

# Dismantling Structural Racism

DATE

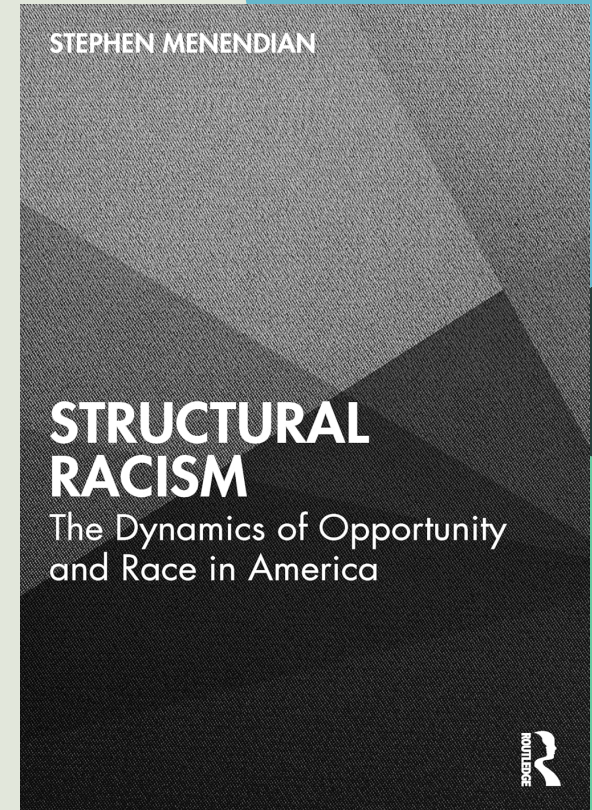
May 28, 2025

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AUTHORIAL SUPPORT

N/A



# Upcoming Book June 2025

## ***Structural Racism:***

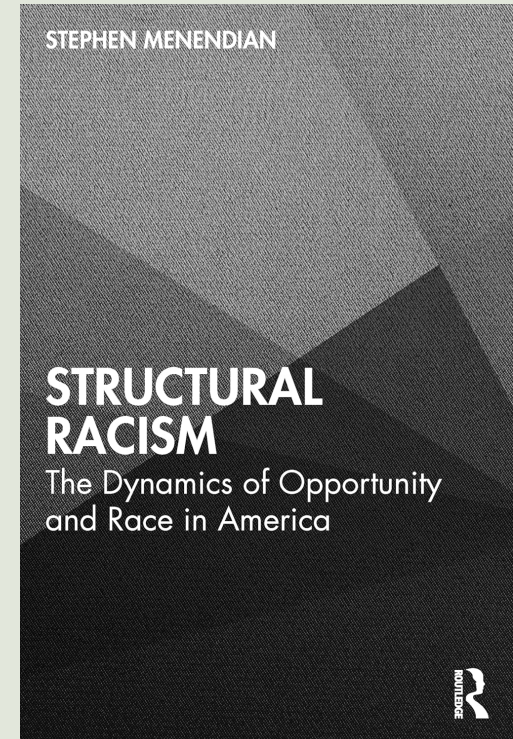
***The Dynamics of Opportunity and Race in America***

by Stephen Menendian



*Scan here to pre-order!*

<https://www.routledge.com/Structural-Racism-The-Dynamics-of-Opportunity-and-Race-in-America/Menendian/p/book/9781032902968>

