A Brief Primer on Racial Disparities and African Americans in California

Introduction

Years of research has shown that American society is riddled with racial disparities across sectors including healthcare, education, social services and the justice system. This is true for California (CA), the most populous state in the U.S., with more than 39 million residents. It is also one of the most diverse states, with people of color (non-“White alone” persons) now making up 62.3% of the population, according to most recent official U.S. Census estimates. A recent report by the Advancement Project, which measures racial disparities in CA across multiple issues, states “racial disparity is pervasive across CA and it impacts all of us...a rising tide does not lift all boats.” The report also found that Black Americans overwhelmingly carry the greatest burden of these disparities; they are more likely to be poor, in jail, and die young. Even though Blacks are only 6.5% of the overall CA population (U.S. Census), they are repeatedly amongst the most disproportionately over-represented when it comes to negative indicators for wellbeing, sometimes at rates as much as three times or greater than 6.5%.

This primer on racial disparities is designed to encourage a more inclusive conversation about racial disparities and their solutions. Conversations about racial disparities and systemic racism too frequently pit groups against one another, women against men, heterosexuals against gays, and poor Whites against Latinos and Blacks, each group vying for dwindling public resources. However, human personhood is not one thing; it is an intersectional thing. Race is the modality in which all the classification researchers use to measure disparities is lived. Indeed, race, gender class and sexuality are so intertwined, they are difficult to separate.

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The sooner empirical researchers and communities understand this, the sooner we will get beyond polarizing discussions about race, and come together to eliminate the racial disparities this primer presents.

I. What is racial equity?

Racial Equity is the state of affairs that would exist if racial group affiliation did not predict life outcomes, despite other affiliations such as class, gender and sexuality.

"Equity requires on-going work, but it’s a home we will pass on to future generations."

II. Why is racial equity important?

Racial equity has individual, social, and economic and national significance. The goal of racial equity is not to simply reduce disparities; racial equity develops strategies that will result in improvements for all groups, but the strategies are targeted based on the needs of a particular group.

“Systems that are failing communities of color, are actually failing all of us.”

ONTRACK Program Resources
Technical Assistance Provider to the African American Implementation Pilot Projects
California Reducing Disparities Project
Office of Health Equity
California Department of Public Health
III. What are racial disparities?

Racial Disparities are not only the comparative differences in status or outcomes between racial groups, but also the differences within other demographics.

For instance, there are racial disparities in health outcomes between African Americans and Whites, and within the LGBTQ demographic.

People of color are massively overrepresented among victims of anti-LGBT violence. Latino people made up 43% of survivors of anti-LGBT violence, while black LGBT people represented about 23% of survivors. These statistics likely understate the prevalence of attacks against them, given that white survivors are consistently the largest racial group that reports to NCAVP programs, the coalition says.

IV. Racial disparities exist in every system in California.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Health Disparity</td>
<td>Health and mental health disparities are differences in health and mental health status among distinct segments of the population, including differences that occur by gender, age, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, education or income, disability or functional impairment, or geographic location, or the combination of any of these factors.²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child welfare</td>
<td>Disproportionality and Disparity</td>
<td>Disproportionality occurs when a group makes up a proportion of those experiencing some event that is higher or lower than that group’s proportion of the population. Disparity is a comparison of one group regarding outcomes, services, etc. to another group.¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile justice</td>
<td>Disproportionate minority contact (“DMC”)</td>
<td>The rate at which youth of color contact the system as compared to the rate at which White youth contact the system. Each rate can be calculated using the total youth population as the base or the previous decision point of 9 key decision points as the base.³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Achievement gap)</td>
<td>Racial Achievement Gap</td>
<td>Differences in the average standardized test scores of white and black or white, Hispanic and students of color. Achievement gaps are one way of monitoring the equality of educational outcomes.⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Discipline)</td>
<td>Racial Discipline Gap</td>
<td>Differences in the rate of school suspension of students belonging to different racial groups. School suspensions are directly related to lost instructional time and to Grade Point Average (GPA) and standardized test results.⁵</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


V. What do we know about racial disparities in California?

1. With regard to African Americans, racial disparities are very similar across systems;
2. Socio-economic (SES) differences do not explain racial inequity;
3. Systems contribute significantly to disparities;
4. Racial disparities among African Americans are not consistent across counties. Racial disparities are concentrated in certain counties;

5. Racial disparities exist within other sub-populations.

Across the indicators we examined statewide, Black Californians were most heavily weighed down by disparities. They are the lowest-performing group on 18 out of the 41 indicators for which they are included in the data—higher than any other group. For example, Black children are arrested for truancy at more than three and a half times the rate for White children. They also have the worst rates in California for life expectancy, homeownership, suspensions, household income, census participation, and incarceration. Across every issue area, Black Californians face multiple interlocking disparities that accumulate into the greatest burden of any racial group in the state.

