁵⁷ In 2020, the poverty rate was 14.6 percent among Black Californians and 7.9 percent among white residents.⁵⁵⁸ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Black families in California were nearly twice as likely to be in the bottom tier of income distribution than would be expected for their share of the population.⁵⁵⁹ Factors that lead to African Americans often being first to suffer economic downturn and last to recover also persist in California. During the COVID-19 pandemic, sixty-eight percent of surveyed Black workers in Southern California who had lost their jobs reported that they were still looking for work a year after the start of the pandemic.⁵⁶⁰

African Americans are also under-represented in California's two major industries: Hollywood and Silicon Valley. In Hollywood, for example, in films released between 2015 and 2019, Black actors were less

likely to be in lead roles than white actors, and Black actors were often funneled into race-related projects, which are typically less well funded.⁵⁶¹ Emerging Black actors received six leading role opportunities early in their careers, compared with nine for white actors.⁵⁶² Black talent is even more underrepresented in positions of creative control—African American directors directed six percent of films released between 2015 and 2019, African American producers produced six percent of those films, and African American screenwriters wrote

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of savings, African Americans can be more vulnerable to upheavals in the labor market and are more likely to experience homelessness, as discussed in Chapter 5. During the COVID-19 pandemic, African Americans were more likely to hold jobs that exposed them to the novel coronavirus, and more likely to lose their jobs at the same time. They were more likely to see their savings shrink and more likely to not have enough to eat. As was the case after the 2008 recession, they are experiencing the slowest recovery.⁵⁵³

four percent of those films.⁵⁶³ In 2020, the *Los Angeles Times* conducted a study of diversity in Hollywood studios and reported that of 230 senior corporate executives, division heads, and other senior leaders in entertainment com-

The disparities are worse in Silicon Valley. Although between 2004 to 2014, Black college students were more likely to major in computer science than white students,⁵⁶⁶ a 2018 report revealed that in large tech firms

in Silicon Valley, African Americans made up only 4.4 percent of all employees. 1.4 percent were executives, 2.5 percent were managers, and 2.9 percent were professionals.⁵⁶⁷

A 2018 report revealed that in large tech firms in Silicon Valley, African Americans made up only 4.4 percent of all employees. 1.4 percent were executives, 2.5 percent were managers, and 2.9 percent were professionals.

A recent report also found that for every Black individual who is a direct employee of a tech company, there are 1.4 Black contract workers,

panies analyzed by the *Times*, 10 percent were African Americans.⁵⁶⁴ Ninety-two percent of film industry C-suite executives were white, making the industry more homogenous than the energy and finance industries.⁵⁶⁵

who generally earn 75 cents for every dollar made by a direct employee and are far less likely to receive health benefits or paid time off.⁵⁶⁸

VI. Conclusion

Enslavement was the nation's original disregard for Black lives and theft of Black labor. Slavery persisted for more than 200 years, and when it formally ended, the nation found new ways, from the Black Codes to Jim Crow, to keep African Americans tethered to the lowest rungs of work. Discrimination, exclusion, and devaluation never ceased. For more than 150 years since the formal end of slavery, African Americans have been denied opportunity and pathways to higher wages and been shunted into the lowest paying, least protected, and oft times most dangerous work, or they have been denied work altogether.

The few instances of affirmative effort to remedy or at least neutralize discrimination were inadequate and short-lived. Severe employment and wage disparities and attendant socioeconomic gaps never closed because the root causes of discrimination, exclusion, and subjugation were never addressed and have been sanctioned by the government and allowed to persist and entrench. Centuries of government-supported and government-protected racism have produced a labor market that is so solidly and structurally anti-Black that it can now stand on its own. It cannot and will not come undone without an affirmative dismantling and concentrated investment in creating opportunity for full participation by African Americans and full valuation of their work.

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¹⁴³Jones, American Work, *supra*, at fn. 12, pp. 213, 216, 221-22, 248-53.

¹⁴⁴Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns, *supra*, at fn. 20, p. 316.

¹⁴⁵Jones, Labor of Love, *supra*, at fn. 32, p. 128 (providing example of 1897 protest of the hiring of two Black female spinners at an Atlanta textile mill, where union staged a walk-out and the company fired the two Black women).

¹⁴⁶History.com, [Labor Movement](#) (Mar. 31, 2020)

¹⁴⁷Cassedy, [African Americans and the American Labor Movement](#) (Summer 1997) Prologue Magazine

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹Rothstein, The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America (2017) pp. 155-56, 158.

¹⁵⁰*Id.* at p. 156.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*

¹⁵²Reich, A Working People, *supra*, at fn. 34, pp. 58-59.

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¹⁵⁴Kersten, Labor's Home Front: The American Federation of Labor During World War II (2006) p. 77; Greene, Pure

and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917 (2006) p. 19.

¹⁵⁵ Greene, Pure and Simple Politics, *supra*, at fn. 155, p. 39.

¹⁵⁶ Kersten, Labor's Home Front, *supra*, at fn. 155, 78.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Id.* at p. 79.

¹⁶⁰ Reich, A Working People, *supra*, at fn. 34, pp. 58-59.

¹⁶¹ Jones Testimony, *supra*, at fn. 6

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

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¹⁶⁵ See, e.g., Little Hoover Com., [Jobs for Californians: Strategies to Ease Occupational Licensing Barriers](#) (Oct. 2016) p. 5 (as of Apr. 29, 2022); Dept. Treas. Off. Economic Policy et al., [Occupational Licensing: A Framework for Policymakers](#) (Jul. 2015) p. 6 (as of Apr. 29, 2022).

¹⁶⁶ Freeman, [The Effect of Occupational Licensure on Black Occupational Attainment](#) in Occupational Licensure and Regulation (Rottenberg edit., 1980) pp. 165-66; Dept. Treas. Off. Economic Policy et al., Occupational Licensing, *supra*, at fn. 166, p. 41 (noting that "licensing policy falls in the purview of individual States").

¹⁶⁷ Bernstein, [Licensing Laws: A Historical Example of the Use of Government Regulatory Power Against African-Americans](#) (1994) 31 San Diego L. Rev. 89, 90.

¹⁶⁸ Klein et al., [Was Occupational Licensing Good for Minorities? A Critique of Marc Law and Mindy Marks](#) (2012) 9 Econ J. Watch 210, 222-23, citing Williams, The State Against Blacks (1982) pp. 90-91.

¹⁶⁹ Freeman, [The Effect of Occupational Licensure on Black Occupational Attainment](#), *supra*, at fn. 167, p. 166, quoting Greene & Woodson, The Negro Wage Force (1969) p. 192.

¹⁷⁰ Bernstein, [Licensing Laws](#), *supra*, at fn. 168, p. 94-97.

¹⁷¹ *Id.* at p. 94.

¹⁷² *Id.* at p. 94, fn. 29, citing Bloch, [Craft Unions and the Negro in Historical Perspective](#) (1958) 43 J. Negro Hist. 10, 23.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, citing Williams, The State Against Blacks (1982) p. 94-95.

¹⁷⁴ See generally Bernstein, [Licensing Laws](#), *supra*, at fn. 168 (describing the efforts to exclude Black workers from professions including medicine and barbering); Freeman, [The Effect of Occupational Licensure on Black Occupational Attainment](#), *supra*, at fn. 167, p. 166 (describing the efforts in Georgia to exclude Black workers from becoming firemen on locomotives by way of licensure); Crawford & Das, D.C. Fiscal Policy Inst., [Black Workers Matter: How The District's History of Exploitation & Discrimination Continues to Harm Black Workers](#) (2020) p. 3 (as of Apr. 9, 2022) (describing occupational licensing bans written into Black Codes that prevented Black workers from working in any trade other than driving carts or carriages).

¹⁷⁵ Bernstein, [Licensing Laws](#), *supra*, at fn. 168, p. 92 (noting that "lower courts universally accepted the general proposition that licensing statutes were constitutional")

¹⁷⁶ *Id.* at p. 97.

¹⁷⁷ *Id.* at pp. 96-97.

¹⁷⁸ *Id.* at p. 97.

¹⁷⁹ *Id.* at p. 98.

¹⁸⁰ Williams, Race and Economics: How Much Can Be Blamed on Discrimination (2013) p. 94, citing Shimberg et al., Occupational Licensing (1973) pp. 112-13.

¹⁸¹ Bernstein, [Licensing Laws](#), *supra*, at fn. 168, p. 98.

¹⁸² U.S. Bur. Lab. Statistics, [Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey](#) (2021) (as of Apr. 9, 2022).

¹⁸³ Decker, [Occupational Licensing as a Barrier for People with Criminal Records: Proposals to Improve Anti-Discrimination Law to Address Adverse Employment Impacts from the Criminal Legal System](#) (2021) 49 Fordham Urban L.J. 189, 197.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ See Dept. Treas. Off. Economic Policy et al., Occupational Licensing, *supra*, at fn. 166, pp. 19-22; Decker, [Occupational Licensing](#), *supra*, at fn. 184, p. 197.

¹⁸⁶ See, e.g., Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, [Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act](#) (2012) pt. V(A)(2).

¹⁸⁷ For example, while people with criminal records are half as likely to get a callback to get an interview than those without a record, Black men with records are one-third as likely to get a callback as those without records. Natividad Rodriguez & Avery, Nat. Employment L. Project, [Unlicensed & Untapped: Removing Barriers to State Occupational Licenses for People with Records](#) (2016) p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ *Id.* at pp. 1, 5 fn. 12, 10.

¹⁸⁹ *Id.* at pp. 1, 5 fn. 10, 14

¹⁹⁰ Petersilia, When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry (2003) p. 114.

¹⁹¹ Ewald, [Barbers, Caregivers, and the "Disciplinary Subject": Occupational Licensure for People with Criminal Justice Backgrounds in the United States](#) (2019) 46 Fordham Urban L.J. 719, 733

¹⁹² See generally Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (2012 ed.) pp. 140-177; Natividad Rodriguez & Avery, Unlicensed & Untapped, *supra*, at fn. 188; Dept. Treas. Off. Economic Policy et al., Occupational Licensing, *supra*, at fn. 166, pp. 35-37.

¹⁹³ Nerbovig, [License to Clip](#) (Jul. 10, 2018) The Marshall Project; see also Love & Schluskel, Collateral Consequences Resource Center, [From Reentry to Reintegration: Criminal Records Reform in 2021](#) (2022) pp. 8-11 (describing legislative efforts in 2021 to reform licensure schemes).

¹⁹⁴ A search of the National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction database for "Business licensure and participation" in the "Consequence

Type” field yielded 12,989 consequences. See Nat. Reentry Resource Center, [Nat. Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction](#) (as of Apr. 9, 2022)

¹⁹⁵Jones, *American Work*, *supra*, at fn. 12, p. 319.

¹⁹⁶Trotter, *Workers on Arrival*, *supra*, at fn. 6, p. 78. Adjusting for the higher cost of living in the North, “increases in migrant earnings ranged from a low of about 56% to a possible high of 130 percent.” *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸*Id.* at p. 86.

¹⁹⁹*Id.* at pp. 86-87.

²⁰⁰*Id.* at p. 88.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*

²⁰²Thomas, *Life for Us is What We Make it: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (1992) pp. 106-107.

²⁰³*Ibid.*

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*

²⁰⁵Jones, *American Work*, *supra*, at fn. 12, p. 367.

²⁰⁶Geschwender, *Class, Race, & Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (1977) p. 91.

²⁰⁷California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans (October 13, 2021) [Testimony of William Spriggs](#), (as of Apr. 7, 2022) (Spriggs Testimony)

²⁰⁸U.S. Bur. Labor Statistics, [Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator](#) (comparing Jan. 1950 dollars with Jan. 2022 dollars) (as of Apr. 9, 2022).

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²¹⁰Jones Testimony, *supra*, at fn. 6

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²¹²Baradaran, *The Color of Money*, *supra*, at fn. 30, p. 101.

²¹³Walker & Brechin, [The Living New Deal: The Unsung Benefits of the New Deal for the United States and California](#), IRLE Working Paper No. 220-10 (2010) Inst. Research on Labor & Employment, pp. 23-28.

²¹⁴*Id.* at pp. 15-17.

²¹⁵Baradaran, *The Color of Money*, *supra*, at fn. 30, p. 101; Perea, *The Echoes of Slavery*, *supra*, at fn. 33, pp. 102-03.

²¹⁶Perea, *The Echoes of Slavery*, *supra*, at fn. 33, pp. 103-04; Jones Testimony, *supra*, at f

²¹⁷Perea, *The Echoes of Slavery*, *supra*, at fn. 33, pp. 102-03; 120-21.

²¹⁸Jones Testimony, *supra*, at fn. 6

²¹⁹Jones Testimony, *supra*, at f

²²⁰See, e.g., DeWitt, [The Decision to Exclude Agricultural and Domestic Workers from the Social Security Act](#) (2010) 70 Soc. Sec. Bulletin 4.

²²¹Perea, *The Echoes of Slavery*, *supra*, at fn. 33, p. 104.

²²²Jones Testimony, *supra*, at fn. 6

²²³*Ibid.*

²²⁴Social Welfare History Project, [The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933](#) (2011) Va. Commonwealth Univ. (as of Apr. 9, 2022).

²²⁵Perea, *The Echoes of Slavery*, *supra*, at fn. 33, p. 104.

²²⁶*Id.* at p. 106.

²²⁷*Ibid.*

²²⁸*Ibid.*

²²⁹Dubal, [The New Racial Wage Code](#), UC Hastings Research Paper Forthcoming (May 28, 2021) Harvard L. & Policy Rev., pp. 15-16.

²³⁰Perea, *The Echoes of Slavery*, *supra*, at fn. 33, p. 107, citing Caldwell, *What the NRA is Doing to the Race!*, Chi. Defender (May 26, 1934) p. 10.

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²³²*Id.* at 155-56, 158-59.

²³³*Id.* at 158-61.

²³⁴Walker & Brechin, *The Living New Deal*, *supra*, at fn. 214, p. 33.

²³⁵McNicholas et al., *Economic Policy Inst.*, [Why Unions Are Good for Workers—Especially in a Crisis Like COVID-19](#) (Aug. 25, 2020) (as of Apr. 9, 2022).

²³⁶*Ibid.*

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²³⁹Jones, *American Work*, *supra*, at fn. 12, p. 343.

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²⁴⁴*Independent Metal Workers Local 1 (Hughes Tool Co.)* (1964) 147 N.L.R.B. 1573; Meltzer, *The National Labor Relations Act and Racial Discrimination*, *supra*, at fn. 244, pp. 5-6.

²⁴⁵*Emporium Capwell Co. v. Western Addition Community Organization* (1975) 420 U.S. 50; Jones, *Race, Economic Class, and Employment Opportunity*, *supra*, at fn. 244, p. 78.

²⁴⁶Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, *supra*, at fn. 150, p. 161.

²⁴⁷Section 210(b) of the Social Security Act excludes agricultural service and domestic labor in a private home from old-age benefits; and Section 907(c) defines “employment” to exclude agricultural labor and domestic service in a private home for purposes of unemployment benefits. See [Social Security Act](#) (Aug. 14, 1935) Chap. 531, tit. II, § 210(b) (1)-(2), 49 Stat. 620, 625; Chap. 531, tit. IX, § 907(c)(1)-(2), 49 Stat. 620, 643.

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I. Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapters, throughout history, the American government at all levels has treated African Americans as criminals for the purposes of social control, and to maintain an economy based on exploited Black labor. This criminalization of African Americans is an enduring legacy of slavery. These persisting effects of slavery have resulted in the over-policing of Black neighborhoods, the mass incarceration of African Americans, and other inequities in nearly every corner of the American legal system.

This long history of criminalization began with enslavement and has created what some describe as a caste-like system in America where African Americans are in the lowest caste of America's racial hierarchy.¹ As the following chapter will show, this criminalization of African Americans has resulted in a criminal justice system that, overall, physically harms, imprisons, and murders African Americans more than other racial group relative to their percentage of the population. While constitutional amendments² and federal civil rights laws³ have tried to ameliorate this mistreatment of African Americans, the inequities that remain are so significant that some scholars have argued that, as it relates to African Americans, U.S. society has replaced legal segregation with the criminal justice system.⁴ African Americans are more likely than white Americans to be arrested, convicted, and to serve lengthy prison sentences.⁵ Black adults are 5.9 times as likely to be incarcerated than white people.⁶ The experiences of African Americans with the criminal justice system also result in a general mistrust of the civil justice system⁷ where African Americans also face barriers to accessing justice such as obtaining a lawyer.⁸

In California, the history of the inequities African Americans experience is similar to the rest of the country's history. Although enslavement did not exist on the same scale in California that it did in southern states, California has contributed to the inequities African Americans have experienced and continue to experience. For example, California law once prohibited African Americans from testifying in court cases involving white people.⁹ More recently, California's punitive criminal justice policies, such as the state's three-strikes law, have resulted in large numbers of African



Young Black men enslaved as part of the convict labor system of Florida. (1915)

Americans in prisons and jails.¹⁰ Although there is very little scholarship on African Americans' experience in the civil legal system compared to scholarship on their experience in the criminal justice system, there is evidence that African Americans have historically experienced and continue to experience discrimination, such as lack of access to a lawyer¹¹ and racial bias among jurors.¹²

Section II will discuss the historical criminalization of African Americans and implicit bias. Section III will discuss discrimination in policing. Section IV will discuss discrimination in trial and

sentencing. Section V will discuss discrimination in incarceration. Section VI will discuss the effects of contact

Well after the Civil War, federal, state, and local governments criminalized African Americans as a way to control and exploit them. Some scholars argue that this system intensified during legal segregation.

with the criminal justice system. Lastly, section VII will discuss the experience of African Americans in the civil legal system.

II. Criminalization of African Americans

It is well established in the historical scholarship that American society has criminalized African Americans starting with enslavement.¹³ Federal, state, and local governments, in order to subjugate African Americans and maintain their enslaved status, criminalized African Americans as a way to control them. This system survived the abolition of slavery and the Civil War and as some scholars argue, intensified during legal segregation. Once enslavement ended, white Americans created a new legal and social system to continue to socially control and exploit approximately four million African Americans.¹⁴

Southern states passed laws which criminalized African Americans by prohibiting every day, harmless behavior and punishing violations with harsh penalties.¹⁵ State and local governments then leased out unjustly accused, prosecuted, and convicted African Americans to private companies to work to pay off their fines.¹⁶ Between approximately the 1870s and 1940s, this system of leasing essentially created a new form of slavery.¹⁷ In the segregated South, laws that segregated African Americans treated African Americans as peripheral in American society by physically separating them from white people.¹⁸ Segregation continued to criminalize African Americans by imposing criminal punishments, such as fines and jail time, for violations of laws discriminating against African Americans.¹⁹

From approximately the 1950s to the 1990s, “law and order” or “tough on crime” political campaigns and the war on drugs resulted in laws that punished African Americans and resulted in their mass incarceration.²⁰

The Slave Codes and the Fugitive Slave Act

The American legal system's early criminalization of African Americans through legalized social control and punitive laws stretches back to the colonial era and became more punitive over time as discussed in Chapter 2, Enslavement. Oppression of African Americans began with cases in the first American colony of Virginia.²¹ In the 1640 case of John Punch, the courts punished three servants running away from their employer.²² This was one of the first documented court cases involving the rights of African Americans.²³ Two of the servants were white and the third was Black, but they all committed the same crime.²⁴ The court ordered whippings for all three, but ordered that the white servants serve their employer for three more years²⁵ while it ordered the Black servant, John Punch, to serve his enslaver for the rest of his life.²⁶

The first laws also treated African Americans more harshly than whites. Virginia passed the Casual Killing Act of 1669, which declared that if an enslaved person died while resisting their enslaver, the enslaver would not be considered to have acted with malice, which effectively made it legal for enslavers to kill the people they enslaved.²⁷ According to one scholar, most of the major slave codes were from 1680 to 1682 as they marshalled previously piecemealed legislation into one code. In 1705, Virginia passed “An act concerning Servants and Slaves,” which combined older laws regarding forced labor in Virginia. This law prohibited African Americans from engaging in activity that white people were free to do such as resisting a white person,²⁸ holding weapons,²⁹ and leaving their plantation without permission.³⁰ The laws in Virginia became a model for other southern states throughout the slavery era.³¹

Much like Virginia, other colonies adopted their own slave codes and ensured that the law subjected African Americans to criminal penalties more harshly than white people. Eventually, every enslaving state had its own slave code. Slave codes, in territories like the District of Columbia,³² and states like Alabama³³ and North Carolina,³⁴ all fundamentally treated African Americans as inferior to white people.

Although Americans frequently believe that the North was not segregated, this was not the case in reality. In 1849, the Massachusetts Supreme Court held that segregated schools were permissible under the state's constitution.³⁵ The Michigan Supreme Court held in 1855 that a steamboat company could refuse to sell an overnight cabin to Black abolitionist William Howard Day.³⁶ Courts in southern states even cited to this case—which was in a northern state—when ruling against African Americans in other cases involving segregation in schools, streetcars, and public accommodations.

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Federal laws and court decisions criminalized African Americans for asserting their human right to be free. The Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793³⁷ and 1850³⁸ required that all enslaved people seeking freedom by crossing state lines to free states be returned to their enslavers. In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that African Americans—whether enslaved or free—were not citizens of the United States and therefore did not have the rights and privileges of the U.S. Constitution.³⁹ There are many documented examples of court laws, court decisions, and associated documents⁴⁰ during this time that demonstrated that the American legal system treated African Americans as inferior, with fewer rights, and who were therefore subject to more punitive treatment under the law.

After the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War, Congress made several efforts to safeguard the rights of African Americans. Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery.⁴¹ Congress also passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which defined African Americans as citizens in order to protect the civil rights of newly freed people.⁴² To primarily

protect their physical safety, Congress passed the Ku Klux Klan Act to eliminate extralegal violence against formerly enslaved people.⁴³ Congress also created the Freedmen's Bureau in order to provide food, clothing, fuel, and other forms of assistance to destitute formerly enslaved people.⁴⁴

But, as discussed in previous chapters, white supremacist southern politicians rose to power after the contested U.S. presidential election of 1876. U.S. troops withdrew from key cities in the southern states, and the Freedmen's Bureau had already been dismantled in 1872 because of southern political pressure. As a result, these amendments and statutes were largely ignored or circumvented for a century.⁴⁵

The Black Codes

Southern states passed the Black Codes and vagrancy laws to criminalize, socially control, and maintain formerly enslaved African Americans in a lower social caste and as a source of exploited, free labor.⁴⁶ Though often confused with segregation laws, the Black Codes existed to criminalize the everyday activities of African Americans in southern states during the years immediately after the end of slavery until the Reconstruction Act of 1867.⁴⁷ If arrested and convicted of violations, African Americans again had little

to no control over their own lives. This provided an opportunity for white Americans in economic and political power to continue using Black labor to support the southern economy.⁴⁸ Moreover, Black Codes and vagrancy laws were a revival of a legal system that existed during the slavery era and further contributed to the social control of African Americans, enabling their economic exploitation.⁴⁹

During slavery, white Americans generally believed that free African Americans were suspicious, as white Americans saw free African Americans as “masterless” and therefore unhoused or vagrant, and most likely fleeing from the law.⁵⁰ In some states, police arrested African Americans if they could not prove that they worked for a white employer.⁵¹ They could not change employers without permission.⁵² African Americans could not sign labor contracts without a discharge paper from their previous employer.⁵³ This placed all the power in employers, much like slavery placed all the power in enslavers, and left African Americans with little control over their ability to find other work.

Other Black Codes supported the forced labor of Black children, as discussed in Chapter 8, Pathologizing the Black Family. As part of the Black Codes, states passed vagrancy laws that declared African Americans who were unemployed and without a permanent residence as vagrants and therefore subject to fines or imprisonment, which criminalized and controlled African Americans.⁵⁴

While the Black Codes ended in the 1860s, ex-Confederate states passed vagrancy laws after the end of Reconstruction.⁵⁵ All former states in the confederacy, except Arkansas and Tennessee, passed vagrancy laws by

The conditions under which incarcerated people worked in the convict leasing system were oppressive. Unlike in the slavery era, lessees had no incentives to keep incarcerated people healthy or alive, so the convict leasing system was “worse than slavery.”⁶³ Working and living conditions for incarcerated people were dangerous, unhealthy, and violent.⁶⁴

Archaeologists recently discovered a mass grave of incarcerated people’s remains in Sugar Land, Texas at the Bullhead Camp Cemetery that was once part of the Central State Prison Farm owned by the State of Texas.⁶⁵ In this mass grave, on land that was once owned by enslavers and their descendants, archaeologists found 95 bodies of men and boys and possibly one woman—almost all of whom were African Americans—who were participants in the state-sanctioned convict leasing system, which existed in Texas between 1871 and 1911.⁶⁶

In a system known as “convict leasing,” state laws and the U.S. Constitution allowed private entities to force African Americans into doing the same work, on the same land, and even for the same people as when they were enslaved.

1865.⁵⁶ After the police arrested African Americans for minor infractions, they leased them to a private company or a white private citizen who would pay the fine in exchange for the person’s forced labor.⁵⁷ Under this system, incarcerated people could often never earn enough to repay the plantation enslaver to their satisfaction, and allowed the plantation enslaver to continue exploiting Black workers for many years.⁵⁸

Convict Leasing and Re-enslavement

In a system known as “convict leasing,” laws and the U.S. Constitution allowed private entities to force formerly enslaved people and descendants of enslaved people into doing the same work, on the same land, and even for the same people as African Americans would have done when they were enslaved.⁵⁹ Black men and boys were arrested on vagrancy charges or minor violations, fined, and forced to pay off their fine through convict leasing. The convict leasing system was legal because the Thirteenth Amendment allowed forced labor for people who had been convicted of a crime.⁶⁰ Therefore, the legal system considered incarcerated people to have few rights because, in the words of the Supreme Court of Virginia, they were “slaves of the state.”⁶¹

In some instances, the private citizens who benefitted from this system were former enslavers or even former Confederate soldiers, such as the owner of the Angola State Penitentiary land,⁶² which was formerly a plantation, as will be discussed below in the incarceration section of this chapter.

Historical documents showed that incarcerated individuals at this plantation frequently died from heat stroke, malnourishment, extreme physical activity for extended periods of time, and disease.⁶⁷ Further, the incarcerated individuals had occupational injuries and wounds from gunshots and corporal punishment.⁶⁸ Convict leasing, such as what occurred in Sugar Land, Texas, existed throughout the American South.⁶⁹ Further, a variety of individuals and businesses used convict leasing,⁷⁰ such as Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad Co., which U.S. Steel owned.⁷¹ Scholars indicate that convict leasing gradually ended by around the 1940s,⁷² as each state stopped leasing convict labor to private individuals and business.

COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Convicted children working in the fields. (1903)

Legal Segregation and Racial Terror

During the era of legal segregation, southern state and local governments implemented a system of legalized social control to separate Black and white Americans. As discussed below, these laws were a legacy of slavery because they criminalized African Americans in a post-slavery era by mandating their separation from white Americans and provided for criminal punishments for any violations. The United States Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld the rule of “separate but equal,” legalized laws that required the separation of African Americans and white people in nearly all public places such as parks, businesses, and public transportation.⁷³ Laws provided for criminal penalties such as fines and imprisonment through the legal justice system—only for African Americans—who violated segregation laws.⁷⁴

In addition, as Chapter 3, Racial Terror, discusses, government actors and private citizens routinely punished African Americans who violated these laws—or even appeared to be breaking racial norms created by white people—through extrajudicial means such as lynching, racial massacre, and social fear-mongering. Lynching also contributed to the popular belief among Americans that Black people were assumed to be guilty.⁷⁵ White lynch mobs murdered Black suspects who were later found to be innocent.⁷⁶ Sometimes these murders occurred for no reason at all and at least one targeted a pregnant woman and her unborn child.⁷⁷ White mobs often framed the lynching as a method of self-defense against African Americans who were portrayed as dangerous criminals who posed a threat to white society.⁷⁸

Segregation laws were legal until the 1950s and 1960s when landmark cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 found them unconstitutional or made them illegal.⁷⁹

Although Americans often associate segregation laws as a southern phenomenon, the northern legal system also discriminated against African Americans and treated them as inferior after the Civil War through court cases and laws.⁸⁰ This discrimination is particularly apparent in a line of cases involving the rights of African Americans on railroad cars.⁸¹ In 1867, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled against Mary Miles who refused to sit in the colored-only section of a streetcar.⁸² Courts in southern states, such as the Florida Supreme Court⁸³ and the Tennessee Supreme Court,⁸⁴ later cited the *Miles* case in

other cases in which the courts decided against African Americans who sought to sit in the whites-only sections of streetcars.⁸⁵ It is also well-established that, from the 1880s to 1960s, northern states had laws that allowed segregation in schools and public accommodations.⁸⁶

Tough on Crime Era and the War on Drugs

The civil rights movement ended legal segregation and made explicit discrimination against African Americans in the text of court cases and statutes illegal. However, scholars argue that legalized social control continues today in the legal system despite existing civil rights laws and regulations.⁸⁷ These scholars argue that the incarceration of African Americans, particularly Black men, occurs in our legal system in two stages.⁸⁸

First, police, prosecutors, and judges have significant discretion as to who they may stop, search, arrest, and prosecute even in a supposedly racially neutral system.⁸⁹ During this first stage, the implicit bias—which the previously described history of America’s criminalization of African Americans created—affects decision makers and results in high numbers of African Americans in prison.⁹⁰ Second, as discussed above, several court cases prevented legal challenges to racial discrimination.⁹¹

White lynch mobs murdered Black suspects who were later found to be innocent. Sometimes these murders occurred for no reason at all, and even targeted Black children. White mobs often framed the lynching as a method of self-defense against African Americans who were portrayed as dangerous criminals who posed a threat to white society.

Several laws in the decades during and after the Nixon administration provided for increasingly harsh penalties on criminal defendants that resulted in a higher likelihood of African Americans in prison than white Americans.⁹² During the post-civil rights era, both Republican and Democratic politicians ran on “tough on crime” or “law and order” political platforms that popularized especially punitive criminal laws—particularly laws prohibiting drug sales, distribution, possession, and use—to gain support from voters.⁹³ John Ehrlichman, who had been Nixon’s domestic policy advisor, explained:

“The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and

black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."⁹⁴

Much like what Ehrlichman describes, and many scholars have noted, Republican politicians essentially sought to appeal to the backlash against the civil rights movement by supporting punitive criminal laws.⁹⁵ Democratic politicians such as President Bill Clinton also ran on tough on crime platforms during his campaigns and supported punitive laws once in office.⁹⁶

These political campaigns often relied on the negative stereotypes of African Americans as criminals built by the previous three centuries of American law and order. George H.W. Bush produced a series of advertisements for his 1988 presidential campaign against Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis that featured a Black man named William Horton. These advertisements exploited the stereotype of Black men as predators and rapists of white women. William Horton was convicted of murdering a white woman and stabbing her partner while on furlough through a weekend pass from prison. The furlough was granted through a Massachusetts program when Dukakis was governor of Massachusetts. The advertisement primarily consisted of a voice-over summarizing Horton's crimes and a mug shot where he looked particularly threatening. The advertisement also nicknamed Mr. Horton "Willie."⁹⁷ The "Willie Horton" advertisements inaccurately portrayed bi-partisan supported furlough programs. These programs were used in all 50 states, and afforded incarcerated individuals the opportunity to leave prison for a certain amount of time to visit family, search for employment, and prepare for life out of prison.⁹⁸ Thousands of incarcerated individuals safely took advantage of furlough programs in the nation, and William Horton was the rare tale of a disaster.⁹⁹

Once politicians entered office, racist political campaigns morphed into racist policies. In 1971, President Nixon declared a "War on Drugs."¹⁰⁰ In the speech on it, he described drug abuse as "Public Enemy Number

One."¹⁰¹ This marked the beginning of the federal government's effort to fight illegal drugs by significantly increasing penalties, enforcement, and incarceration of people who possessed, distributed, and sold illegal drugs.¹⁰² Rather than treat drug use as a public health issue, the American government chose to treat illegal drug use as a criminal justice issue.¹⁰³ Federal and state governments chose to punish drug users rather than offer medical help. The war on drugs, which continues today,¹⁰⁴ is a cause for the high numbers of imprisoned African Americans, as evidence exists to suggest that African Americans use drugs at approximately the same rate or less than white Americans.¹⁰⁵

Federal and state governments chose to punish drug users rather than offer medical help. The war on drugs, which continues today, is a cause for the high numbers of imprisoned African Americans, as evidence exists to suggest that African Americans use drugs at approximately the same rate or less than white Americans.

In the decades that followed Nixon's announcement initiating the war on drugs, Congress passed laws that harshly punished criminal defendants. During the presidency of Ronald Reagan, Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which allocated \$1.7 billion to the war on drugs and provided for mandatory minimum sentences for various drug offenses.¹⁰⁶

The law included far more severe punishment for the distribution of crack cocaine (cocaine in a solid pellet form) than the punishment for powdered cocaine (cocaine in a fine powdered form),¹⁰⁷ even though there is no scientific difference between these forms of the drug.¹⁰⁸ The law established a 100 to 1 disparity in the punishment created for the distribution of crack and powdered cocaine.¹⁰⁹ Distribution of only five grams of crack resulted in a minimum five-year federal prison sentence.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, distribution of 500 grams of powder cocaine resulted in the same sentence.¹¹¹

In 1988, Congress added even harsher penalties to the law.¹¹² The change allowed public housing authorities to evict any tenant who allows any form of drug-related criminal activity to occur in or near public housing premises¹¹³ and eliminated many federal benefits, such as student loans, for anyone convicted of a drug offense.¹¹⁴ An arrest is not required to evict entire families from public housing, as long as an agency employee

determines that a household member or guest has engaged in drug related activity.¹¹⁵ Scholars have argued that these policies perpetuate residential segregation.¹¹⁶

The law also expanded the use of the death penalty for serious drug-related offenses and imposed new mandatory minimums for drug offenses.¹¹⁷ This Anti-Drug Abuse Act has had a disproportionate effect on African Americans because African Americans have more commonly used crack cocaine rather than powdered cocaine.¹¹⁸ One study found that the probability that a Black man would enroll in college dropped 10 percent after the passage of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986.¹¹⁹ Another showed that close to one third of individuals arrested for drug possession in the U.S. are Black adults.¹²⁰

Some scholars argue that other laws passed during this time intensified drug law enforcement by incentivizing local law enforcement to stop, search, prosecute, and/or incarcerate large numbers of people. During the presidency of President Bill Clinton, Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 or “The 1994 Crime Bill,” which made several changes to the law, such as increased federal penalties for many crimes; made a variety of offenses federal crimes; and provided federal funding in ways that encouraged the growth of a more punitive criminal justice system.¹²¹

Some scholars have argued that this bill contributed to the exponential growth of the prison population in the United States in part by promising \$8 billion to states if they adopted “truth-in-sentencing” laws, which required that incarcerated people serve at least 85 percent of their sentences.¹²² To name another example,

In 1984, Congress passed the Comprehensive Forfeiture Act which allows the police to keep assets of people engaging in criminal activity. Numerous studies around the country have found that the police are more likely to seize money and property from Black defendants.

Congress passed the Comprehensive Forfeiture Act of 1984, which as some scholars argue, incentivizes police to engage in over-policing because it allows them to keep assets of people engaging in criminal activity.¹²³ Numerous studies around the country have found that the police are more likely to seize money and property from Black defendants.¹²⁴

Implicit Bias

As federal, state, and local governments intentionally and methodically criminalized African Americans, Americans, regardless of race, began to associate African Americans with crime. This enduring legacy of slavery has resulted in an American society that is biased against African Americans. Psychologists have documented, for almost 60 years, that the stereotype of African Americans as violent and criminal.¹²⁵ This association is not only strong, it also appears to be automatic (unconscious).¹²⁶ Other studies show that in cases involving a white victim, the more stereotypically Black a defendant is perceived to be, the more likely that person is perceived to be dangerous.¹²⁷

A new but growing body of scholarship shows that police officers are frequently biased against African Americans.¹²⁸ New policing technologies may perpetuate how police treat African Americans because they use algorithms that replicate human biases.¹²⁹

California

Much like courts in southern states and northern states, California courts and the legislature also discriminated against African Americans throughout history.

In 1874, the California Supreme Court upheld school segregation in San Francisco.¹³⁰ In 1919, the California Supreme Court decided a case *against* a Black couple, the Garys, who fought to keep their Los Angeles property against a racially restrictive covenant.¹³¹ These cases show that California courts were actively involved in legitimizing discrimination against African Americans.

In addition to court cases, California also passed discriminatory laws. As discussed in other chapters, in 1850, the state prohibited marriage between Black and white Americans¹³² and prohibited African Americans from testifying in civil and¹³³ criminal court cases that involved white people.¹³⁴ The California Supreme Court upheld this law prohibiting testimony from African

Americans.¹³⁵ Like other states and the federal government, California also passed its own Fugitive Slave Law in 1852.¹³⁶ Much like southern states, California also had vagrancy laws.¹³⁷

More recently, California passed the Mulford Act on July 28, 1967, which made it a misdemeanor to carry

loaded firearms in public.¹³⁸ The bill was in response to the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which was formed in Northern California in 1966 and organized legal armed demonstrations in the state to support and protect African Americans.¹³⁹ In February 1967, 20 armed Panthers escorted Malcom X's widow Betty Shabazz to the Malcom X Grassroots Memorial in San Francisco.¹⁴⁰ In April 1967, 12 armed Panthers led a protest against a Contra Costa County Sheriff who killed a young Black man.¹⁴¹ It was against this backdrop that state Assemblyman Donald Mulford introduced legislation to ban the carrying of firearms in public places.¹⁴² In response to the proposed legislation, a group of Panthers walked inside the Assembly chamber at the California Capitol while carrying firearms to protest.¹⁴³ Although Assemblyman Mulford had denied that the legislation was racially motivated, after that demonstration, Assemblyman Mulford added a provision to Assembly Bill 1591 that would also include a ban on carrying loaded weapons in state buildings.¹⁴⁴

California has also imprisoned Black activists. Romaine “Chip” Fitzgerald and Geronimo Pratt, both influential members of the Black Panther Party, were sentenced to life in prison for separate murders in 1969 and 1971, respectively.¹⁴⁵ Even though by 1990 there was substantial evidence indicating that Geronimo Pratt was framed, the California Supreme Court refused to overturn his conviction at the time and a Los Angeles County Deputy

III. Policing

Police have harassed, brutalized, and killed African Americans since the slavery era. The stereotypes created to support slavery and that have carried through to the modern day have resulted in implicit biases against

Slave patrols were made up of ordinary citizens, like farmers, hotelkeepers, and brick makers, who banded together to catch, return, and discipline freedom seekers and prevent revolts.