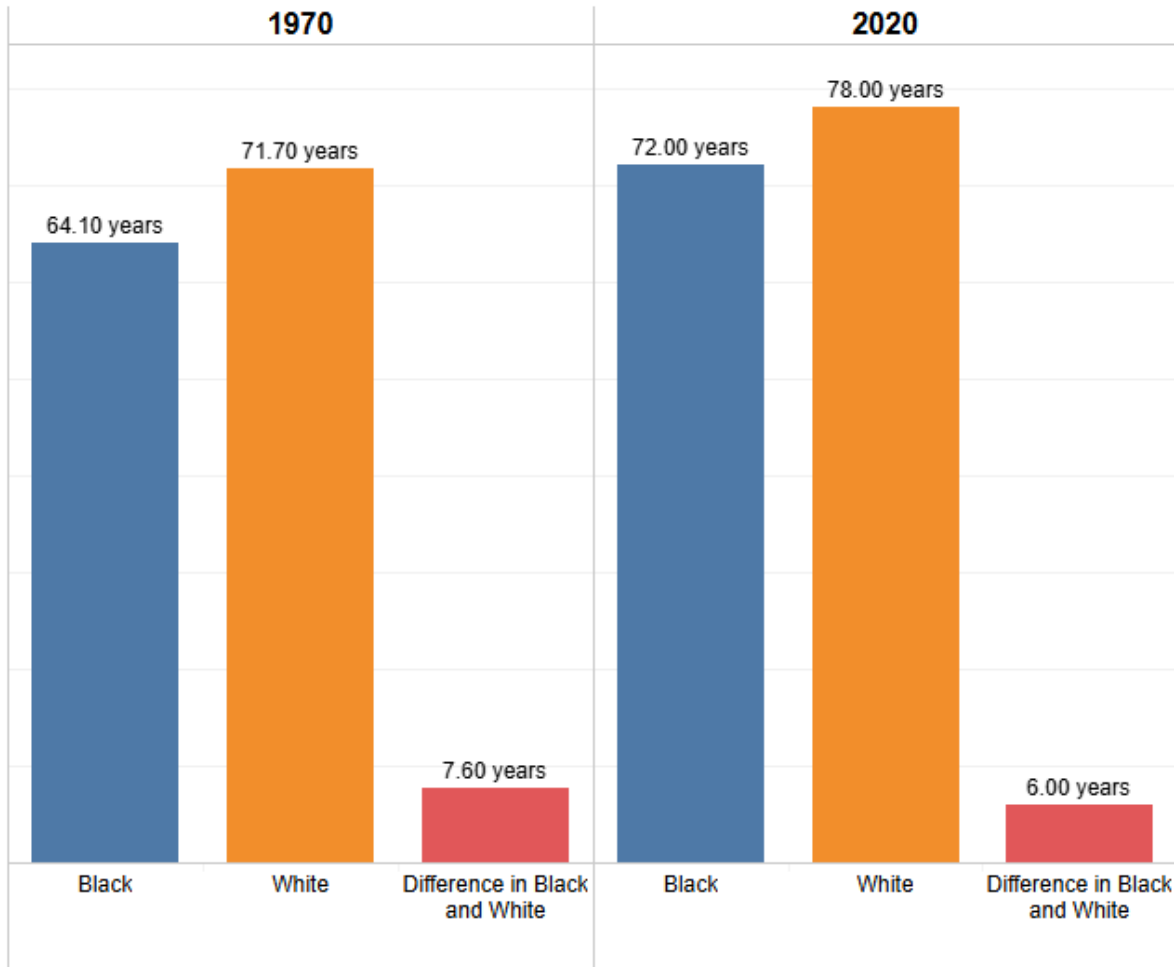


# Racial Disparities

## Life Expectancy

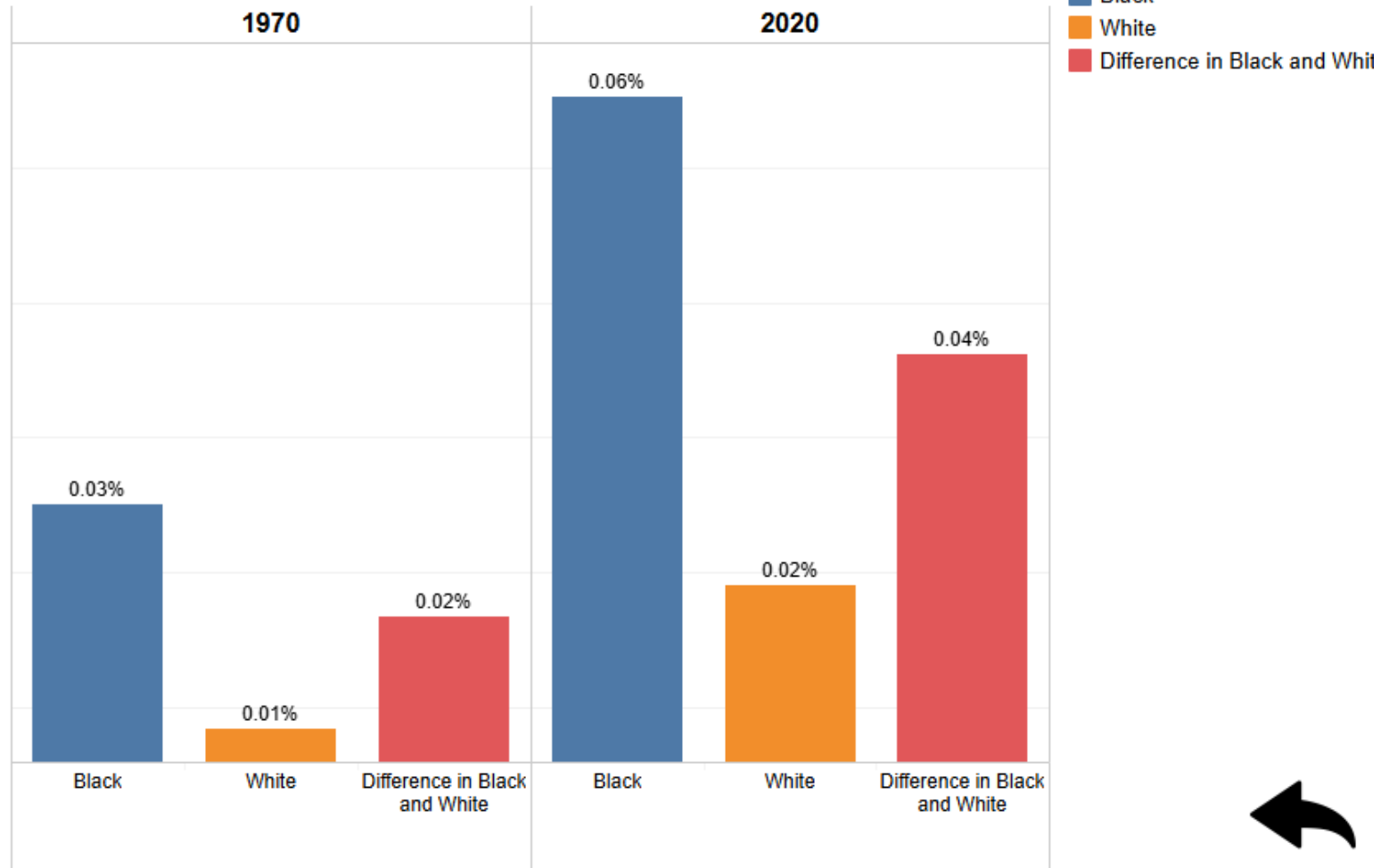