VI. Racial disparities among African Americans are worse in some regions and counties than others.

Color coding represents “the relationship between performance and disparity for each county. Counties colored orange are those with “Prosperity for the Few,” as they have overall high performance but relatively higher race-based disparities. Yellow counties are “Struggling to Prosper,” as they have relatively lower disparities often due to lower performance, indicating deprivation affecting all county residents. Finally, red counties are “Stuck and Unequal,” with low performance and high disparities both representing barriers to progress. The size of the circle indicates a county or regions size.”

Source: Race Counts: Advancing Opportunity for All Californians, pg. 38, Winter 2017
VII. Racial disparities among Blacks begin at birth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>California</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latina</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Low birth weight is considered a weight fewer than 5.8 lbs. at birth. 11.7% of African Americans weigh less than 5.8 lbs. at birth. Conversely, only 6% of Whites are below 5.8 lbs. at birth.

VIII. African Americans experience shorter lifespans than other groups and lifespan differs by gender.

The average life expectancy for an African American male at birth is 68.6 compared to 75.6 for White males and 85 years for Asians and 83 years for Latinos. The racial disparity in life expectancy among women is only slightly smaller, and women live longer than men on average.

IX. African American Men Are Dramatically More Likely to Be Incarcerated Than Other Groups?

African American men are dramatically more likely to be imprisoned than are other groups.

Less than two thirds of California’s adult male population is nonwhite or Latino (60%), but these groups make up three of every four men in prison: Latinos are 42%, African Americans are 29%, and other races are 6%. Among adult men in 2013, African Americans were incarcerated at a rate of 4,367 per 100,000, compared to 922 for Latinos, 488 for non-Latino whites, and 34 for Asians.
X. National longitudinal data demonstrates that class does not explain African American incarceration rates.

Rich black kids are more likely to go to prison than poor white kids

Share of people born between 1957 and 1965 who eventually went to prison or jail, by how much wealth they had as of 1985, when they were between 20 and 28 years old

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BLA</td>
<td>HIS</td>
<td>WHI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth decile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth decile</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth decile</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
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xi. Blacks are four times as likely than Whites to enter the child welfare system.

XII. Blacks are overrepresented in child welfare system and disparities increase as they progress through the system.

Ethnicity and Path Through the Child Welfare System
California 2016
(Missing/multirace values excluded from % calculations)
*Includes children 18.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pop</th>
<th>Allegations</th>
<th>Sub</th>
<th>Entries</th>
<th>In Care</th>
<th>Exits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9,118,201</td>
<td>494,062</td>
<td>70,859</td>
<td>29,071</td>
<td>53,749</td>
<td>28,006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Counties colored green are those with “Gains at Risk”; they have above average performance and below average disparity metrics—indicating progress in some areas that may be under threat by changing economic or demographic trends. Counties colored orange are those with “Prosperity for the Few,” as they have overall high performance but relatively higher race-based disparities. Yellow counties are “Struggling to Prosper,” as they have relatively lower disparities often due to lower performance, indicating deprivation affecting all county residents. Finally, red counties are “Stuck and Unequal,” with low performance and high disparities both representing barriers to progress. The size of the circle indicates a county or regions size.”

XII. National data shows income does not explain test results.

XIII. The racial achievement gap is the result of systems and programs, and some do better than others. With similar demographics, Texas produces better results with African Americans than does California.

xiv. While state-wide hate crime data shows that anti-Black hate crimes outnumber all others, the data is incomplete in that it does not disaggregate sub-populations by race.

xv. Systems and individuals contribute to racial disparities.

**Excerpts from Institute of Medicine’s “Unequal Treatment”**

“...research indicates that minorities are less likely than whites to receive needed services, including clinically necessary procedures, even after correcting for access-related factors, such as insurance status.”
“Aspects of health systems—such as the ways in which systems are organized and financed, and the availability of services—may exert different effects on patient care, particularly for racial and ethnic minorities.”

“...research to date has demonstrated that health care providers’ diagnostic and treatment decisions, as well as their feelings about patients, are influenced by patients’ race or ethnicity and stereotypes associated with them...

...[stereotypes] are held even by people who truly believe that they do not judge others based on social categories”.

**Source:** Racial Equity Institute, Measuring Racial Equity: A Groundwater Approach.


**XV. Five truths of Racial Disparities Affecting African Americans?**

1. Black Californians face the greatest burden of any racial group in the state.

2. Socio-economic differences are not the causes of racial inequity.

3. Systems and individuals contribute to racial disparities.

4. Racial disparities among African Americans are not consistent across counties. Racial disparities are concentrated in certain counties;

5. Race is a category of all sub-populations, such as gender, sexual identity and social economic status. Racial disparities in status and outcomes exist in all subgroups.

6. Racial disparities impact the future of all groups and the future of California as a whole.