African Americans in the American public at large and in our police force. Due to implicit bias in policing, and the effects of residential segregation, Black communities are paradoxically both under and over-policed depending on the type of crime.¹⁵⁰ The police and the American public see African Americans not as victims, but as criminals. The legacy of slavery continues to devalue Black lives today as police are more likely to stop, arrest, and kill African Americans than white Americans.

COURTESY OF DAVE RANDOLPH/SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE VIA GETTY IMAGES



San Francisco Police raid Black Panthers in the Fillmore District (1969)

District Attorney argued against Pratt's parole stating, “he is still a revolutionary man.”¹⁴⁶ While Fitzgerald remained in prison for over 51 years until his death at age 71,¹⁴⁷ Pratt was eventually released in 1996 after documents confirmed that the government's key witness was an undercover police operative who posed as a member of the Black Panther Party.¹⁴⁸ Advocates argue that other Black political activists currently imprisoned in California should be considered political prisoners because they have been denied parole as a result of their political affiliations.¹⁴⁹

Slave Patrols

Slavery era “slave patrols” were an early form of policing and one of the first patrols began in the Carolina colony in the early 1700s.¹⁵¹ Slave patrols were made up of ordinary citizens, like farmers, hotelkeepers, and brick makers,¹⁵² who banded together to catch, return, and discipline freedom seekers and prevent revolts.¹⁵³ Some slave patrol members were community leaders and the enslavers who enslaved large numbers of people in the region.¹⁵⁴ Some slave patrols had written patrol enforcement instructions, member rosters, and correspondence.¹⁵⁵ Others were more informal and simply consisted of all adult men in a community.¹⁵⁶

Slave patrols had many similarities with modern police departments. Much like current police departments, some slave patrols had hierarchical organization structures that mimicked military units with ranks such as

captain.¹⁵⁷ Slave patrols also used dogs to attack enslaved people by biting them but also to instill fear, and used bloodhounds to track down enslaved people.¹⁵⁸ Freedom seekers learned to run without shoes and put black pepper in their socks to make the slave patrols' bloodhounds sneeze and throw them off their scent.¹⁵⁹

Much like slave patrols, police have continued to use dogs against African Americans in the 20th century through the present. Police used dogs against demonstrators during the civil rights movement.¹⁶⁰ The United States Department of Justice noted in its 2015 report that the Ferguson Police Department “exclusively set their dogs against black individuals, often in cases where doing so was not justified by the danger presented.” In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, police dogs bit at least 146 people from 2017 to 2019 and almost all of whom were Black.¹⁶¹

Law Enforcement Targeting of Black Political Leaders

Law enforcement agencies have not only targeted African Americans and physically hurt them, but

COURTESY OF DUNCANI890/DIGITALVISION VECTORS VIA GETTY IMAGES



Vintage engraving of an African American man running through long grass chased by men on horseback with dogs. (c. 1880)

the federal government has targeted Black political leaders to neutralize their effectiveness. As discussed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror and Chapter 4, Political Disenfranchisement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and state intelligence agencies, like the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, targeted civil rights leaders and activists to deter them. The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission openly discussed murdering civil rights activists¹⁶² and were implicated in false convictions of activists.¹⁶³ The Federal Bureau of Investigation has continued surveillance action today against Black Lives Matter organizers.¹⁶⁴

Over-Policing

A majority of African Americans live in communities where there are higher rates of violent crime. As described in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, due to government-sanctioned residential segregation, African Americans are far more likely than white Americans to live in impoverished neighborhoods with higher rates of violent crime.¹⁶⁵ Sixty-two percent of African Americans live in highly segregated, metropolitan areas that experience a high degree of violent crime, while the majority of white Americans live in “highly advantaged” neighborhoods where there is little violent crime.¹⁶⁶ As Dr. Bruce Appleyard testified during the December 7, 2021 Task Force Meeting, there may be a connection with formerly redlined communities and higher rates of police stopping and searching of African Americans.¹⁶⁷

Studies suggest that police treat African Americans differently than white Americans. Some scholars believe that police arrest large numbers of African Americans for relatively minor crimes, such as loitering, drug possession, and driving infractions. In 2019, African Americans comprised 26 percent of all arrests yet they only made up 13.4 percent of the population.¹⁶⁸ According to a recent large-scale analysis of racial disparities in of nearly 100 million state patrol police stops in 33 states, researchers found that police officers stop African Americans more often than white drivers relative to their share of the driving-age population.¹⁶⁹ Drivers—after controlling for age, gender, time, and location—are more likely to be ticketed, searched, and arrested when they are Black than when they are white.¹⁷⁰ There is also evidence that the bar for searching Black drivers is lower than for searching white Americans.¹⁷¹ A 2021 study of traffic stop data in Florida shows that approximately 42 percent of police officers in that state discriminate during traffic stops and that minority drivers are less likely to be able to leave with a warning when compared to white drivers.¹⁷² Another study shows that police use more force against Black and Latino suspects in the beginning stages of interactions.¹⁷³

Some early data also indicates that police may have arrested a large number of African Americans, relative to their proportion of the population, for violating social distancing rules during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷⁴

Some research indicates that American society views African Americans so differently than the rest of the population that marketing professionals have identified and potentially exploited this trend.¹⁷⁵ Marketing has targeted African Americans for consumer products to defy racism and project a middle class identity.¹⁷⁶ Respondents in one study indicated that being well groomed is a way to defy racism by showing worthiness.¹⁷⁷

The daily ongoing fear of racial profiling has an enduring effect on African Americans. Former First Lady Michelle Obama discussed her fears about her daughters becoming the victims of racial profiling:¹⁷⁸ “The fact that they are good students and polite girls, but maybe they’re playing their music a little loud, maybe somebody sees the back of their head and makes an assumption.” “Many of us still live in fear as we go to the grocery store, walking our dogs, or allowing our children to get a license.” Obama said.¹⁷⁹

Policing in Black communities, such as through “stop and frisk” techniques, “communicates to Black men that they are objects of disdain by the state and that their citizenship is degraded.”¹⁸⁰

A 2017 study of officer-worn body camera footage showed police officers speaking significantly less respectfully to African Americans than to white Americans in everyday traffic stops after controlling for officer race, infraction severity, stop location, and stop outcome.¹⁸¹

Federal programs and nationwide policing practices have contributed to this over-policing. Operation Pipeline is a federal program in which over 300 state and local law enforcement agencies train officers to use pretextual stops and consent searches on a large scale for the interception of the transportation of drugs. “Broken Windows,” an aggressive crime prevention strategy, emphasizing arresting people for committing both major and minor offenses, was first implemented in New York City in the 1990s.¹⁸² It resulted in arrests of disproportionate numbers of Latino and Black youth.¹⁸³

Under-Policing and the Dismissal of Black Victims

In addition to perceiving African Americans as more dangerous, Americans and police officers are also less likely to view African Americans as victims of crimes, particularly in areas of violence against women and girls, and mass shootings. Evidence of such under-policing is apparent in the popular news coverage of many cases in which law enforcement authorities appear to have ignored the disappearance of Black women, girls, and children.

Crimes against Black women are poorly investigated and sometimes ignored altogether. When police actually attempt to investigate alleged crimes against Black women, they often believe the victims are not credible.

Although Black women experience more sexual violence, Black women have historically not received the same level of attention as white women following sexual assaults.¹⁸⁴ As one scholar explains: “Crimes against Black women are poorly investigated and sometimes ignored altogether. When police actually attempt to investigate alleged crimes against Black women, they often believe the victims are not credible. Further, the few sexual assault crimes that actually lead to police charges are frequently not pursued by prosecutors[,] . . . denying [Black women] access to justice.”¹⁸⁵ Black women and girls are disproportionately more likely to be victims of sex trafficking in the United States than women and girls of other races.¹⁸⁶

These biases are rooted in history. In 1855, a judge instructed a jury that Missouri’s laws protecting women who resist sexual assault did not apply to a 19-year-old enslaved woman, Celia, who killed her enslaver when he was attempting to rape her, after she had already endured five years of rape resulting in the birth of two of his children.¹⁸⁷

This trend also extends to crimes against Black children. Black children on average remain missing longer than non-Black children.¹⁸⁸ Black women and girls, in particular, go missing in numbers larger than their proportion of the population.¹⁸⁹ Not only the police but also the media¹⁹⁰ typically pay them less attention compared to missing white women and girls.¹⁹¹ Police and prosecutors

sometimes have also improperly handled these cases.¹⁹² In Atlanta, Georgia, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, a serial killer murdered approximately two dozen children, many of whom were Black boys.¹⁹³ Police arrested and prosecutors convicted Wayne Williams of killing two adults, but prosecutors never tried or convicted him of killing any children, even though many believe he murdered the missing children.¹⁹⁴ In fact, prosecutors have never obtained a conviction for the murders of all the missing children.¹⁹⁵

Similarly, Black transgender and gender non-conforming people receive inadequate police protection, even though they are more likely to suffer violent crime.¹⁹⁶ Advocates have described an increasing “epidemic of violence” against the transgender community,¹⁹⁷ and studies show that Black transgender women are significantly more likely to experience violence or be murdered compared to white transgender women.¹⁹⁸ In 2019, for example, Black transgender women made up 91 percent of all transgender people killed by violent crime.¹⁹⁹ Despite experiencing greater levels of violence, Black transgender people are also less likely to seek and receive help from the police.²⁰⁰ This is because Black transgender people suffer much higher rates of harassment and assault when interacting with the police.²⁰¹

Some very new and limited scholarship shows that “mass shootings” occur more in Black communities than in other communities and more frequently than is cov-

Black children on average remain missing longer than non-Black children. Black women and girls, in particular, go missing in numbers larger than their proportion of the population. Not only the police but also the media typically pay them less attention compared to missing white women and girls.

ered in media reports.²⁰² Part of the reason is due to the fact that the definition of “mass shootings” is different, depending on the government agency, and the media tends only to cover “mass public shooting” rather than mass shootings that grow out of violence between individuals or groups.²⁰³

Employment Discrimination

Employment discrimination in police departments against Black applicants may exacerbate discrimination

and police brutality against African Americans. The Obama administration’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing noted in its recommendations that the diversity of the nation’s law enforcement agencies was an important aspect in developing community trust in the police.²⁰⁴ The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has identified problems with hiring, retention, harassment, and promotion of Black police officers.²⁰⁵ Police officers have publicly complained in news outlets throughout the country about issues around discrimination and harassment against Black police officers and correctional officers.²⁰⁶ These conditions have resulted in many departments that have very few Black police officers. Some scholars have argued that this lack of diversity in police departments contributes to discrimination and police brutality against African Americans.

Extrajudicial Police Killings

There is a very long history of police officers killings of African Americans throughout the United States, from the slavery era to present day. This history has not been limited to the southern states, but as discussed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror, is also part of California’s history.

A study of thousands of use of force incidents has concluded that African Americans are far more likely than other groups to be the victims of police violence.²⁰⁷ African Americans are 2.9 times more likely to be killed by police than white people.²⁰⁸ In fact, the statistics may be worse than this because, according to one study of data from 1980 to 2019, more than half of all killings by police in the U.S. go unreported in the USA National Vital Statistics System database from which some analysis is drawn.²⁰⁹

There are many well-publicized examples of police killing African Americans such as: George Floyd (Minneapolis, Minnesota) and Breonna Taylor (Louisville, Kentucky).²¹⁰ Some have died while in police custody, like Sandra Bland in Waller County, Texas. Others have likely died because of police neglect, such as Mitrice Richardson who disappeared in Malibu, California in 2009.

California

Police violence against African Americans is similar in California.²¹¹ Statistics from California’s Racial and

African Americans are



to be killed by police

More than half of all killings by police in the U.S. go unreported in the USA National Vital Statistics System database from which some analysis is drawn.

Identity Profiling Advisory Board’s 2022 report, drawing on data from 18 law enforcement agencies, including California’s 15 largest agencies, shows that police stopped a higher percentage of people perceived to be Black for reasonable suspicion that the person was engaged in criminal activity than any other racial group.²¹²

In 2020, African Americans made up about seven percent of the population, but those perceived to be Black made up 17 percent of people police stopped,²¹³ and 18 percent of the people police have shot or seriously injured,²¹⁴ and 20 percent of those killed by police.²¹⁵

Officers searched, detained on the curb or in a patrol car, handcuffed, and removed from vehicles more people who the officers perceived as Black than individuals they perceived as white.²¹⁶ Search discovery rate analysis showed that individuals who police perceived as Black had the highest search rate.²¹⁷ People perceived to be Black were also more likely to have police use force against them compared to people perceived as white.²¹⁸ Police officers also reported ultimately taking no action during a stop most frequently when stopping a person they perceived to be Black,²¹⁹ suggesting there may have been no legitimate basis for the stop.

As in the rest of the country, the Operation Pipeline Program in California led to racial profiling in the state. In a 1999 report by the California State Legislature, the California Highway Patrol described Operation Pipeline enforcement efforts as a way to find illegal drugs by generating “a very high volume of legal traffic enforcement stops to screen for criminal activity, which may include drug trafficking.”²²⁰ As one California Highway Patrol sergeant said in an interview, “It’s sheer numbers. . . . Our guys make a lot of stops. You’ve got to kiss a lot of frogs before you find a prince.”²²¹ California Highway Patrol canine units were involved in nearly 34,000 such stops in 1997 and only two percent of those stopped were carrying drugs.²²² In 1999, the American Civil Liberties Union sued the California Highway Patrol and alleged that Operation Pipeline taught officers to stop

Black and Latino male drivers for little or no reason.²²³ The California Highway Patrol admitted in court documents that its officers were twice as likely to stop Black drivers than white drivers, and were more likely to ask Black drivers for permission to search their cars than white drivers.²²⁴

Relatedly, an analysis of data from 2000 to 2008 in California showed that African Americans were significantly more likely than white people to be arrested for a marijuana offense.²²⁵ After the legalization of cannabis in California, news reports indicated that Black entrepreneurs who try to start new cannabis related businesses face challenges and delays, including a slow licensing processes.²²⁶ For an in depth discussion of discrimination in licensure, see Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity.

African Americans are also increasingly victims of hate crimes both nationwide and in California. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 48.5 percent of single-bias hate crime incidents were motivated by anti-Black bias in 2019.²²⁷ According to the California Attorney General’s report on hate crimes in the state in 2020, 34.3 percent of single-bias hate crimes were motivated by anti-Black bias.²²⁸ Anti-Black bias events were the most prevalent of all types of hate crimes and increased 88 percent from 2019 to 2020.²²⁹

88% increase
in **anti-Black** hate crimes
from 2019 to 2020



There are numerous high-profile incidents of police killing African Americans in California such as Ezell Ford (Los Angeles); Kendrec McDade (Pasadena); Wakeisha Wilson (Los Angeles); Anthony McClain (Pasadena); Oscar Grant (Oakland); Dijon Kizzee (Los Angeles); Richard Risher (Los Angeles); Stephon Clark (Sacramento); and Alfred Olango (San Diego). These deaths and many others nationwide have sparked increased activism and public awareness on the issue of police brutality. Activists established the first chapter of Black Lives Matter in Los Angeles and it is now a global network of activists.²³⁰

Police departments throughout the state have histories of violence against African Americans.

In Los Angeles before the turn of the century, the city's police had a history of violence against other historically marginalized groups such as Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. As more African Americans moved to the city, the time period between the 1920s to the 1960s was characterized by police brutality against African Americans and protests, such as the Watts Rebellion in 1965. Much like many other historical events that are often considered “riots,” what occurred in Watts was a reaction to injustice or a “rebellion.” For further discussion of rebellions, please see Chapter 3, Racial Terror.

In the 1980s, the Los Angeles Police Department, which is the largest police department in California and one of the largest in the country, referred to Black suspects as “dog biscuits.”²³¹ Victims of police dogs sued and alleged that the department disproportionately used dogs in minority neighborhoods, which resulted in police dogs inflicting 90 percent of their reported bites on African Americans or Latinos.²³² In 2013, the Special Counsel to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, which is the largest sheriff's department in California and the country, found that African Americans and Latinos comprised 89 percent of the total individuals who were bitten by the department's dogs from 2004 to 2012.²³³ During the same time, the Special Counsel found that the number of African Americans that police dogs bit increased 33 percent.²³⁴

Often, such incidents of police brutality led to community protests that, in turn, sometimes continue brutality by police.²³⁵ The beating of Rodney King by the LAPD is one such example.²³⁶ On March 3, 1991, Rodney King stopped his car after leading LAPD officers on a pursuit.²³⁷ Officers beat Rodney King and were captured on video.²³⁸ The officers were charged but, despite strong video evidence against the officers, were ultimately acquitted.²³⁹

There is also at least some evidence that law enforcement gangs—which are groups of peace officers within an agency that engage in a pattern of on-duty behavior that intentionally violates the law or fundamental principles of professional policing²⁴⁰—such as those alleged in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, have exacerbated the brutalization of African Americans by law enforcement in California.²⁴¹ In 1990, at least 75 Lynwood resident filed a class action lawsuit alleging that the sheriff's department allowed the “Vikings,” a

sheriff's department deputy gang, to carry out racially motivated violence in the community.²⁴²

In Los Angeles County, which is the state and country's most populous county,²⁴³ as of April 2022, police have killed 964 people since 2000, 24 percent of whom were Black even though African Americans comprised only eight percent of the population during that time.²⁴⁴ Los Angeles police have also historically appeared to ignore the disappearance of Black women.²⁴⁵ Lonnie David

The Los Angeles Police Department, the largest police department in California and one of the largest in the country, once referred to African American suspects as “dog biscuits.”

Franklin Jr. was believed to have murdered several Black women and girls in the Los Angeles area.²⁴⁶ He was not arrested and convicted until 2016, due to what activists believe was police neglect.²⁴⁷

In the Bay Area, police brutality became such a concern that the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which later became the Black Panther Party, formed to provide protection to African Americans from the police during the 1960s.²⁴⁸ Two young activists, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, saw brutality against civil rights protestors as part of a long history of police violence.²⁴⁹ Eventually, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense evolved into an organization that provided several other services to the community such as medical clinics and free breakfasts for children.²⁵⁰ In fact, the Black Panthers even engaged in forms of “counter-mapping,” which is a form of activism in which marginalized groups use maps to challenge inequality, to propose the creation of new police districts in Berkeley, California.²⁵¹ In the San Francisco Bay Area, according to a study, 27 percent of the people police killed were Black even though they only comprised seven percent of the population at the time.²⁵²

Discrimination by Californian police against African Americans is not limited to large police departments like the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. According to analysis of traffic stops by the San Diego Police Department from 2014 to 2015, officers are more likely to search and question Black drivers than white drivers even though officers were less likely to find them with contraband.²⁵³ An evaluation of 2016 to 2018 data showed that both the San Diego Police Department and Sheriff's Department were more likely to stop, search, and use force against African Americans and people with disabilities than

other groups.²⁵⁴ Further, African Americans were 4.3 times more likely than white people to be arrested by the police department for drug possession even though research shows that Black and white people use and sell drugs at similar rates.²⁵⁵ The police department also stopped African Americans at a rate three times higher than white people.²⁵⁶ Both agencies used higher levels of force against African Americans compared to other groups.²⁵⁷ Both agencies used more severe levels of force against African Americans than white people at every level of alleged resistance.²⁵⁸

After the fatal shooting of Stephon Alonzo Clark by members of the Sacramento Police Department, the Attorney General conducted a review of the Sacramento Police Department's policies, procedures, and training regarding the use of force, and issued two reports to help guide the police department's reform efforts.²⁵⁹



COURTESY OF JUSTIN SULLIVAN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Sacramento, California—Hundreds packed a special city council at Sacramento City Hall to address concerns over the shooting death of Stephon Clark by Sacramento police. (2018)

In California's rural and suburban regions, the California Attorney General has investigated²⁶⁰ and secured a stipulated judgment²⁶¹ involving the Kern County Sheriff's Department regarding unlawful practices such as

unreasonable use of force, stops, searches, and seizures, and failure to exercise appropriate management and supervision of deputies. The Attorney General has also investigated²⁶² the Bakersfield Police Department, and secured a stipulated judgment for the police department to strengthen its engagement with the community.²⁶³ The Attorney General is also reviewing the practices of the Torrance Police Department amidst serious allegations of racist text messages, some of which contained disparaging comments about African Americans, and other discriminatory conduct.²⁶⁴

As a result of community activism and increased nationwide public awareness of police brutality against African Americans in 2020 in particular, California has recently taken steps to attempt to address the numerous concerns with policing in the state. Assembly Bill 89 raises the minimum qualifying age to be a police officer from 18 to 21 years of age and sets other minimum qualification requirements for peace officers in an effort to reduce uses of deadly force.²⁶⁵ Assembly Bill 750 makes it a crime for a police officer to make a false statement to another peace officer if that statement is included in a peace officer report.²⁶⁶ Assembly Bill 1506 requires the California Department of Justice to investigate and review for potential criminal liability all officer-involved shootings that result in the death of unarmed civilians in the state.²⁶⁷ Senate Bill 2 creates a process to decertify police officers for misconduct, preventing such officers from being able to join any another agency in California.²⁶⁸ California was one of only four states without that power.²⁶⁹ Assembly Bill 118 creates pilot programs to allow community organizations to respond to 911 calls rather than police.²⁷⁰ Assembly Bill 26 requires officers to intervene if they witness another officer using excessive force, and requires officers to report the use of force and prohibits retaliation against reporting officers.²⁷¹ But these reforms do not alone address the many years of discrimination African Americans have experienced at the hands of the criminal justice system.

IV. Trial and Sentencing

History

During the slavery era, most states denied African Americans the right to service on juries, as most states linked the ability to serve on juries to the ability to vote.²⁷² As discussed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror, African Americans were not allowed to vote in most states during this time. Most states also denied African Americans the right and protections of a jury trial, leaving African Americans vulnerable to unjust convictions.²⁷³

After the Civil War, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 outlawed race based discrimination in jury selection.²⁷⁴ As discussed in Chapter 4, Political Disenfranchisement, the 14th and 15th Amendments guaranteed Black men the right to vote and serve on juries.²⁷⁵ In some states, racially integrated juries protected the rights of Black defendants and prosecuted white perpetrators of racial violence.²⁷⁶

In the South, after Reconstruction, and until the 1960s, numerous allegations of crimes involving Black defendants and white victims never made it to trial.²⁷⁷ Instead, the accused Black person was lynched.²⁷⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror, prosecutors rarely tried or convicted the white Americans who tortured and murdered African Americans through race massacres and lynchings. The same all-white juries who did not indict white perpetrators of violence convicted Black defendants, imposed harsh sentences for minor crimes, often with little evidence.²⁷⁹ According to the Select Committee of the Senate outlined in the Report on Alleged Outrages in the Southern States in 1871, “In nine cases out of ten the men who commit the crimes constitute or sit on the grand jury, either they themselves or their near relatives or friends, sympathizers, aiders, or abettors.”²⁸⁰

The U.S. Supreme Court did not decide until 1935 that excluding African Americans from juries because of race was unconstitutional.²⁸¹ In *Norris v. Alabama*, eight Black teenagers were convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to death for the rape of two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama, despite overwhelming evidence of their innocence.²⁸² No Black person had served on a jury in Scottsboro in living memory.²⁸³

After *Norris v. Alabama*, many jurisdictions continued to exclude African Americans from jurors by using pre-emptory strikes or other pretexts.²⁸⁴

Systemic Bias Today

Today, systemic problems in the criminal justice system continue to discriminate against African Americans. Courts throughout the country have and continue to be underfunded, which can result in barriers in accessing justice, such as case delays.²⁸⁵ Although courts in California are now required to take into account an individual’s ability to pay when setting bail,²⁸⁶ in other parts of the country wealthy defendants can essentially purchase their pre-trial freedom through the cash bail system, whereas low-income defendants might suffer additional harsh consequences solely because of their inability to pay. This occurs despite three waves of attempts to reform the cash bail system nationwide.²⁸⁷ As discussed in the civil legal system discussion of this chapter, lack of diversity in the legal profession may also exacerbate the discrimination African Americans face in the criminal justice system.²⁸⁸ Scholars argue that racial bias against Black defendants results in discriminatory choices by

prosecutors, who make important decisions in the criminal justice system,²⁸⁹ although empirical evidence exists of such bias only seems to exist in certain types of crimes.²⁹⁰

One study showed that when witnesses knew that the perpetrators were Black, witnesses who claimed to not be racially biased were more likely to incorrectly identify the perpetrator than witnesses who stated they were racially prejudiced.

Discrimination against African Americans in the criminal justice system not only results from racial biases in police, but also in witnesses and jurors. One study showed that when witnesses knew that the perpetrators were Black, witnesses who claimed to not be racially biased were *more* likely to incorrectly identify the perpetrator than witnesses who stated they were racially prejudiced.²⁹¹ Lack of diversity on juries continues to be a nationwide problem.²⁹² A study in North Carolina showing that qualified Black jurors were struck from juries at more than twice the rate of qualified white jurors.²⁹³ Scholars have identified the following as factors contributing to underrepresentation on juries: “racial discrimination in jury selection,” socioeconomic barriers preventing participation by African Americans, “judicial discrimination that allows racially demarcated jury representation,” and “institutional racism and bureaucratic discrimination in perpetuating judicial inequality.”²⁹⁴

One scholar has shown that study participants remembered and misremembered legally relevant facts in racially biased ways.²⁹⁵ The author of the study argues that implicit racial biases affect the way judges and jurors encode, store, and recall, relevant case facts, which leads to the conclusion that implicit memory biases operate in legal decision-making.²⁹⁶ A lack of jury diversity can also harm African Americans in family courts and the child welfare system, which the Chapter 8, Pathologizing, the Black Family, discusses in more detail.

The lack of diversity in juries can result in poor trial and sentencing outcomes for African Americans.²⁹⁷ According to a 2017 report from the United States Sentencing Commission, Black men who commit the same crimes as white men are given prison sentences that are about 20% longer, even after controlling for prior criminal history.²⁹⁸ African Americans are more likely than white Americans to be serving sentences of life, life without parole, or sentences of 50 years or more.²⁹⁹

Capital Punishment

As discussed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror, advocates have argued that capital punishment is the modern day, legal equivalent of lynching. The U.S. Supreme Court has acknowledged that the death penalty has a discriminatory effect on African Americans. In *Furman v. Georgia*, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Douglas noted that there is evidence of racial discrimination in the imposition of the death penalty³⁰⁰ and that an African American would be more likely to get the death penalty when convicted for rape when compared to a white American.³⁰¹ Regardless, the Supreme Court still decided that the death penalty is constitutional in some circumstances.³⁰² Currently, 27 states have the death penalty while 23 states and the District of Columbia do not.³⁰³ Three states, such as California, currently have a gubernatorial moratorium on executions.³⁰⁴

In the states where executions still occur, Black men are overrepresented among people federal and state governments execute.³⁰⁵ A 2015 meta-analysis of 30 studies showing that those responsible for the murders of white people were more likely than those responsible for the murders of Black people to face a capital prosecution.³⁰⁶

California

Historically, California barred African Americans from serving on juries.³⁰⁷ Lack of diversity on juries continues to be a widespread problem throughout California as, a 2020 study showed that racial discrimination is an “ever-present” feature of jury selection in California.³⁰⁸ The study found that California prosecutors’ use of peremptory challenges to exclude African Americans from juries is still pervasive.³⁰⁹ In the last 30 years, the California Supreme Court has reviewed 142 cases involving *Batson* claims, which is the process by which a party can object to a preemptory challenge because of a juror’s race, and found a violation only three times.³¹⁰ In fact, from 2006 to 2018, California courts held that there was a *Batson* error in just 18 out of 683 cases.³¹¹ It has been over 30 years since the California Supreme Court held that there was a *Batson* violation involving a Black juror.³¹²

Prosecutorial misconduct, which is generally when a prosecutor violates their duty to refrain from improper

methods calculated to produce a wrongful conviction,³¹³ also continues to be an issue in California’s criminal courts as one study of 4,000 state and federal appellate rulings in California from 1997 through 2009 discovered that courts found prosecutorial misconduct in 707 cases, which on average, amounts to about one case a week during that time.³¹⁴

California is one of several states that have a three-strikes law. Although amended by Proposition 36 in 2012 to apply to only serious or violent felonies,³¹⁵ California’s initial three-strikes law, imposed life sentence for almost any crime—no matter how minor—if the defendant has two prior convictions for crimes that were serious under the California Penal Code. The general goal of the three-strikes law was to deter offenders, particularly violent ones, from committing crimes again.

The cases of Leandro Andrade is an example of how California’s three strikes law was especially punitive and led to excessive sentencing.³¹⁶ In 1982, Andrade committed three residential burglaries during the same day while unarmed and when nobody was in the homes he burglarized.³¹⁷ Then, in 1995, he stole five videotapes, which were worth \$84.70 and was arrested for shoplifting.³¹⁸ Later that same year, he stole four videotapes, which were worth \$68.84 and was arrested for shoplifting.³¹⁹ Under California’s three strikes law at that time, the third strike could be for any crime and did not necessarily need to be a serious or violent felony.³²⁰ As a result, he received a sentence of 50 years to life.³²¹

In *Furman v. Georgia*, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Douglas noted that there is evidence of racial discrimination in the imposition of the death penalty and that an African American would be more likely to get the death penalty when convicted for rape when compared to a white American.

These policies have resulted in longer sentences for African Americans in California correctional facilities.³²² Recent reforms in California, which this chapter discusses below, have offered alternatives to incarceration for some individuals, but many African Americans still served excessive prison sentences for years.³²³

V. Incarceration

History

The history of criminalization of African Americans since slavery and the inequities in policing, trials, and sentencing have resulted in an overrepresentation of African Americans in jails and prisons, a phenomenon known as mass incarceration. As this chapter has described, American society began to criminalize African Americans starting from the era of slavery through Black Codes, vagrancy laws, and segregation laws. Further, “law and order” or “tough on crime” political campaigns in the 20th century resulted in particularly punitive sentencing and parole systems, which have led to the imprisonment of large numbers of African Americans. Although correctional authorities did not always uniformly collect data on the race of prisoners, there is evidence from the U.S. Department of Justice showing that African Americans have comprised a percentage of prisoners exceeding their percentage of the population outside of correctional facilities, from at least 1926 to 1986.³²⁴

One study has found that while Black and white incarcerated people were equally likely to break rules, correctional authorities were more likely to report infractions by Black people.

The percentage of prisoners admitted to state and federal institutions who are Black has consistently grown, and which general population trends cannot explain.³²⁵ Although the imprisonment rate of African Americans has generally decreased since 2006,³²⁶ African Americans continue to be overrepresented both nationwide and in California in adult incarceration, solitary confinement, capital punishment, and juvenile incarceration.

Adult Incarceration

The United States has the highest imprisonment rate—the number of people in prison or jail as a percentage of its total population—in the world.³²⁷ Numerous academics, activists, and politicians have called for an end to mass incarceration, and there have been reforms in several states such as Texas, Kansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, Kentucky, and Ohio.³²⁸

These reforms largely focus on reducing excessive prison sentences. However, advocates argue that these efforts are not sufficient to undo decades of prison expansion.³²⁹ One study estimates that at current rates, it will take 72 years to cut the U.S. prison population in

half.³³⁰ Despite reforms, African Americans continue to be overrepresented in prisons nationwide: 20 percent of prisoners in federal and state correctional facilities were African Americans even though they made up just 13.4 percent of the population in 2019.³³¹ In 2021, African Americans comprise 38.3 percent of people in federal prisons across the country.³³²

In addition to overrepresentation of African Americans in correctional facilities, federal and state officials continue to use the labor of incarcerated people.³³³ In fact, some present-day prisons where incarcerated people still perform labor are on land that was once a plantation where enslaved people worked before the Civil War and where southern states similarly enslaved African Americans after the Civil War through convict leasing.³³⁴ Angola Louisiana State Penitentiary shows how, in some ways, the American correctional system continues the legacy of slavery.³³⁵

Angola, which is currently outside of present day Baton Rouge, was originally a plantation named for the African country from which most of its enslaved people were trafficked.³³⁶ After the Civil War and abolition of slavery, former Confederate Major Samuel

Lawrence James received a lease of Louisiana State Penitentiary and all its incarcerated individuals.³³⁷ Under this lease, James subleased the majority of black people who were incarcerated to land owners to replace enslaved people while others continued to work on levees, railroads, and road construction while others were given clerical and craftsmanship work.³³⁸ Later, there were also attempts to industrialize prison labor by forcing incarcerated people to make shoes and clothing.³³⁹ In 1898, the State of Louisiana banned convict leasing and, in 1901, the State of Louisiana purchased the prison camp and resumed control of its prisoners.³⁴⁰ More recently, incarcerated people in Angola continue to engage in production to sell goods such as growing crops like wheat, corn, soybeans, cotton, milo,³⁴¹ sugar cane,³⁴² and even producing art.³⁴³ To this day, approximately 65 percent of incarcerated people in Angola are African Americans.³⁴⁴

Correctional facilities, such as the Federal Prisons Industries of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, argue that these programs teach marketable job skills.³⁴⁵ But some academics argue that these work programs are not beneficial.³⁴⁶

Correctional Discipline

African Americans also experience discrimination in the correctional disciplinary system. At least one study has found that while Black and white incarcerated people were equally likely to break rules, correctional authorities were more likely to report infractions by Black people.³⁴⁷

There is an overrepresentation of African Americans in solitary confinement. Scholars have defined solitary confinement as when correctional facility officials separate incarcerated people from the general population and hold them in their cells for an average of 22 hours or more per day for 15 continuous days or more.³⁴⁸ A 2018 study showed that both federal and state correctional facilities placed large numbers of Black males in solitary confinement. Black males in prison made up approximately 42.5 percent of the prison population but comprised 46.1 percent of the people in solitary confinement.

Juvenile Incarceration

African Americans are also overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. As discussed in Chapter 8, Pathologizing the Black Family, American culture tends to see Black children not as children, but as adults. Black students are subject to discipline at a higher rate than other groups in schools nationwide. In 43 states and the District of Columbia, Black students are arrested at higher levels relative to their percentage of the population.³⁴⁹ There is also evidence that these racial disparities in school-based disciplinary actions are associated with county-level rates of racial bias.³⁵⁰ This sort of disciplinary actions and bias contribute to how African Americans are eventually pushed to incarceration through the school-to-prison pipeline, as described in Chapter 6, Separate and Unequal Education and Chapter 8, Pathologizing the Black Family.

their white peers.³⁵² Black youth are more likely to be in custody than white youth in every state except Hawaii.³⁵³

As a result of their experiences with the juvenile justice system, many African Americans distrust the system.³⁵⁴ This report further discusses the enduring impact of the juvenile justice system on Black families in Chapter 8, Pathologizing the Black Family.

California

The previously described history of the criminal justice system in America, such as California three-strikes laws and similar policies that have affected large numbers of African Americans, has led to several conditions that have caused California to lead the way in expansion of prisons in the United States until recent reforms. That history, particularly from the 1980s to present, has contributed to what has been described as “the biggest prison building project in the history of the world” here in California.³⁵⁵ The City of Los Angeles imprisons more people than any other American city.³⁵⁶ According to one scholar, law enforcement officials often arrested, incarcerated, and/or instructed African Americans to leave Los Angeles during the 1920s and 1930s.³⁵⁷

African Americans are overrepresented in correctional facilities. Approximately 28.3 percent of California’s prisoners were Black, when they make up about 6 percent of the population.³⁵⁸ Further, Black people who are incarcerated in California correctional facilities also experience forms of segregation from the moment they enter a facility.³⁵⁹

California has a history of extremely poor conditions in its numerous prisons, which disproportionately harms African Americans, as they are more likely to be in prison and to serve longer sentences due to systemic racism. Like the federal government, California still houses and invests in the incarceration of people in large numbers. It houses approximately 100,000 people in its facilities, has forecasted a budget of approximately \$227.2 billion for 2021-22, and operates 35 adult facilities.

In a 2011 U.S. Supreme Court case called *Plata v. Brown*, the Court ordered the State of California to reduce its prison population because the medical and mental health care in California prisons was so bad that it violated the U.S. Constitution’s prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment.³⁶⁰ Since the decision in 2011,



Black youth comprise 41 percent of youth in juvenile facilities even though they make up 15 percent of all youth in America.³⁵¹ Black youth are more than four times as likely to be detained or committed in juvenile facilities as

California has been required to decrease the number of people in state correctional facilities.³⁶¹ Later that year, the state passed Assembly Bill 109, which reduced overcrowding in state facilities by shifting incarceration responsibilities from state to local authorities for certain people convicted of low-level offenses.