### Legend

- Black
- White
- Difference in Black and White



# Racial Disparities

## Maternal Mortality Rates



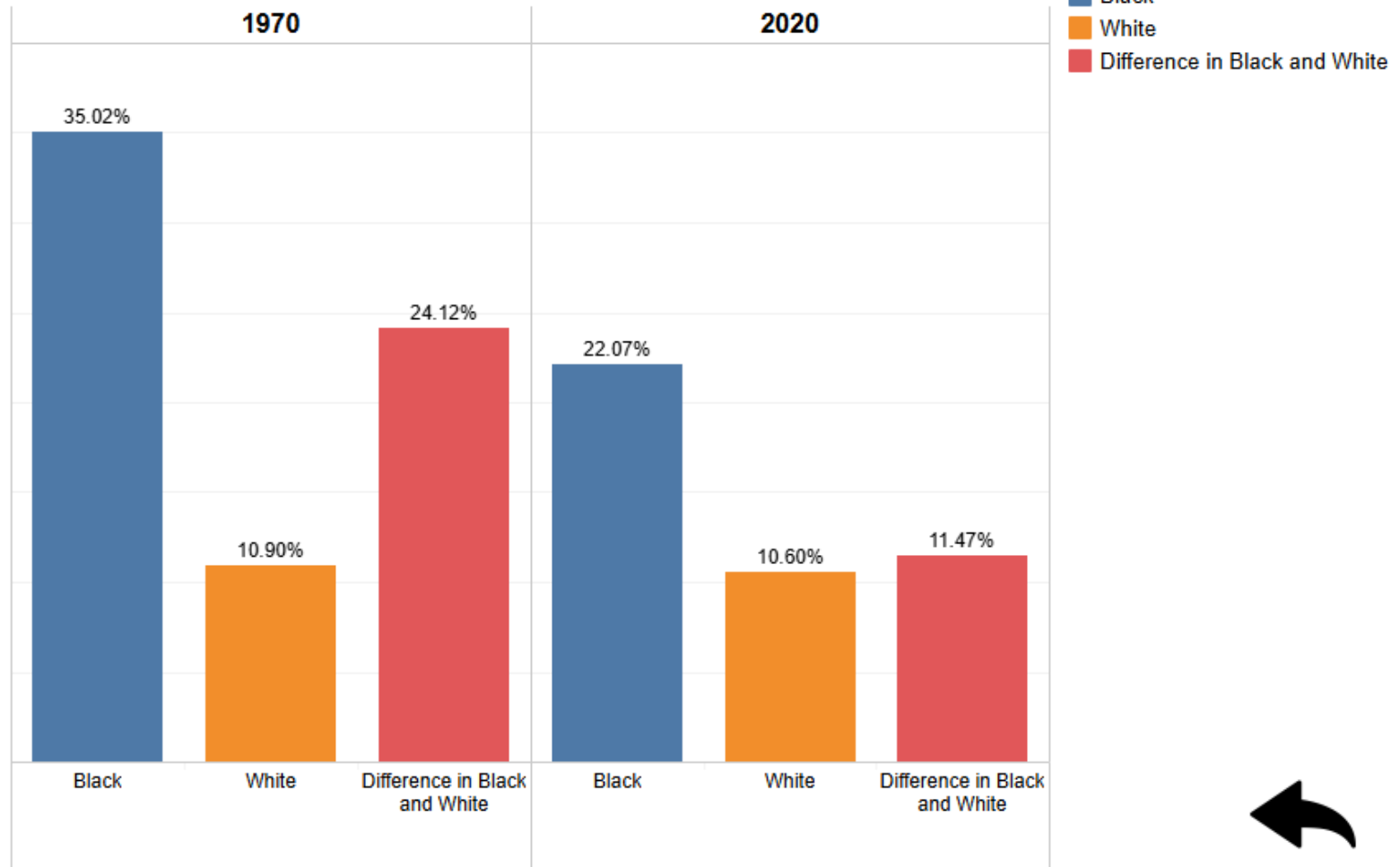
Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



