Uprooting Inequity LLC



Contemporary Structural Racism

Description:

- What is structural racism?
- How does structural racism impact access to opportunity?

First, I introduce the concept of structural racism using several metaphors, demonstrate how it is rooted in the persistent legacies of historical discrimination, and explain how it differs from individual bias. Then, I illustrate how contemporary structural results in racial disparities in access to opportunity: a. access to quality education, b. opportunity to earn employment income, and c. opportunity to build home equity. If enough time is allotted, I will also identify the role of individual "opportunity hoarding" in reproducing and exacerbating structural racism.

A. Five qualifiers:

- 1. I distinguish between *empirical* vs. *policy* questions about race.
 - **Empirical issues** (e.g. "Does systemic racism exist?") have a right-or-wrong answer that can be discovered through scientific study (data/evidence), and thus are not subject to debate.
 - **Policy issues** (e.g. "What should the government do about racism?") are debatable questions without a right-or-wrong answer, and thus should be debated.
- 2. **Structural inequities are influential, but not determinant.** Privilege does not solely determine outcome; rather, it amplifies the impact of individual merit on outcomes (while the presence of privilege mutes it).
- 3. Structural racism is only one of several intersecting inequities
- 4. Structural racism harms us all
- 5. None of us is to blame for the past, but we are collectively responsible for the future

B. What is structural racism?

- 1. Structural racism refers to policies and practices that are rooted in the persistent legacies of historical discrimination, that limit access to opportunity for (low-income) African Americans and shape and constrain their individual choices and behavior, and result in systemic disparities in outcomes, whether intentional or not.
 - The historical racial wealth gap continues to impact racial disparities today because generational wealth provides access to opportunities and a financial "head start" on life. Historical residential segregation continues to impact racial disparities today because it concentrates poverty and limits access to opportunity (and thus also upward mobility).
 - Historical discrimination and segregation are perpetuated in facially "race-neutral" ("colorblind") forms, with wealth and geography acting as proxies for race.
 - Even if all interpersonal racial bias ended, structural racism would continue almost unabated, and racial economic disparities would continue to grow.

- Since historical discrimination was usually place-based, so too is contemporary structural racism.
- Individuals with privilege (of all races) reinforce structural racism to maximize self-interests within the constraints of institutions, rather than because we are "bad" or "racist."
- 2. Difference between structural racism and interpersonal racism:
 - Interpersonal racism ("people"): bias, prejudice, stereotypes, and racial status beliefs about a group's competence and hierarchical status
 - Structural racism ("place"): place-based inequalities in access to institutions and opportunities that are rooted in historical racial discrimination against a racial group ("people") in a vicious cycle.
- 3. Difference between structural *racism* and structural *poverty*:
 - Structural poverty ("place"): place-based inequalities in access to institutions and opportunities.
 - Structural racism ("place"): place-based inequalities in access to institutions and opportunities that are rooted in historical racial discrimination against a racial group ("people") in a vicious cycle.

C. How does structural racism impact access to quality education?

- **1. Racial bias** impacts racial bias in grading, discipline, and selection for gifted programs. White families avoid schools with a significant share of Black students.
- **2. Generational wealth disparities** impact access to tutoring, intervention for learning disabilities, enrichment activities, SAT prep, and SAT scores.
- **3.** Racial segregation impacts K-12 school funding, and thus school quality and access to 8th grade Algebra and AP/IB classes.

D. How does structural racism impact opportunity to earn employment income?

- 1. **Racial bias** impacts employment hiring, evaluations, and promotions.
- 2. **Generational wealth disparities** impact the ability to cushion financial shocks, afford internships, get job/internship contacts, and finance new businesses and career changes.
- 3. Racial segregation impacts K-12 education quality and proximity to employment (spatial mismatch)

- 1. Racial bias impacts mortgage discrimination, higher mortgage interest, 'racial steering', disparate treatment (more stringent financial qualifications required), whites avoiding integrated neighborhoods, lower home appreciation.
- **2. Generational wealth disparities** impact the availability of financial assistance and inheritance from family, and exposure to financial literacy.
- **3.** Racial segregation impacts access to conventional (vs. predatory/subprime) mortgages, housing appreciation, and property taxes.