California also passed several other laws to reduce its prison population including:

- Proposition 36 limits California's three-strikes law to serious or violent felonies for third strike offenders and establishing a process for third strike offenders to ask a court to reduce their term under certain circumstances.
- Assembly Bill 2942 allows courts to resentencing a defendant on the recommendation of district attorneys.
- Senate Bill 567 requires criminal courts to only impose a maximum term if a jury considers aggravating facts regarding the offense and permits a criminal defendant and other parties to dispute facts in the record or present additional facts for the purposes of sentencing.
- Senate Bill 73 ended the prohibition against probation and suspended sentencing for certain types of drug offenses.
- Assembly Bill 484 changes the requirement that a person who is granted probation after being convicted of furnishing or transporting certain controlled substances serve 180 days in a county jail as a condition of probation.
- Senate Bill 136 ended a sentence enhancement that added an extra year for anyone convicted of recommitting a felony for each prior prison or felony jail time they already served.
- Assembly Bill 32 prohibits California, as a state, from entering into or renewing a contract with a private, for-profit prison to incarcerate people.
- Other laws attempt to end private financial incentives to incarcerate large numbers of people in correctional facilities.
- Assembly Bill 2542 or the Racial Justice Act, prohibits the use of race, ethnicity, or national origin to seek or obtain convictions or impose sentences.

The Racial Justice Act is also an attempt to address previous court decisions and systemic issues in the

In 2011, the medical and mental health care in California prisons was so bad that the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the State to immediately reduce its prison population because the living conditions grossly violated the U.S. Constitution's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment.

state's criminal justice system, which have made it nearly impossible for criminal defendants to challenge racial bias.³⁶²

Many of these laws are new so it is difficult to evaluate their impact on African Americans.

While individuals serve their prison sentences, the State of California uses their labor in many ways. The California Prison Industry Authority produces myriad products such as clothing, furniture, cleaning products, and food.³⁶³ They also perform a wide range of duties in areas such as laundry, kitchen, and general maintenance.³⁶⁴ The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection employed around 1,600 incarcerated individuals to fight forest fires in May 2021.³⁶⁵

As previously discussed, some scholars have challenged the value of these programs because they do not necessarily provide incarcerated people with marketable job skills. Incarcerated individuals are often tasked with low skill work and obtaining a job as a firefighter can be particularly difficult, even for people without criminal records.³⁶⁶

Although California has attempted to reform its juvenile justice system in recent years, it has a well-documented and troubled history of juvenile incarceration.³⁶⁷ The number of incarcerated youth reached unprecedented heights in the 1990s.³⁶⁸ California housed over 10,000 youth in 11 facilities throughout the state in 1996.³⁶⁹ Since that time, the state has attempted to make several systemic reforms to not only reduce the population of incarcerated youth but also to improve the treatment of youth who are in such facilities.³⁷⁰

There have also been recent attempts to decentralize the juvenile justice system and provide localized services for juveniles who are accused of crimes.³⁷¹ To that end, most recently, Senate Bill 823 provided for the closure of the California Department of Corrections and

Rehabilitation's Division of Juvenile Justice, formerly the California Youth Authority, and established the Office of Youth and Community Restoration in the California Health and Human Services Agency.³⁷²

But many racial inequities for young African Americans remain. Currently, in California, Black youth are 31.3 times more likely to be committed to imprisonment in the state's juvenile justice system than white youths. As of June 2020, of the total 782 youth in California juvenile detention facilities, 227 were Black. In that same time, Black youth made up 36 percent of those committed to a juvenile detention facility even though they comprised only 14 percent of the population in California.

The number of incarcerated youth reached unprecedented heights in the 1990s. California housed over 10,000 youth in 11 facilities throughout the state in 1996.

The treatment of Black youth as criminals in California begins at an early age when they are in school. School administrators, teachers, and school police, often treat young Black students as criminals. As Jacob Jackson tes-

tified at the October 12, 2021 Task Force hearing, he was targeted by his teacher and school police when he was a student at Crenshaw High School in Los Angeles.³⁷³ More information on the juvenile justice system in California is available in Chapter 8, Pathologizing the Black Family.

VI. Effects

The lingering negative impact of contact with the criminal justice system are wide-ranging and far-reaching. African Americans who have had contact with the criminal justice system experience significant discrimination when looking for a home or a job, when they are

long time, for example any application for school, housing, a job, you needed to check the box saying you're formerly incarcerated. The disenfranchisement pushes a lot of people into the informal market—selling drugs, for example.”³⁷⁹

African Americans who have been incarcerated experience significant levels of housing instability soon after they leave prison. The Prison Policy Initiative estimates that returning citizens are almost 10 times more likely to be unhoused than the general public, and the problem among Black returning citizens is worse than other racial groups.

Lingering Discrimination

African Americans who have been incarcerated experience problems finding a permanent place to live. As discussed in the Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, African Americans have experienced homelessness dating back to slavery,³⁸⁰ regardless of whether they have participated in the criminal justice system.

trying to vote,³⁷⁴ or serving on juries.³⁷⁵ Just observing the effects of the criminal justice system can negatively affect the mental health of African Americans,³⁷⁶ and lead to mistrust of the legal system.³⁷⁷ Although California has passed laws to limit the lingering harms of the criminal justice system, these changes will not fully address the many years of effects of contact with the criminal justice system that many African Americans have experienced.

African Americans who have been incarcerated experience significant levels of housing instability soon after they leave prison.³⁸¹ The Prison Policy Initiative estimates that returning citizens are almost 10 times more likely to be unhoused than the general public,³⁸² and the problem among Black returning citizens is worse than other racial groups.³⁸³ Another study offers an example of the collateral damage of incarceration. Having a recently incarcerated father greatly increases the risk of child homelessness, a phenomenon that is more likely experienced by Black children than white children.³⁸⁴

Devon Simmons, who served 15 years in prison for crimes he committed as a teenager in Harlem, explained:³⁷⁸ “You’ve got to find a way to reinvent yourself and promote yourself to the world. But there’s a stigma. For a

Finding jobs is also difficult for Black returning citizens.³⁸⁵ Lack of employment opportunities for returning

citizens can have a broader, negative impact on their families. Scholars argue that the high number of incarcerated members of Black families contribute to the Black-white wealth gap.³⁸⁶ Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits consideration of a job applicant's criminal history if it negatively impacts Black job applicants, these cases are difficult for plaintiffs to prove. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency which enforces civil rights laws in employment, recognizes that employers' consideration of a conviction or arrest are factors that are particularly problematic for Black men because they are more likely to have criminal histories.³⁸⁷

To address these issues, there is a nationwide movement to prohibit employers from considering a job applicant's criminal history before employers consider their qualifications for a job. This movement is also referred to as

A 2018 study found that a police murder of an unarmed African American triggered days of poor mental health for African Americans living in the state where that murder occurred.

the “ban the box” movement. Currently, 36 states and over 150 cities and counties have “banned the box” or prohibited employers from asking about conviction or arrest history, and delay background checks until later in the hiring process. But much like other criminal justice reforms discussed in this chapter, these new laws do little to address the many decades of discrimination Black returning citizens experienced when looking for work throughout American history.

Laws that deprive people with convictions of the right to serve on a jury also disproportionately harm African Americans. Some states exclude people from serving on juries when they commit misdemeanors, although reliable nationwide statistics on the number of Black people who cannot serve on juries is unavailable because no national database exists to track such data. Because African Americans are incarcerated more than other groups, they are also more likely to be excluded from jury participation as well. As discussed above, lack of jury diversity is a legacy of slavery and a serious and nationwide problem.³⁸⁸

Some states also deprive people who have criminal convictions of the right to vote. A 2003 study found that regions with large nonwhite prison populations are more likely to pass laws restricting the right of people

with convictions to vote.³⁸⁹ Depriving people who have convictions diminishes the political power of African Americans.³⁹⁰ The Sentencing Project estimates that approximately 1.3 million African Americans of voting age cannot vote because of past convictions, which is a rate 3.7 times greater than that of non-African Americans.³⁹¹ In fact, over 6.2 percent of the Black population cannot vote because of past convictions compared to 1.7 percent of the non-Black population.³⁹²

Contact with the criminal justice system through incarceration affects the mental health of African Americans. Studies show that incarceration was associated with perceived discrimination, depressive symptoms, and psychological distress,³⁹³ and the impact is long lasting.³⁹⁴ Incarceration negatively affects the overall physical health of Black people after they leave prisons and jails as discussed in Chapter 12, Harm and Neglect: Mental, Physical, and Public Health. As discussed in Chapter 8, Pathologizing the Black Family, there is also evidence that mass incarceration negatively impacts family members of African Americans who have been incarcerated, both during and after their incarceration.

Even for African Americans who have not had direct contact with the criminal justice system, just observing the effects of the criminal justice system takes a toll on African American's mental health. A 2018 study found that a police murder of an unarmed African American triggered days of poor mental health for African Americans living in the state where that murder occurred.³⁹⁵ This total number of painful days over a year was comparable to the rate diabetics experienced.³⁹⁶

These negative experiences with the criminal justice system have caused many African Americans, and Black men in particular,³⁹⁷ to distrust police.³⁹⁸ As a result, African Americans are less likely to call the police than Latinos and white people.³⁹⁹ This distrust likely leads to an underutilization of police and government services in general, such as the civil legal system, as will be discussed below. As the Kerner Commission noted in 1968, “To some Negroes police have come to symbolize white power, white racism, and white repression. And the fact is that many police do reflect and express these white attitudes. The atmosphere of hostility and cynicism is reinforced by a widespread belief among Negroes in the existence of police brutality and in a ‘double standard’ of justice and protection—one for Negroes and one for whites.”⁴⁰⁰

California

In California, as discussed earlier, courts also contributed to the growing body of law that discriminated against African Americans. California's Fair Practice Act specifically and explicitly banned testimony by "negroes, or persons having one-half or more of negro blood" in any civil court case to which a white person was a party.⁴⁰¹ Free Black activists, who were enslaved people's greatest allies, could not be witness in any court proceedings.⁴⁰²

Currently, there is some evidence that African Americans experience discrimination in the civil legal system. The civil legal system is the system through which African Americans can obtain remedies, such as money, for the discrimination they experience in nearly every area of their life as identified in the chapters on labor, education, housing, racial terror, and wealth. But African Americans with low incomes face several systemic problems in the underfunded court systems both nationwide and in California when attempting to access justice such as obtaining a lawyer.

There appears appear to be very little scholarship on African Americans' distrust of the legal system as a whole and how that affects their underutilization of the civil law system,⁴⁰³ but some evidence does indicate that their contact with the criminal justice system negatively affects trust in the civil legal system. The California Judicial Council Advisory Committee on Racial and Ethnic Bias provided some helpful insight when it studied the treatment of minorities in state courts and public perceptions of fairness in 1997.⁴⁰⁴

The Committee noted in 1997 that members of the Council had developed the impression from opinion surveys of over 2,000 Californians and public hearings that "many minority-group members do not believe that they will receive equal justice in the California courts. Several speakers pointed to the large percentage of minority-group members, particularly African American males, who inhabit state's jails and prisons."⁴⁰⁵

In California, returning citizens still experience discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, jury participation, and voting. Much like under federal law, housing providers may lawfully consider the criminal history of returning citizens under California law.⁴⁰⁶ As a result, Black returning citizens still face many barriers

when obtaining housing. California has made some recent progress towards implementing reforms to mitigate the effects of contact with the criminal justice system in the state⁴⁰⁷ by passing the following laws:

- Proposition 47 ("The Safe Neighborhoods and School Act"): This 2015 law essentially allowed people convicted of non-serious felonies to mitigate the effect of their convictions;⁴⁰⁸
- Proposition 57 ("The Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act of 2016"): This 2016 law sought to give people who committed nonviolent crimes an opportunity for early parole;⁴⁰⁹
- Assembly Bill 1076 ("The Clean Slate Act"): This 2018 law allows automatic criminal record relief in certain circumstances and makes several other changes to make it more difficult for employers to discriminate against certain people who have had contact with the criminal justice system;⁴¹⁰
- Assembly Bill 1008 ("The Fair Chance Act"): This 2018 law made it illegal for most employers in California to ask about the criminal record of job applicants before making a job offer;⁴¹¹
- Senate Bill 393 ("Consumer Arrest Record Equity Act"/"C.A.R.E Act"): This 2019 law allows for any person who is arrested but not convicted of a crime to ask a court to seal their record;⁴¹²
- Senate Bill 310 (The Right to a Jury of Your Peers): This 2017 law allows people who were convicted of a felony to serve on juries if they have finished their prison time and are not on parole, probation, or other post-prison supervision; and
- Proposition 17: This 2020 voter initiative restored voting rights to people on parole.

While these new laws certainly help mitigate the negative effect an arrest and conviction can have for someone who has had contact with the criminal justice system—they do very little to remedy the many decades of discrimination African Americans suffered before California passed these laws.

VII. Discrimination in the Civil Justice System

The civil legal system is an especially important part of the legal system in the United States because it is the system through which Americans can solve common and ordinary problems. Americans must use the civil legal system to solve everyday problems in nearly every area of life such as family law, housing, health, finances, employment, government services, wills and estates, and education. Nationwide, approximately 47 percent of Americans experience at least one civil legal problem in their household each year.⁴¹³ Unlike in the criminal justice system, there is no constitutional right to counsel in all types of cases in the civil legal system. But a lawyer is crucial to prevailing in any civil case.

Historically, African Americans have experienced discrimination in the civil legal system nationwide and in California. American government and its citizens have used the civil legal system to subjugate African Americans during and after slavery. For an in depth discussion of the impact of the civil legal system on labor and employment rights, see Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity. African Americans today continue to face numerous barriers in access to civil justice, including lack of resources and access to courts, and lack of diversity in the legal profession.

Systemic Barriers

The U.S. Supreme Court notoriously held in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that African Americans—whether enslaved or free—were not citizens of the United States and therefore did not have the rights and privileges of the U.S. Constitution.⁴¹⁴ After slavery ended, many federal civil decisions harmed African Americans, such as cases that legalized segregation,⁴¹⁵ that prevented the federal government from outlawing racial discrimination by private citizens,⁴¹⁶ and that protected the economic liberties of white Americans over the civil rights of African Americans.⁴¹⁷ Further, in many states throughout the country African Americans could not testify in a case in which a white person was a party.⁴¹⁸ These government actions that occurred after slavery ensured African Americans remained in the lowest caste of the American racial hierarchy.

Evidence exists that African Americans' negative past experiences with the criminal justice system contribute to resistance to seeking help from the civil legal system.⁴¹⁹

One study has shown that Black claimants are underrepresented in federal court cases and white claimants are overrepresented.⁴²⁰

Members of historically marginalized communities, including African Americans, have long faced difficulties accessing justice due to systemic problems like underfunding.⁴²¹ Underfunded courts have reduced hours and staff, resulting in case delays and a decreased ability to provide services, such as resources for litigants without lawyers. These problems particularly affect people with low incomes, who are disproportionately Black.

According to the Legal Services Corporation, which Congress created to provide attorneys to low-income Americans, approximately 21 percent of people who have family incomes at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty line identified as Black in 2016.⁴²² In that same year, approximately 71 percent of low-income households experienced at least one civil legal problem, which included issues with domestic violence, veterans' benefits, disability access, housing conditions, and healthcare.⁴²³ Americans with low incomes received inadequate or no legal help for 86 percent of their civil legal problems in 2016.⁴²⁴

Lack of Diversity in the Legal Profession

Historically, law schools and bar associations have discriminated against African Americans by preventing their entry into law schools and the profession.⁴²⁵ As discussed in Chapter 6, Separate and Unequal Education, predominately-white graduate schools like law schools routinely excluded African Americans until the 1960s.⁴²⁶ The American Bar Association, the main profession association of attorneys in the United States prohibited

Scholars also argue that the bar exam, the licensure exam for lawyers, is culturally biased against and designed to exclude historically marginalized groups, like African Americans. Nationwide, in 2020, African Americans comprised eight percent of students in law schools, but only about 5 percent of lawyers, even though they were 13.4 percent of the country's population.

African Americans from joining until 1943.⁴²⁷ Black lawyers founded the National Bar Association instead.⁴²⁸ Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity,

provides an in depth discussion of racial discrimination against African Americans by professional guilds and licensure process. The American Bar Association initially rescinded the membership of William H. Lewis in 1912, the first black assistant U.S. attorney general and two other Black men because leaders determined that they had elected him “in ignorance of material facts” and that “the settled practice of the Association has been to elect only white men as members.”⁴²⁹

Today, scholars argue that the Law School Admissions Test and law school accreditation continues this discrimination.⁴³⁰ Scholars also argue that the bar exam, the licensure exam for lawyers, is culturally biased against and designed to exclude historically marginalized groups, like African Americans. Nationwide, in 2020, African Americans comprised eight percent of students in law schools, but only about 5 percent of lawyers⁴³¹, even though they were 13.4 percent of the country’s population.⁴³² Only 66 percent of African Americans passed the 2020 bar examination on their first attempt nationwide, which is the lowest passage rate when compared to other racial groups.⁴³³

As a result, African Americans are underrepresented in the national legal profession and federal judiciary. These statistics have remained almost unchanged since 2011.⁴³⁴ Nationwide, in 2020, African Americans comprised 9.8 percent of federal judges even though African Americans make up 13.4 percent of the population.⁴³⁵

In general, lawyers in the legal system are particularly important as they “play a vital role in the preservation of society”⁴³⁶ and “an officer of the legal system and a public citizen have special responsibilities for the quality of justice.”⁴³⁷ Scholars argue that a law degree is a springboard to lucrative and powerful careers, which are closed off to many African Americans.⁴³⁸ Advocates argue that Black attorneys provide Black litigants and defendants with much needed and effective culturally appropriate legal services.⁴³⁹

California

These same issues exist in California. Much like California criminal courts, the state’s civil courts have been historically underfunded,⁴⁴⁰ which leads to many conditions that result in inadequate resources for the public such as limited services for self-represented litigants, decrepit facilities, and limited court staff.

As a result of underfunded courts, civil cases move slowly and cases are often not resolved for years. The COVID-19 pandemic, which caused statewide court closures and resulted in continuances of hearings and trials, has also further lengthened the time it takes for civil cases to resolve.⁴⁴¹ Approximately 55 percent of Californians experience at least one civil legal problem in their household each year.⁴⁴² But according to the State Bar of California, 85 percent of Californians received no or inadequate legal help for their civil legal problems.⁴⁴³ People with low incomes, many of whom are Black, struggle with problems related to housing, health, finances, employment, family law issues, disability benefits, and many other civil law issues.⁴⁴⁴

Individuals with Black-sounding names receive half the callbacks of those with white-sounding names in response to calls for legal representation.

California has passed laws that provide for counsel in certain civil cases, like those involving family law issues.⁴⁴⁵ But, overall, in the vast majority of civil cases, there is no right to counsel both nationwide and in California. Some studies show that African Americans, in particular, face unique impediments in obtaining access to a lawyer.⁴⁴⁶ One study showed that those with Black-sounding names receive one-half the callbacks of those with white-sounding names in response to calls for legal representation.⁴⁴⁷

Although African Americans are not underrepresented in the California judiciary, they are underrepresented in the statewide legal profession. In 2020, eight percent of judges were Black.⁴⁴⁸ In California, during 2019, African Americans comprised four percent of lawyers even though they comprise 6 percent of the population in the state.⁴⁴⁹ These numbers have “remained stagnant” in the last 30 years.⁴⁵⁰

While this lack of diversity presents a problem for creating trust in both the criminal and civil legal system, it is especially problematic for African Americans because it is the system through which they can address the discrimination they continue to experience as this report discusses in the across all of its chapters.

VIII. Conclusion

Rooted in the tools to maintain slavery, social control of African Americans continued through American history as the Black codes and segregation laws. Federal and state governments continue the legacy of slavery by criminalizing African Americans today. California court cases and statutes contributed to a national body of law that explicitly discriminated against African Americans. As a result of legalized discrimination against African Americans, the American general public developed and perpetuated biases and stereotypes against African Americans. American politicians capitalized on these racist stereotypes to win office and implement more laws and policies that have imprisoned more African

Americans than white Americans compared to their shares in the population. This ensured that African Americans remained in the lowest caste of the American racial hierarchy.

Much like in the criminal justice system, the effects of slavery in the civil legal system have caused African Americans to experience significant inequities. African Americans, particularly those with low incomes, experience numerous barriers in the underfunded court systems, both nationwide and in California, that prevent them from accessing justice in civil courts.

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Endnotes

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²See, e.g., U.S. Const., 13th, 14th, and 15th Amends.

³See, e.g., The Civil Rights Act of 1866, The Reconstruction Acts of 1867–1868, The Ku Klux Klan Act, The Civil Rights Act of 1875, The Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Voting Rights Act of 1965, and The Fair Housing Act of 1968.

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⁵The Sentencing Project, *Report of the Sentencing Project to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance* (March 2018) (as of Apr. 24, 2022).

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⁷Greene, *Race, Class, and Access to Civil Justice* (2016) 101 Iowa L. Rev. 1263, 1266–67 (Greene); DeVito, *Of Bias and Exclusion: An Empirical Study of Diversity Jurisdiction, its Amount-in-Controversy Requirement, and Black Alienation from U.S. Civil Courts* (2021) 13 Geo. J. L. & Mod. Critical Race Persp. 1 (as of Apr. 24, 2022).

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¹⁵See generally Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, (2008) (Blackmon) at pp. 53–54, 99–100.

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¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰See generally Alexander, *supra*, at pp. 50–73.

²¹See generally Higginbotham Jr., *Virginia Led The Way in Legal Oppression*, (May 21, 1978), *The Washington Post* (as of Apr. 24, 2022) (Higginbotham); see also Newby-Alexander, *The “Twenty and Odd”: The Silences of Africans in Early Virginia Revealed* (2020) 57 *Phylon* 25–36 (as of Apr. 24, 2022).

²²General Court, *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia* (July 9, 1640), p. 466 (as of Apr. 24, 2022); Higginbotham, *supra*; The court's sentence suggests that he was not already enslaved as it would be nonsensical to sentence an already enslaved person to a sentence in which they must be enslaved for the rest of their life.

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²⁴*Ibid.*; see generally Higginbotham, *supra*;

²⁵*Ibid.*; see generally Higginbotham, *supra*.

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⁴⁶ Hammad, [Shackled to Economic Appeal: How Prison Labor Facilitates Modern Slavery While Perpetuating Poverty in Black Communities](#) (2019) 26 Va. J. Soc. Pol’y & L. 65, 66-67 (Hammad); Whitehouse, [Modern Prison Labor: A Reemergence of Convict Leasing Under the Guise of Rehabilitation and Private Enterprises](#) (2017) 18 Loy. J. Pub. Int. L. 89, 90 (as of Apr. 24, 2022).

⁴⁷ Hammad, *supra*, at p. 66.

⁴⁸ Blackmon, *supra*, at pp. 52-53

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Johnson, [African Americans and Homelessness: Moving Through History](#) (2010) 40 Journal of Black Studies 583-605 (as of Apr. 24, 2022) (Johnson).

⁵¹ See generally Blackmon, *supra*. African Ameri

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⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

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⁴³²American Bar Association, [ABA Profile of the Legal Profession](#) (2020), p. 33 (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴³³American Bar Association, [Summary Bar Pass Data: Race, Ethnicity, and](#)

[Gender 2020 and 2021 Bar Passage Questionnaire](#) (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, [Quick Facts: U.S.](#) (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴³⁶ American Bar Association, [Model Rules Prof. Conduct: Preamble: A Lawyer's Responsibilities](#) (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴³⁷ State Bar of California, [Rule 1.0 Purpose and Function of the Rules of Professional Conduct](#), Comment 5 (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴³⁸ See Shepherd, [No African-American Lawyers Allowed: The Inefficient Racism of the ABA's Accreditation of Law Schools Journal](#) (Mar. 5, 2001) 53 J. Legal Educ. 103 (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴³⁹ King, [Race, Identity, and Professional Responsibility: Why Legal Services Organizations Need African American Staff Attorneys](#) (2008) 18 Cornell L. Rev. 1, at p. 1 (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴⁴⁰ See generally Judicial Council of Cal., [The Road to Independence: A History of Trial Court Funding California Courts Review](#) (Winter 2009) (as of Apr. 26, 2022); Judicial Council of Cal., [Special Rep.: Trial Court Funding](#), (1997) (as of Apr. 26, 2022); Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee, [Memorandum of Trial Court Presiding Judges' Advisory Committee's Summary of Impacts from "Instant Survey"](#) (March 11, 2013) (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴⁴¹ Judicial Council of Cal., Judicial Branch Budget Com. Rep. [COVID-19 Backlog Funding Data, Materials for January 5, 2021 Meeting, Judicial Branch Budget Committee](#) (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴⁴² The State Bar of Cal., [2019 California Justice Study Gap, Executive Report](#) p. 6 (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴⁴³ *Id.* at p. 7.

⁴⁴⁴ *Id.* at p. 11.

⁴⁴⁵ See generally American Bar Association Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants, [Directory of Law Governing Appointment of Counsel in State Civil Proceedings: California](#) (2016) (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴⁴⁶ Libgober, *supra*.

⁴⁴⁷ *Id.* at p. 26.

⁴⁴⁸ Judicial Council of Cal., [Demographic Data Provided by Justices and Judges Relative to Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender Identify/Sexual Orientation](#) Gov. Code, § 12011.5, subd. (n)) (2020) (as of Apr. 26, 2022).

⁴⁴⁹ State Bar of California, [First Annual Report Card on the Diversity of California's Legal Profession](#) (2020), Appendix Table 1 (as of Apr. 26, 2022)

⁴⁵⁰ *Id.* at p. 7.

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I. Introduction

Scholars have stated that Europeans developed a racial hierarchy in which Black people were relegated to the bottom of humanity, and often placed outside of it altogether, in order to justify the enslavement of African people.¹ The United States is no exception to this global reality. This chapter will describe how federal, state, and local governments subjected enslaved people and their descendants to brutal and dehumanizing conditions, policies, and practices. The United States has treated African Americans as subhuman and engaged in practices harmful to the health of African Americans through forced labor, racial terror, oppression, torture, sexual violence, abusive medical experimentation, discrimination, harmful neglect, and more, as will be explained throughout this chapter. Scholars have stated that racism and enslavement are, at least in part, responsible for the fact that African Americans have had the worst healthcare, health status, and health outcomes of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.²

During enslavement, enslaved people were treated like animals, and physicians provided healthcare only to the extent necessary to profit from enslaved peoples' bodies.³ After the end of slavery in 1865 and a short-lived period of reconstruction, federal, state, and local government officials worked with private citizens to segregate African American communities—damaging Black health, creating unequal healthcare services for Black people; depriving African American communities of safe sanitation and adequate sewage systems; and sacrificing Black health for medical experiments.⁴ During the 20th century, federal and state sponsored corporatization of healthcare resulted in rising healthcare costs, the separation of Black doctors from Black patients, and further inequality between white and African Americans.⁵

Centuries of exposure to racism has contributed to a serious decline in African American physical and mental health.⁶ African Americans die at disproportionately higher rates from preventable health problems.⁷ Doctors are more likely to misdiagnose African Americans, leading to disparate outcomes in mental health.⁸ African American women face high rates of maternal death and adverse birth outcomes—even Black women with the highest education attainment have the worst birth outcomes across *all* women in America.⁹ African American

children face poverty, malnutrition, and worse health than that of white American children.¹⁰ The mismanagement of public health crises by county, state, and federal governments has resulted in an undue burden of disease and death in African American communities—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹ Despite this, in the face of overwhelming oppression, African American healthcare providers, patients, and community members, nonetheless, have worked to build healthy communities and fight for a more equitable healthcare system.¹²

Section III of this chapter discusses the racist theories developed and perpetuated by doctors and scientists about African Americans. Section IV describes the health conditions of African Americans during enslavement. Sections V, VI, and VII discuss how systemic discrimination and segregation was established and how it continues in the American health care system. Sections VIII and IX describe the history of medical

experimentation on Black bodies throughout American history, and how medical research and technologies harm African Americans. Section X describes the history of racism in mental health and the effects of 400 years of racial oppression on the mental health of African

Today, studies have found that a significant number of white medical students and residents hold false beliefs about biological differences between African Americans and white Americans, such as the belief that African Americans have a higher pain threshold than white Americans

Americans. Sections XI and XII discuss reproductive, gender identity-responsive healthcare, and child health. Section XIII discusses public health crises. Section XIV describes the effects of racial oppression on the physical health of African Americans.

II. Pseudoscientific Racism as Foundation of Healthcare

During the enslavement era, scientific racism defined race as an innate biological and genetic trait.¹³ Pseudoscientific definitions of Blackness were based on differences in skin color, facial features, hair texture, lip size, and false beliefs about “brain size” and immunity to diseases.¹⁴ Pseudoscientists invented “phrenology”—the baseless “science” of measuring the size of the skull as evidence of intelligence in different races.¹⁵ This pseudoscience was influential across the United States throughout the 1800s.¹⁶ During the slavery era, medical researchers tried to prove that Black people were biologically suited to slavery.¹⁷

In the 1880s and 1890s, the decades following Reconstruction, false medical theories explained the poverty that African Americans experienced as justified by their “inherent inferiority,” instead of as the result of almost three centuries of enslavement.¹⁸ Doctors published influential studies stating that African Americans’ “immorality” was responsible for the syphilis and tuberculosis they suffered.¹⁹ In 1880, the New Orleans public health agency claimed that African Americans’ naturally weaker immune system and “irregular habits,” were the reason that so many African Americans died, rather than inadequate access to sanitation, drinking water, food, and overcrowded uninhabitable housing due to racial segregation.²⁰ During Congressional debates over the

establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau, a program which included government-funded healthcare for newly freed Americans, white legislators argued that healthcare assistance to free Black people would result in dependence.²¹ Consequently, federal and state governments relied on racist theories to justify slavery and racist neglect in public policy.²²

In the 20th century, the federal and state governments supported the eugenics movement, which sought to eliminate nonwhite populations, considered to have undesirable traits.²³ Eugenics is based upon the white supremacist ideology that white Anglo-Saxon people are an inherently superior race.²⁴ Eugenicists enacted laws resulting in the forced sterilization of undesirable “races,” including Black people, to create and maintain a white supremacist nation.²⁵ By 1931, 30 states had eugenics laws that targeted vulnerable groups across the nation for involuntary sterilization in federally-funded programs.²⁶ It was not until 1979 that federal sterilization regulations required voluntary consent of the person being sterilized.²⁷

Today, studies have found that a significant number of white medical students and residents hold false beliefs about biological differences between African Americans and white Americans, such as the belief that African

Americans have a higher pain threshold than white Americans.²⁸ Black patients are especially vulnerable to harmful biases and stereotypes, including the under-treatment of their pain.²⁹ Physicians widely hold racist beliefs that African Americans feel less pain or exaggerate their pain.³⁰ These beliefs result in racial bias in pain perception and treatment.³¹ Consequently, anti-Black pseudo-scientific racism that justified enslavement continues to adversely affect Black health today, as a vestige of enslavement. Despite centuries of pseudo-scientific racism and anti-Blackness in the healthcare system, Black doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers have worked tirelessly to provide anti-racist culturally responsive healthcare to Black communities.³²

California

California civic leaders were some of the most influential proponents of eugenics in the nation and around the world—including in Nazi Germany.³³ They

Thousands of mental health patients were forcibly sterilized across California due to the eugenicist efforts of the Human Betterment Foundation. In 1937, one of Nazi Germany's leading eugenicists wrote to Ezra S. Gosney, the financier who started the Human Betterment Foundation, saying, "You were so kind to send...new information about the sterilization particulars in California. These practical experiences are also very valuable for us in Germany. For this I thank you."

played a key role in popularizing the eugenics movement.³⁴ The Human Betterment Foundation was a private think tank based in Pasadena, California

that promoted sterilization from 1926 to 1943.³⁵ The Human Betterment Foundation shaped public policy in California by working with state officials, representing the eugenics movement to the public, and collecting data on sterilizations nationwide.³⁶ The foundation hoped that public support would result in state legislation that would increase the number of sterilizations performed each year.³⁷ The foundation's members included many prominent leaders of Californian institutions such as David Starr Jordan, Stanford University's first president; *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harry Chandler; Nobel Prize-winning physicist and head of the California Institute of Technology, Robert A. Millikan; and University of Southern California President Rufus B. von KleinSmid.³⁸

Thousands of mental health patients were forcibly sterilized across California due to the eugenicist efforts of the Human Betterment Foundation.³⁹ Black patients were more likely to be sterilized than white patients.⁴⁰ Paul Popenoe, a self-trained biologist hired by the Human Betterment Foundation, stated that this was not surprising because "studies show that the rate of mental disease among Negroes is high."⁴¹ Hundreds of thousands of studies, pamphlets, and books written by the Human Betterment Foundation were distributed to policymakers, schools, and libraries.⁴² In 1937, one of Nazi Germany's leading eugenicists wrote to Ezra S. Gosney, the financier who started the Human Betterment Foundation, saying, "You were so kind to send... new information about the sterilization particulars in California. These practical experiences are also very valuable for us in Germany. For this I thank you."⁴³

III. Health and Healthcare during Slavery

Scholars have stated that the institution of slavery has had a lasting legacy in the discriminatory healthcare system that would later emerge in the United States.⁴⁴ During the enslavement era, enslavers kept enslaved people in overcrowded, dilapidated living areas, which contributed to the spread of infectious and parasitic diseases.⁴⁵ Enslaved people were denied treatment in hospitals and access to mental healthcare.⁴⁶ Enslavers freely and openly tortured enslaved people, raped and abused women, and trafficked children with no legal consequence.⁴⁷ Physicians used enslaved people for

dangerous experimental surgeries and procedures without repercussion.⁴⁸ Federal, state, and local governments used the law to further damage the health of enslaved people and dehumanize them, while neglecting to provide public health and healthcare services.⁴⁹ Dr. Carolyn Roberts stated during a hearing before the California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans that, "[t]his was a form of healthcare where medical violence against African and African descended people became an acceptable, normative, and institutionalized practice."⁵⁰

Physical Health

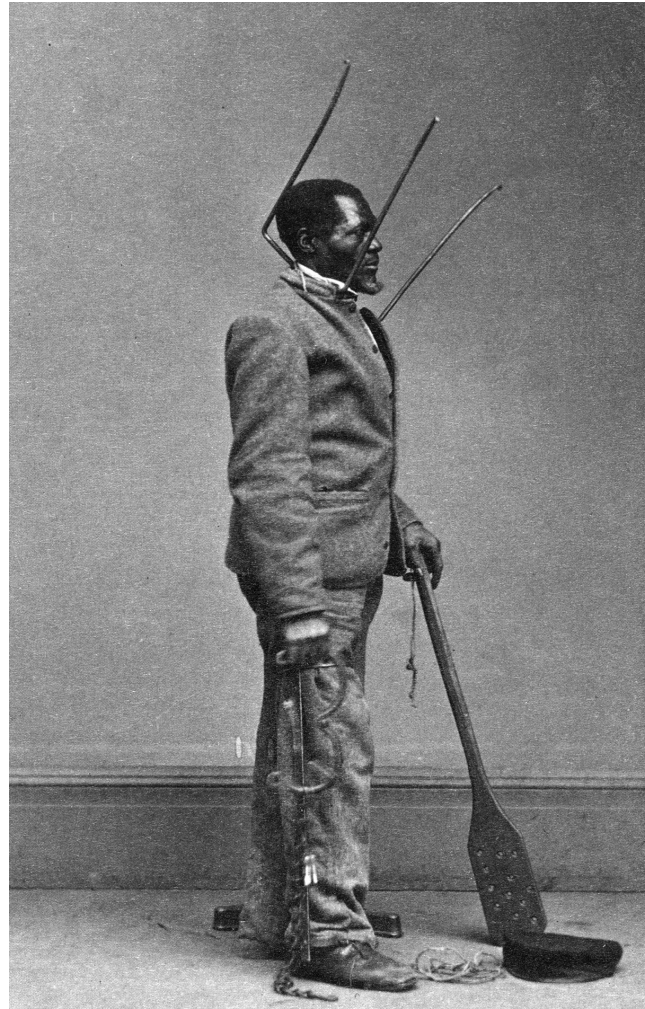
Slavery had disastrous health consequences for enslaved people due to lack of public health regulations and harsh working conditions that led to widespread infectious and nutritional diseases.⁵¹ Infectious and parasitic diseases thrive in poor living conditions and overcrowding.⁵² So, they were among the major causes of illness and death for enslaved people.⁵³ Worm infections were common among enslaved people due to contact with polluted food and soil.⁵⁴ Hookworm infestation resulted in low birth weights and high infant mortality.⁵⁵ Contagious respiratory diseases were prevalent in the winter months due to the overcrowded quarters and uninhabitable living conditions.⁵⁶ Malaria led to low birth weights and high infant mortality.⁵⁷

The lack of federal or state public health regulations resulted in contaminated food and water, nonexistent sanitary facilities or sewage disposal, wastewater leakage, and poor garbage disposal, which contributed to diseases and infections that were more likely to affect enslaved people.⁵⁸ There was no government-funded healthcare, or regulations regarding water treatment, sewage disposal, or vaccination and the prevention of disease.⁵⁹ Sexually transmitted infections were major public health problems affecting the lives of enslaved people disproportionately due to forced breeding, overcrowded quarters, and lack of access to treatment.⁶⁰ Diseases, like pellagra, caused by a lack of nutrition in the diet, weakened the immune systems of enslaved people.⁶¹

The health of enslaved people was worse than that of white people, because there were hardly any hospitals where they could be treated for disease.⁶² With few exceptions, enslaved people and free Black people were not allowed to access hospitals, almshouses, and facilities for the deaf and blind.⁶³ The welfare of enslaved people was left to enslavers, while free Black people were forced to fend for themselves.⁶⁴ In 1798, Congress established a loose network of marine hospitals to care for sick and disabled seamen, however, the U.S. Treasury Department did not allow Black sailors to be treated at these hospitals.⁶⁵

White enslavers tortured enslaved people openly, inflicting cruel punishment upon them without any legal consequences and often permanently damaged their health.⁶⁶ Enslavers deprived enslaved people of food and water, whipped them to inflict serious pain, and abused them.⁶⁷ The brutal violence of enslavers and the harsh labor conditions they imposed resulted in branding, dog bites, assaults with fists and rods, burns, lacerations, mutilated body parts, and bone fractures for enslaved people.⁶⁸

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The forehead of Wilson Chinn, a formerly enslaved person from Louisiana, was branded with the initials of his enslaver. Chinn is wearing a punishment collar and posing with other equipment used to punish slaves. (1863)

Gashes from chains and iron restraints resulted in injuries, infections, and permanent disability for enslaved people.⁶⁹ Enslaved people were routinely murdered by white enslavers and white people who stabbed, shot, and whipped them to death with impunity.⁷⁰ The lack of protections from extreme climates, in addition to harsh laboring conditions, resulted in illness, injury, and disease.⁷¹

Mental Health

The first public mental hospital in the United States was founded in 1773, in Williamsburg, Virginia.⁷² Eventually, a few public mental asylums opened in Maryland, Kentucky, and South Carolina during the antebellum period.⁷³ Initially, Black patients were only admitted to the asylum in Williamsburg, Virginia—the other public mental health institutions did not allow Black patients to be admitted.⁷⁴ There, free Black patients were funded

by the state at much lower rates than whites, so patients received less care and services.⁷⁵ Some enslaved people were diagnosed with fictitious mental illnesses, as will be further discussed in Section X of this chapter.⁷⁶ Numerous “diseases” that allegedly affected enslaved people were invented by southern doctors, including “drapetomania,” the “irrational” desire to run away, and “dysesthesia,” a supposed laziness that caused enslaved people to mishandle enslaver property.⁷⁷ Doctors recommended torturing enslaved people as “treatment” for these false diseases.⁷⁸

Generally, antebellum mental asylums were segregated or closed to Black patients.⁷⁹ If admitted, Black patients were housed in poorer accommodations and forced to work at the asylums under harsher conditions than white patients.⁸⁰ They were assigned the dirtiest and most difficult jobs, including meal preparation, and handling the personal hygiene of ill patients.⁸¹ In “Central Lunatic Asylum” in Virginia, enslaved people were forced to labor, frequently on a plantation while being mechanically restrained.⁸² In the North, state and local governments typically denied African Americans access to mental healthcare in asylums.⁸³ For mentally ill free African Americans in the North, the poorhouse and the jail were the only social “welfare” institutions open to them in the antebellum era.⁸⁴ Free African Americans did work as janitors in northern mental hospitals and medical schools, but were not allowed to work as direct caregivers.⁸⁵ Consequently, enslaved people and free African Americans were deprived of adequate mental healthcare by federal and state governments during the slavery era.