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# Racial Disparities

## Poverty Rates



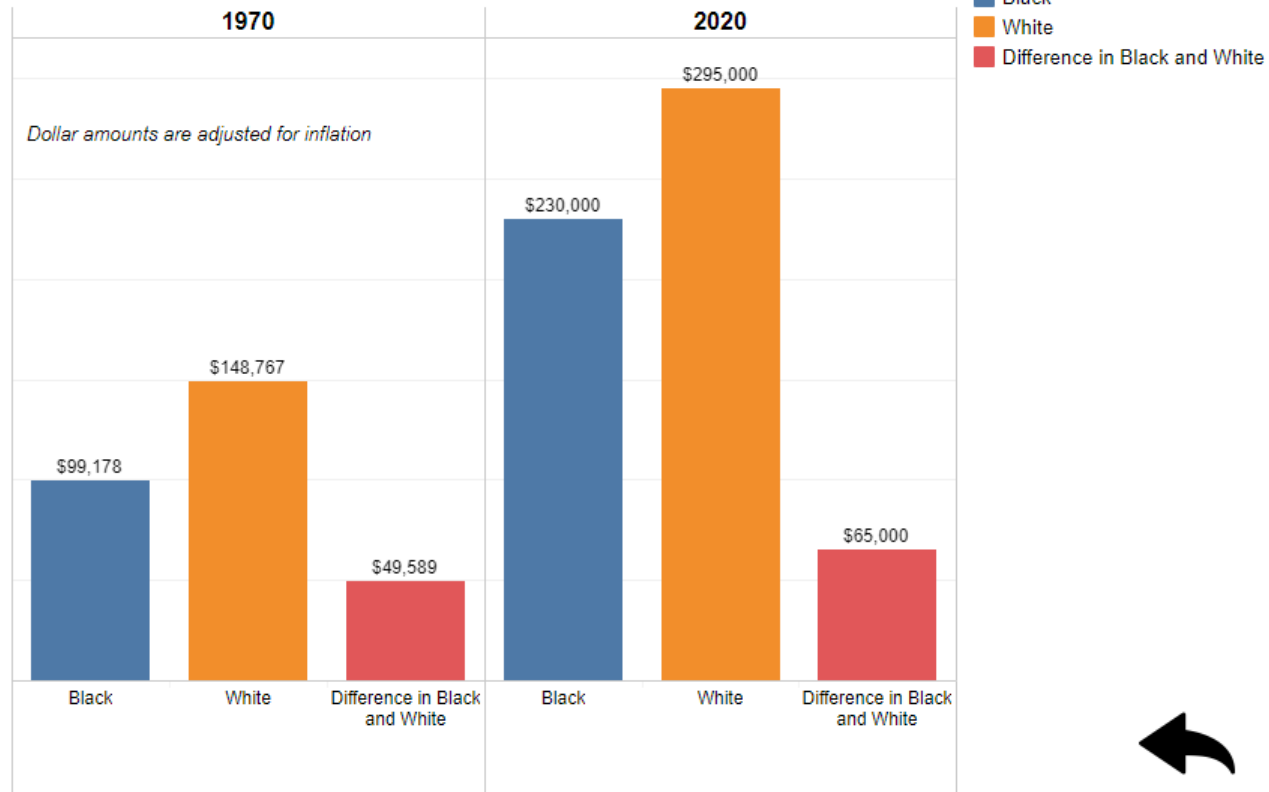
Data from U.S. Census Bureau



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# Racial Disparities

## Median Home Value



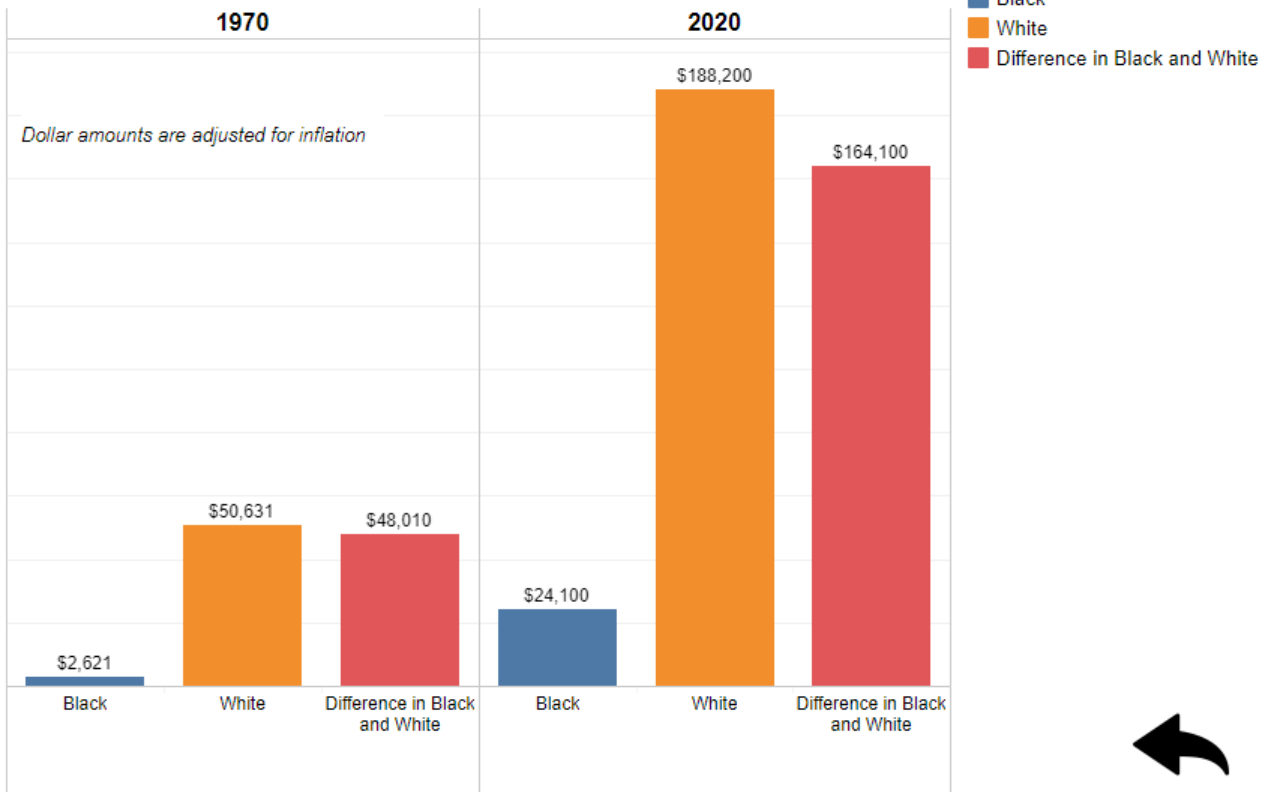
Data from U.S. Census Bureau

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## Median Racial Wealth Gap



Data from the Federal Reserve and Urban Institute



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# The Problems with Racial Disparities (1)

First, the fact of a racial disparity does not tell us why it exists. It is not explanatory of cause or etiology.

In fact, when presented with racial disparities, people assimilate this information into an implicit theory they already hold, which tend to be:

- 1) Discrimination
- 2) Differences in biology/genetics/intelligence
- 3) Differences in culture / drive / upbringing

Presenting someone with a disparity does not indicate whether it is these or other explanations. In fact, is it mostly none of these.



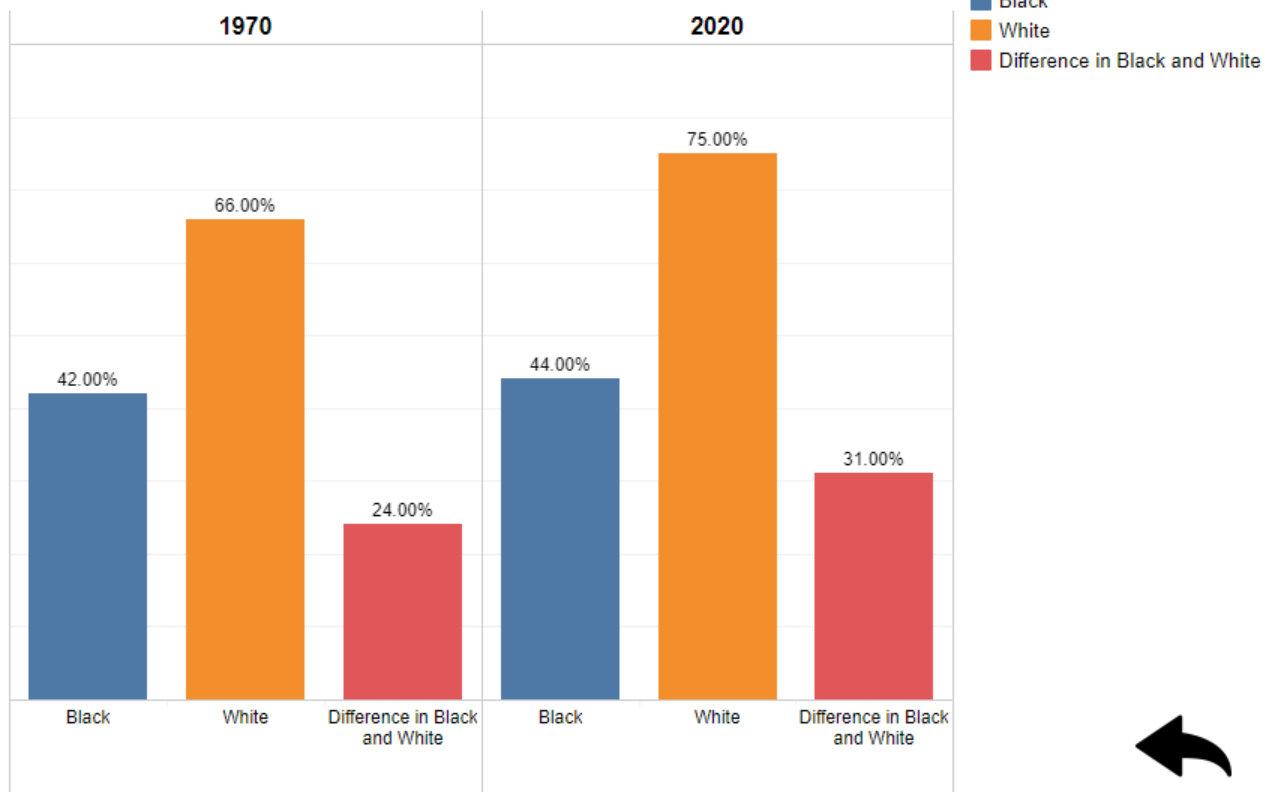
# The Problems with a Disparities Focus (2)

Nor does disparity data tell you what to do! Without a theory or diagnosis of causes, you can't make a prescription.

And, in fact, disparities data tends to draw us towards the wrong prescriptions. Here are some problems with disparities:

1. It triggers a Zero-Sum Mindset
2. Draws Attention to Groups Rather than Structures/Conditions
3. Implicitly Makes a Group the Norm
4. Closing a Disparities Doesn't = Fairness or Justice
5. Reducing Disparities Through Retrogression
6. Disparities Can Persist Even if Absolute Conditions Improve
7. They are complicated!