Enslaved Women and Children

Enslavers held unrestrained reproductive control over enslaved women using rape and livestock breeding techniques sanctioned by law.⁸⁶ The enslaver, President Thomas Jefferson, wrote in his journal of plantation management, “I consider a woman who brings a child every two years as more profitable than the best man of the farm. [W]hat she produces is an addition to the capital.”⁸⁷ Jefferson was commenting on the enslaver’s practice of using enslaved women to reproduce, like livestock. Enslavers used a variety of tactics to induce enslaved women to bear children—such as punishing and selling women who did not bear children, committing sexual assault, manipulating the marital choices of enslaved people, and forced breeding.⁸⁸ State laws stated that children

born to enslaved mothers and white men were legally considered to be enslaved, leading enslaved women to be vulnerable to sexual violence inflicted by white men.⁸⁹ Furthermore, state laws did not recognize the rape of enslaved women as a crime.⁹⁰

White enslavers were legally allowed to economically profit from raping enslaved women because rape generated a larger workforce of enslaved people—and enslavers could rape freely, without consequence.⁹¹ White women married to enslavers often whipped and tortured enslaved women after they were sexually assaulted by white men.⁹² Enslavers inflicted psychological and physical punishment on enslaved women if they did not bear children.⁹³ Enslavers forced enslaved women to submit to being raped by men and castrated enslaved men who were not fit for “breeding.”⁹⁴

The health of enslaved mothers and their babies was greatly damaged due to the treatment of enslaved women as objects to be raped, bred, or abused.⁹⁵ On average, enslaved women became mothers earlier than white women due to pressure to reproduce.⁹⁶ Enslavers treated enslaved women who did not bear children as “damaged goods”—pawning them off on other enslavers.⁹⁷ Southern courts even established rules for sellers of enslaved women who misrepresented their fertility, which were akin to rules governing the sale of commodities—i.e., imposing some sort of fine or consequence for misrepresenting their “merchandise.”⁹⁸ Mother-child bonding was shattered as white enslavers trafficked children for labor to other plantations or sold them.⁹⁹ Records show that expectant mothers only received work relief after the fifth month of pregnancy and often returned to heavy labor within the first month of the infant’s life.¹⁰⁰ Enslaved mothers were forced to labor in fields and to breastfeed white children, while neglecting their own.¹⁰¹

Numerous “diseases” that allegedly affected enslaved people were invented by southern doctors, including “drapetomania,” the “irrational” desire to run away, and “dysesthesia,” a supposed laziness that caused enslaved people to mishandle enslaver property. Doctors recommended torturing enslaved people as “treatment” for these false diseases.

Pregnant enslaved women were whipped routinely by white enslavers.¹⁰² Enslavers dug holes in the ground, forced women to lie face down so that their stomachs would fit inside the holes, and whipped their backs.¹⁰³

This was done to punish enslaved women without damaging the fetus, which was legally considered to be the enslaver's future property.¹⁰⁴ Women became pregnant during winter months when labor was reduced, consequently giving birth during the summer—the time of highest labor demand and greatest sickness—leading to high infant mortality rates.¹⁰⁵ Enslaved women had rich cultural knowledge of natural birth control from their indigenous cultures, which they were forced to conceal from enslavers.¹⁰⁶ Black midwives assisted pregnant enslaved women with inducing and hiding abortions.¹⁰⁷

Children born into slavery suffered from mortality rates that were double the free population, consumed contaminated and less nutritious food, and experienced stunted growth and health problems throughout childhood.¹⁰⁸ Two-thirds of infants died within their first month of life—due in part to the hard labor enslaved mothers were forced to do.¹⁰⁹ Children were forced to work by the time they turned seven or eight years old.¹¹⁰

Medical Experimentation

Courts neglected to protect the health and safety rights of enslaved people, who were rendered legally invisible under the institution of slavery.¹¹¹ In many hiring contracts concerning enslaved people, references to medical care of enslaved people were omitted.¹¹² In legal disputes concerning enslaved people hired out to others, state courts ruled that the hirers need not provide medical care to the enslaved people.¹¹³ Because enslavers wished to avoid paying medical expenses, enslavers often only called physicians as a last resort, when the enslaved person was nearly dead.¹¹⁴ Physicians actively exploited enslaved people—practicing dangerous experimental procedures on them and using their cadavers for dissection without consent.¹¹⁵

White southern doctors were hired by enslavers and insurance companies to accurately determine the market value of Black bodies.¹¹⁶ Physicians used slavery for economic security and experimented on Black people using dangerous procedures that harmed them, but furthered the physician's professional advancement.¹¹⁷ Black bodies filled dissecting tables, operating theaters, and experimental facilities.¹¹⁸ An enslaved person named Sam was experimented on by multiple doctors; he had his lower jaw bone removed without anesthesia for medical research.¹¹⁹

James Marion Sims, the “founder of modern gynecology,” and an enslaver, experimented upon enslaved women and performed vaginal surgeries upon them against their will.¹²⁰ Sims used enslaved women's bodies to perfect surgical instruments and advance his professional status.¹²¹ Sims' enslaved patients worked as his enslaved nurses and surgical assistants, though they did not receive recognition for doing so.¹²² After being experimented upon by Sims, the enslaved patients were returned to their enslavers.¹²³ After it was perfected through medical experimentation upon enslaved women, Sims received numerous invitations to perform the vaginal procedure for European royalty.¹²⁴

Enslaved people were used to test experimental caesarean sections and vaccines.¹²⁵ Surgeons often used enslaved people for surgical experiments and experimentation in

James Marion Sims, the “founder of modern gynecology,” and an enslaver, experimented upon enslaved women and performed vaginal surgeries upon them against their will. Sims used enslaved women's bodies to perfect surgical instruments and advance his professional status.

medication and dosages.¹²⁶ Enslaved people's bodies were dissected after death to advance medical knowledge and their remains were found at Virginia Commonwealth University in 1994—findings such as these have occurred in numerous medical schools across the country.¹²⁷

California

During the period of enslavement, white southerners flocked to California with hundreds of enslaved Black people when the Gold Rush began in 1848, forcing them to toil in gold mines and hiring them to cook, serve, and perform manual labor.¹²⁸ Some enslaved people were forced to work in the gold fields to make money for their enslavers, despite illness—and if they could not do so, would lose their chance at freedom.¹²⁹ Black newspapers described brawls between enslaved people and white enslavers across California.¹³⁰

In 1851, the U.S. Congress created a U.S. Marine Hospital in San Francisco, which was completed in 1853.¹³¹ Marine hospitals were set up to care for sick and disabled seamen by the U.S. Treasury Department.¹³² The U.S. Treasury Department distributed strict guidelines specifying that the “Negro slaves” could not receive treatment at these

hospitals.¹³³ African Americans were relegated to the segregated sections of state hospitals in San Francisco and Sacramento.¹³⁴

In the 1850s, Biddy Mason, moved to California with her enslaver.¹³⁵ She lived for five years in California as an enslaved woman, until she challenged her enslaver

for her freedom in court.¹³⁶ She later became a midwife and nurse, running her own midwifery business and saving enough money to purchase land and establish a church.¹³⁷ She donated to many charities, helped feed and shelter the poor, and founded an elementary school for Black children.¹³⁸

IV. Reconstruction Era

The Civil War resulted in large-scale death, destruction, and casualties for formerly enslaved people—30,000 formerly enslaved people died from infectious diseases.¹³⁹ Sick Black soldiers died five times more often than their white counterparts.¹⁴⁰ After the war, African Americans lived in large, segregated refugee camps called “contraband camps” because there was nowhere else for them to go.¹⁴¹ Hospitals, dispensaries, and military camps were unable to serve the masses of enslaved people, Black soldiers, and other refugees who entered the North due to the Civil War.¹⁴² Escaped and abandoned formerly enslaved people settled near or within the Union Army’s military camps and battle lines.¹⁴³ The camps did not have adequate sanitation, nutrition, or medical care.¹⁴⁴ One out of every four African Americans who lived in the camps died.¹⁴⁵

Following the Civil War, due to segregation, African Americans were forced to live in overcrowded, unventilated tenements and unsanitary shacks.¹⁴⁶ Excessive mortality rates in Black communities were caused by poor living conditions, lack of access to nutritious food, and lack of access to healthcare.¹⁴⁷ Epidemics such as cholera and smallpox broke out often where African Americans lived.¹⁴⁸

From 1865 to 1868, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, commonly known as the “Freedmen’s Bureau,” to provide for

the welfare of formerly enslaved African Americans, including through “issues of provisions, clothing, and fuel, as [necessary] for the immediate and temporary shelter and supply of destitute and suffering refugees and freedmen and their wives and children,” according to the statute.¹⁴⁹ The Freedmen’s Bureau included a short-lived attempt to provide medical aid to formerly enslaved people in need.¹⁵⁰ The Bureau was hampered by cities and counties that focused on the health of white people and refused to provide healthcare for formerly enslaved people.¹⁵¹ The Freedmen’s Bureau was poorly equipped to provide mental health services to formerly enslaved people.¹⁵²

The Freedmen’s Bureau dispensaries did provide thousands with annual treatment and prescriptions.¹⁵³ However, many of the white physicians affiliated with the bureau were racist to their Black patients, and sometimes refused to treat them.¹⁵⁴ After two years of operation, with southern legislators claiming the costs were too high, Congress ended the Freedmen’s Bureau medical services—just as demand for services was increasing.¹⁵⁵ When the Bureau’s medical services ended, formerly enslaved people continued to suffer from illness, destitution, and racial discrimination from physicians and were left with little to no access to medical care.¹⁵⁶ The Freedmen’s Bureau failed to provide for the health and welfare of newly-freed African Americans, despite the promises made by the federal government.¹⁵⁷

V. Racial Segregation Era

Following the Freedmen’s Bureau’s failed attempts to provide healthcare to African Americans, the Jim Crow era of racial segregation and discrimination greatly degraded the health of Black communities. White hospitals discriminated against Black doctors and nurses and treated Black patients only in “colored wings.”¹⁵⁸ Black hospitals suffered from underfunding and resource constraints, such as struggles with licensing

accreditation, and developing links with municipal hospitals.¹⁵⁹ In 1946, Congress passed the Hill-Burton Act, which provided federal funding to segregated healthcare facilities—further entrenching discrimination and segregation in the healthcare system.¹⁶⁰ The racial segregation of the Jim Crow era was a vestige of enslavement during which African Americans suffered dire health consequences.¹⁶¹

Black Patients and Medical Professionals

During the Jim Crow era, Black hospitals and segregated units within predominantly white hospitals were the only viable sources for medical services for African Americans, due to pervasive racial discrimination, poverty, and lack of geographic accessibility.¹⁶² Some white hospitals operated small wards for Black patients, but they were in the worst areas of hospitals—in basements or crowded “colored wings.”¹⁶³ These white hospitals did not hire Black doctors, and white doctors often treated Black patients with disdain.¹⁶⁴

During World War I and after, millions of African Americans living in southern states migrated to the urban Northeast and Midwest in the Great Migration.¹⁶⁵ During this time, underfunded and under-resourced Black hospitals were not able to provide care for local African Americans and newly arriving migrants.¹⁶⁶ In northern cities, Black patients who sought treatment in large city hospitals were forced to compete for healthcare resources with poor European immigrants.¹⁶⁷ Private doctors were unaffordable for most African Americans.¹⁶⁸

From the 1880s to 1964, southern states segregated Black people from white Americans in every aspect of life, including healthcare.¹⁶⁹ The Hill-Burton Act allocated separate funds for Black and white hospitals, resulting in a disparity in hospital beds available for Black patients.¹⁷⁰ Black women often could not afford to have physicians deliver babies in hospitals, and were instead treated by Black midwives in the rural regions of the South.¹⁷¹ White patients refused to be treated next to Black patients and by Black doctors or nurses.¹⁷² Most poor African Americans could not afford hospital care.¹⁷³ Some Black doctors could have their Black patients admitted to white hospitals—however, the Black doctors themselves were barred from working as physicians at those white hospitals.¹⁷⁴

White hospitals received public and private funds to establish models of care based on the newest scientific developments, while Black hospitals had to rely on their own small community of patients for funding. Black hospitals were forced to open in older, outdated hospital structures that were abandoned by prior white founders.

White doctors refused to treat Black patients—like the son of scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, Burghardt, who suffered from diphtheria.¹⁷⁵ Du Bois tried in vain to find a Black physician, but his son died when he was about one and a half years old.¹⁷⁶ Baby Burghardt’s death mirrored the many deaths of enslaved children from the same

disease.¹⁷⁷ While white public health leaders and professionals ignored the needs of the Black community, Black physicians and health leaders traveled to churches, schools, and community meetings to give healthcare education presentations.¹⁷⁸

COURTESY OF RUSSELL LEE/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



A waiting room in a Black hospital in Chicago in 1941. Black hospitals were the only viable sources for healthcare for Black Americans because many white hospitals did not admit Black patients or provided discriminatory care. As late as 1945, Chicago only had one hospital operated by Black healthcare providers that served roughly 270,000 Black residents.

Because African Americans were denied medical education, they founded their own medical schools. The first Black medical school, Howard University Medical Department, was founded in 1867.¹⁷⁹ It was the first of 14 Black medical schools founded between 1868 and 1900.¹⁸⁰ In 1910, the Carnegie Foundation commissioned a report to evaluate every medical school in the U.S. and Canada.¹⁸¹ In the wake of the report, most Black medical schools closed.¹⁸² By 1915, five of the eight Black medical schools established in the 1880s and 1990s had closed.¹⁸³ By 1923, only two training sites were left for black doctors and other medical professionals—Howard University in Washington, D.C. and Meharry Medical College in Tennessee.¹⁸⁴

At the time, there was intense pressure in the medical field to modernize and redesign medical facilities with higher clinical and operational standards.¹⁸⁵ Black hospitals thus faced greater problems—adhering to these new modernized standards without the funds or institutional support of major industrialists, premier academic institutions, and political leaders, while also caring for growing healthcare needs of African Americans in the Jim Crow era.¹⁸⁶ Due partly to racism, Black medical schools were not able to link with modernized hospitals to train their students.¹⁸⁷ Without a means of training students, and a lack of teaching and

funding resources, Black medical schools were no longer viable institutions for a medical education.¹⁸⁸ From 1900 to 1980, only about two percent of medical professionals were Black.¹⁸⁹ As of 2018, just five percent of physicians were Black.¹⁹⁰ Consequently, Black medical schools shut down, in part, due to systemic racial discrimination and lack of government support—resulting in the underrepresentation of African Americans in the medical field.

Black professionals experienced constant racial discrimination and exclusion from medical institutions and professional associations during legal segregation.¹⁹¹ Black doctors were not allowed to treat Black patients in some white southern hospitals.¹⁹² Black interns, residents, and registered nursing personnel were excluded from white hospitals in the South.¹⁹³ Black pharmacists were limited to employment in “colored drugstores.”¹⁹⁴ Many Black women who entered the nursing profession were discriminated against and not allowed to enter the nation’s major government and charitable health agencies.¹⁹⁵

Black hospitals were the only viable sources for healthcare for African Americans because many white hospitals did not admit Black patients or provided discriminatory care.¹⁹⁶ As late as 1945, Chicago only had one hospital operated by Black healthcare providers that served roughly 270,000 Black residents.¹⁹⁷ Philadelphia had two Black hospitals.¹⁹⁸ Southern Black women relied on private physicians and hospitals for maternity care.¹⁹⁹ Even in 1949, when an increasing number of white women were assisted by physicians during birth, most Black women had no physician present for birth.²⁰⁰

Until 1954, when the Veterans Administration announced the end of segregation in agency hospitals, Black veterans received worse treatment than white veterans due to separate and unequal facilities.²⁰¹ White hospitals received public and private funds to establish models of care based on the newest scientific developments, while Black hospitals had to rely on their own small community of patients for funding.²⁰² Black hospitals were forced to open in older, outdated hospital structures that were abandoned by prior white founders.²⁰³

The American Medical Association (AMA) is the most powerful umbrella organization for physician advocacy and lobbying in the United States.²⁰⁴ The AMA actively discriminated against Black medical professionals and supported state-sanctioned discrimination.²⁰⁵ From about 1846 to 1888, the AMA did not allow

Black doctors to join.²⁰⁶ This policy of tolerating racial exclusion was pivotal in creating a two-tier system of medicine in the United States.²⁰⁷ In response to the AMA’s racial discrimination, in 1895, Black physicians formed their own professional association, the National Medical Association.²⁰⁸

From the 1870s through the late 1960s, the AMA excluded and discriminated against Black physicians, hindering their professional advancement, and creating discriminatory barriers to adequate healthcare for Black patients.²⁰⁹ During this period, the AMA was made up of local physician societies.²¹⁰ Societies that were in segregationist states freely denied Black physicians entry, yet remained part of the national AMA.²¹¹ Consequently, Black physicians were denied membership in state, county, and municipal medical societies throughout the South and in many border states.²¹² Exclusion from these medical societies restricted access to training and limited professional contacts.²¹³ Since membership in a state medical society was required by most south-

In 1946, Congress passed the Hill-Burton Act, which provided federal construction grants and loans to states that needed health care facilities. Ultimately, Congress included the “separate but equal” provision in the Hill-Burton Act to appease the southern states.

ern hospitals, this policy resulted in the denial of admitting privileges, which meant that Black physicians could not admit Black patients to southern hospitals.²¹⁴ This, in turn, created barriers to healthcare for African Americans and barriers to professional advancement for Black physicians.²¹⁵ Furthermore, the AMA was silent in debates over the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and did not support efforts to amend the “separate but equal” provision of the Hill-Burton Act.²¹⁶

The Hill-Burton Act (1946)

In 1946, Congress passed the Hill-Burton Act, which provided federal construction grants and loans to states that needed health care facilities.²¹⁷ However, the Hill-Burton Act allowed “separate but equal” healthcare facilities.²¹⁸ In congressional debates, northern Senators William Langer and Harold Burton called for nondiscrimination in the use of federal funds.²¹⁹ Southern Senators, such as Lister Hill from Alabama, claimed that state legislatures and local hospital authorities had the right to set policy without federal interference.²²⁰ Ultimately, Congress

included the “separate but equal” provision in the Hill-Burton Act to appease the southern states.²²¹

Southern states received a significant portion of the federal funds allotted through the Hill-Burton Act.²²² Because Hill-Burton Act funds were disbursed through regional, state, and local offices, states that were highly segregated continued to engage in racial exclusion.²²³ By 1962, 98 hospitals in the South banned Black patients outright, while others only allowed Black patients in segregated areas.²²⁴ The Hill-Burton Act allowed patients to be denied admittance into hospitals on account of race.²²⁵ The Hill-Burton Act thus permitted racial segregation and discrimination in healthcare, a legacy of the racism that existed during slavery and continued through the legal segregation era.

Healthcare During Legal Segregation Era

Due to discrimination and segregation instituted and allowed by federal and state governments during the legal segregation era, African Americans suffered from inadequate care.²²⁶ Studies conducted on the Black community in the mid-20th century, revealed high rates of syphilis, tuberculosis, maternal and infant mortality, and disparities in life expectancy—healthcare concerns that continue.²²⁷ Communicable childhood diseases such as whooping cough, measles, meningitis, diphtheria, and scarlet fever were twice as frequent among Black children than white children—reflecting inadequate access to modern medical treatment.²²⁸ The infant death rate for Black children was twice that of white children in the late 1950s.²²⁹ The Black maternal mortality rate was four times greater than the white maternal mortality rate.²³⁰ Compared to white Americans, African Americans died at earlier ages of heart disease and respiratory cancer.²³¹

A contributing factor to premature death for African Americans was that the federal government prohibited African Americans from accessing antipoverty programs.²³² As a result, they could not afford or access quality healthcare.²³³ Government-sanctioned racial segregation and discrimination extended the legacy of slavery, impacting the healthcare system far into the 20th century and until today.

California

In the late 1940s, Fresno lost its only Black doctor, Dr. Henry C. Wallace.²³⁴ At the time, young Earl Meyers, a

Black teenager in Fresno, was impressed by Dr. Wallace.²³⁵ “Dr. Wallace inspired him ... He was Earl’s mother’s doctor and he healed her,” Mattie Meyers, Earl Meyers’ former wife, said. “At that time, there weren’t any black doctors here. Dr. Wallace was Earl’s mentor,” she said. Earl Meyers then left Fresno to receive his medical degree at Tennessee’s Meharry Medical College—one of the only Black medical schools left in the United States.²³⁶

Communicable childhood diseases such as whooping cough, measles, meningitis, diphtheria, and scarlet fever were twice as frequent among Black children than white children—reflecting inadequate access to modern medical treatment. The infant death rate for Black children was twice that of white children in the late 1950s. The Black maternal mortality rate was four times greater than the white maternal mortality rate.

Many of the Black residents of Fresno described the difficulty they had in getting medical care from white doctors and asked Dr. Meyers to return to his hometown.²³⁷ Dr. Meyers did return home to Fresno, where he established a medical clinic.²³⁸ He also established a dispensary and made prescriptions available at wholesale cost—often refusing to charge impoverished patients for his services.²³⁹



In 1950 **65%** of hospitals in Los Angeles **racially segregated** Black patients

Hospitals in California that received Hill-Burton Act funds²⁴⁰ discriminated against Black patients and physicians. From 1947 to 1971, Hill-Burton Act funds contributed to 427 projects at 284 facilities in 165 communities in California.²⁴¹ A 1950 survey of Los Angeles hospitals found that 11 of the 17 hospitals racially segregated patients.²⁴² A separate, 1956 study found that only 24.8 percent of Black physicians in Los Angeles served at predominately white hospitals.²⁴³ The legacy of this discrimination carries through today. In 2021, a nonpartisan health organization found that Los Angeles tied Atlanta for the highest number of “least inclusive hospitals.”²⁴⁴

Consequently, California has a history of healthcare discrimination against Black Californians, due to the segregation of hospitals in California and the inadequacy

of access to healthcare for Black Californians, which is a legacy of slavery that carries through to today.

VI. Post-Civil Rights Act Era

The Civil Rights Act brought marked improvements in addressing healthcare discrimination.²⁴⁵ However, the United States healthcare system was built upon a foundation of enslavement and segregation, which has never been dismantled. Scholars have stated that the legacy of enslavement and segregation persists in the legal barriers to medical education for African Americans, the anti-Black discrimination in the healthcare profession, and the transformation of hospitals and healthcare into a high profit industry that has neglected to provide care for African Americans.²⁴⁶ This legacy of enslavement continues to harm African Americans today, as some scholars have stated, resulting in continued inequities in medical treatment and health outcomes.²⁴⁷

Medical Education

The U.S. Supreme Court's ban on race-based quotas in affirmative-action programs for medical schools led to a dearth of Black doctors.²⁴⁸ In the 1960s, white medical and dental schools began efforts to increase Black enrollment through affirmative action programs to recruit and graduate higher numbers of Black medical students.²⁴⁹ Affirmative action programs increased the number of Black medical school students from 783—or 2.2 percent of all medical students in 1969—to 3,456—or 7.5 percent of all medical students by 1975.²⁵⁰ Of all those who treated Black communities and patient populations, Black physicians provided the most care.²⁵¹

Racism by white doctors has led to unconscious bias that has resulted in African Americans receiving inferior medical care as compared to white Americans. Across virtually every type of diagnostic and treatment intervention, African Americans receive fewer procedures and poorer-quality medical care than white Americans.

The University of California, Davis opened a medical school with an affirmative action program in 1966.²⁵² However, in 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the racial quotas used in this program were unconstitutional in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*.²⁵³

This ruling reduced the number of Black students admitted in the nation's medical schools—particularly middle- and lower-ranked schools, where the percentage of Black students admitted dropped to miniscule levels.²⁵⁴ There were fewer Black men in U.S. medical schools in 2014 than in 1978.²⁵⁵ Medical education began to use a “colorblind” model of selecting and training Black professionals based upon the *Bakke* ruling, which has contributed to racial health disparities that exist today.²⁵⁶

Major growth of the medical sector eventually led the bulk of the nation's hospitals to be operated by the government, large corporations, and not-for-profit healthcare businesses.²⁵⁷ Due to the transformation of healthcare from a largely government provided service to a for-profit industry, Black physicians were separated from Black patient populations.²⁵⁸ Black hospitals were closed and taken over by large corporate entities.²⁵⁹ Black hospitals were not funded by government, corporate, and non-profit economic circles and consequently could not afford to remain open.²⁶⁰ They closed, merged into larger hospital systems, or were renovated into nursing homes by the mid-1980s.²⁶¹ The mainstream medical establishment was unorganized, and spread out geographically.²⁶² Black doctors who used to serve Black patients concentrated in Black geographic areas were consequently scattered and unable to continue serving Black patient populations in clinics and hospitals.²⁶³

Research has shown that diversity among physicians leads to better outcomes for Black patients.²⁶⁴ Non-Black medical students' explicit racist attitudes are associated with decreased intent to practice with underserved or minority populations.²⁶⁵ One study found that Black patients assigned to a Black doctor increased their demand for preventive care, brought up more medical issues, and were more likely to seek medical advice.²⁶⁶

Racism by white doctors has led to unconscious bias that has resulted in African Americans receiving inferior medical care as compared to white Americans.²⁶⁷ Higher implicit bias scores among physicians are associated with

biased treatment recommendations for the care of Black patients.²⁶⁸ Providers' implicit bias affects their nonverbal behavior, which is associated with poorer quality of patient-provider communication.²⁶⁹ Across virtually every type of diagnostic and treatment intervention, African Americans receive fewer procedures and poorer-quality medical care than do white Americans.²⁷⁰

Discrimination in Healthcare

Prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, federally-funded hospitals refused to provide care to Black patients.²⁷¹ Barriers to equality in care for Black patients remained even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act.²⁷² Due to insufficient government-funded healthcare services, as well as the disempowerment and neglect of Black patients by healthcare institutions, Black communities suffered major gaps in healthcare delivery in the impoverished neighborhoods where they lived.²⁷³ Black residents who lived in urban poverty received medical care from crowded emergency rooms and outpatient services at overburdened public hospitals, or at small practices of private Black physicians.²⁷⁴

In 1960, there was only one Black doctor for every 5,000 Black patients, compared to the national average of one doctor for every 670 Americans.²⁷⁵ Poor Black women could not afford safe abortions through private doctors and could not receive adequate care at the hospitals and clinics in their communities.²⁷⁶ Hospitals in Black neighborhoods were older than public general hospitals.²⁷⁷ They were usually administered by nonprofit bodies and funded by voluntary contributions and paying patients.²⁷⁸ They were insufficiently staffed and were in too poor of a physical condition to provide the medical services needed by the Black communities around them.²⁷⁹

In 1960, there was only 1 Black doctor per 5,000 African Americans



compared to 1 white doctor for every 670 Americans

As a result, between 1950 to 1970, life expectancy for African Americans remained almost a decade

shorter than that of white Americans.²⁸⁰ Death rates from pneumonia, influenza, and tuberculosis were two to three times higher for African Americans than white Americans due to lack of access to hospital care.²⁸¹ Similarly, maternal mortality rates for Black mothers remained four times higher than that of white mothers.²⁸² Black mortality from sexually transmitted infections and tuberculosis remained much higher than that of white Americans.²⁸³ African Americans also continued to suffer from chronic illness at higher rates than white people.²⁸⁴

In the 1950s and 1960s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People brought several lawsuits to force government funded hospitals to hire Black doctors, treat Black patients, and desegregate facilities.²⁸⁵ The federal government filed a brief in support of Black patients in *Simkins v. Moses H. Cone Memorial*

As a result, between 1950 to 1970, life expectancy for African Americans remained almost a decade shorter than that of white Americans.

Hospital; however, the government did not always strictly enforce the Civil Rights Act against medical segregation, sometimes leaving Black medical professionals to fight case by case in the courts for desegregation.²⁸⁶

Health Insurance

Insurance status predicts the quality of care a patient will receive.²⁸⁷ Health insurance is necessary to pay for healthcare procedures, such as preventive care, screenings, disease management, and prescription drugs.²⁸⁸ In the United States, health insurance is dependent upon employment.²⁸⁹ In 1942, during World War II, rising prices and competing wages led the federal government to put a cap on wages.²⁹⁰ Health insurance was an exception to that wage cap and employer contributions to health insurance premiums were tax-free.²⁹¹ Employers began paying for health insurance to lure employees.²⁹² Eventually, this led employees with higher-paying jobs to receive more benefits from their health coverage than those with lower incomes.²⁹³ Healthcare became a privilege for those with good jobs, rather than a right for all.²⁹⁴ As discussed in Chapter 10, African Americans have historically not been able to access jobs that provide medical insurance through employers due to barriers to education, employment, and discrimination.²⁹⁵ Due to employment discrimination, private, job-based, health care systems excluded

African Americans.²⁹⁶ Consequently, as of 2018, only 46 percent of African Americans are covered by employer-sponsored health insurance.²⁹⁷

In the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society legislation and the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act contained the seeds for creating a nationwide health care system for all citizens.²⁹⁸ However, the Medicaid and Medicare programs did not eliminate racial inequality in healthcare.²⁹⁹ Medicare and Medicaid are health insurance programs paid for by the federal government.³⁰⁰ Medicare serves people with disabilities and people who are 65 years or older.³⁰¹ Medicaid serves people who are low-income.³⁰²

Before Medicaid and Medicare, southern states were resistant to a nationwide health insurance system for all, due to desegregation brought about by the civil rights legislation.³⁰³ They wanted limited federal involvement while continuing to run their own health programs for low-income residents.³⁰⁴ Before Medicaid's enactment, states had control over federal health insurance programs for low-income residents, which disproportionately included African Americans.³⁰⁵ These programs were underfunded, and states with large populations of African Americans—Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, referred to as the “Black Belt” states—refused to participate in federal health insurance programs.³⁰⁶ A state-run Medicaid program would limit federal involvement while allowing states to determine eligibility for health insurance programs on their own.³⁰⁷

The enactment of Medicaid as a program implemented by state governments allowed states to disproportionately exclude Black, low-income populations who otherwise would have qualified for the program.³⁰⁸ Medicaid provided insurance to low-income and unemployed people—about one-fifth of the Black population was considered poor enough to qualify for Medicaid.³⁰⁹ Consequently, in the 1970s, 25 percent of the African American population was uninsured, while only 12 percent of the general population was uninsured.³¹⁰

However, in the 1990s, the Black Belt states changed their income criteria, lowering the threshold income for Medicaid so much that many poor Black families were not considered poor enough to qualify for Medicaid.³¹¹ Reimbursement policies established by government and health insurance regulators limited hospitals and

physicians in the type and number of patients they could treat.³¹² Consequently, private physicians and hospitals preferred not to treat Medicaid recipients, who lacked the funds to access care in a wide range of hospitals.³¹³ Due to this, throughout the 1990s, about 20 percent of the nation's Black population lacked health insurance, while 17 percent of all Americans lacked health insurance.³¹⁴

The Affordable Care Act, passed in 2010, greatly reduced the number of uninsured people in the United States.³¹⁵ Three million Black people previously uninsured obtained insurance.³¹⁶ However, the U.S. Supreme Court made expansion of Medicaid eligibility under the Affordable Care Act optional to states rather than mandatory.³¹⁷ The expansion of Medicaid eligibility would have increased access to screening and preventive care, resulted in earlier diagnosis of chronic conditions, and improved mental health.³¹⁸ However, the states that chose not to expand Medicaid were primarily the Black Belt states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas.³¹⁹ African Americans are among the most likely to be uninsured compared to other populations, further inhibiting African Americans from accessing quality healthcare.³²⁰

Medicare does not cover all healthcare services that an individual may need, and often supplemental coverage is needed.³²¹ This coverage is sold by private insurance companies, or may be provided by employer-sponsored retiree benefits.³²² However, due to the low levels of employer-sponsored health coverage for African Americans and the expense of private insurance, older African Americans are far more likely than white Americans to rely solely on the Medicare program, or may supplement it with Medicaid.³²³ About a quarter of African Americans lack supplemental coverage, while only 10 percent of white Americans lack supplemental coverage.³²⁴ The lack of supplemental insurance exposes African Americans to higher out of pocket costs and delayed medical care.³²⁵ Discrimination in Medicare

In early 1970, the Black Panther Party published in its newspaper an account of “the disrespectful, unprofessional, and even authoritarian encounters between physicians and their patients at San Francisco General.”

extends to the quality of medical services. Ten percent of African Americans receiving Medicare report unwanted delays in getting an appointment and problems

finding a new specialist, while only six percent of white Americans report similar problems.³²⁶ Consequently, the discriminatory health insurance system has resulted in worse health for older African Americans who rely on Medicare.

Black physicians in California have alleged that the Medical Board of California disciplines Black doctors more than white doctors. Research shows that Black physicians in California were more likely to receive complaints and have their complaints escalated to investigations than white physicians, but these investigations were not more likely to result in disciplinary action.

California

To address the lack of healthcare services and medical discrimination experienced by Black Californians, the Black Panther Party attempted to provide free healthcare clinics to administer basic healthcare services.³²⁷ In early 1970, the Black Panther Party published in its newspaper an account of “the disrespectful, unprofessional, and even authoritarian encounters between physicians and their patients at San Francisco General.”³²⁸ Shortly after, the Black Panther Party established a few free, community-based clinics, known as People’s Free Medical Clinics.³²⁹ At the clinics, medical professionals trained health workers to administer basic services.³³⁰

However, local governments retaliated against the Black Panther Party’s clinics. The Oakland Police Department, on the order of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, hounded the Black Panther Party for soliciting clinic funds without proper permits.³³¹ In 1969, police in Los Angeles raided the local Black Panther Party chapter’s headquarters, where the party was planning to open the Bunchy Carter People’s Free Medical Clinic.³³² The raid severely damaged the clinic building enough that its forthcoming opening was postponed.³³³

Today, discrimination against Black Californians in healthcare is exacerbated by the fact that there are not enough Black physicians in California to meet the needs of California’s Black population. In California, Black

physicians are less than three percent of the entire medical profession, despite African Americans making up six percent of the state’s population.³³⁴ The passage of Proposition 209 in 1996 in California, prohibited the consideration of race, ethnicity, or national origin in public education, employment, and contracting.³³⁵ As a result, in California’s private medical schools, the proportion of Black students matriculating fell from six percent in 1990 to five percent in 2019.³³⁶

Black physicians in California have alleged that the Medical Board of California disciplines Black doctors more than white doctors.³³⁷ Research shows that Black physicians in California were more likely to receive complaints and have their complaints escalated to investigations than white physicians, but these investigations were not more likely to result in disciplinary action.³³⁸ Black physicians have been historically underrepresented in California’s medical field and continue to be underrepresented and discriminated against today.

Black Californians continue to face discrimination in healthcare and disparities in health outcomes.³³⁹ In 1965, in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, an area with a large Black population, only 106 doctors were serving over 250,000 residents—a doctor to patient ratio of one to 2,377.³⁴⁰ The United States today has a doctor to patient ratio of about one doctor per 384 patients.³⁴¹ Today, Black Californians experience racism in their interactions with the healthcare system and many have wanted more access to Black physicians.³⁴² In a study conducted in 2021 where 100 Black Californians were interviewed, some recounted experiences of delayed or missed diagnoses due to inattentive healthcare providers.³⁴³ One Black man from the Central Valley said, “I couldn’t hold down any food. I couldn’t walk. I couldn’t eat, do anything. So, I went to a clinic and I told them what was wrong. And they prescribed naproxen, which is generic for Midol and Advil. [So] I went to the hospital and had dual kidney infections... I just don’t think they take me seriously...I don’t think they take me as seriously as they would a white man or a white woman.”³⁴⁴

VII. Medical Experimentation

Federal and state governments have allowed doctors and scientists to experiment on the bodies of African Americans and have at times conducted dangerous medical experiments on African Americans. In 1932, the U.S. Public Health Service began its study of syphilis, known as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, which promised free medical care to hundreds of poor Black sharecroppers in Alabama.³⁴⁵ Over the course of 40 years, the government did not treat the subjects, though treatment was available, and sought to ensure that the subjects of the study did not receive treatment from other sources.³⁴⁶ Forty of the wives of the Black sharecroppers and at least 19 children contracted syphilis during the study.³⁴⁷ The government did not prosecute anyone for the deaths and injuries that were caused.³⁴⁸

COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES



Subjects of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. In 1932, the U.S. Public Health Service began its study of syphilis, known as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, which promised free medical care to hundreds of poor Black sharecroppers in Alabama. Over the course of 40 years, the government did not treat the subjects, though treatment was available, and sought to ensure that the subjects of the study did not receive treatment from other sources.

African American bodies have been used for major medical advancements and experimentation, without any compensation given to those who were involved, or to their families. For instance, scientists at Johns Hopkins University were treating Henrietta Lacks, a Black woman, for cervical cancer in the 1950s.³⁴⁹ Without compensation to her family or permission from them, her cells were used extensively in scientific research to develop modern vaccines, cancer treatments, in vitro fertilization techniques, among other medical advancements.³⁵⁰ Doctors and scientists repeatedly failed to ask her family for consent as they revealed her name publicly and gave her medical records to the media.³⁵¹ Like so many enslaved people, Lacks' body was used for medical experimentation without her consent and without compensation.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved contraceptives, such as Norplant, which were disproportionately distributed to poor Black women and young girls in schools.³⁵² States offered poor women financial incentives for using Norplant—however, due to concerns about complications and effectiveness, Norplant's distributor eventually discontinued it in 2002.³⁵³ Similarly, in 1973, many Black women had filed lawsuits alleging that they were coerced into sterilization, often under the threat that their welfare benefits would be taken away if they did not submit to the procedure.³⁵⁴ The coercive use of contraception and sterilization by the legal system and welfare system has forced Black women to choose between financial freedom or prison time.³⁵⁵

African Americans have also been subjected to harmful experiments conducted, facilitated, or allowed by the government. In the 1950s, the Central Intelligence Agency reportedly attempted to test biological weapons by breeding millions of mosquitos and releasing them in Black housing developments in Florida and Georgia.³⁵⁶ Residents living in these areas showed symptoms of dengue fever and yellow fever and some died from these illnesses.³⁵⁷ In Pennsylvania's Holmesburg Prison, Dr. Albert M. Kligman conducted numerous experiments on mostly Black incarcerated Americans throughout the 1960s.³⁵⁸ Incarcerated individuals filed lawsuits for their injuries due to this abusive experimentation.³⁵⁹ Dr. Kligman was temporarily banned from experimentation by the Food and Drug Administration in 1966, however, clinical research on incarcerated people was not banned by the government until decades later.³⁶⁰ In the 1990s, the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University conducted experiments on Black boys by giving them doses of the now-banned drug fenfluramine to test a theory that violent or criminal behavior may be predicted by levels of certain brain chemicals.³⁶¹ Consequently, federal and state governments allowed or participated in abusive experimentation on Black children and incarcerated people throughout the nation.

California

Home to an extensive eugenics movement, California had the highest number of sterilizations in the United States.³⁶² In the 1920s Black people constituted just over one percent of California's population, but they accounted for four percent of total sterilizations by the State of California.³⁶³ By 1964, the State of California sterilized over 20,000 people—one-third of all sterilizations in the

U.S. and more than any other state.³⁶⁴ The sterilizations were authorized by law and performed in state institutions, hospitals, and prisons.³⁶⁵

By 1964, the State of California sterilized over 20,000 people which accounts for 1/3 of all sterilizations in the U.S.

Dr. Leo Stanley, a eugenicist, performed forced sterilizations at San Quentin State Prison and was responsible for further segregation of the prison medical facilities.³⁶⁶ He also used the testicular glands of an executed Black man for his experiments, without obtaining the consent of the man's family because his body was not "claimed."³⁶⁷ In 2018, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation glowingly described Dr. Stanley as a doctor who "push[ed] prison medicine into [the] 20th century."³⁶⁸

Between 2006 and 2010, almost 150 people imprisoned in California's women's prisons were sterilized without

proper authorization while giving birth.³⁶⁹ Many of the women subjected to forced sterilization were Black and Latina.³⁷⁰ Kelli Dillon was forcibly sterilized while incarcerated at the Central California women's facility in Chowchilla when she was told she needed a surgery to treat an ovarian cyst.³⁷¹ She was not aware of the sterilization until she requested her medical records with the help of a lawyer.³⁷² Dillon said, "It was like my life wasn't worth anything," she said. "Somebody felt I had nothing to contribute to the point where they had to find this sneaky and diabolical way to take my ability to have children."³⁷³ After her release from prison, Dillon founded Back to Basics, an organization fighting for justice for survivors of forced sterilizations in California.³⁷⁴ In 2021, California became the third state to offer reparations payments, setting aside \$7.5 million for victims of forced sterilization.³⁷⁵

In the State of California, Elmer Allen was illegally injected with plutonium at the University of California, San Francisco medical hospital in San Francisco—he was likely never informed of the consequences of this.³⁷⁶ The university later acknowledged that the injection was not of therapeutic benefit to him, which was a requirement for medical experiments on people.³⁷⁷ The federal government created a committee to investigate the government-sponsored radiation experiments, after which President Clinton issued an apology.³⁷⁸

VIII. Medical Therapies, and Technology

The history of experimentation and discrimination has led to the exclusion of African Americans from modern clinical trials, due to the mistrust this has sowed among African Americans—resulting in continuing health disparities that harm African Americans.³⁷⁹ Prior to modern research, there has been a long history of Black bodies being stolen for dissection and anatomical investigation without informed consent.³⁸⁰ The Freedman's Cemetery in Dallas, excavated in the 1990s, contained the remains of African Americans, which were illegally used for dissection or stolen.³⁸¹ Today, African Americans are less likely to be in clinical trials for the development of medication, vaccines, or other treatment, which can exacerbate health disparities.³⁸² For example, although sickle cell disease primarily affects African Americans, there is a great disparity in research funding and attention paid to this genetic condition.³⁸³

Algorithms are widely used in U.S. hospitals to refer people to health programs that improve a patient's

care—however, at least one widely-used algorithm was found to systematically discriminate against Black

COURTESY OF DISSECTION: PHOTOGRAPHS OF A RITE OF PASSAGE IN AMERICAN MEDICINE, 1880-1930, PAGE 101



Students at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, 1898. The English sociologist Harriet Martineau wrote in 1838 that "...the bodies of coloured people exclusively are taken for dissection because the whites do not like it, and the coloured people cannot resist."

patients.³⁸⁴ This algorithm led to Black patients receiving less referrals for programs that provided personalized care—despite being just as sick as white patients.³⁸⁵

African Americans are less likely to be treated for skin diseases due to the lack of medical research and training for diagnosing skin conditions for those with darker skin.³⁸⁶ Most medical textbooks and journals that assist dermatologists in diagnosing skin disorders do not include images of skin conditions as they appear on

African Americans.³⁸⁷ Images of darker skin with skin conditions caused by COVID-19, skin cancer, psoriasis, rosacea, and melanoma often do not appear in medical textbooks and journals.³⁸⁸ Doctors routinely miss these diagnoses for Black patients because they are not trained to identify or treat skin conditions for Black patients.³⁸⁹ Consequently, discriminatory medical research and technology has resulted in worsening health disparities that harm African Americans.

IX. Mental Health

Steve Biko, the South African anti-apartheid activist observed that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”³⁹⁰ Historically, the dehumanization of African Americans has grown into structural, institutional, and individual racism today.³⁹¹ Poor mental health among Black youth and adults must be understood in the context of historical race-based exclusion from access to resources.³⁹² The harsh impact of multigenerational racism on Black mental health and inherent racism within the discipline of psychology has contributed to disastrous mental health consequences for African Americans.

rarely admitted into southern asylums because they supposedly did not suffer from severe mental illness.³⁹⁹ The racist notion that only white people suffered from mental illness was written into the law in Virginia.⁴⁰⁰ Black patients experienced outright denial of services, and when they were admitted, they were housed in worse circumstances than white patients.⁴⁰¹

In the 1970s, due to systemic racism, psychiatrists were taught that clinical depression was nonexistent among African Americans. Black military personnel under conditions of intense racial discrimination received higher rates of severe mental illness diagnoses, such as paranoid schizophrenia.

History of Racism in Mental Health

The federal government and state governments, including the State of California, have historically discriminated against African Americans in the provision of mental healthcare. Established in 1773, the Public Hospital for Persons of Insane and Disordered Minds in Williamsburg, Virginia, was the first public psychiatric hospital in the United States.³⁹³ However, the asylum prioritized white people over enslaved people for admission.³⁹⁴ The asylum used enslaved labor to operate and accepted enslaved people as payment for care and treatment of white people.³⁹⁵

Psychiatric hospitals in the first half of the 19th century were some of the United States’ first officially segregated institutions.³⁹⁶ One of the American Psychiatric Association’s founding members refused to admit Black patients to his mental hospital.³⁹⁷ He influenced the design of the Government Hospital for the Insane in Washington, D.C., which housed Black patients in a separate building—far away from the better facilities for the white patients.³⁹⁸ Before 1861, Black patients were

By the 1960s and 1970s, African Americans were left with a mental health system that proved ineffective at addressing the root causes of mental illness—such as racism and poverty.⁴⁰² In 1970, African Americans were 52 percent more of the population in mental health institutions than white Americans.⁴⁰³ However, there were nine times more African Americans than white Americans in correctional settings.⁴⁰⁴

White mental health staff at federally-funded clinics and hospitals often diagnosed Black patients as schizophrenic, when they should have been diagnosed with depression.⁴⁰⁵ In the 1970s, due to systemic racism, psychiatrists were taught that clinical depression was nonexistent among African Americans.⁴⁰⁶ Black military personnel under conditions of intense racial discrimination received higher rates of severe mental illness diagnoses, such as paranoid schizophrenia.⁴⁰⁷ Studies of the diagnoses of Black patients at Veterans Affairs facilities have also shown that misdiagnosis has remained a problem for Black communities due

to clinicians' prejudice and misinterpretation of Black patients' behaviors.⁴⁰⁸

The American Psychological Association and the Discipline of Psychology

The American Psychological Association (APA), in conjunction with federal and state governments, played a significant role in the ongoing oppression of African Americans.⁴⁰⁹ In 2020, the APA issued an apology for its role in promoting, perpetuating, and failing to challenge racism in the U.S.⁴¹⁰ The APA helped establish racist scientific theories, opposition to inter-racial marriage, and support of segregation and forced sterilization.⁴¹¹ The APA also promoted the idea that racial difference is biologically-based, created discriminatory psychological tests, and failed to take action to end racist testing practices.⁴¹² For centuries, the APA has failed to represent the approaches, practices, voices, and concerns of African Americans within the field of psychology and within society.⁴¹³

Throughout American history, the field of psychology has also influenced federal and state eugenics policies.⁴¹⁴ In 1895, an article published in an APA journal argued that white people had a superior, more evolved intelligence.⁴¹⁵ In 1913, a study reported the inferiority of school performance among Black children in integrated schools in New York.⁴¹⁶ Racial difference was used to argue against improved schooling opportunities for Black children.⁴¹⁷ One psychologist, Raymond Cattell, argued that race-mixing was dangerous and would lead to a society of “lower intelligence” through the early 1990s.⁴¹⁸

In 1917, the federal government conducted psychological tests on nearly two million soldiers.⁴¹⁹ Due to culturally-biased questions, the study labeled 89 percent of Black recruits as “morons.”⁴²⁰ Throughout the 1930s, Black psychologists conducted studies countering the racist findings of white psychologists.⁴²¹ Their studies suggested that environment plays a central role in shaping intelligence scores and outlined the impact white examiners have on the test scores of Black test takers.⁴²² However, these studies were often dismissed.⁴²³ The APA continued to support the use of testing to validate theories about innate racial hierarchy.⁴²⁴

From the 1950s on, psychologists received funding from white supremacist organizations to support segregation and other racist projects.⁴²⁵ In 1952, former APA president, Henry E. Garrett, testified in support of segregation in *Davis v. County School Board*, one of five federal

court cases combined into *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁴²⁶ He testified that segregation would not harm Black students, and the three-judge panel that ruled in favor of segregation agreed.⁴²⁷ Garrett also testified before Congress in opposition to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968.⁴²⁸ He argued that African Americans could not reach the intelligence levels of white Americans.⁴²⁹ Garrett promoted the idea of an innate racial hierarchy and worked with racial extremist and neo-Nazi groups.⁴³⁰

In 1968, 75 Black psychologists left the APA in protest and formed the Association of Black Psychologists.⁴³¹ However, published articles in top psychological journals continued to be overtly racist and neglect issues and topics beneficial to African Americans. Between 1970 and 1989, just 3.6 percent of published articles focused on African Americans.⁴³² Most of the work is focused on standardized testing and none on healthy

In 1917, the federal government conducted psychological tests on nearly two million soldiers. Due to culturally-biased questions, the study labeled 89 percent of Black recruits as “morons.”

personality development and the competent intellectual functioning of African Americans.⁴³³ As late as 1985, white psychologists published articles arguing that African Americans evolved to have lower intelligence, have more children, care for them poorly, and commit more crime.⁴³⁴ The legacy of the discriminatory practices of the APA and the discipline of psychology is evident in the underrepresentation of African Americans in the psychology workforce, as will be discussed in the next subsection.

Racism in Mental Health Today

Structural racism continues to be embedded in the mental health system. Studies document continued and consistent patterns of misdiagnosis, mistreatment, and disparities in quality of and access to mental healthcare for African Americans.⁴³⁵ Black patients are more likely to receive higher doses of antipsychotics despite evidence that they have more adverse side effects.⁴³⁶

There is a dearth of Black psychologists and culturally appropriate treatment for African Americans.⁴³⁷ As of 2014, only four percent of the psychology workforce in the United States is Black.⁴³⁸ White psychology curriculums dominate higher education—and seven percent of psychology doctoral students are Black, though 14 percent of Americans are Black.⁴³⁹

Black clients' experiences of microaggressions from white therapists have negatively impacted their satisfaction with both counselors and counseling in general.⁴⁴⁰ Many African Americans feel worse after their counsel-

that has achieved some degree of cohesion[.]”⁴⁵² Cultural imperialism is when the culture of one society is forced onto another society or group of people.⁴⁵³ Internalized racism is “the process of accepting the racial stereotypes of the oppressor.”⁴⁵⁴

Mental health problems among Black youth often result in school punishment or incarceration, rather than mental healthcare.

ing experiences.⁴⁴¹ Racial bias and stereotypes by clinicians have led to misdiagnoses of African Americans in some cases.⁴⁴² This leads to further disparities in quality of mental healthcare for Black patients due to the implicit biases of mental health providers.⁴⁴³

African Americans face barriers to accessing mental healthcare today.⁴⁴⁴ These barriers include stigma from mental health professionals, unavailability of treatment, overdiagnosis and misdiagnosis, being unable to afford the cost of healthcare, lacking insurance, and being unable to access transportation.⁴⁴⁵ Due to these barriers, Black men who are depressed underutilize mental health treatment and have depression that is more persistent, disabling, and resistant to treatment than white men.⁴⁴⁶ This extends to youth. Mental health problems among Black youth often result in school punishment or incarceration, rather than mental healthcare.⁴⁴⁷ Overall, African Americans are less likely to receive care than white Americans for mood and anxiety disorders, which may contribute to chronic mental health issues.⁴⁴⁸ Consequently, African Americans face institutional and individual racism in the mental health system, which is the legacy of historical anti-Black discrimination, and is especially harmful to Black mental health today.

Impact of Anti-Black Racism on Black Mental Health

For centuries, nearly every institution of the Western world has—explicitly and implicitly—reinforced the message that African Americans are to be devalued.⁴⁴⁹ Within this context, it is inevitable that African American mental health and well-being has suffered.⁴⁵⁰ The psychic effects of this anti-Black narrative include cultural trauma, cultural imperialism, and internalized racism.⁴⁵¹ Cultural trauma is “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric affecting a group of people

Anti-Black racism leads to racial stress, which causes adverse psychological effects.⁴⁵⁵ This can profoundly affect Black children by undermining their emotional and physical well-being and their academic success.⁴⁵⁶ African American women identify racial discrimination as a persistent stressor occurring throughout their lives.⁴⁵⁷ These experiences having long-lasting effects on their identities and on how they perceive encounters with others, particularly white Americans.⁴⁵⁸ Many Black women describe ruminating on past experiences, developing defense mechanisms in anticipation of future threats, and feeling the need to overcompensate for negative stereotypes.⁴⁵⁹ They may work harder to prove themselves, suppress emotions, and code switch.⁴⁶⁰ African American women may feel an obligation to present an image of strength, suppress emotions, resist being vulnerable or dependent on others, determined to succeed despite limited resources, and feel an obligation to help others.⁴⁶¹ This may lead to chronic psychological distress, which is associated with physiological processes, such as chronic inflammation, abdominal obesity, and heart disease.⁴⁶²

Cultural trauma is “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion[.]”

The overwhelming amount of racial stress caused by racism can result in trauma.⁴⁶³ Racial trauma, a form of race-based stress, is defined by psychologists as persistent psychological injury caused by racism.⁴⁶⁴ This trauma may produce mental illnesses or psychological wounds tied to historical traumatic experiences, like slavery.⁴⁶⁵ Studies have shown that racial and ethnic discrimination may play an important role in the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for Black people.⁴⁶⁶ Racial trauma can cause symptoms similar to PTSD, including hypervigilance, flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance, suspiciousness, and physical symptoms such as headaches, heart palpitations, and other such symptoms.⁴⁶⁷ Studies have also shown that

public racial discrimination against African Americans is linked to an increase in depressive symptoms.⁴⁶⁸

Historical trauma is the legacy of numerous traumatic events inflicted on a group of people and experienced over generations.⁴⁶⁹ The health consequences of historical racism and discrimination can be passed down psychologically, socially, and emotionally from one generation to the next resulting in intergenerational harm to

used by the state's public education system to block educational and economic opportunities for Black youth in California.⁴⁷⁸ In 1979, the Federal District Court of Northern California ruled in favor of five Black students who had been placed in special education classes due to their performance on psychological tests.⁴⁷⁹

The mental health system in California has discriminated against Black Californians through inaccurate diagnoses, use of involuntary force, high cost, and a lack of culturally-competent services.⁴⁸⁰ In comparison to other racial and ethnic groups, it takes longer for Black Californians to be removed from inpatient mental health care settings to a less restrictive level of care.⁴⁸¹ Despite higher rates of inpatient treatment, over 50 percent of Black Californians must wait more than eight days to step down from an inpatient setting to a lower level of care.⁴⁸² It takes twice as

long for Black Californians than it does for most other racial or ethnic groups, despite no evidence of less need.⁴⁸³ These racial disparities also exist in California's small counties, despite fewer numbers of people from nonwhite communities.⁴⁸⁴

Many Black Californians suffer from high rates of serious psychological distress, depression, suicidal ideation, dual diagnoses, and other mental health issues.⁴⁸⁵ Unmet mental health needs are higher among Black Californians, as compared with white Californians.⁴⁸⁶ This includes being unable to access mental healthcare and substance abuse services.⁴⁸⁷ Across racial groups, the highest percentage of serious psychological distress and attempted suicide was found among Black Californians.⁴⁸⁸ Black Californians had the highest percentage of missed days of work and daily activities due to mental health concerns.⁴⁸⁹ Black people are over-represented in vulnerable groups at risk for mental illness, such as unhoused people; current and formerly incarcerated people; children in foster care; and veterans.⁴⁹⁰ These groups have an increased risk for developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.⁴⁹¹

California budget cuts in funding for indigent care have disproportionately affected Black communities, who are more likely to be indigent and in need of mental health services.⁴⁹² The lack of recruitment and retention of Black psychiatrists in Los Angeles has negatively affected Black Californians, who are more likely to seek services from someone with the same racial background.⁴⁹³

Studies have shown that racial and ethnic discrimination may play an important role in the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for Black people. Racial trauma can cause symptoms similar to PTSD. Studies have also shown that public racial discrimination against African Americans is linked to an increase in depressive symptoms.

Black mental health due to racism.⁴⁷⁰ Long-term adverse health impacts linked to legal segregation laws illustrate the long reach of institutional racism.⁴⁷¹ Historical trauma studies show that children of Black parents who have been affected by trauma, also exhibit symptoms of PTSD, or "historical trauma response."⁴⁷²

Traumatization can occur at a community level as well. Highly publicized police killings of unarmed African Americans affect the mental health of African Americans in the region where the killing occurs.⁴⁷³ In one study, the impact was felt for months afterwards, whereas no negative effects were found for white Americans in those same localities.⁴⁷⁴ A 2013-2016 study on the mental impacts of killings of African Americans in certain states found that African Americans had more poor mental health days, whereas white people were not affected in the same way.⁴⁷⁵

California

Psychological institutions have contributed to over-incarceration, forced sterilization, and denial of educational opportunities for Black Californians. In 1915, psychologists leading the California Bureau of Juvenile Research at Whittier State School oversaw some of the earliest eugenics projects, examining family trees and conducting psychological testing of boys confined at the institution.⁴⁷⁶ The results of this project harmed Black youth in California by increasing incarceration rates and promoting sterilization.⁴⁷⁷ Psychological tests were

Black mentally ill incarcerated Californians are over-represented in Los Angeles County jails.⁴⁹⁴ Records indicate that they receive more mental health services while incarcerated than while they are out in the community, which is illustrative of how poor community mental health services are for Black Californians.⁴⁹⁵

Black Californians represent only 11 percent of Alameda County's population, but make up 47 percent of the county's unhoused population, 48 percent of the jail system's population, and 53 percent of people who cycle in and out of both the criminal and

hospital systems.⁴⁹⁶ The State of California has repeatedly awarded state and county contracts to agencies that

Across racial groups, the highest percentage of serious psychological distress and attempted suicide was found among Black Californians. Black Californians had the highest percentage of missed days of work and daily activities due to mental health concerns.

continually fail to meet a minimum level of culturally relevant care for African Americans.⁴⁹⁷

X. Reproductive and Gender Identity Responsive Health

The federal and state governments have historically policed the childbearing practices of African American women and denied reproductive rights and healthcare.⁴⁹⁸ Black women have been used as tools of reproduction for capitalist profit—or forcibly sterilized and denied reproductive freedom.⁴⁹⁹ Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Americans are less likely to access healthcare.⁵⁰⁰ As a result, Black women and LGBTQ Americans have suffered, in part, due to the legacy of enslavement.

Expecting and new Black mothers often find that their reports of painful symptoms are overlooked or minimized by medical practitioners. Black women must wait longer for prenatal appointments and are ignored, scolded, demeaned, and bullied into having C-sections.

Maternal Health

Black women were denied autonomy over their reproduction during the slavery era and denied their rights as mothers.⁵⁰¹ State and federal governments forcibly sterilized Black women in 19th and 20th centuries.⁵⁰² Later, state policies included plans to distribute experimental birth control, like Norplant, in Black communities.⁵⁰³ States criminalized and sterilized Black women for giving birth if traces of controlled substances were found in them or their babies.⁵⁰⁴ Coercive welfare policies mandated long-term contraceptive insertion, with

harmful health consequences, as a condition for receiving welfare benefits.⁵⁰⁵

Historically, state and federal governments have refused to subsidize reproductive care, such as abortion for poor women.⁵⁰⁶ This especially harms Black women's access to reproductive care. Black women rely on publicly funded clinics in higher numbers, due to lack of access to private health insurance or income for a private physician.⁵⁰⁷ Black women are also less likely to have access to information about informed consent, sterilization, and side effects of contraceptives.⁵⁰⁸ Forced sterilization, mentioned earlier, was used in conjunction with these policies, to deny Black women autonomy over their own bodies and their reproductive health.⁵⁰⁹

Studies show that Black women suffer from disproportionate infertility in comparison to other groups.⁵¹⁰ This disparity stems from untreated sexually transmitted infections, nutritional deficiencies, complications from childbirth and abortion, and environmental hazards.⁵¹¹ Black women are treated as infertile by doctors who underdiagnose endometriosis in Black women.⁵¹² Many reproductive technologies are unaffordable or inaccessible to Black women experiencing fertility issues.⁵¹³

One of the most harmful legacies of slavery is the disproportionate maternal and infant death of Black women

and children today due to lack of access to adequate reproductive healthcare.⁵¹⁴ Black women experience disproportionate racial discrimination in access to and quality of prenatal care.⁵¹⁵ Expecting and new Black mothers often find that their reports of painful symptoms are overlooked or minimized by medical practitioners.⁵¹⁶ Black women must wait longer for prenatal appointments and are ignored, scolded, demeaned, and bullied into having C-sections.⁵¹⁷ Even wealthier Black women suffer the racist disregard of medical providers.⁵¹⁸ Serena Williams, the renowned tennis champion, was ignored by medical providers who dismissed her concern regarding a post-pregnancy blood clot.⁵¹⁹ After insistence by Williams that she undergo a CT scan, doctors found a clot in her lungs.⁵²⁰

Black women disproportionately experience adverse birth outcomes and adverse maternal health.⁵²¹ Researchers have found evidence that this may be influenced by the uniquely high level of racism-induced stress experienced by Black women, as discussed above.⁵²² Structural racism is a stressor that harms Black women at both physiological and genetic levels.⁵²³ Structural racism contributes to maternal and infant death disparities. In the United States, pregnancy-related mortality is three to four times higher among Black women than among white women.⁵²⁴ Adequate prenatal care does not reduce racial disparities for African American women, who are still at elevated risk for preterm birth.⁵²⁵ Hypertension, which has been linked to the stress of living in a racist society, contributes to racial disparities in pregnancy-related complications, such as eclampsia.⁵²⁶ Black mothers are less likely to breastfeed their babies than white mothers due to numerous historical factors, including predatory marketing practices.⁵²⁷ Lower breastfeeding rates are associated with higher risk of medical issues before and after childbirth, and maternal mental health issues.⁵²⁸

Health of Black LGBTQ Americans

Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Americans experience discrimination in healthcare.⁵²⁹ They are also more likely to be uninsured.⁵³⁰ For Black transgender Americans, this results in difficulties in seeing healthcare providers and receiving gender-affirming care due to cost.⁵³¹ Studies have indicated that Black LGBTQ Americans experience assumptions, judgment, stigma, and discrimination in the healthcare system.⁵³² It is difficult for them to establish a personal bond, trust, and familiarity with providers, who do not often meet their needs with respect to their sexual and gender identities.⁵³³

Black LGBTQ Americans suffer from especially poor health outcomes. Black LGBTQ people who identify as women have higher diagnoses of hypertension, stroke, and diabetes.⁵³⁴ Many Black LGBTQ Americans are at higher risk for HIV when compared with white cisgender, heterosexual Americans.⁵³⁵ As of 2015, Black transgender women had HIV at the rate of 19 percent, while 1.4 percent of the transgender population at large had HIV.⁵³⁶ Black LGBTQ Americans have also been found to have higher rates of asthma, heart attacks, and cancer.⁵³⁷

Compared to all transgender Americans, Black transgender Americans are

5x MORE LIKELY to be infected with HIV

A large proportion of Black LGBTQ Americans have suffered verbal insults or abuse, threats of violence, physical or sexual assault, and robbery or property destruction.⁵³⁸ Black LGBTQ Americans are almost twice as likely to report a diagnosis of depression compared to African American non-LGBTQ adults.⁵³⁹ Researchers posit that such mental and physical health outcomes are linked to a combination of anti-Black racial discrimination, and anti-LGBTQ prejudice.⁵⁴⁰ Stigma and discrimination can create a stressful social environment that may lead to mental and physical health problems for African Americans in the LGBTQ community.⁵⁴¹

California

In California, as well as nationally, Black women are substantially more likely than white women to suffer severe health complications during pregnancy, give premature birth, die in childbirth, and lose their babies.⁵⁴² From 2014 to 2016, the pregnancy-related mortality ratio for Black women in California was four to six times greater than the mortality ratio for other ethnic groups.⁵⁴³ In fact, Black women were overrepresented for pregnancy-related deaths for all causes, but most notably for deaths during pregnancy or during hospitalization post-delivery.⁵⁴⁴ Over the past decade, Black babies died at almost five times the rate of white babies in San Francisco.⁵⁴⁵ In a comprehensive study of 1.8 million hospital births, it was found that when a Black doctor is the primary charge on these cases, the infant mortality rate is cut in half.⁵⁴⁶

The high rates of preterm birth and maternal mortality for Black women are due, in part, to complications from

underestimated or undiagnosed health conditions.⁵⁴⁷ In 2006, in Los Angeles, Bettye Jean Ford gave preterm birth to a baby who did not survive.⁵⁴⁸ “Giving birth was horrible,” she said. “It was just an awful experience emotionally, physically.”⁵⁴⁹ Black people giving birth experience the highest rates of postpartum depression and mortality during childbirth.⁵⁵⁰ California passed the Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act in 2019, which aims to address implicit bias in healthcare and collect data on maternal health.⁵⁵¹ However, experts state that the bill is difficult to enforce, since physicians contract with hospitals and are not subject to the same oversight as ordinary employees.⁵⁵² It is left to healthcare facilities to implement practices to address implicit bias—which is not likely to occur.⁵⁵³

A survey in California found that Black women disproportionately reported unfair treatment, harsh language, and rough handling during their hospital stay, as compared to white women.⁵⁵⁴ Doulas are trained professionals who provide physical, emotional, and informational

support to mothers.⁵⁵⁵ Evidence shows that women who had the support of doulas were less likely to have C-sections and have healthier babies.⁵⁵⁶ Doulas play an

Over the past decade, Black babies died at almost five times the rate of white babies in San Francisco. In a comprehensive study of 1.8 million hospital births, it was found that when a Black doctor is the primary charge on these cases, the infant mortality rate is cut in half.

important role as advocates for Black women in the medical system when medical providers do not believe Black women or address their needs.⁵⁵⁷ However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the California state legislature failed to pass an initiative to provide doula care for pregnant and postpartum people in the 14 California counties with the highest birth disparities.⁵⁵⁸

In the American West, Black LGBTQ Americans are more likely to be uninsured, diagnosed with depression, and diagnosed with asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, and cancer.⁵⁵⁹ A 2021 study of transgender women in the San Francisco Bay Area revealed that Black transgender women are at a higher risk for suffering from hate crimes because of the intersectional effects of racism and transphobia.⁵⁶⁰ Black transgender women had a higher tendency to be the victim of battery with a weapon, a potentially fatal form of violence, compared to white transgender women who participated in the study.⁵⁶¹

**In California, compared to all women,
Black women were**

4-6x to die during or after pregnancy or and birth
MORE LIKELY

XI. Child and Youth Health

Some scholars have stated that the legacy of slavery, and the segregation and racial terror that occurred in the years after, has resulted in high rates of infant mortality and damaged health.⁵⁶² Discriminatory care has continued through the centuries—resulting in lasting health disparities affecting Black children and youth.⁵⁶³ As will be discussed in this section, the public school, foster care, and carceral systems further damage the health of Black youth due to the discriminatory and violent treatment Black youth receive at the hands of state and local officials.

Pediatric Care

Racial segregation in hospitals has resulted in lower quality care for Black babies, contributing, in part to low

birth weight and premature birth for Black infants.⁵⁶⁴ The infant death rate for Black babies is the highest in the nation.⁵⁶⁵ Black infants are twice as likely to die as white infants—11.3 per 1,000 Black babies die, compared with 4.9 per 1,000 white babies.⁵⁶⁶ This racial disparity is wider than that of 1850, when African Americans were enslaved.⁵⁶⁷ Studies show that education does not mitigate this problem. Black women with advanced degrees are more likely to lose their babies than white women with less than an eighth-grade education.⁵⁶⁸ Federal and state governments have not addressed this problem, since, as of March 2022, only nine states investigate racial disparities when conducting reviews of pregnancy-related deaths.⁵⁶⁹ Racial disparities in infant mortality and low birth weight have been associated with racial

Black students are 2.9 times more likely to be labeled with a disability than white students, resulting in disproportionate placement of Black students in special education, where they are less likely than white students to return to regular instruction and are prescribed unnecessary psychotropic medications.

discrimination and maternal stress.⁵⁷⁰ Studies show that Black physician care of Black newborns significantly reduces the Black infant death rate; however, Black physicians are disproportionately underrepresented in the field of medicine.⁵⁷¹

The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that racism is a social determinant of health which has a profound impact on the health of children.⁵⁷² African American children experience worse health outcomes than white American children, due to unequal access to care, in part, because of parental unemployment and lower household net worth.⁵⁷³ (For a more detailed discussion of wealth disparities, please see Chapter 13 on the Wealth Gap.) The impact of racism has been linked to birth disparities and health problems in Black children and adolescents.⁵⁷⁴ Chronic stress leads to increased and prolonged levels of exposure to stress hormones, which lead to inflammatory reactions that predispose children to chronic disease.⁵⁷⁵ Increased stress related to racial discrimination experienced by Black children has been associated with increased asthma risk and severity.⁵⁷⁶ African American children are more likely to die from asthma.⁵⁷⁷ Children's exposure to discrimination has also been linked with higher rates of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, depression, and decreased general health.⁵⁷⁸

Black youth disproportionately suffer from obesity and being overweight due to social and environmental circumstances that produce psychological stress—including less access to education and more exposure to racial discrimination.⁵⁷⁹ Black children are referred less quickly for kidney transplants than white children.⁵⁸⁰ They are also more likely to die following surgery.⁵⁸¹ The underdiagnosing of Black children is linked to the lack of Black pediatricians, which has resulted in inadequate access to pediatric care for Black children.⁵⁸²

School, Foster Care, and Carceral Systems

Black youth are overrepresented in the foster care system and suffer disproportionately worse health outcomes

in the system.⁵⁸³ Black youth suffer from greater rates of child abuse and neglect as well as negative impacts on mental health in state-run foster care systems.⁵⁸⁴ They may be placed on psychotropic drugs which alter behavior patterns and increase the risk for suicide and illness.⁵⁸⁵

Black students experience disparate health outcomes and discrimination in public school systems.⁵⁸⁶ Racial disparities in educational access and attainment, along with racism experienced in schools, affect the trajectory of academic achievement for Black youth and ultimately harm their health.⁵⁸⁷ (For a more detailed discussion of discrimination in education, please see Chapter 6 on Separate and Unequal Education.) Black students are 2.9 times more likely to be labeled with a disability than white students, resulting in disproportionate placement of Black students in special education, where they are less likely than white students to return to regular instruction and are prescribed unnecessary psychotropic medications.⁵⁸⁸

In public schools, despite health screenings and low academic scores that indicate mental illness, a learning disability, or developmental delay—Black youth are over-diagnosed for conduct disorder and under-diagnosed for depression.⁵⁸⁹ The closure of public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in missed meals, negatively impacting Black children's health, nutrition, and food security because Black students are more likely to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals.⁵⁹⁰

Black youth are overrepresented at every level of the juvenile justice system, from initial contact with law enforcement to sentencing and incarceration, which has led to worsening health.⁵⁹¹ Among youth who are arrested, Black youth are three times as likely to be incarcerated in the juvenile justice system and less likely to be diverted to non-carceral settings than white youth.⁵⁹² African American youth involved in the carceral system have worse mental and physical health, during and after incarceration.⁵⁹³ This is due to communicable diseases, which spread in juvenile facilities, physical and sexual trauma, as well as erosion of mental health.⁵⁹⁴ Black youth are overprescribed psychotropic medication and misdiagnosed by the carceral system, when compared with white youth.⁵⁹⁵ Within juvenile justice settings, African American boys are 40 percent more likely to be diagnosed with conduct disorder than white youth, while African American girls are 54 percent more likely—even when controlling for trauma, behavioral indicators, and criminal offense charges.⁵⁹⁶

California

Malnutrition rates are higher for Black children in California, when compared with other racial groups.⁵⁹⁷ For instance, 20.2 percent of Black Californian households reported having children who did not have enough to eat, which is higher than the 15.9 percent of all Californian households that reported not having enough food to eat.⁵⁹⁸ According to data from 2018, almost three times as many Black Californian children live in poverty when compared with white children.⁵⁹⁹ Poverty results in worse cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health.⁶⁰⁰ This is particularly prevalent for Black children in California, due to their overrepresentation among poor children at large.⁶⁰¹

In California, Black youth are more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers, and have likely had prior exposure to toxic stress.⁶⁰² The poor living conditions among incarcerated youth intensify health problems.⁶⁰³ The carceral system inadequately serves the health needs of Black incarcerated youth.⁶⁰⁴ Tanisha Denard, a Black teenager,

was in high school when she violated her probation due to unpaid truancy tickets and was sent to juvenile hall.⁶⁰⁵ Her time in juvenile hall severely harmed her mental health.⁶⁰⁶ “Being locked down make you feel that you are worthless to society,” she said. “You start to think about any way to escape, even if it means suicide.”⁶⁰⁷ While incarcerated she was subjected to solitary confinement, not allowed to use the restroom, and forced to sleep on

Black youth are three times as likely to be incarcerated in the juvenile justice system and less likely to be diverted to non-carceral settings than white youth. African American youth involved in the carceral system have worse mental and physical health, during and after incarceration. This is due to communicable diseases, which spread in juvenile facilities, physical and sexual trauma, as well as erosion of mental health.

bedsheets stained with urine, blood, and feces.⁶⁰⁸ The juvenile justice system lacks policies, practices, and interventions specific to serving Black youth like Denard.⁶⁰⁹

XII. Public Health Crises

Scholars have theorized that the federal and state governments’ racist public health practices, along with centuries of slavery, segregation, and white oppression have resulted in entrenched systemic racism, which has harmed African American health.⁶¹⁰ The public health crises described in this section are not an exhaustive list of the mismanagement of health crises; rather, they are selected illustrative examples. Today, African Americans continue to be at the highest risk for negative health impacts from public health crises.⁶¹¹

Infectious Diseases

In 1793, anti-Black racism on the part of state officials in Pennsylvania resulted in the death of hundreds of African Americans during the yellow fever epidemic.⁶¹² At the time, medical historians and prominent white leaders, assuming Black people were immune to the disease, encouraged African Americans to assist with managing the epidemic.⁶¹³ Many Black residents remained in the city, instead of fleeing, participating in the epidemic relief effort, caring for the ill and burying the dead.⁶¹⁴ In the end, hundreds of African Americans died from yellow fever.⁶¹⁵

In the post-Reconstruction era, tuberculosis was a deadly health problem for African Americans.⁶¹⁶ In 1900, there were large disparities in tuberculosis rates between white and Black populations because segregated Black neighborhoods were impoverished, had congested housing, and could not access basic health-care information.⁶¹⁷ In the early 1900s, state and local public health agencies, hospitals, and physicians portrayed Black people as a hazardous population to the white public.⁶¹⁸

In 1964, Black tuberculosis rates were two to three times higher than for white Americans.⁶¹⁹ Substandard and segregated housing, in addition to concentrated poverty, contributed to high HIV and tuberculosis rates in the 1980s and 1990s.⁶²⁰ The disease spread widely in prisons, hospitals, cramped housing, and homeless shelters, leading tuberculosis rates to increase among African Americans.⁶²¹ Due to a combination of government neglect and systemic racism, African Americans have been harmed by the spread of infectious diseases.