## Homeownership Rates



Data from the National Community Rehabilitation Coalition and The Federal Reserve



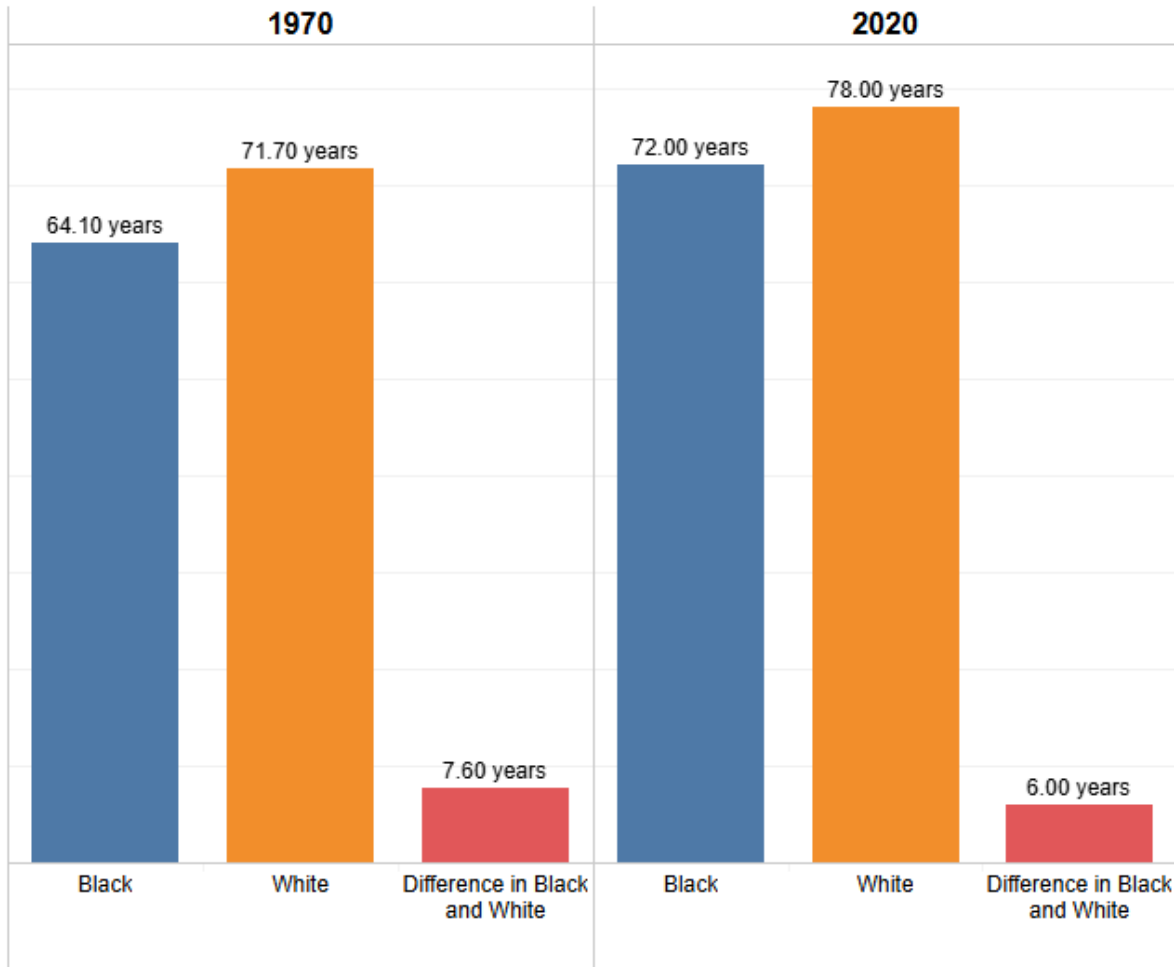
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# Racial Disparities

## Life Expectancy

### Legend

- Black
- White
- Difference in Black and White



# Structural Racial Inequality

Structural Racial Inequality is the idea that the forces and arrangements that foster human development, nurture potential, extend opportunity, and facilitate well-being in the United States are racialized, meaning that they generate and reinforce group advantages and disadvantages on the basis of race.

It is this reality, rather than racist ideas about group-based inferiority or presumed cultural differences, which explains much of the stark and persistent racial disparities in educational attainment, employment, income, wealth, health, and incarceration.

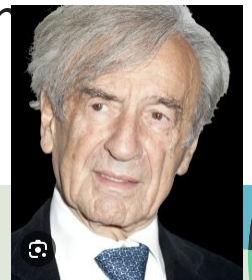
Simply put, unequal opportunity produces unequal outcomes. This is not to say that all unequal outcomes are caused by unequal opportunities, but unequal opportunity does cause, and help explain, unequal outcomes.