Drug Addiction

Internationally, public health officials have recognized that drug addiction should be treated as a health disorder and not as a criminal behavior.⁶²² The federal government has chosen to respond to rising drug addiction as a criminal justice issue, instead of as a public health issue.⁶²³ This has resulted in state action against Black people in need of substance abuse services.⁶²⁴ According to healthcare providers and experts, the government should treat drug addiction as a public health issue.⁶²⁵ Drug addiction is a medical condition, not a flaw in character.⁶²⁶ Punishment for substance abuse disorders does not treat addiction—it leads to higher risk of drug overdose.⁶²⁷

By the 1980s, the government embarked upon a rigorous crackdown on the usage of crack, a crystalized type of cocaine which is highly addictive and relatively cheap.⁶²⁸ During the 1970s, hospital emergency rooms began testing pregnant women for suspected drug use and reporting them to police authorities.⁶²⁹ In many cases, hospitals imprisoned women, shackled them while they gave birth, or took temporary or permanent custody of their children.⁶³⁰ Hospitals reported Black pregnant women 10 times more frequently to government health authorities than white women.⁶³¹

From 1991-2016, compared to whites, Black crack users were

7x
MORE LIKELY

to be sent to federal prison for their offense

State policy leaders did not address the need for increasing preventive mental illness and rehabilitation resources.⁶³² Nor did they address the psychosocial origins for the demand for crack.⁶³³ Police crackdowns and incarceration for drug possession did not relieve the social conditions that spawned the crack cocaine epidemic, but rather created harmful consequences for African Americans.⁶³⁴ State actions exacerbated them by treating drug addiction as a crime, as opposed to a public health issue.⁶³⁵ By the year 2000, over 80 percent of those charged with crack-related crimes were Black, while less than six percent were white.⁶³⁶ Throughout the course of the crack epidemic, sentencing disparities caused African Americans to receive excessive sentences in prison, and many continue to serve such excessive sentences today.⁶³⁷

HIV/AIDS

During the 1980s, AIDS harmed Black communities severely, especially LGBTQ Black populations and intravenous Black drug users, who were overrepresented among AIDS victims.⁶³⁸ Today, the prevalence of HIV is especially high within the African American LGBTQ community.⁶³⁹ Black gay and bisexual men are infected by HIV more than any other group in the United States today and have the highest HIV death rate.⁶⁴⁰ Between 2010 and 2019, the number of HIV infections among white gay men decreased significantly while the number of infections among African American gay men did

Black gay and bisexual men are infected by HIV more than any other group in the United States today and have the highest HIV death rate.

not decrease.⁶⁴¹ Longstanding inequities in access to and delivery of healthcare to African Americans has led to this disparity.⁶⁴² Black women accounted for the largest share of women living with an HIV diagnosis in 2017.⁶⁴³

Due to the lack of federal or state-funded healthcare resources for the AIDS epidemic, Black healthcare leaders and organizers worked to connect AIDS victims to medical services, benefits, and health education.⁶⁴⁴ Churches and community organizations formed to educate African Americans about sexual health and AIDS prevention.⁶⁴⁵ They worked with Black LGBTQ populations to educate them about safe sex practices and to provide outreach and health services to people with AIDS.⁶⁴⁶ Despite this work by African American communities, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention planned to cut funding from dozens of groups operating AIDS services.⁶⁴⁷

Nutrition

African Americans are more likely to live in food deserts—areas with limited access to healthy, affordable food.⁶⁴⁸ (For a more detailed discussion of discrimination in infrastructure, please see Chapter 7 on Racism in Environment and Infrastructure.) Tobacco products, such as menthol cigarettes, have been historically marketed to Black communities by tobacco companies at higher rates than white communities.⁶⁴⁹ Despite regulating and banning other products, the federal government did not consider banning menthol flavored tobacco products until 2021.⁶⁵⁰ Additionally, the over-concentration of liquor stores in African American

neighborhoods is correlated to African American health problems.⁶⁵¹

The makers of sugar sweetened beverages, fast foods, and other products also often target Black communities in marketing schemes.⁶⁵² These food products contribute to overconsumption, leading to diabetes, obesity, and other health problems.⁶⁵³ Between 2005 and 2008, Black adults consumed nearly nine percent of their daily calories from sugar drinks, compared to about five percent for white adults.⁶⁵⁴ Black children and teens see more than twice as many ads for certain sugar drinks than their white peers.⁶⁵⁵ Lower-income Black neighborhoods have disproportionately more outdoor ads on billboards, bus benches, sidewalk signs, murals, and store window posters for sugar drinks.⁶⁵⁶ Sugar has had disproportionately negative consequences for Black people, and is linked to diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.⁶⁵⁷ Marketing companies are protected by law under the First Amendment, while Black youth are not protected from the harmful consequences of their actions.⁶⁵⁸

Natural Disasters

The federal government has engaged in the racist mismanagement of natural disasters like hurricanes—a prime example is Hurricane Katrina. Racial health disparities among Black communities in New Orleans existed prior to Hurricane Katrina.⁶⁵⁹ This was due to lack of health insurance for low-income residents, high levels of infant mortality, and high levels of chronic disease.⁶⁶⁰ Charity Hospital, a state hospital in New Orleans, had been the center of hospital care for poor

African Americans prior to Hurricane Katrina.⁶⁶¹ Three quarters of its patients were Black, with incomes below \$20,000.⁶⁶² The hospital provided care for HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, psychiatric care, and trauma care.⁶⁶³ After the hurricane, the state did not reopen Charity Hospital—leaving poor African Americans in New Orleans without medical care.⁶⁶⁴

Following Hurricane Katrina, Black communities received diminished medical care that amplified health disparities, while white communities were restored to even better conditions than they had lived in before the hurricane hit.⁶⁶⁵ By 2010, 34 percent of the Black population in New Orleans was living in poverty, compared to 14 percent of white people.⁶⁶⁶ Black youth in New Orleans were four times more likely to die from any cause than their white counterparts.⁶⁶⁷ There were increased death rates for African Americans from kidney disease and HIV.⁶⁶⁸ From 2009 to 2011, one-third of Black residents lacked health insurance, double that of white Americans.⁶⁶⁹ The federal government directed funding to repair the buildings, bridges, and streets of New Orleans.⁶⁷⁰ However, the government did not address the rampant poverty and health disparities among Black people that had been exacerbated by Hurricane Katrina.⁶⁷¹

COVID-19

Today, African Americans are disproportionately at risk for COVID-19 infection and death due to structural factors such as healthcare access, density of households, employment, and pervasive discrimination.⁶⁷² As of March 2022, African Americans are 1.1 times more likely to contract COVID-19, 2.4 times more likely to be hospitalized due to COVID-19, and 1.7 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than white Americans.⁶⁷³ The federal government suggests that long standing racial inequities contribute to worse COVID-19 outcomes for Black people.⁶⁷⁴ Factors that increase COVID-19 risk for African Americans include: unaffordable housing, lack of healthy food, environmental pollution, poor quality healthcare, poor health insurance, essential worker jobs, lower incomes, greater debt, and poorer access to high quality education.⁶⁷⁵ All of these factors disproportionately harm African Americans due to systemic racism.

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COURTESY OF JAMES NIELSEN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



National Guardsmen stand watch at barricades outside the Superdome as emotional refugees driven from their homes by Hurricane Katrina await evacuation from the flooded city of New Orleans, La. Following Hurricane Katrina, African Americans in New Orleans received worse medical care than white Americans, which made pre-existing disparities worse. Living conditions for white Americans in New Orleans were restored or improved upon when compared with conditions before the hurricane hit. (Sept. 1, 2005)

California

The State of California has also engaged in the mismanagement of public crises in ways that have harmed African Americans. In California, the criminal justice system excessively targeted African Americans during the crack cocaine epidemic. In Los Angeles, Black Californians would receive up to a 10-year federal sentence, while white Americans prosecuted in state court faced a maximum of five years and often received no

Black Californians do not have enough grocery stores, access to organic produce, thriving small businesses, affordable housing, or medical services.⁶⁸³ In View Park area, a majority Black South Los Angeles neighborhood, the nearest grocery store is an Albertsons more than a mile away.⁶⁸⁴ Black residents have been forced to engage in urban micro-farming, building community gardens, and mini markets to compensate for the lack of healthy available food.⁶⁸⁵

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more than a year in jail.⁶⁷⁶ From 1987 to 1992, a University of California Los Angeles study found there were no white Americans among the 71 defendants prosecuted federally by the U.S. attorney's office in Los Angeles.⁶⁷⁷ This discriminatory prosecution occurred even though studies showed that white Americans accounted for the majority of people who used crack cocaine in Los Angeles.⁶⁷⁸

As of 2017, California incarcerated African American men at 10 times the rates of white American men, resulting in devastating health impacts for the African American community.⁶⁷⁹ Black women are imprisoned at a rate that is more than five times that of white women in California.⁶⁸⁰ Black Californians are also overrepresented among California's unhoused.⁶⁸¹ The overrepresentation of Black Californians among the unhoused and incarcerated populations, both of which are vulnerable to COVID-19, means that Black Californians are consequently at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and other illnesses.⁶⁸²

California is also home to many food deserts that harm African American health. In South Los Angeles, many

The trifecta of liquor stores, smoke shops, and marijuana dispensaries in Black neighborhoods in California has resulted in inadequate access to healthy foods.⁶⁸⁶ Maria Rutledge, a Black resident of South Los Angeles, said, "We are in desperate need of a real grocery market in the area that is welcoming to families, provides healthy food choices, and that

supports a safer environment."⁶⁸⁷ In addition to the lack of grocery stores, there is an overabundance of liquor stores.⁶⁸⁸ During the early 1990s, there were 728 liquor stores in a 54-square-mile radius encompassing South Los Angeles.⁶⁸⁹ While that number has decreased, South Los Angeles communities are still overrun by liquor stores, with approximately 8.5 liquor stores per square mile compared to 1.97 liquor stores per square mile in West Los Angeles, a majority white neighborhood.⁶⁹⁰ The trifecta of liquor stores, smoke shops, and marijuana dispensaries in Black neighborhoods have indirectly resulted in sexual harassment, violence, and a climate of fear—leading to poor mental and physical health for Black Californians.⁶⁹¹

In California, COVID-19 infections disproportionately affect African Americans. As of March 2022, the death rate for Black Californians due to COVID-19 is 18 percent higher than the COVID-19 death rate for all Californians.⁶⁹² According to a survey conducted by the Association of Black Psychologists, about 40% of Black Californians wished they had more support during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁹³

XIII. Impact of Racism on Black Health

Systemic racism has culminated over centuries in severely damaged physiological health for African Americans.⁶⁹⁴ Some scholars have argued that medical discrimination in the United States against African Americans is so severe that it is a form of biological terrorism.⁶⁹⁵ Low life expectancy, lack of access to health

insurance, and high rates of disease have resulted in great physiological harm to African Americans.⁶⁹⁶ State-sanctioned systemic racism has led to environmental racism, urban poverty, and over-incarceration—all of which have harmed the health of African Americans.⁶⁹⁷ The cumulative effect of institutional racism by federal

and state governments has led to racial trauma that has had intergenerational impacts on the mental health of African Americans.⁶⁹⁸

Health Outcomes

African Americans have higher rates of morbidity and mortality than white Americans for almost all health outcomes in the United States, an inequality that increases with age.⁶⁹⁹ African Americans suffer disproportionately from cardiovascular disease relative to white people.⁷⁰⁰ In surveys of hospitals across the country, Black patients with heart disease receive older, cheaper, and more conservative treatments than their white counterparts.⁷⁰¹ They also suffer from higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and obesity.⁷⁰² These are all risk factors for cardiovascular disease.⁷⁰³

This is linked to the fact that African Americans suffer from weathering—constant stress from chronic exposure to social and economic disadvantage, which leads to accelerated decline in physical health.⁷⁰⁴ Social environments that pose a persistent threat of hostility, denigration, and disrespect lead to chronically high levels of inflammation.⁷⁰⁵ Studies have shown that Black youth who are exposed to discrimination and segregation have worse cases of adult inflammation due to race-related stressors.⁷⁰⁶ In fact, race-related stress has a greater impact on health among African Americans than their diet, exercise, smoking, or being low income.⁷⁰⁷ Cortisol, which is a stress hormone, locates itself in bodies in response to racism—consequently African American adults have higher rates of cortisol than their white counterparts, and this is linked to cardiovascular disease.⁷⁰⁸

Therefore, exposure to racism as a child or adolescent lays the foundation for inflammation and subsequent health disparities. Even middle- and upper-class African Americans manifest high rates of chronic illness and disability.⁷⁰⁹

Discriminatory attitudes and behaviors by healthcare professionals may also contribute to misdiagnosis and mismanagement of cardiovascular disease among Black patients. African Americans disproportionately lack access to renal transplants due to racial bias exhibited by physicians, as well as institutionalized racism.⁷¹⁰ African Americans are less likely to be identified as transplant candidates, referred for evaluation, be put on the kidney transplant waitlist, receive a kidney transplant, and receive a higher-quality kidney from a living donor.⁷¹¹ Black patients with sickle cell disease

are discriminated against by medical providers who display racist attitudes and accuse people with sickle cell disease of faking their pain.⁷¹² This results in inadequate treatment.⁷¹³ There are many reports of Black children with sickle cell disease who do not receive screening tests and treatment necessary to prevent strokes that can occur due to the disease.⁷¹⁴

Racial disparities in Black health outcomes occur today as a culmination of historical racial inequality, discriminatory health policy, and persistent racial discrimination in many sectors of life in the United States.⁷¹⁵ Discriminatory health systems and healthcare providers contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare.⁷¹⁶ The U.S. Office for Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is charged with enforcing several relevant federal statutes and regulations that prohibit discrimination in healthcare, such as Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.⁷¹⁷ However, the agency is under-resourced and has not been proactive in investigating healthcare related complaints from the public, conducting compliance reviews of healthcare facilities, or initiating enforcement proceedings for civil rights violators.⁷¹⁸ For example, the Office for Civil Rights could identify examples of discriminatory practices, require the collection and reporting of demographic data, and conduct investigations.⁷¹⁹

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Policing and Incarceration

Policing and incarceration have clear adverse consequences for the health of African Americans. Racial inequality and racial bias occur in all aspects of the criminal legal system, with federal and state governments over-incarcerating and disproportionately punishing African Americans.⁷²⁰ (For a more detailed discussion of discrimination in the criminal justice system, please see Chapter 11 on An Unjust Legal System.) Police violence kills hundreds of African Americans and injures thousands each year.⁷²¹ Incarcerated people—who are disproportionately Black—face a high risk of death after they are released from prisons and jails due to poor health as a result of incarceration.⁷²² Prisons and jails have been major sites of disease transmission.⁷²³ The churn in and out of incarceration

can result in community spread of sexually transmitted infections or other infectious diseases.⁷²⁴

African Americans are overrepresented in state carceral facilities, are less likely to receive the latest psychiatric medications, and have greater difficulty in achieving successful community integration once they leave carceral facilities—further harming their mental health.⁷²⁵ State prisons often force incarcerated African Americans into solitary confinement at higher rates.⁷²⁶ Solitary confinement has serious documented harmful mental health effects.⁷²⁷

Anti-Black government action harms the mental health of Black communities. Police violence can harm mental and physical health for Black communities through constant surveillance and threats of violence.⁷²⁸ Studies have shown that African Americans who view racist materials experience an increase in blood pressure.⁷²⁹ Scientific evidence shows that police killings of unarmed African Americans have adverse effects on mental health among Black adults in the general population.⁷³⁰ Mental health screening tools used in state and federal carceral facilities reproduce racial disparities, resulting in fewer African Americans screening positive for mental illness.⁷³¹ Thus, African Americans remain under-referred and undetected in the jail population.⁷³²

Environment

State and federal underfunding of medical resources combined with unhealthy physical environments, unemployment, and poverty in Black communities has led to a public health crisis.⁷³³ Urban neighborhoods have the highest rates of preventable diseases, and lack health insurance and adequate housing.⁷³⁴ By 1980, urban neighborhoods were where 60 percent of the nation's Black population lived due to redlining and historical housing segregation.⁷³⁵ Black communities continue to experience disproportionately high rates of chronic diseases linked to environmental racism.⁷³⁶ (For a more detailed discussion of environmental racism, please see Chapter 7 on Racism in Environment and Infrastructure.) Built-up pollution from abandoned industrial and commercial work sites resides in soil, water, structures, and air.⁷³⁷ Asthma, cancer, and childhood disorders that affect Black communities are linked to polluted environmental conditions such as toxic waste exposure and lead poisoning.⁷³⁸

Segregation adversely affects the availability and affordability of care—creating a lack of access to high-quality primary and specialty care, as well as pharmacy services.⁷³⁹ A review of nearly 50 empirical studies generally found that government-facilitated segregation was associated with poorer health.⁷⁴⁰ The state-perpetrated discriminatory practice of redlining officially ended in 1968, but it created residential segregation, which continues today.⁷⁴¹ Segregation has been found to be positively associated with later-stage diagnosis, elevated mortality, and lower survival rates for both breast and lung cancers for Black people.⁷⁴²

Housing segregation excessively exposes Black communities to pollution and isolates African Americans from healthcare resources, including pharmacies, clinics, hospitals, and healthy food stores.⁷⁴³ Disparities in life expectancies between Black and white people are rooted in policies that oppressed and segregated African Americans.⁷⁴⁴ Evidence shows that gaps between white and Black life expectancy are dependent on zip codes and housing segregation.⁷⁴⁵

There may be other cumulative negative effects of institutional and systemic racism which have yet to be studied by scientists. A public health study conducted in 2021, for example, revealed that repeated use of chemical irritants for crowd-control by local and federal law enforcement during racial justice protests in the U.S. likely harmed people's mental and physical health.⁷⁴⁶

California

Black Californians experience the shortest life expectancy than any other race or ethnicity.⁷⁴⁷ In the San Francisco Bay Area, life expectancy is more than five years greater in white neighborhoods (84 years) than highly segregat-

Housing segregation excessively exposes Black communities to pollution and isolates African Americans from healthcare resources, including pharmacies, clinics, hospitals, and healthy food stores.

ed Black neighborhoods (79 years).⁷⁴⁸ Black Californians have the highest mortality rate in nine out of the top ten causes of death in San Francisco.⁷⁴⁹ A high number of Black Californians live in Southwest Fresno, an area with lower life expectancy than the affluent neighborhoods

of Fresno.⁷⁵⁰ Black Californians suffer from the highest cancer rates among all races in colorectal, prostate, and lung cancer.⁷⁵¹ Black men are dying of prostate cancer at almost five times the rate of white men in California.⁷⁵² In 2015, Black Californians had the highest rate of preventable hospitalizations for diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and angina.⁷⁵³ Black youth suffer from the highest number of asthma cases in California.⁷⁵⁴ Black children in California tend to live in areas with higher levels of traffic related pollution, which contributes to higher levels of asthma.⁷⁵⁵ Historically redlined census tracts in California have significantly higher rates of emergency department visits due to asthma.⁷⁵⁶ This evidence suggests that redlining might be contributing to racial and ethnic asthma health disparities.⁷⁵⁷

Compared to white Californian men,
Black Californian men are

5x to die from
MORE LIKELY prostate cancer

Black Californians are the most disproportionately affected by the HIV epidemic due to racism, in part.⁷⁵⁸ In

XIV. Conclusion

The legacy of slavery has destroyed the health of Black communities through segregation, racial terror, abusive experimentation, systemic racist oppression, and harmful racist neglect. Today, African Americans face racial discrimination from healthcare providers across the entire healthcare system, which has contributed to the overall destruction of African American health.⁷⁶⁷ African Americans suffer from low life expectancy and high mortality rates across virtually every category of health.⁷⁶⁸ Due to historical and contemporary traumatization from racist violence, racist microaggressions, and institutional racism, African Americans often suffer from serious psychological distress.⁷⁶⁹ The mismanagement of public health crises by state and federal governments has resulted in additional adverse health consequences and deaths in Black communities—most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷⁷⁰ In some cases, the racial health disparities between Black and white Americans are worse today than they were during the period of enslavement.⁷⁷¹

2018, Black Californians were approximately six percent of California's population, but they were 18 percent of California's HIV positive population.⁷⁵⁹ Among women newly diagnosed with HIV, 31 percent were Black Californians.⁷⁶⁰ Black transgender people were for 14 percent of those who were newly diagnosed with HIV.⁷⁶¹ Consequently, Black Californians are overrepresented among the HIV population.

Police violence and incarceration have greatly damaged the health of Black Californians. Black Californians account for 20 percent of serious injuries and fatalities due to police use of force, even though they are only six percent of the population.⁷⁶² More than four in 10 Californians shot by police were identified as suffering from a mental health condition, having an alcohol- or drug-related disorder, or both, according to hospital data.⁷⁶³ In *Brown v. Plata*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered the State of California to reduce overcrowding in its prison population due to inadequate healthcare for incarcerated people.⁷⁶⁴ Black Californians in Los Angeles' jails who have mental health conditions report receiving harsher sentences and less alternative treatment programs than their white counterparts.⁷⁶⁵ Due to the overrepresentation of Black Californians in the prison and jail systems, inadequate prison healthcare greatly diminishes the overall health of Black Californians.⁷⁶⁶

The racist dehumanization of African Americans in the United States began with the institution of enslavement and its degradation of African American health. Since then, this racist dehumanization has been sustained by a healthcare system that destroys Black health through overt and covert discrimination by medical providers, public policies that neglect African Americans' health needs, hospital systems that continue to be segregated, medical schools that systematically exclude African Americans, and a health insurance system designed to be inaccessible to poor African Americans.⁷⁷² The United States' healthcare system was designed during the time of enslavement to keep enslaved people alive for profit, but not to take care of their health.⁷⁷³ After slavery was abolished in name, this healthcare system continued to operate in the same manner—segregating, excluding, harming, abusing, experimenting upon, and slowly degrading African American health.⁷⁷⁴ To atone for the violence of slavery and its destructive impact on Black health, health-based reparations must be awarded to African Americans.⁷⁷⁵

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I. Introduction

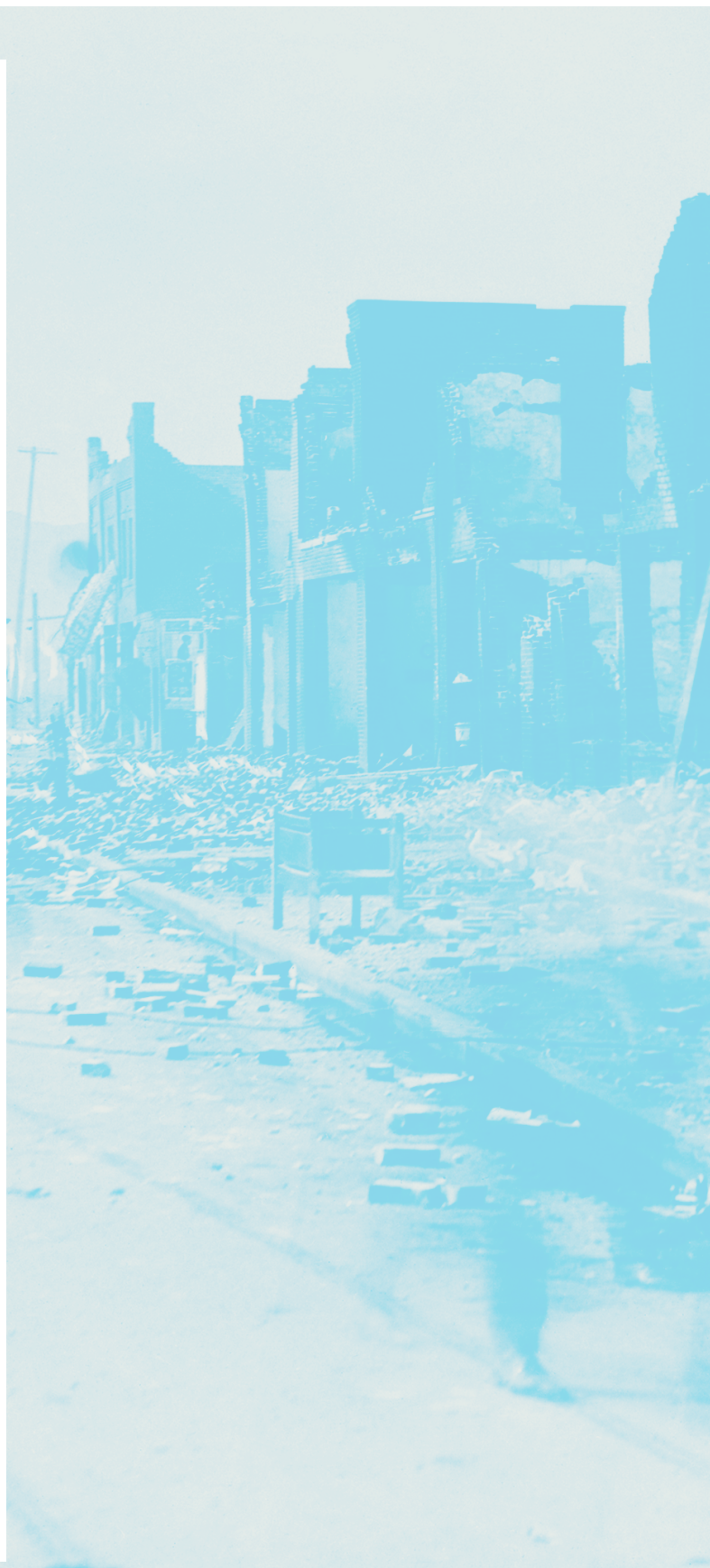
Wealth—what you own minus what you owe—is the key to economic security.¹ It is what enables families to build a better future.² Wealth functions in many ways. It provides economic stability during lean times. It opens doors to improving quality of life. It is a dam against the floodwaters of economic catastrophes. It provides access to political power and it allows us to live and retire with dignity.

Wealth can also be passed down through generations, allowing children to live better lives than their parents and grandparents. It allows parents to pay for their children's college education. It allows grandparents to help a young family buy their first home. Throughout American history, government policies at all levels have helped white families collect these tools while preventing or undermining Black families' ability to do the same.

As a result, the wealth gap between Black and white Americans is enormous and roughly the same today as it had been two years before the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964.³ In 2019, the median Black household had a net worth of \$24,100, less than 13 percent of the median net worth of white households at \$188,200.⁴

This wealth gap persists regardless of education level and family structure.⁵ For example, at the median, single Black women over the age of 60 with a college degree— at \$11,000—have less than three percent of the wealth of single white women over the age of 60 with a college degree— at \$384,000.⁶ Single white parents have more than double the wealth (\$35,000), at the median, than married Black parents (\$16,000).⁷

The wealth gap is present across all income levels. In 2016, estimates drawn from the Survey of Consumer Finances indicate the median white household in the bottom fifth of incomes, or the poorest “quintile” of white households, had a net worth of \$21,700, which is greater than the median net worth of \$18,601 for *all* Black households.⁸ Black households in the bottom fifth of incomes had a median net worth of \$2,700, less than one eighth as much as the poorest quintile of white households.⁹



Burnt residences and businesses following the Tulsa Race Massacre. Tulsa, Oklahoma. (June 1921, 1965)

The trend is the same across social classes. In 2019, the median white working-class household had a net worth of \$114,270, while the median Black professional-managerial household had a net worth of \$38,800. In the same year, white professional-managerial households—at \$276,000—had a median net worth that was eight times the median Black professional-managerial household and 19 times the median Black working-class household.¹⁰

This wealth gap is the result of the discrimination that African Americans experience, as described in the previous chapters.¹¹ The American government at the federal, state, and local levels has systematically prevented Black communities from building, maintaining, and passing on wealth. These harms cascade over a lifetime and compound over generations.

The wealth gap was roughly the same in 2016 as it was in 1962.

The historical causes of the wealth gap is based in enslavement and legal segregation and continues through ongoing racial inequality and racism today. They include direct government creation of white wealth and

destruction of Black wealth through the support of racial terror, disenfranchisement, land theft, mass incarceration, exclusion of African Americans from government benefits, and banking discrimination. Unequal homeownership, fewer assets, and lower business ownership continue to drive the wealth gap today. This has resulted in racial differences in the capacity of African Americans to transmit resources across generations, lower financial resilience during crises, and homelessness.

Section II discusses estimates of the contemporary racial wealth gap for the nation as whole, for California, by gender, and for descendants of Africans enslaved in the United States. Section III describes historical causes of the racial wealth gap during enslavement and post-enslavement, including racial terror, land theft, mass incarceration, and discrimination in government benefits, the labor market, and banking. Section IV discusses the drivers of the contemporary wealth gap today include unequal homeownership, fewer assets, and lower business ownership. Section V discusses the harmful effects of the wealth gap, which has resulted in racial differences in the capacity of African Americans to transmit resources across generations, lower financial resilience during crisis, and increased homelessness.

II. The Contemporary Racial Wealth Gap

National and California Estimates

Significant research demonstrate that white Americans have long had a higher net worth than African Americans. The gap has changed little since 1989, when the median white household wealth was \$143,000, and the median Black household wealth was \$9,000, approximately 94 percent less than white household wealth.¹² The wealth gap was roughly the same in 2016 as it was in 1962,¹³ two years before the Civil Rights Act. Preliminary research suggests that, despite rapid accumulation of wealth by African Americans in the decades after slavery and a narrowing of the racial wealth gap during World War II and the Civil Rights era, this progress halted by the mid-20th century with the racial wealth gap widening over the last several decades.¹⁴ From 2005 to 2019, an interval that captures much of the impact of the Great Recession, median household wealth—all assets minus all debt—among African Americans fell 53 percent, compared with a drop of 16 percent among white Americans.¹⁵

An asset is anything you own that adds financial value, as opposed to a liability, which is money you owe.¹⁶ Examples of personal assets include: a home or other property, such as a rental house or commercial property; a checking or savings account; cars; financial and retirement accounts; gold, jewelry, and coins; collectibles and art; and life insurance policies.¹⁷

Wealth estimates can be demonstrated in median and mean figures, both of which are provided in this chapter. A median figure shows the worth of the middle household in each community.¹⁸ A mean figure shows the worth of the average household in the community.¹⁹ Some researchers suggest that the median is a more useful measure for estimating differences in wealth between Black and white people because it is not affected by exceptions like the few extremely rich individuals who would skew the average higher than is representative.²⁰ However, researchers also suggest that the mean is the appropriate target measure for calculating the sum required to eliminate the racial wealth gap.²¹

Policymakers have usually focused on the median gap in wealth, which some researchers argue is not representative of what is happening to the average Black or white person in reality.²² Comparing Black and white wealth at the mean—for the average household in each community—shows a far larger wealth gap.²³

Today, white American households continue to be far more likely to hold assets, and the types of assets they hold are worth, on average, more than that of Black households.²⁴ In 2019, the most recent year for which data is available, the total financial assets of white households is nine times higher than Black households.²⁵ The median Black household wealth was approximately \$24,100, while the median white household wealth was approximately \$188,200—a difference of \$164,100.²⁶ The mean for Black household wealth is \$142,300, while the mean for white household wealth is close to \$1 million at \$983,400—a difference of \$840,900.²⁷

In 2019, white households owned

9x  **MORE**

assets than Black households

This wealth disparity cannot be explained by lack of personal motivation and effort, lack of financial literacy, family instability, lack of education, lack of homeownership, or lack of entrepreneurship on the part of African Americans.²⁸ For instance, there is very little, if any, evidence to support the claim that Black saving behavior is the source of the enormous racial wealth gap.²⁹ There is no significant difference in savings between Black and white families with similar income levels, nor a difference in rates of return on their personal investments.³⁰ In fact, in some income categories, Black people display a higher rate of savings.³¹ And though African Americans have more family obligations on their income than white Americans because their relatives are more likely to need help than white Americans, the savings rate among Black people is comparable to the savings rate at each level of household income among white people.³²

Differences in family structure also do not explain the racial wealth gap.³³ Single white women with children have a higher median net worth than black women with no children.³⁴ At the median, single white parents have more than two times the wealth (\$35,000) than married Black parents (\$16,000).³⁵

This wealth disparity cannot be explained by lack of personal motivation and effort, family instability, or lack of education. For example, in 2019, black professional-managerial households had a net worth of \$38,800, while white professional-managerial households had a net worth of \$276,000. Single white parents had more than two times the wealth— at \$35,000 —of married black parents— at \$16,000.

Nor does effort or education. For comparable levels of family socioeconomic status, Black youth obtain more years of schooling and credentials, including college degrees, than white youth.³⁶ And the wealth gap exists between Black and white women regardless of whether or not they have a bachelor's degree.³⁷

Although the wealth gap and its causes in California and the nation is an under-studied area, preliminary studies suggest that the racial wealth gap in California is the same or worse than it is at the national level.

Some studies extrapolate California's racial wealth gap from national estimates.³⁸ Direct California estimates of the racial wealth gap are only available for a single metropolitan area: Los Angeles.³⁹ In 2016, while the median net worth of white Angelino households (assets minus debts) was \$355,000, median net worth of native-born Black Angelino households was \$4,000.⁴⁰ The average Black household in Los Angeles had only just had one percent of the median wealth of the average white household, far worse than the national average of 10 to 15 percent.⁴¹

Gender-Specific Issues

The wealth gap between Black men and Black women, which is small,⁴² functions differently than the wealth gap between white men and white women, which is much larger. Black men and women have similarly low wealth, although for slightly different reasons.⁴³

The wealth gap between white men and women is large because white men have traditionally had access to

jobs that provide retirement accounts and other benefits available to careers not available to women.⁴⁴ This difference in access does not exist between Black men and women, as African Americans of all genders historically have been excluded from these benefits due labor discrimination, as discussed in Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity.

The median wealth for single Black women is \$200, while the median wealth of single Black men is \$300.⁴⁵ Studies that show a greater wealth gap between Black women and men do not appear to take into account incarcerated Black men, who are deprived of their ability to build wealth for themselves and their family during a prison sentence.⁴⁶

2015 MEDIAN WEALTH FOR SINGLES



White Men **\$28,900**



Black Men **\$300**



White Women **\$15,640**



Black Women **\$200**

Federal statistical agencies, including the U.S. Census Bureau, collect little information about people who are incarcerated, and they are excluded from household samples in national surveys.⁴⁷ As a result, these individuals are invisible to most mainstream social institutions, lawmakers, and nearly all social science research not directly related to crime or criminal justice.⁴⁸ And since African Americans are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white Americans, this has the effect of making it appear that African Americans are better off financially than they really are.⁴⁹ As discussed below in section III, criminal convictions also create numerous barriers to wealth building even after the sentence ends.

Still, Black women face barriers to wealth building due to the combination of racism and sexism. As a result, there are vast differences in wealth between Black women and both white men and white women.⁵⁰ One study reports that, in 2019, single Black women's median net wealth was \$7,000, while median net wealth for white women was \$85,000 and \$92,000 for single white men.⁵¹ While white men's median wealth was \$28,900 in 2015, Black women's median wealth was \$200, less than one cent on every dollar of white men's median wealth.⁵²

The large wealth gap faced by single Black women is particularly important because Black women are more and increasingly likely to be single and breadwinners.⁵³ The marriage rate of Americans aged 25 to 54 has declined since the early 1960s across all groups, but especially for Black women for whom it has halved to less than 40 percent.⁵⁴ One-third of Black women aged 25 to 54 are single with children in the household.⁵⁵ Among Black mothers, more than 80 percent are breadwinners compared to 50 percent of white mothers.⁵⁶ At least half of unmarried Black women have zero or negative assets.⁵⁷ On average, Black women do not accumulate net worth approaching retirement; they have no financial assets at age 50 and do not accumulate any more as they age.⁵⁸

Black men also face a stark wealth gap with white women and men. One study reports that, in 2015, median net wealth for Black men was 15 percent of the median net wealth for white men and 16 percent of the wealth of white women.⁵⁹ While white men's median wealth was \$28,900 in 2015, Black men's median was \$300, about one cent on every dollar of white men's wealth.⁶⁰

There does not appear to be extensive research on wealth gap estimates for Black LGBTQ populations.

Estimates Based on Immigration and Migration Patterns

Today, approximately 41.1 million Black people live in the United States, according to the 2020 census.⁶¹ Of those 41.1 million Black individuals, experts differ on how many are the descendants of Black people enslaved in the United States.