# Structural Racial Inequality

- Nor are these developments explained by racial prejudice, animus, resentment, aversion, or even anxiety and discomfort. In many cases, they are a product of self-interest, opportunism, callous indifference, and inadequate foresight. Even if we curbed acts of racial discrimination and drove out racist ideas, racial disparities would persist on a massive scale.
- Structural racial inequality is the result of a complex set of relationships and interactions between many institutions, policies, and people over many years, most of which are either well-intended or not colored by racial animus or based on racist ideas. They nonetheless result in significant and persistent racial disparities based upon a structural logic that, once established, requires only indifferent policies preferences and largely self-interested individual and collective action.

# Structural Racism

- Structural inequality is like the federal tax code: the accretion of generations and product of countless decision makers that has resulted in a sprawling, byzantine complex of practices, rules, institutions, and interactions that were, in at least some cases, designed for the common good but have been exploited or manipulated by the well-heeled, special interests, and well-connected.
- Structural *racism* is the persistent neglect and callous *indifference* and lack of regard to the conditions of structural racial inequality.
- “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not hope, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.” – Elie Weisel





[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQ\\_8eOaiz8o&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQ_8eOaiz8o&t=1s)

# So, What Do We Do About It?

First, we must be clear on principles and goals.

Second, we must be outcome (not intent) oriented.

- Ineffective interventions are worse than nefarious ones.

Third, we should aim to target systems and structures rather than people.



# The Goal of Racial Justice

- What is the goal of racial justice?
- One possible goal of racial justice is to eliminate, or at least reduce, average group-based racial disparities.
- Alternative: the goal should be to accomplish this only through absolute improvements in well-being.
- My Take: Ultimate goal is that race no longer shapes life chances and where opportunity is broadly available to all.

# Ten Interventions

1. Embrace Fiscal Regionalism
2. Prevent Displacement and Place-Based Strategies
3. Support Housing Mobility
4. End Snob Zoning and Exclusionary Land Use Policies
5. Enforce Fair Housing Laws and Promote Residential Integration
6. Revitalize and Expand Public Education from PreK to Higher Ed and Beyond
7. End Mass Incarceration and the War on Drugs
8. Reform the Criminal Justice System
9. Limit Occupational Licensing, Non-Compete Clauses and other Employment Barriers
10. Subsidize Core Capacities & Critical Access Points

# Employment Barriers

- As a complement to anti-discrimination provisions, policymakers should consider proactive measures that limit, restrict or curb artificial barriers to opportunity.
- Foremost among those that merit greater scrutiny are unfair and unnecessary employment screening barriers, such as criminal back-ground inquiries, non-compete clauses, and credit checks, as well as occupational licensing requirements.
- In addition to expanding personal freedom to pursue opportunity, curbing or more carefully limiting these devices may remove pretexts for identity-based discrimination.

# Employment Barriers

- Any employment qualification, especially those for entry level positions, should be scrutinized and validated or thrown out.
  - Diplomas too often stand-in for the presence of actual skills and relevant experience, and arbitrary requirements such as "X number of years of experience" should correlate to minimally required performance and not used to filter out weaker candidates.
- Job cards for public or government positions should be systematically and periodically reviewed to ensure that job qualifications and requirements are strictly necessary rather than lazy winnowing tools. Instead, critical job skills can be assessed through tests, interviews, work samples, and reference checks rather than through generic certifications, specific credentials, or arbitrary years of experience.

# Access to Credit!

- Too many individuals, regardless of talent, industriousness or ambition, are unable to start new businesses and pursue economic opportunity because of lack of access to fair credit.
- The National Urban League co-produced a report that surveyed Black entrepreneurs, and found that they were often shut out of traditional financing opportunities and starved of venture capital.
- Many businesses take years to turn a profit, and credit is needed to build and sustain these businesses before they become profitable. Microloans have a proven track record globally, and expanding such programs (with loans up to \$50,000 or \$100,000) for Black and Latino borrowers could provide a significant boost to long-term wealth creation and reducing the racial wealth gap.

# Access to Credit!

- This is why banks in places like St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Iowa tried microlending programs for Black borrowers. Such loans allow entrepreneurs and small business owners to invest in equipment, supplies, and facilities. In addition, lower-cost loans could help disadvantaged communities or members of disadvantaged groups, especially if they have been locked out of traditional credit markets.
- The problem is that many of these programs have been shut down by legislatures or successfully challenged in court in recent years. They will need to be redesigned to survive legal challenge.

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