About 12 percent of Black people in America were born in a foreign country.⁶² Nine percent of African Americans have at least one foreign-born parent.⁶³ By 2060, the Black foreign-born population is projected to make up about one-third of the U.S. Black population.⁶⁴ Fifty-eight percent of Black immigrants arrived in the

United States after 2000.⁶⁵ Of the current 2.8 million Black Californians, 244,969 are foreign born, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.⁶⁶

Every U.S. census conducted since 1970 has found that Black immigrants from the English speaking Caribbean earn more, are more likely to be employed than U.S.-born African Americans, are more likely to hold more financial assets,⁶⁷ are more likely to own their home,⁶⁸ and most are more likely to be healthy than U.S.-born African Americans.⁶⁹

There appears to be no data at the national and state level and limited scholarship at the city level describing the wealth gap between descendants of Black people enslaved in the United States, recent Black immigrants, and white Americans.⁷⁰ Very few of the city level studies present findings on the wealth gap that disaggregates the racial category of Black by national origin.⁷¹ Some scholars argue that the effects of systemic racism have uniquely harmed African American descendants of slavery when compared to Black immigrants who do not

have the same experience of systemic racial discrimination in the United States.⁷²

One study, “*The Color of Wealth in Los Angeles*,” included separate data for U.S. born African Americans and recent immigrants from Africa.⁷³ National origin and race were both self-reported in this study.⁷⁴ On average, white Angelinos were far more likely to hold assets in stocks, mutual funds, and investment trusts than both U.S.-born and African Black Angelinos.⁷⁵

But, African Black Angelinos were likely to hold more assets than U.S.-born Black Angelinos. For example, 87 percent of African Black Angelinos owned liquid assets versus 62 percent of Black Angelinos born in the United States.⁷⁶ Eighty percent of African Black Angelinos had a checking account versus 68 percent of U.S.-born African Americans.⁷⁷ Eighty percent of African Black Angelinos had a savings account versus 56 percent of U.S.-born Black Angelinos.⁷⁸ Such studies in other cities reflect comparable wealth gaps between U.S.-born African Americans and recent immigrants.⁷⁹

III. Historical Causes of the Racial Wealth Gap

The modern racial wealth gap between African Americans and other racial groups began with enslavement. But scholars debate whether enslavement should be the basis for reparations given that today’s wealth gap is the cumulative effects of racism over centuries.⁸⁰ This section describes historical causes of the racial wealth gap during and post-slavery, including racial terror, land theft, mass incarceration, and discrimination in government benefits, the labor market, and banking.

Enslavement

Several scholars have estimated the slavery bill for reparations.⁸¹ Most of these estimates require a calculation in today’s dollars for unpaid wages, the purchase prices of the human property, or the land promised to the formerly enslaved.⁸² These estimates are generated by multiplying earlier values by a compounding interest rate.⁸³ For example, Thomas Craemer’s calculations for unpaid wages owed to enslaved people amounts to \$19.4 trillion in today’s dollars.⁸⁴ He arrives at this number by multiplying the prevailing average market wage by the number of hours worked for each 24-hour day by those enslaved over the interval of 1776 to 1865 and applies a three percent interest rate.⁸⁵ Merely doubling the interest rate to the more realistic six percent

would increase the total estimate to \$6.6 quadrillion in 2019 dollars.⁸⁶

Similar to Craemer’s estimates is James Marketti’s bill using the idea of income diverted from enslaved persons, arriving at a figure of \$2.1 trillion as of 1983.⁸⁷ Using a six percent interest rate; the 2018 value amounts to \$17.1 trillion.⁸⁸ Other estimates are reached by calculating the value in today’s dollars of the wealth held in enslaved

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White homesteaders in El Monte, 1936. The federal government essentially gave land away for free to mostly white families through the Homestead Act. (1936)

people as property. For example, Judah P. Benjamin, a critical member of Jefferson Davis's Confederate Cabinet proclaimed the value of enslaved persons in 1860 to be four billion dollars, which compounds to \$42.2 trillion by 2019 at a six percent interest rate.⁸⁹ Other scholars argue that these large sums are underestimates because they do not account for the physical and emotional harms of enslavement, the coercive nature of the system, the denial of the ability to acquire property, or the deprivation of autonomy.⁹⁰

Post-Enslavement

The case for reparation extends beyond slavery to the near-century-long era of legal segregation, violence and terror, and the atrocities that continue today: mass incarceration; police killings of unarmed African Americans; sustained credit, housing, employment discrimination; and the immense Black-white wealth disparity.⁹¹ Scholars have divided post-slavery American history into five overlapping phases of federal government policies, which created the modern racial wealth gap. They involve white wealth creation through government land grants and mortgage subsidies and Black wealth destruction through racial terror, eminent domain, and mass incarceration.

Between 1868 and 1934, the federal government gave 246 million acres of land essentially for free to mostly white Americans—an area close to the size of California and Texas combined. More than 1.5 million white families received land patents, and today as many as 46 million of their living descendants reap the wealth benefits, approximately one-quarter of the adult population of the United States.

White Wealth Creation through Government Land Grants

From 1862 to 1976, the federal government transferred massive amounts of land mostly to white families. Some scholars have named this phase the Wagon Train phase, after the covered-wagon caravans romanticized by 1950s television shows, which carried white families to seek their fortunes in the West.⁹²

In 1862, the federal government established the Homestead Act, which distributed land until about 1980, although more occasionally after the 1920s.⁹³ The Homestead Act encouraged western migration by providing American citizens—and immigrants soon to be citizens—up to 160

acres of public lands, which was increased to 320 acres in 1909—for \$0 if they continuously lived on the property for five years and paid a small \$10 filing fee.⁹⁴

Homesteaders also had the option of paying \$1.25 per acre if they lived on the property for six months.⁹⁵ While the language of the act did not exclude people based on race, African Americans were unable to secure land allocations under the act for four years until the Civil Rights Act of 1866 clarified that they were citizens.⁹⁶ California's homestead laws similarly excluded African Americans before 1900 because they required a homesteader to be a white citizen.⁹⁷

Though Black homesteaders were able to secure land allocations under the Act after 1866, they were few in comparison to the multitudes of white settlers and had to settle for the least desirable land.⁹⁸ Between 1868 and 1934, the federal government gave 246 million acres of land essentially for free to mostly white, native-born and immigrant Americans—an area close to the size of California and Texas combined.⁹⁹ More than 1.5 million white families received land patents, and today as many as 46 million of their living descendants reap the wealth benefits, approximately one-quarter of the adult population of the United States.¹⁰⁰ In comparison and as an

example, approximately 3,500 Black claimants succeeded in obtaining their patents from the General Land Office in the Great Plains, granting them ownership of approximately 650,000 acres of prairie land.¹⁰¹

The federal government undermined other efforts to allocate land to the formerly enslaved. Another estimate of reparations to African Americans can be made by calculating the value in today's dollars of the unfulfilled land distribution of “forty acres and a mule” promised to

the formerly enslaved beginning in 1865.¹⁰² On January 16, 1865, upon seizing the coastline from Charleston, South Carolina to St. John's River, Florida,¹⁰³ General Sherman issued Special Field Orders No. 15 that established the provision “of not more than (40) forty acres of tillable ground” designated “for the settlement of the negroes now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States.”¹⁰⁴

The order carved out 400,000 acres of land confiscated or abandoned by Confederates. Each family of formerly enslaved Black people would get up to 40 acres.¹⁰⁵ The Army would lend them mules no longer in use.¹⁰⁶ Further, the Freedmen's Bureau Act of March 3, 1865,

had an explicit racial land redistribution provision that specified that “not more than 40 acres” of land was to be provided to refugee or freed male citizens at three years’ annual rent not exceeding six percent of the value of the land based on appraisal of the state tax authorities in 1860.¹⁰⁷ At the end of three years of occupying the land,

General William Tecumseh Sherman’s famous 40 acres and a mule field order, given in 1865, amounts to \$1.3 trillion at six percent interest, in today’s dollars.

they could purchase it and receive title.¹⁰⁸ Similar provisions were included in the postwar Southern Homestead Act of 1866. Freedmen were to receive land in the southern states at a price of \$5 for 80 acres.¹⁰⁹

President Andrew Johnson intensely opposed these acts and neither were effectively implemented on behalf of the formerly enslaved.¹¹⁰ By the end of 1865, Johnson also had ordered the removal of thousands of formerly enslaved persons from the lands they had settled under Sherman’s Special Field Orders No. 15,¹¹¹ which were ultimately given back to former enslavers.¹¹² With the exception of a small number who had legal land titles, freed Black people were removed from the land as a result of President Johnson’s “restoration” program.¹¹³

If four million enslaved persons had gained emancipation by 1865, and the land allocation rule meant that roughly 40 acres would go to families of four, each formerly enslaved individual would have been allocated about 10 acres. This implies a total distribution of at least 40 million acres of land.

Using a conservative estimate of \$10 per acre, the total value of the projected distribution of land to the freedmen would have been \$400 million in 1865.¹¹⁴ The value in today’s dollars at a six percent interest rate would be \$1.3 trillion. This number would be much higher if the conditions of the Southern Homestead Act, which provided for 80 acres of land to be sold to freedman at \$5 total were treated as a debt to be paid to the descendants of the formerly enslaved.¹¹⁵ If, as some scholars interpret, *each* freedman was eligible to receive 40 acres of land, it would have led to a much higher total value of the land to be distributed to freedmen after the war—amounting to \$1.6 billion in 1865 and compounding to \$12.6 trillion at a six percent interest rate in 2019.¹¹⁶

Black Wealth Destruction through Racial Terror

From 1865 to the present, federal, state and local government actors refused to protect African Americans as they faced violence and land theft. Sometimes, government actors joined, led, or supported the violence.¹¹⁷ As detailed in Chapter 3, Racial Terror, white federal, state, and local government officials, working jointly with private citizens, terrorized African Americans to prevent them from accumulating political and economic power.

White mobs destroyed thriving Black communities in racial massacres nationwide in Louisiana, North Carolina, Michigan, Delaware, Nebraska, Florida, Illinois, Oklahoma, Texas, and elsewhere.¹¹⁸ The most well-known was the destruction of the Greenwood district in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Greenwood district was known popularly as “Black Wall Street.”¹¹⁹ Scholars estimate that the present value of destroyed Black property in Tulsa is at least \$100 million.¹²⁰ The 1919 massacre in Elaine, Arkansas destroyed \$10 million of Black wealth.¹²¹

Evidence exists that murders of African Americans continue to be driven by underlying economic incentives.¹²² Police killings of unarmed African Americans frequently occur in neighborhoods undergoing white gentrification.¹²³

White Wealth Creation through Mortgage Subsidies

In the 19th century, federal, state, and local governments passed laws and implemented practices that heavily subsidized the creation of the white middle class while substantively crippling the ability of Black people to do the same.¹²⁴ Federal policies, implemented by private citizens, focused on helping mostly white Americans buy single-family homes.¹²⁵ As discussed in Chapter 5, *The Root of Many Evils: Housing Segregation*, the Veterans

Scholars estimate that the present value of destroyed Black property in Tulsa is at least \$100 million.

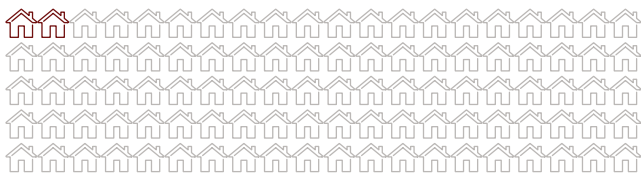
Administration, the Federal Housing Administration, and the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation helped white families buy single family homes in the suburbs while preventing Black families from doing the same.¹²⁶

Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government created programs that subsidized low-cost loans and opened up home ownership to millions of average Americans for the first time.¹²⁷ At the same time, government underwriters introduced a national appraisal system, tying property value and loan eligibility in part to neighborhood racial composition, which designated predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods as hazardous and coloring these areas red—a process known as redlining.¹²⁸

White communities received the highest ratings and benefited from low-cost, government backed loans. Minority and mixed neighborhoods—and especially Black neighborhoods—received the lowest ratings and were denied these loans.¹²⁹ This functionally concentrated African Americans into impoverished neighborhoods in America’s urban centers.¹³⁰ Of the \$120 billion worth of new housing subsidized between 1934 and 1962, less than two percent went to nonwhite families—virtually locking them out of homeownership.¹³¹

Today, approximately three in four neighborhoods—74 percent—that the federal government deemed “hazardous” in the 1930s remain low- to moderate-income, and more than 60 percent are predominantly nonwhite.¹³²

<2% of subsidized new housing went to nonwhite families from 1934 – 1962



Black Wealth Destruction through Disenfranchisement and Land Theft

As described in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, the federal government passed the National Highway Act of 1956 and urban renewal legislation.¹³³ Funded by the federal government, state and local officials used eminent domain to destroy thriving Black communities in the name of highway construction and urban renewal,

erasing generations of accumulated Black wealth.¹³⁴ Black business districts were cleaved by the highways, and never recovered.¹³⁵

In the mid-20th century, the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) policies discriminated against and displaced Black.¹³⁶ During the civil rights era, federal anti-discrimination statutes that applied to

Funded by the federal government, state and local officials used eminent domain to destroy countless thriving Black communities in the name of highway and park construction, and urban renewal, erasing generations of accumulated Black wealth. African American business districts were cleaved, and never recovered.

the USDA were diluted by the time they reached the local level, and did not provide protection for Black farmers.¹³⁷ White USDA administrators gave millions of dollars in funding to all-white Southern local agricultural committees.¹³⁸ These powerful committees were county arms of the USDA and did not want Black farmers on their boards, so they would prevent their election by splitting the Black vote or through voter intimidation tactics.¹³⁹ These boards made decisions on loan recipients, acreage allotments, appropriate crop yields, hardship adjustments, and preferred farming methods benefitting white farmers.¹⁴⁰

The Farmers Home Administration was another agency that discriminated against and displaced Black farmers.¹⁴¹ The agency offered loans and credit to poor farmers for home construction and improvement.¹⁴² But instead of going to badly-needed rural housing in the South, these loans went to segregated swimming pools, picnic areas, tennis courts, and golf courses in white communities.¹⁴³ Loan requirements were stringent and often subjective, such as whether an applicant was a good citizen.¹⁴⁴ Loans went to the white and wealthy while Black farmers were turned down.¹⁴⁵ Even if a Black farmer received a loan, agency administrators would seek to get rid of them by luring them into debt and then foreclosing and auctioning off their machinery.¹⁴⁶

As a result, Black farmers were pushed off their land.¹⁴⁷ Lawrence Lucas, President Emeritus of the United States Department of Agriculture Coalition of Minority Employees testified that the USDA’s programs continue to discriminate against Black farmers and that “a culture of systemic racism at the USDA that denies Black farmers

LAND OWNERSHIP: BLACK FARMERS

In 1910 Black farmers owned **16 million acres** of land. In 2007, they owned **3.2 million acres**, an **80% loss.**

their dignity, that denies Black farmers a right to farm, denies Black farmers the right to the same programs and services that white farmers get in this country” is still present today.”¹⁴⁸

In 1910, Black farmers owned 16 million acres of land. In 2007, they owned 3.2 million acres, an 80% loss.¹⁴⁹ In 1999, Black farmers filed a class action lawsuit against the USDA for unlawful discrimination against them in denying their farm loan applications.¹⁵⁰ The lawsuit, *Pigford v. Glickman*, ultimately settled for money damages, but no policy changes at the USDA.¹⁵¹ While many claims have been paid, the USDA nonetheless has been slow to pay out all the claims, and has spent extensive resources in fighting claims.¹⁵² In the 2021 coronavirus relief bill, \$4 billion was set aside for debt relief for socially disadvantaged farmers, including Black farmers, but payments have been stopped do to an ongoing lawsuit alleging it is reverse-racism and a “windfall” for some farmers.¹⁵³

Black Wealth Destruction through Mass Incarceration

In the late 1980s mass incarceration and the war on drugs continued the American government’s historical criminalization of African Americans.¹⁵⁴ As discussed in Chapter 11, An Unjust Legal System, African Americans have experienced marginalization, physical harm, and death, at the hands of the American criminal justice system at both the federal and state level beginning in slavery and continuing today.¹⁵⁵

During the slavery era, federal and state governments criminalized African Americans as a method of establishing, maintaining, and socially controlling African Americans as a lower class of human being than white

Americans.¹⁵⁶ Today, mass incarceration continue to separate families and dehumanize the descendants of enslaved Black people.¹⁵⁷ In the 156 years since slavery was abolished, Black people in the United States have gone from being considered less than human under the law to being treated as less than human by a criminal justice system that punishes them more harshly than white people.¹⁵⁸

Until the 1940s, state laws and the U.S. Constitution allowed private entities to force African Americans into doing the same work, on the same land, and even for the same people as during slavery in a system called convict leasing.¹⁵⁹ People who were “leased” were treated even more brutally than enslaved people because plantation owners had a financial incentive to keep enslaved people alive.¹⁶⁰ Working and living conditions for incarcerated people were dangerous, unhealthy, and violent.¹⁶¹ Most incarcerated people who were leased for labor did not survive to complete 10-year sentences.¹⁶² Until the mid-1950s, states routinely forced chain gangs of imprisoned people to do public works projects while wearing chains weighing as much as 20 pounds.¹⁶³

American politicians ran on “law and order” or “tough on crime” platforms and passed laws and policies

Mass incarceration creates a vicious cycle. Studies have shown that lower wealth increases the likelihood of incarceration and incarceration decreases the ability to build or maintain wealth.

that punished African Americans more than white Americans, often for similar crimes.¹⁶⁴ This has contributed to mass incarceration and overrepresentation of African Americans in the criminal justice system to present day, nationwide and in California.¹⁶⁵ Nearly 70 percent of young Black men will be imprisoned at some point in their lives, and poor Black men with low levels of education make up a disproportionate share of incarcerated Americans.¹⁶⁶

Mass incarcerations create a vicious cycle. Studies have shown that lower wealth increases the likelihood of incarceration and incarceration decreases the ability to build or maintain wealth.¹⁶⁷

African Americans, who have lower family wealth than white Americans,¹⁶⁸ are especially vulnerable to incarceration.¹⁶⁹ Growing up with less family wealth means living in poorer neighborhoods with lower-quality

education and a greater exposure to high “street” crime and high imprisonment areas. Sixty-two percent of African Americans live in highly segregated, inner-city neighborhoods where socioeconomic vulnerabilities contribute to higher rates of violent crime,¹⁷⁰ while the majority of white Americans live in “highly advantaged” neighborhoods where there is little violent crime.¹⁷¹

Mass incarceration has been catastrophic to the ability of Black families to build and maintain wealth by reducing household assets and income, and lowering homeownership rates. As discussed in detail in Chapter 11, An Unjust Legal System, the criminalization of African Americans has contributed to racial disparities at every step of the criminal justice system.

In 2019, African Americans comprised 26 percent of all arrests yet they only made up 13.4 percent of the population.¹⁷² According to a recent large-scale analysis of racial disparities in over 60 million state patrol police stops in 20 states, including California, researchers found that police officers stop African Americans more often than white drivers relative to their share of the driving-age population.¹⁷³ Further, these researchers found that, after controlling for age, gender, time, and location, police are more likely to ticket, search, and arrest African American drivers than white Americans.¹⁷⁴ Thus in practice, the bar for searching African American drivers is lower than for searching white Americans.¹⁷⁵

Low family wealth can also mean being unable to afford additional education and delaying entering the labor market, leading to higher risks of incarceration.¹⁷⁶

Once released, criminal convictions make it harder for returning citizens to find and maintain jobs, find leases, and be approved for mortgages.

Once a person is a criminal defendant, low family wealth makes it hard to post bond or to hire lawyers to help navigate the criminal justice system, making incarceration more likely.¹⁷⁷

In 2009, African Americans made up less than 13 percent of the U.S. population, but comprised over a third of all the people in prison.¹⁷⁸ As explained in Chapter 11, An Unjust Legal System, African Americans are also more likely to be convicted and experience lengthy prison sentences.¹⁷⁹

Involvement in the criminal justice system increases legal debt.¹⁸⁰ Incarceration means loss of income and may lead to missed mortgage payments and other debts.¹⁸¹ This increases interest obligations and penalties, which in turn can send an incarcerated individual’s credit score plummeting.¹⁸² Incarceration also means household instability, placing an additional barrier to building wealth.¹⁸³

As Chapter 11 explains, federal and state prisons continue to exploit the labor of predominantly Black incarcerated people.¹⁸⁴ While convict leasing as an official practice has ended, underpaid or unpaid prison labor continues today as incarcerated people are not protected by labor laws.¹⁸⁵

For example, in-house prison labor, the most common type of prison labor, typically refers to jobs within and related to the prison including kitchen duty, cleaning, or grounds keeping.¹⁸⁶ Workers can be punished and sent to solitary confinement for taking a sick day, including in the eight states where the labor is unpaid.¹⁸⁷ In states where prison labor is paid, the average rates across the U.S. range from 14 to 63 cents per hour. These are the rates before wage garnishment, which can account for up to half of one’s earnings, although some advocates argue that wage garnishment serves as appropriate sources for victims’ restitution.¹⁸⁸

In addition to jobs within the prison, incarcerated people also provide underpaid and unprotected industry labor unrelated to maintaining the prison, like phone banking, packaging, and textile work.¹⁸⁹ Participating private companies must pay minimum wage, which the prison garnishes for the incarcerated person’s room and board in prison cells.¹⁹⁰ The garnishment only applies to basic room and board, and the incarcerated person must pay additionally for stamps, paper, toiletries, supplementary food, or phone calls.¹⁹¹ Advocates argue that such costs are not fairly calculated and that the American criminal justice system is filled with fees that shift the costs of incarceration not only to the incarcerated, but also to their families.¹⁹²

Scholars argue that work programs in incarceration are not beneficial to incarcerated people when they seek work after their incarceration.¹⁹³ Once released from incarceration, criminal convictions make it harder to find and maintain jobs, find leases, and be approved for mortgages.¹⁹⁴ A record of previous incarceration also has wide-ranging immediate and future consequences that act as a barrier to employment, thus lowering

earnings.¹⁹⁵ A criminal conviction makes it difficult to build wealth because of stigmatization and lack of access to supportive social institutions and credit.¹⁹⁶

Exclusion and Discrimination in Government Benefits

African Americans have consistently been excluded from numerous major categories of government benefits, which have generally benefited white Americans. Government benefits refer to assistance programs that provide either cash assistance or in-kind benefits to individuals and families from a governmental entity. There are two major types of government benefit programs: social welfare programs and social insurance programs.

Benefits received from social welfare programs are usually based on low income. Benefits received from social insurance programs are usually based on other criteria, such as age, employment status, or being a veteran. Some of the major federal, state, and local social insurance programs are Social Security, veteran's benefits, unemployment insurance compensation, and workers' compensation.

Social insurance programs can provide important support in times of crisis. Unemployment insurance, a state level program, helps protect against unexpected drops in income by paying cash benefits to unemployed workers who have lost jobs through no fault of their own.¹⁹⁷ The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, gives money to low-income families to buy food, and expands to provide important support when people lose their jobs.¹⁹⁸ Recipients have improved food security, health, and reduced healthcare expenses.¹⁹⁹

Historically, federal policy decisions dealing with welfare, work, and war in the 1930s and 1940s excluded or discriminated against the vast majority of African Americans.²⁰⁰ The exclusion and discrimination continued due to the Congressional representatives elected from southern states that created barriers to African Americans voting.²⁰¹

Among other things, southern legislators prevented Congress from including anti-discrimination provisions in an expansive range of social welfare programs, such as community health services, school lunches, and hospital construction grants—all the programs that distributed funds to the South.²⁰² As a result, when federal policies provided most white Americans with valuable

tools to build wealth—insure their old age, get good jobs, acquire economic security, build assets, and gain middle-class status—most African Americans were left out.²⁰³

Social Security, passed and signed by President Roosevelt in 1935, left out most African Americans for the first quarter century of its existence.²⁰⁴ Southern congressional representatives heavily influenced the Social Security Act with devastating results.²⁰⁵ The federal government gave the power to control benefit levels, eligibility, and administration of such programs to the states and ex-

Historically, federal policy decisions dealing with welfare, work, and war excluded or discriminated against the vast majority of African Americans.

cluded occupations mostly held by African Americans.²⁰⁶ At the time, sixty-five percent of African Americans fell outside of eligibility for the Social Security program—and between 70 and 80 percent fell outside eligibility requirements in different parts of the South.²⁰⁷

For example, in 1940, the year Social Security payments for seniors began, the Social Security Board identified nearly 2.3 million Black workers as eligible for old age insurance, but the majority of those identified were disqualified because they were farm or domestic workers.²⁰⁸ These exclusions continued until 1954, when the occupational exclusions were eliminated.²⁰⁹

This exclusion also left most Black workers out of unemployment insurance under the act.²¹⁰ When Black workers qualified by working in eligible industrial and commercial jobs, they often were left out because they lacked a history of regular, stable employment.²¹¹ When they received benefits, the benefits tended to be smaller than those received by white workers.²¹²

Another example of federal government discrimination in benefits are the mortgage subsidies, which not only intensified residential segregation as discussed in detail in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, but also helped white families build wealth and enter the middle class. The federal government supported the creation and maintenance of the white middle class through other programs as well. The New Deal was a collection of government programs with the goal of lifting America out of the Great Depression.²¹³

One example of a New Deal policy was the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill,

which was reinforced in 1948 with the Integration of the Armed Forces Act. Through these laws, the federal government aimed to offer unprecedented benefits to veterans including mortgages to buy homes, job placement services, money for vocational and university education, and loans for small businesses.²¹⁴ However, these programs were administered by the states, which discriminated against southern Black veterans.²¹⁵ While white World War II veterans sent themselves and their children to college and obtained housing and small business grants, Black veterans were not able to do so in the same way.²¹⁶

Part of this stemmed from discrimination in the military. Black soldiers were more likely to be issued neutral and dishonorable discharges, sometimes used to exclude Black veterans from GI Bill benefits.²¹⁷ Ira Katznelson argues that severe discrimination in the GI Bill administration system prevented Black veterans from obtaining home mortgages, small business and farm loans.²¹⁸

Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity, discusses how other New Deal programs excluded African Americans in detail.

Today, African American families continue to have trouble accessing government benefits. Because welfare programs are often administered at the state and local levels, state and especially local governments have been able to introduce racial bias into welfare administration

Social Security, passed and signed by President Roosevelt in 1935, left out most African Americans and scholars have argued that it was characterized “by a form of policy apartheid” for the first quarter century of its existence.

contributing to racially disparate outcomes.²¹⁹ States have been significantly more likely to both adopt and impose welfare sanctions if they have higher proportions of nonwhite welfare recipients.²²⁰ States with higher Black populations—generally in the South—tend to provide fewer unemployment payments for a shorter time.²²¹ Additionally, in many places, part-time workers—who are disproportionately Black—are not eligible for unemployment payments.²²²

Despite having higher unemployment rates in general, Black workers receive unemployment benefits at lower rates than white Americans.²²³ A report by the Government Accountability Office found that 73 percent of Black unemployment applicants received unemployment payments during the pandemic versus 80.2 percent of white applicants.²²⁴ Although governments have waived work requirements for some SNAP recipients during certain national crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have found that work requirements disproportionately cut off Black adults from SNAP benefits, which may be partially due to discrimination in the labor market making the job search more difficult for Black people.²²⁵

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Protesters at the landmark civil rights demonstration, the March on Washington. (1963)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most households received several stimulus checks from the federal government. Studies have found that these payments were “likely crucial” to help households that lost jobs that pay their expenses.²²⁶ The federal government supplemented state unemployment payments with up to \$600/week for unemployed workers, extended the duration of benefits, and gave benefits to workers traditionally left out of unemployment insurance programs.²²⁷ The federal government also instituted the Paycheck Protection Program to provide loans that enable businesses suffering from COVID-19’s economic shocks to pay their employees and other costs.²²⁸

During the pandemic, even though African Americans were more likely to hold the types of jobs most severely impacted by the pandemic, white households received their COVID-19 stimulus checks faster than Black households.²²⁹

This was likely due to the Internal Revenue Service focused structure of the program, which made receiving the payment more complicated for unbanked families and families who did not file taxes. Black people are more likely to be among both groups.²³⁰

Studies of pandemic-era federal loans have found that 29 percent of Black applicants were successful in obtaining loans for their businesses versus 60 percent of white applicants.²³¹ Businesses in majority-Black neighborhoods were also more likely to receive federal loans later than businesses in majority-white neighborhoods.²³² Federal

College degrees do little to close the racial wealth gap. For example, college-educated African American households have 30 to 33 percent less wealth at the median than non-college educated white households. Average wealth for white Americans in this category is \$180,500, while the African American average is \$23,400.

money was paid out through large banks, which historically excluded Black businesses.²³³ Black business owners may have been less likely to obtain them, despite being more likely than white business owners to have at risk or distressed businesses even before the pandemic.²³⁴

Education Segregation and Debt

Higher education for African Americans can have a positive effect on their income, but does not translate into a reduction in the wealth gap.²³⁵ College degrees do little to close the racial wealth gap.²³⁶ For example, college-educated African American households have 30 to 33 percent less wealth at the median than non-college educated white households. Average wealth for white Americans in this category is \$180,500, while the African American average is \$23,400.²³⁷ As Rucker C. Johnson testified before the Reparations Task Force, affluent Black households with incomes above \$75,000 still live in more under-resourced neighborhoods with under-resourced school than their white counterparts, which disadvantages Black students from the start of childhood.²³⁸

Black students carry more student loan debt because they receive a higher interest on their student loans and they borrow more because their families are less wealthy than white students.²³⁹ For example, 20 to 29-year-old single white women who have completed college have a median net worth of \$3,400. Single Black women of a similar age and level of education have a median net worth of *negative* \$11,000.²⁴⁰

Labor Market Discrimination

Income is different from wealth. Income represents how much a person earns in a lifetime, both from work and from a yearly return on their investments.²⁴¹ Wealth represents a person's total net worth calculated from assets minus debts.²⁴² While income plays a modest role in the ability to generate wealth, as lower income translates to reduced capacity for savings or investments, income does not explain massive Black-white wealth disparities in the United States. Without savings or wealth of some form, which can be passed from generation to generation, economic stability quickly falls apart when income is cut or disrupted through job loss, reduced work hours or reduced wages, or if families suffer from an unexpected health emergency.²⁴³ In fact, the intergenerational transfer and impact

of wealth is one of the reasons why racial wealth inequities have become entrenched.²⁴⁴

As detailed in Chapter 10, Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity, labor market discrimination significantly contributes to the wealth gap.²⁴⁵ Some scholars have based their estimates for reparations on more recent economic injustices such as labor market discrimination.²⁴⁶ Bernadette Chachere and Gerald Udinsky estimated the monetary benefits that white workers gained from employment discrimination between 1929 and 1969.²⁴⁷ They concluded that by the mid-1980s, white workers gained in \$1.6 trillion from employment discrimination at the expense of Black workers, assuming that 40 percent of the Black-white income gap was because of labor market discrimination.²⁴⁸

David Swinton concludes that even if one subtracted the total cost of government benefits programs including Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment insurance, and other welfare programs—which are often argued to be reparations—over the same time span from the Chachere and Udinsky estimate, there would be still

be a \$500 billion net benefit to white people from labor market discrimination by the mid-1980s.²⁴⁹

But, income alone cannot explain the racial wealth gap. A reduction in racial differences in income would leave as much as three-fourths of the wealth gap unaddressed.²⁵⁰

Similar achievements do not lead to similar wealth for African Americans in comparison to white Americans.²⁵¹ For example, between 1984 and 2009, every dollar increase in average income for white households added \$5.19 in wealth. The same increase in average incomes for African American households added only \$0.69 in wealth.²⁵²

Scholars estimate that 40 percent of the Black-white income gap is due to labor discrimination. As a result, By the mid-1980s, white workers gained in \$1.6 trillion at the expense of Black workers.

In fact, the racial wealth gap increases as income increases. The wealth gap between African Americans and whites in the bottom fifth of income levels is \$7,400, but the wealth gap between comparable African Americans and whites in the top fifth of income levels is \$264,700.²⁵³ And, while white households have five to 10 times the net worth of African American households, they only earn twice as much as African American households.²⁵⁴ Within the same income brackets, African American wealth is less than one-half that of white people.²⁵⁵ White people in the bottom fifth of the income distribution have more than 10 times the median wealth of African Americans in the bottom fifth.²⁵⁶

Lower incomes for African Americans because of labor market discrimination affect wealth only to the extent that it reduces capacity for savings that can be passed across generations. There is no evidence that African Americans have a lower savings rate than white Americans once household income is taken into account.²⁵⁷ One study found that once income is taken into account, if anything, African American families actually have a slightly higher savings rate than their white counterparts.²⁵⁸ In fact, white households spend 1.3 times as much as African American households with similar incomes.²⁵⁹

At high income levels, African Americans save more than white people who tend to invest.²⁶⁰ In addition to savings from income or “active savings,” a family’s wealth can also increase because of “passive savings” or when the

value of a family’s assets rises or appreciates. Data collected before the predatory subprime mortgage market crisis shows that there is no significant racial advantage in “passive savings” for white families with positive assets after family income is taken into account.²⁶¹

Discrimination in Banking

African Americans have historically faced systemic discrimination in banking which has impacted their ability to accumulate wealth. Banks established by the federal government discriminated against African Americans and deprived them of wealth. The Freedmen’s Fund,

Free Labor and Union Army Military Banks, and the Freedman’s Bank were three banking institutions established by the federal government in the early to mid-1860s, which provided recently emancipated African Americans with the means to save the money they earned.²⁶² But racist paternalistic attitudes by government officials prevented

African Americans from investing their own money and accumulating wealth.²⁶³ Bank employees improperly invested client savings and lost approximately \$2.9 million, or \$63 million in 2017 dollars, harming freedmen and their descendants for generations to come.²⁶⁴

In another example, Union army chaplain John Eaton created the Freedmen’s Fund in 1862, to hold the wages of formerly enslaved African Americans who fled to Union or who worked for Union troops.²⁶⁵ These freedmen had no access to their individual wages or savings, nor did they have any say in how their own wages or the money that was donated for their benefit would be used.²⁶⁶ Instead, Eaton pooled the wages in the fund to collectively provide food, shelter, and other needs, essentially treating freedmen as contract laborers.²⁶⁷

Eaton also stole all their wealth. Soldiers confiscated horses, wagons, money, and other valuables that self-emancipated African Americans brought with them to the Union lines.²⁶⁸ Eaton took anything that the soldiers and quartermasters did not steal for themselves.²⁶⁹ By 1864, he had formalized his contract labor system to negotiate contracts for and hired out Black workers on abandoned plantations that the federal government had leased to northerners and to some southerners who supported the Union.²⁷⁰ Any profits from the cash crops that Black workers grew and harvested were placed in the Freedmen’s Fund.²⁷¹ Eaton also used the fund for other expenses.²⁷² In one year alone, Eaton stole \$103,000 or \$1.6 million in 2017 dollars from

Black depositors to pay for the Union Army's incidental expenses; \$5,000 in medical expenses; the salaries of all hospital stewards and medical assistants.²⁷³ The Free Labor and Union Army Military Banks first established in 1864, was another Bank that used an exploitative model of contracting Black people's labor similar to Eaton's freedmen's fund.

In 1865, Congress created the Freedman's Bank and Trust Company, also known as the Freedman's Savings Bank, seeding the bank with unclaimed deposits from the free labor and military banks.²⁷⁴ The initial charter designated an all-white board of trustees with broad discretion to oversee the bank, and intended to hold only the deposits of the survivors of enslavement and their descendants.²⁷⁵ Despite this nominal limitation, the bank welcomed customers of all races and regardless of whether they were formerly enslaved, though formerly enslaved people made up the vast majority of bank customers.²⁷⁶ And though the charter made clear that its purpose was to invest the deposits in low-risk treasury notes and conservative U.S. securities, it vaguely stated that a third of the deposits, called "available funds," could be invested anywhere, leaving an opening for abuse.²⁷⁷

The Freedman's Bank used a number of aggressive methods and tactics to solicit deposits and to convince Black patrons that their money was safe and that they could grow wealth.²⁷⁸ Passbooks and other bank literature contained numerous slogans and poems on the ways of thrift and savings.²⁷⁹ Bank advertisements often included the names of prominent government officials, such as Abraham Lincoln and Oliver Otis Howard, misleading customers and the public into believing that the federal government protected and guaranteed their deposits.²⁸⁰ Depositors were reminded during public meetings and other bank-sponsored gatherings that the bank was under Congressional charter, and thus under its complete protection.²⁸¹

With such assurances that their deposits were safe, African Americans from a wide variety of backgrounds and occupations, many excited to be receiving a wage for their services for the first time in their lives, opened accounts with the Freedman's Bank between 1868 and 1874 at an extraordinary rate. Within 10 years, 75,000 depositors—who were virtually all African Americans—trusted the bank by depositing more than \$75 million, approximately \$1.5 billion in today's dollars.²⁸² Most of these deposits were being saved to buy land and other

productive goods such as tools or agricultural supplies as depositors were told to do.²⁸³

But the bank turned quickly from a savings bank to a risky private investment bank controlled by a small minority of trustees.²⁸⁴ Against the bank's original Congressional charter and without the knowledge of the Black customers, who were largely unable to secure loans from the bank, the bank invested the money in risky railroad and real estate holdings to benefit white businessmen and bank managers.²⁸⁵ When, on June 29, 1874, the bank failed and closed due to fraud, 61,131 mostly Black depositors lost about \$2.9 million or \$63 million in 2017 dollars.²⁸⁶ One study estimated the average amount owed to depositors across 71 bank failures of federally chartered banks between 1865 to 1933,²⁸⁷ and the Freedman's Savings Bank ranked third for the largest amount owed to depositors at the time of bank failure.²⁸⁸

Because the bank had represented much more than just a place to store money, the African Americans who lost their money also lost their trust in the federal government and in banks in general.²⁸⁹

State and private banks following emancipation refused to serve the credit needs of freedmen during the late 19th century, which meant that they had to rely on more expensive and exploitive credit systems.²⁹⁰ General stores became an important means of accessing short-term credit.²⁹¹ Prices were at the discretion of the merchant.²⁹² One price for goods purchased with cash

Bank officials at the government chartered Freedmen's Bank improperly invested the savings of newly freed enslaved people, leading to the loss of approximately \$2.9 million or \$63 million in 2017 dollars. This loss of wealth devastated newly freed enslaved people and their descendants for generations.

and a higher price (often by 25 percent) for goods purchased with credit.²⁹³ Goods purchased on credit were charged interest of eight to 15 percent, as determined by the personal judgment of the merchant, based on the creditworthiness of the borrower.²⁹⁴

Black-owned banks were established to provide banking services to Black communities.²⁹⁵ Approximately 130 Black-owned banks were established between 1900 and 1934. Fifty savings and loans and credit unions were also established during this period. Only eight banks

survived the Great Depression out of 130 Black-owned banks.²⁹⁶ Today, there are only 21 Black-owned banks nationwide, and 32 Black-owned financial institutions overall, including credit unions.²⁹⁷

The federal government prevented the success of Black-owned banks by excluding them from full participation in the banking market.²⁹⁸ Black bank deposits were smaller and were more frequently withdrawn than white bank deposits, which made them more risky.²⁹⁹ Most Black depositors had no wealth to invest in the bank and were just depositing money from their wages while keeping small amounts to live on.³⁰⁰ They put their money into Black-owned banks not only for safekeeping, but also as rainy-day funds during bad times that came often.³⁰¹

Because their deposits experienced high risk, Black-owned banks had to keep more cash as reserves or invest in other more liquid assets such as government securities, which were safer than loans.³⁰² They needed to make sure they always had enough cash at the bank to pay out to depositors. Black-owned banks also held very high capital ratios to offset this risk.³⁰³ For example, in 1920, the mean capital ratio for white banks was 18 percent, while Black banks had an average capital ratio of 32.9 percent.³⁰⁴ This meant that the Black bank owners invested more of their own money and earnings in the bank to keep it secure, but this severely lessened their ability to make a profit or lend money.³⁰⁵

Another source of vulnerability for Black banks was their assets or loan portfolios.³⁰⁶ The fate of Black banks was tied up with the fate of Black businesses, which meant that Black banks lacked the diversified investments needed for safe, and profitable banking.³⁰⁷ Most thriving

banks hold a mix of commercial and real estate loans, but Black-owned banks made almost exclusively home loans because the vast majority of Black businesses were small service operations with no need for bank financing.³⁰⁸

As described in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, the federal government generally labeled Black homeowners and Black neighborhoods as being at higher risk of

Before the Great Depression, there were 130 Black-owned Banks. Today there are only 21 Black-owned banks.

default, and white-owned banks generally refused to issue mortgages to Black homeowners. Black-owned banks often met the need and provided home loans to Black homebuyers.³⁰⁹

Since homes owned by African Americans were undervalued due to government redlining, the property held for collateral during the term of the loan immediately diminished in value, upholding the perception that these loans were inherently risky investments.³¹⁰ Therefore, there was no market for mortgages held by African Americans because of the devaluation of property owned by African Americans and the assumption that loans held by African Americans were inherently risky.³¹¹ This in turn meant that it was difficult for Black-owned banks to earn a profit from an investment portfolio that was largely composed of home loans to African American homebuyers.³¹²

California

In California, Black homesteaders can be traced back to 1900, when agricultural settlements were promoted at various times after the turn of the century in Yolo, San Bernardino, Tulare, and Fresno counties.³¹³ At least two different efforts at colonization occurred in San Bernardino County between 1900 and 1910, including solicitation of families to homestead government land in the Sidewinder Valley, desert land near Victorville.³¹⁴ Black homesteaders also established an agricultural settlement in 1908 in the town of Allensworth in Tulare County, which ultimately was depleted of a water supply necessary to sustain the settlement.³¹⁵

The racial climate around African American colonies ranged from welcoming or neutral to hostile, although none have been reported to experience the kind of everyday violence and intimidation African Americans regularly experienced in the South.³¹⁶

COURTESY OF JASON ARMOND / LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES



Incarcerated firefighters from Eel River Conservation Camp continue to tackle the Caldor Fire as the fires footprint continues to expand southwest of the Lake Tahoe Basin. (Aug. 27, 2021)

Incarcerated people in California produces myriad products such as clothing, furniture, cleaning products and food.³¹⁷ They also perform a wide range of duties in areas such as laundry, kitchen, and general maintenance.³¹⁸ The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection employed around 1,600 incarcerated individuals to fight forest fires in May 2021.³¹⁹ Some are paid as little as \$1.45 a day.³²⁰ As discussed in Chapter 10, An Unjust Legal System, advocates argue that this is exploitive and does not necessarily help the incarcerated firefighters to be find jobs once they are released.³²¹

The costs of higher education are a larger burden for Black Californians.³²² Generally, white Americans are twice as likely as African Americans to receive financial assistance from their families for higher education.³²³ Only 16 percent of very low-income Black Californian students receive a CalGrant award.³²⁴ The state financial aid African Americans do receive is often insufficient, especially with respect to housing.³²⁵ Fifteen percent of white households in Los Angeles had student loan debt, in contrast with 20.5 percent of households headed by African Americans.³²⁶

Structural racial disparities regarding access to unemployment insurance, food stamps, and COVID-19 federal loans in a crisis, and benefits for businesses also exist in California. From March through June 2020, 84.9 percent of California's Black labor force filed for unemployment benefits, compared to 39.1 percent of the state's white labor force.³²⁷ Black Californians who received unemployment insurance during the pandemic received \$293.90, the smallest median weekly benefit of any racial group, versus white claimants who received \$394.90.³²⁸

Generally, white students are twice as likely as Black students to receive financial help from their family for higher education. Only 16 percent of very low-income Black Californian students receive a CalGrant award.

California's version of food stamps, CalFresh, generally maintains the same work requirements that disproportionately cut Black adults off from food assistance at the federal level.³²⁹ In 2016, California enrolled only 72 percent of eligible residents in CalFresh, the fifth lowest rate in the nation.³³⁰ It is also one of 10 states that manage food assistance programs at the county level, which tends to be more expensive and variable than administering the program at the state level.³³¹ Black Californians make up 6.5 percent of the state's population,³³² but 14.7

percent of participating CalFresh households.³³³ During the pandemic, one survey found that 20.2 percent of Black households with children sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in a four week period spanning June and July, compared to 8.8 percent of white households with children.³³⁴

CALIFORNIA UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE MARCH TO JUNE 2020

Weekly benefit amount

White	\$394.90
Black	\$293.90

In California, an analysis of the distribution of federal loans found disparate distribution by race: African American neighborhoods received \$445 per resident, while white neighborhoods received \$666 per resident, partially due to lower concentration of small businesses or small business employees in African American neighborhoods.³³⁵ However, another analysis revealed that in most major metro areas in the country—including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego—businesses in majority-white areas also received federal loans at a greater rate than businesses in majority-African American areas.³³⁶

Proposition 209 (Prop 209) has also disadvantaged Black-owned businesses in the state seeking public contracts with the State of California and local governments. Passed in November 1996, Proposition 209 caused state and local governments to end race-conscious contracting programs, resulting in a loss of \$1 billion to \$1.1 billion every year for minority and women-owned businesses.³³⁷ The biggest contract loss for minority and women-owned businesses was with the State of California where \$823 million has been lost each year since Prop 209.³³⁸ Before Prop 209 passed, in fiscal year 1994-1995, \$519 million was contracted to minority and women-owned businesses or about \$823 million in October 2014 dollars. When California ended its program for minority and women-owned businesses, only a few got back their contracts with the state and some never recovered.³³⁹ There was only an insignificant increase in Small Business Enterprise procurement with the state after Prop 209, which is the main way that state contracts would be available for many of these businesses.³⁴⁰

The City and County of San Francisco lost about \$200 million per year in minority and women-owned business contracts.³⁴¹ Some of this loss emerged immediately after Prop 209. More losses followed the 2004 Coral Construction case, which ultimately ended San Francisco's race-conscious procurement program. Prop 209 also resulted in the loss of about \$30 million per

year in minority and women-owned business contracts with the City of Oakland. It also resulted in an estimated \$20 million loss per year in such contracts with the City of San Jose after the 2000 Hi-Voltage Wire Works case, which ultimately ended San Jose's race-conscious contracting program.³⁴²

IV. Drivers of the Wealth Gap Today

Unequal Homeownership

Homes are one of the most important wealth assets that households can possess.³⁴³ People who own homes can use them to borrow money to pay for expenses or pay off high-interest debt in times of crisis.³⁴⁴ Homeowners

Today, African Americans are in a worse position than white Americans to have homes as assets to aid them in a crisis. The racial homeownership gap was 19 percent in 1940, and grew to 28 percent in 2009. As of the second quarter of 2020, out of \$30.8 trillion in real estate

Nationally, in 2019, 42.8 percent of African Americans owned homes versus 73.3 percent of white Americans. Only 33 percent of Black Californians owned homes.

assets in the U.S., Black households held five percent and white households held 78 percent.³⁵³ In 2019, 42.8 percent of African Americans owned homes versus 73.3 percent of white Americans, and are more likely to face affordability issues in securing capital to purchase and sustain housing at 30 percent of

are able to generate wealth through home equity, so long as their home increases or appreciates in value. Homeownership is also believed to be more beneficial than renting because owners build equity, and obtain additional tax benefits.³⁴⁵ Homeowners may also face less housing instability than renters—partially because they tend to be more well-off in general—especially during a crisis, and may therefore be less likely to lose their housing.³⁴⁶ Housing affordability problems—where an occupant must pay more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs, including utilities³⁴⁷—are more than twice as common among renters than homeowners.³⁴⁸

their gross income, including utilities.³⁵⁴ In the same year, researchers for the National Bureau of Economic Research also found that Black mortgage borrowers were charged higher interest rates than white borrowers were and were denied mortgages that would have been approved for white applicants.³⁵⁵

As discussed in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, and above, government discrimination made it difficult for African Americans to buy real estate, gain wealth through real estate, and transfer that wealth to successive generations.³⁴⁹ Widespread homeownership in the United States was created through government action, starting with New Deal legislation.³⁵⁰ The New Deal created relatively safe long-term mortgage markets and reduced down payment requirements for homeownership. This transformed the housing landscape, allowing many working-class households to move from the rental lifestyle to owning a home.³⁵¹ Yet, as described above and in Chapter 5, Housing Segregation, the path to homeownership has been riddled with entrenched racism.³⁵²

African Americans who own homes have a greater reliance on the house as a source of wealth than white households.³⁵⁶ In 2014, home equity accounted for 92 percent of African Americans' net worth.³⁵⁷ There is a gap between the appreciation of a home owned by a white family and the appreciation of a similar home owned by a Black family.³⁵⁸ When African Americans do own

2019 U.S. HOME VALUES MEDIAN EQUITY BY RACE



homes, they tend to be appraised for less than comparable white homes, limiting the amount of money that can be taken out of their home equity. Race affects the rate of return on home asset.³⁵⁹ African American homeowners had a median home equity of \$66,800 in 2019.³⁶⁰ White homeowners had a median home equity of \$130,000 in the same year.³⁶¹

Residential segregation contributes to the undervaluing of houses in Black neighborhoods.³⁶² African American homeowners tend to own homes appraised for less in neighborhoods deemed less valuable,³⁶³ which decreases their available equity relative to white homeowners.³⁶⁴ Even controlling for factors like neighborhood or home quality, a study has found systemic undervaluation of homes in Black neighborhoods attributable to anti-Black bias.³⁶⁵ Major companies offering real estate insurance have been accused of targeting inner city neighborhoods where Black families live by denying claims as fraudulent.³⁶⁶ All of this limits African Americans' access to the benefits of home equity in a crisis.³⁶⁷

African Americans also experience significant housing cost burdens.³⁶⁸ Without sufficient wealth in the first place, Black households have limited means to invest in homeownership.³⁶⁹

In 2019, 43 percent of Black households spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing—compared with 25 percent of white households.³⁷⁰ Discrimination in mortgage lending may also make it more difficult for Black homeowners to access their home equity through cash-out refinancing,³⁷¹ a means of accessing home equity that has been increasingly popular during the pandemic.³⁷² Between April 2020 and January 2021, less than a quarter of Black homeowners who could have saved \$200 a month by refinancing did so, compared to 40 percent of similarly situated white homeowners.³⁷³

But closing the homeownership gap alone will not close the racial wealth gap; the homeownership gap alone does not explain the racial wealth gap.³⁷⁴ Among Black and white American households who do not own a home, white households still have 31 times more wealth than African American households.³⁷⁵

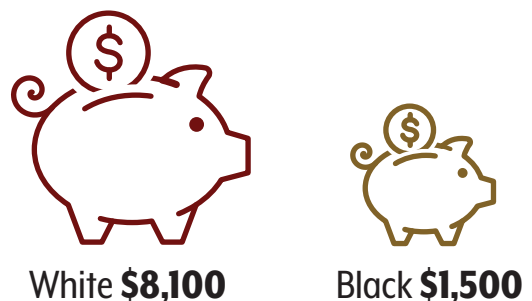
Fewer Assets

Black households hold less assets than white households overall, but Black households hold a higher proportion of assets in their cars and homes, and less in net liquid and net business assets.³⁷⁶ Black households are also generally less likely to hold financial assets.³⁷⁷ African Americans have substantially fewer assets than white

people at every income level, including bank deposits, stocks, bonds, and loans.³⁷⁸

African Americans tend to have fewer investments. Some studies argue that African American investment patterns generally show risk aversion and lack of education on stocks and investments.³⁷⁹ They argue that wealthier African Americans tend to save more and invest less³⁸⁰ compared to wealthier white Americans, and that white Americans are more likely than African Americans to invest in high-risk, high-reward assets.³⁸¹ For example, in 2004, African American families were less likely than white families to have investment accounts and retirement accounts. Only 44 percent of African Americans have retirement savings accounts, with a typical balance of around \$20,000, compared to 65 percent of white Americans, who have an average balance of \$50,000, according to the Federal Reserve.³⁸² And only 34 percent of African Americans own any stocks or mutual funds, compared to more than half of white people.³⁸³ Some studies claim that this can be attributed to familial influence—Black families are less likely to have investment accounts if their parents didn't have any.³⁸⁴ Other studies argue that African Americans are not significantly more risk averse or less financially literate than white people with similar levels of income and wealth. Further, African Americans engage in entrepreneurship, which presents inherent risk, at higher rates than white Americans with similar levels of income and wealth. Low wealth, lack of financial inclusion, and financial constraints on choice often forces Black borrowers to use predatory and abusive alternative financial services rather than financial illiteracy.³⁸⁵

2019 LIQUID ASSETS AMOUNT BY RACE



African Americans have less liquid assets. Liquid assets accessible as cash in times of crisis include cash savings, checking accounts, savings accounts, money market funds, certificates of deposit, and government bonds.³⁸⁶ Access to liquid assets is important in a crisis, as it enables people to continue to pay bills in the event of a

sudden loss of income, or pay for emergency expenses such as medical costs. Lack of access to liquid assets can heighten the impact of crises by making it harder to afford basic necessities.³⁸⁷ People may also turn to family for economic support in times of hardship.³⁸⁸ In addition, access to government aid such as unemployment insurance, nutrition subsidies, and crisis-specific programs, such as stimulus checks and small business loans, help people and their businesses stay afloat.³⁸⁹ These resources are vital for surviving economic crises. For example, liquid assets such as cash savings help people pay bills in the event of a job loss or weather emergency expenses like a medical emergency.³⁹⁰ Similarly, people who have homes, stocks, or retirement funds may leverage their home value for a loan,³⁹¹ liquidate stocks, or borrow from or against their retirement accounts to pay for expenses during difficult economic times.³⁹²

African American households tend to disproportionately lack access to many of these resources, often due to the persistence of historical disparities and racism that continues today.³⁹³ In 2019, while 96.8 percent of African American families had some kind of liquid asset—such as a checking account, savings account, or pre-paid card—typical African American families with liquid assets had \$1,500 in liquid savings, compared to \$8,100 for white families with liquid assets.³⁹⁴ Racism in the banking system today still create barriers to liquid assets for Black customers. Black customers are sometimes profiled,³⁹⁵ viewed with suspicion just for entering a bank,³⁹⁶ and questioned³⁹⁷ over the most basic transactions.³⁹⁸

African Americans have less non-liquid assets. In general, non-liquid assets such as homes, stocks, and retirement funds can support financial security by increasing resources necessary to weather a crisis or invest in wealth-generating assets for the future.³⁹⁹ As discussed above, African Americans experience myriad barriers to homeownership and the mortgage market. Stocks and mutual funds, which can be sold, and retirement funds, which can be liquidated or borrowed against, also provide potential sources of aid in a crisis.⁴⁰⁰ African Americans are also less likely to own stocks than white Americans, and African Americans who own stocks have less equity than white Americans do.⁴⁰¹ While 61 percent of white households own any form of stocks, only 33.5 percent of African American households do.⁴⁰² Among families who own stocks, the typical white family has access to \$50,600 they could tap in an

emergency, compared to \$14,400 for the typical African American family.⁴⁰³

While African Americans are more likely to have access to retirement accounts than homes or other types of stocks, they are still less likely than white Americans to have them.⁴⁰⁴ Around 55 percent of African American working-age families have access to an employer-sponsored retirement plan, and 45 percent participate.⁴⁰⁵ Seventy percent of white working-age families have access to an employer-sponsored retirement plan, and 60 percent of them participate.⁴⁰⁶ Among working-age white families with balances in such accounts, the typical white family has approximately \$50,000 saved, whereas the comparable African American family has approximately \$20,000 saved.⁴⁰⁷ During the pandemic, a survey found that African American households

Black business owners typically start their businesses with half the capital of white business owners despite the fact that they demonstrate a greater need for start-up financing. The median loan amount for Black business owners who are approved for credit is less than half of the loan amounts extended to their white counterparts.

with retirement accounts were much more likely to report that they planned on withdrawing from or borrowing against them (48 percent and 45 percent) than white households (29 percent and 29 percent) due to relative lack of other assets.⁴⁰⁸ However, withdrawing money from retirement accounts can incur tax and other penalties.⁴⁰⁹

Lower Business Ownership

Business ownership allows African Americans to participate in local, regional, and global markets from which they have historically been excluded due to systemic racism and discrimination.⁴¹⁰ Equity in a business is among one of the types of assets that are more unequally distributed by race.⁴¹¹ Lower wealth for African Americans leads to lower business ownership and self-employment.⁴¹² Studies have demonstrated the substantial wealth advantages to self-employment and have shown that those who become self-employed show much stronger gains in wealth compared to individuals who never become self-employed.⁴¹³

UNITED STATES 2004 BUSINESS OWNERSHIP BY RACE



This is especially true for Black business owners given that the median net worth for Black business owners is 12 times higher than Black non-business owners.⁴¹⁴ Further, Black business ownership is a viable path to creating wealth not only for Black business owners, but also for Black communities at large.⁴¹⁵ Most small businesses tend to hire from the community, which tends to create job opportunities for community residents.⁴¹⁶ Therefore, the success of Black-owned businesses is a critical path for economic empowerment in Black communities.⁴¹⁷

The Center for Financial Household Stability and the Federal Reserve Board of St. Louis have documented that, compared to white individuals, African Americans own fewer of their assets in the form of business assets.⁴¹⁸ In terms of market share, Black-owned businesses are significantly underrepresented in comparison to white and other minority-owned businesses.⁴¹⁹ In 2017, only 3.5 percent of all United States businesses were Black-owned compared to 81 percent white-owned.⁴²⁰ Although Black business ownership has been steadily increasing in the United States, growth has been tremendously slow.⁴²¹ Several factors contribute to the racial disparity in American business ownership such as systemic barriers to securing start-up capital and the relatively small size of Black businesses.⁴²²

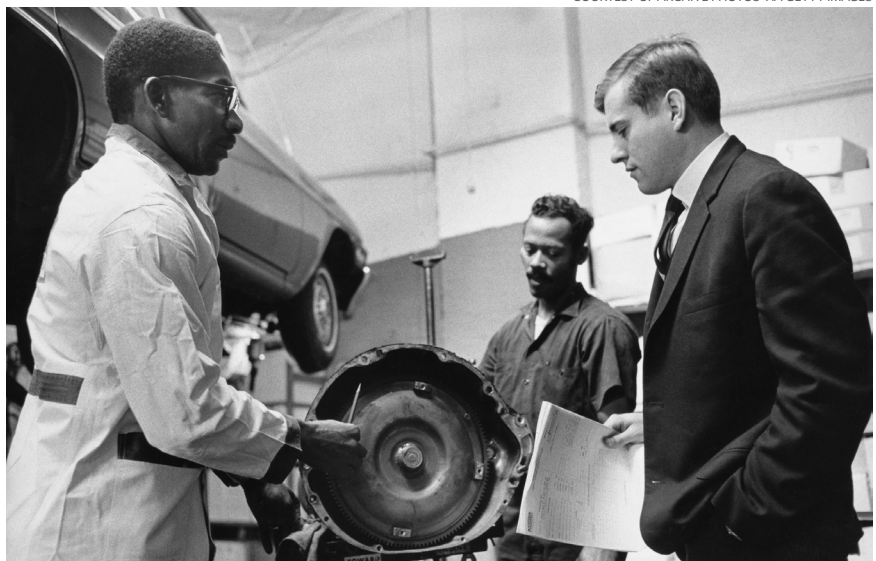
African Americans face many systemic barriers when seeking the social and financial capital necessary to start their own businesses that make it increasingly difficult for Black entrepreneurs to secure the financial capital necessary to launch or grow their own businesses.⁴²³ As a result, Black business owners typically start their businesses with half the capital of white business owners despite the fact that they demonstrate a greater need for start-up financing.⁴²⁴ According to Pepperdine's Private Capital Access Index report, approximately 80 percent of Black businesses sought financing for planned business

growth or expansions compared to only 55 percent of all respondents.⁴²⁵ Although Black businesses demonstrate a greater desire and need to secure financing, due to discriminatory lending practices, Black business owners receive lower loan amounts, and with less frequency than white business owners.⁴²⁶ For example, the median loan amount for Black business owners who are approved for credit is less than half of the loan amounts extended to their white counterparts.⁴²⁷

Another barrier to the growth and development of Black businesses is the fact that, on average, the businesses owned by African Americans are smaller than those owned by white Americans.⁴²⁸ A key factor for measuring the size of a business is whether the business has employees and statistics show that Black-owned businesses are much less likely to have employees than white-owned businesses.⁴²⁹ In 2012, for example, 23.9 percent of businesses owned by white men had employees whereas only six percent of businesses owned by Black men had employees.⁴³⁰ Although the size of a business has a significant influence on the profitability of a business, even Black-owned businesses with employees tend to be much less profitable than white-owned businesses with employees.⁴³¹ In 2014, 63.4 percent of white-owned businesses with employees indicated that they were profitable compared to the reported profitability of only 45.6 percent of Black-owned businesses with employees.⁴³² In addition, the top 100 Black-owned businesses combined earned less than \$30 billion in 2014. Walmart earned \$482 billion, or sixteen times that.⁴³³

The challenges faced by Black business owners were further exacerbated by the economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴³⁴ The Federal Reserve Bank

COURTESY OF ARCHIVE PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES



First Black Owned Aamco Transmission Franchise (c. 1970)

of New York reports that about 58 percent of Black-owned businesses were at risk of financial distress before the pandemic, compared to approximately 27 percent of white-owned businesses.⁴³⁵ The financial instability experienced by Black-owned businesses made these businesses particularly vulnerable at the onset of the pandemic.⁴³⁶ According to a report by the House Committee on Small Business, Black business ownership declined approximately 40 percent, more than any other racial group, during the first few months of the pandemic.⁴³⁷ Black business owners such as Richard Anderson, the owner of Kinfolk Brass Band and Music Group, ex-

renters versus 34.1 percent for white Californians.⁴⁴² Black Californians less likely to have access to the credit and housing stability that owning a home can provide in a crisis.⁴⁴³ Homeownership for Black Californians lags behind the nationwide African American homeownership rate—33.3 percent versus 44 percent nationally in 2019.⁴⁴⁴

63 percent of white Californians own their homes, while only 33 percent of Black Californians do.⁴⁴⁵ Homeownership rates for African American households have fallen every decade for the last 30 years, both unconditionally and after controlling for income and demographics.⁴⁴⁶ Black Californians face higher priced loans, more predatory lending, and more risk.⁴⁴⁷ During the housing crisis of the 2000s, California had the country's highest foreclosure rates, with Los Angeles leading the state.⁴⁴⁸ African American household foreclosure

rates were 1.9 times that of white Americans, likely due to increased targeting of minority communities for predatory lending as discussed above.⁴⁴⁹

Black Californians have less non-liquid assets. African Americans in Los Angeles own fewer stocks, mutual funds, investment trusts, individual retirement account and/or private annuity than white Angelinos.⁴⁵⁰ Eighteen percent of U.S.-born Black households in Los Angeles do not have a car, the lowest of all reported ethnicities.⁴⁵¹ While Californians, in general, face long commute times, Black Californians in Los Angeles, on average, have a 7.5 percent longer commute.⁴⁵²

In Los Angeles, 11.7 percent of white households own a business versus 3.1 percent of African American households.⁴⁵³

During the housing crisis of the 2000s, California had the country's highest foreclosure rates, with Los Angeles leading the state. African American household foreclosure rates were 1.9 times that of white Americans, due to discriminatory banking practices.

perienced significant economic distress as a result of the pandemic.⁴³⁸ Before the pandemic, Kinfolk Brass Band was one of the most popular bands in New Orleans and frequently performed at weddings and music festivals around the world.⁴³⁹ However, lockdown measures enacted to reduce the spread of COVID-19 forced all large events and gatherings to cease.⁴⁴⁰ Without any events to perform at, Kinfolk Brass Band and its band members, including owner Richard Anderson, suffered a significant loss of income in 2020.⁴⁴¹

California

Black Californians are much more likely to be renters and much more likely to be housing cost-burdened. For instance, 58.4 percent of Black Californians are

V. Effects of Wealth Gap

The harmful effects of the wealth gap, which cascade across generations, have resulted in racial differences in the capacity of African Americans to transmit resources across generations and lower financial resilience during crisis, and discriminatory tax structures.

Fewer Intergenerational Wealth Transfers

Lower assets of African Americans means that intergenerational wealth transfers are less likely and tend to be smaller. Inheritance, intergenerational wealth transfers, or parental wealth are primary sources of the capacity

for sustained wealth building.⁴⁵⁴ Wealth, more than income, can be used to invest in appreciating assets for children, such as a college education, an unpaid internship in a high rent city, a new business, a property in a better residential neighborhood, or a job in the family firm.⁴⁵⁵ Without wealth transfers, regardless of income, these assets are harder to attain.⁴⁵⁶

The fewer resources the older generation has to transfer to the next, the lower the wealth position attained by the younger generation.⁴⁵⁷ At least 26 percent of an adult's wealth position is directly due to inheritance or

gift money—a conservative estimate. The true effect could be as high as 50 percent.⁴⁵⁸ Greater familial assistance contributes to white families' greater ability to buy better housing and get better deals on mortgages earlier in life, further compounding the homeownership and wealth gap and giving white families better security in crisis.⁴⁵⁹ An Urban Institute study estimates that the shortfall in large gifts and inheritances accounts for 12 percent of the Black-white wealth gap.⁴⁶⁰

The impact of fewer intergenerational transfers is reflected in the wealth gap between Black and white American millennials. While the typical white millennial family has about \$88,000 in wealth, the typical Black millennial family has only about \$5,000 in wealth. White millennial families made huge strides between 2016 and 2019, and they now lag previous generations of white families by only about five percent.⁴⁶¹ Between 2007 and 2019, however, Black millennials fell further and further behind—not just compared with white millennials, but compared with previous generations of African Americans.⁴⁶² While white millennials trail the wealth of previous generations of white Americans by only five percent, Black millennials trail previous generations of African Americans by 52 percent.⁴⁶³ The typical Black millennial has \$5,700 less in net worth than counterparts in previous generations.⁴⁶⁴

There are several reasons for these deep disparities between Black and white millennials.⁴⁶⁵ First, white millennials are more likely to benefit from having wealthy parents. Greater familial assistance contributes to white families' greater ability to buy better housing and get

In 2019, 71.9 percent of white families expected that they could get \$3,000 from friends or family during a crisis, versus less than 40.9 percent of African American families. Lack of access to liquid assets can also force people into financially risky options during a crisis, such as taking out predatory payday loans or high-interest credit card debt.

better deals on mortgages earlier in life, further compounding the homeownership and wealth gap and giving white families better security in crisis.⁴⁶⁶ Their parents have more resources, for example, to help them with down payments on their first house or to help them pay off their student loans.⁴⁶⁷ About 80 percent of Black

millennials with at least a bachelor's degree still have student loan debt, compared with about half of white millennials. White millennials are also more likely to own assets like stocks and homes, which have ballooned

Between 26-50 percent of an adult's wealth position is directly due to inheritance or gift money. Larger family contributions earlier in life help white families buy better houses and get better mortgages, and create better financial security to combat a crisis.

in value in recent years.⁴⁶⁸ While about two-thirds of white millennials own homes, less than a third of Black millennials own homes.⁴⁶⁹

Lower Financial Resilience during Crisis

Support from family networks can provide a “private safety net” to aid with cash transfers, housing, or childcare in times of material hardship.⁴⁷⁰ Cash transfers can provide additional income, multigenerational housing can provide shelter, and family-provided childcare can permit a parent to work and earn income as well as avoid childcare expenses.⁴⁷¹ For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, almost a quarter of renters borrowed money from friends or family.⁴⁷²

While African Americans receive assistance from family members at high rates, their overall tendency to lack resources may reduce the available quantity of such assistance, and may result in economic harm to the giver.⁴⁷³ African American families are more likely than white families to have high-poverty family networks and more likely to make repeated cash transfers, which hinders their ability to accumulate wealth.⁴⁷⁴

For example, in 2019, 71.9 percent of white families expected that they could get \$3,000 from friends or family during a crisis, versus less than 40.9 percent of African American families.⁴⁷⁵ While new African American mothers are more likely to live in a relative's home, host a family member, and give

or receive money than white mothers, helping family members in poverty may have negative consequences for struggling families.⁴⁷⁶

A pre-pandemic study found that while 31.7 percent of white households are liquid-asset poor (meaning that

they could not use their savings to live for three months at the federal poverty rate), 62.7 percent of African American households are.⁴⁷⁷ And a 2020 study found that 36 percent of white families had enough savings to cover six months of expenses, versus 14 percent of African American families.⁴⁷⁸ In one February 2021 survey of “disadvantaged workers,” 42 percent of white households reported that they could not pay for a \$400 emergency expense without taking on additional debt, drawing down retirement accounts, or selling items, compared to 59 percent of African American households.⁴⁷⁹

African Americans are more likely to suffer from economic crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, a June 2020 survey found that while only 27 percent of white households had experienced financial hardship as a result of the pandemic, 40 percent of African American households had.⁴⁸⁰ In addition, lack of access to liquid assets can also force people into financially risky options during a crisis, such as taking out predatory payday loans or high-interest credit card debt.⁴⁸¹ Lack of access to liquid assets can also make it harder to afford food and rent.⁴⁸² June 2020 census data showed that, among households where a job was lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, 31 percent of African American households lacked sufficient food in the prior week, compared to 12 percent of white households.⁴⁸³ The data also showed that, compared to white renters, African American renters were less likely to have paid their rent in the previous month and more likely to predict that they would not be able to make their next rent payment.⁴⁸⁴ In a May 2020 survey, African American respondents were more than twice as likely as white respondents to report missing a credit card, utility, internet, rent, mortgage, or other “important payment” since the beginning of the pandemic.⁴⁸⁵ African American families with liquid assets also use them up more rapidly than white families during a crisis.⁴⁸⁶ African American families with emergency savings at the start of the pandemic were twice as likely as white households to have needed to use them by May, and more than twice as likely to have already spent at least a quarter of their savings.⁴⁸⁷

Discriminatory Tax Structures

More than 50 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, many wealth-building policies still continue to heavily favor households that do not need help building wealth—mostly wealthy, predominantly white

households—while doing little or nothing for low-wealth African American households, among other households of color.⁴⁸⁸ The largest and most powerful of these programs operate through the U.S. tax code.⁴⁸⁹

These federal tax programs overwhelmingly favor building the wealth of the wealthy, and has contributed to the extreme rise in overall wealth inequality over the past several decades.⁴⁹⁰ Tax policies have drastically different impacts on Black and white families and many were created during a time when Black families paid into the system without having the same legal rights to live, work, marry, vote, or receive an education as their white peers.⁴⁹¹

The modern income tax system traces its roots to the Revenue Act of 1913, which instituted a progressive income tax system where tax rates increase as income increases but did not envision African Americans as taxpayers at all.⁴⁹² Even as African Americans eventually paid into the tax system after amendments and several new laws, they were unable to reap its benefits.⁴⁹³ Today, African Americans are paying more in taxes than their white peers because U.S. tax laws were designed with white Americans in mind.⁴⁹⁴

The federal government has spent more than \$8 trillion in the past twenty years on tax programs to help families build long-term wealth through saving for retirement,

Although the Internal Revenue Service does not collect race or ethnicity data, recent research indicates that overwhelming amount of the federal tax benefits goes to white households at all income levels.

buying a home, starting a business, or accessing higher education.⁴⁹⁵ This spending has resulted in the typical millionaire receiving about \$145,000 in public tax benefits to grow their wealth, while working families get a total average of \$174.⁴⁹⁶

Although the Internal Revenue Service does not collect race or ethnicity data, recent research indicates that overwhelming amount of the spending the federal government does through the tax code goes to white households at all income levels.⁴⁹⁷ Examining individuals earning \$103,466 or more reveals that white people accounted for 79 percent of those respective filers, while Black people accounted for only six percent.⁴⁹⁸ These individuals also took greater advantage

of high-value tax benefits, which cost the government hundreds of billions of dollars each year. For example, in 2012, white people made up 83 percent of the residents in the ZIP codes with the highest percentage of tax returns reporting capital gains and mortgage interest deductions.⁴⁹⁹ But, African Americans made up just three percent of residents in the ZIP codes reporting the highest rates of capital gains income and six percent of residents in ZIP codes reporting the highest rates of mortgage interest deductions. These two tax programs together cost the federal government more than \$100 billion during that year.⁵⁰⁰

California

In California, Los Angeles provides a stark version of nationwide racial disparities in liquid assets accessible during a crisis.⁵⁰¹ A 2014 study of the Los Angeles metro area found that the median value of liquid assets for U.S.-African American households was \$200, compared to \$110,000 for white households.⁵⁰²

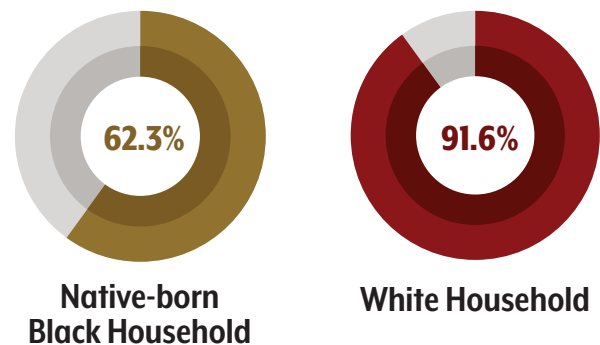
While 91.6 percent of white households had some kind of liquid asset, only 62.3 percent of U.S.-born African American households did. Further, 90.1 percent of white households had a checking account, versus 68.1 percent of U.S.-born African American households.⁵⁰³ In addition, 71.9 percent of white households had a savings account, versus 55.5 percent of U.S.-born African American households.⁵⁰⁴ While 40.7 percent of white households had stocks, mutual funds, or investment trusts, only 21.5 percent of U.S.-born African American households did.⁵⁰⁵ Finally, 63.6 percent of white households had an individual retirement account or private annuity, versus 37.9 percent of U.S.-born African American households.⁵⁰⁶

VI. Conclusion

The legacy of slavery continues to reach into the lives of African Americans today. For hundreds of years, the American government at the federal, state, and local levels has systematically prevented African American communities from building, maintaining, and passing on wealth due to the racial hierarchy established to maintain enslavement.

Segregation, racial terror, harmful racist neglect, and other atrocities in nearly every sector of civil society

Percent of households in Los Angeles that hold some type of liquid asset (2014)



In California, many current state tax policies benefit Californians with higher incomes and wealth—predominantly white and Asian Californians—and give little to no benefits to other Californians, including Black Californians.⁵⁰⁷ For example, many tax benefits are only available to those who opt to itemize their tax deductions, and people who itemize tend to have higher incomes. California's four largest personal income tax deductions provide most benefits to families with incomes over \$100,000, while providing nearly no benefits to those with incomes below \$20,000.⁵⁰⁸ Black Californians are more likely to have low incomes, so they are less likely to benefit from these tax breaks.⁵⁰⁹

California's several tax benefits for homeowners, including the deductions for mortgage interest and property taxes, are also unlikely to benefit Black Californians who have been blocked from homeownership through racist policies and practices, often lack funds for a down payment, and have lower value homes due to residential segregation and racist appraisal practices.⁵¹⁰

have inflicted harms, which cascade over a lifetime and compound over generations. As a result, African Americans today experience a large and persistent wealth gap when compared to white Americans. Addressing this persistent racial wealth gap means undoing long-standing institutional arrangements that have kept African American households from building and growing wealth at the same rate as white households to the present day.

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