HOMELESSNESS, RACISM, and SOCIAL JUSTICE

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HOMELESSNESS IS NOT JUST ABOUT...

Housing
Healthcare
Services
HOMELESSNESS IS ALSO ABOUT...

- Injustice
- Oppression
- Racism
It is an issue of Justice, Equality, and What is Right
WHERE I GREW UP.
WHERE I GREW UP.

STATE JOURNAL

SCHOOL SEGREGATION BANNED

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local government. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society... We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.
WHERE I GREW UP.
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WHERE I GREW UP.
PROGRESS? MOVING BACKWARDS?
The Facts about Homelessness and Race
POVERTY
“We should reintegrate discussions of homelessness with those of persistent poverty. And in these discussions, the issue of race is unavoidable.”
SHELTER
USAGE
ACCORDING TO HUD

60% of the sheltered homeless population are minorities. Almost 40% are African American.

Minorities overall are about 1.5 times more likely to be in the sheltered homeless population than in the total U.S. population, and African Americans are 3 times more likely.

(HUD, 2012)
One study found that:

Blacks were **16x** more likely than whites to live in shelters.

AND

Black children under 5 were **29x** more likely than white children to end up in shelters.

(Culhane & Metraux, 1999)
Total US Population

- White, non-Hispanic: 64%
- Hispanic: 10.5%
- African American: 12.5%
- Other, one race: 10.5%
- Several races: 2.7%

Shelter Population

- White, non-Hispanic: 40%
- Hispanic: 9%
- African American: 38%
- Other, one race: 5.5%
- Several races: 7.9%

(HUD, 2012)
“Since the 1980s, blacks have been overrepresented in the homeless population with respect to their share of the national populations and the poverty population.”

(Carter, 2011)
### Among African Americans...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Population</th>
<th>Poverty Population</th>
<th>Homeless Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>41% total 56% for families</td>
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(Carter, 2011)
“The Latino Paradox”
RESIDENTIAL DISCRIMINATION
“Listen here people, 
Listen to me. 
Don’t try to find a 
home in 
Washington DC 
cause it’s a 
bourgeois town.”

Leadbelly

“Bourgeois Blues”
“Homelessness can be seen as a symptom of structural racism.”

(Powell, 2003)
Homelessness is tied to disparities in income and wealth, availability of housing and jobs, education level, and healthcare access

(Powell, 2003)
Structural Causes

• Poverty
• Increased demand for and decreased supply of affordable housing
• Housing discrimination & residential segregation
• Discrimination in employment and housing
• Lack of access to behavioral health care
• Racial bias in criminal justice
• White privilege

(Carter, 2011; Power, 2006)
While people of color make up 30% of the US population, they account for 60% of those imprisoned.

(Center for American Progress, 2012)
1 in 3 black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetimes.

(Center for American Progress, 2012)
The number of women incarcerated has increased by 800% since 1980, and women of color are 3 times more likely than white women to be incarcerated. (Center for American Progress, 2012)
“We avoid talking about caste in our society because we are ashamed of our racial history.”
A Historical Perspective
Runaway slaves and free blacks
Almshouses
Civil war work camps
The failure of reconstruction
Tramps and cowboys
1927 Mississippi River flood
A “permanent class of migrant workers”
Criminalization
The great migration
Urban renewal

(Johnson, 2011; Wilkerson, 2010)
For 100 years, between 1870 and 1970, African Americans moved to the cities of the North and West. Whites fled.
“Social and racial inequities are geographically inscribed.”

(Powell, 2003)
Racism in Our Communities

• How do racism and homelessness intersect in your community?

• What is your organization doing to fight it?
Racism in Our Programs

• Is there racism in our programs?
• What does it look like?
• How can we change it?
“Invisibility is not an accident, but a determined refusal not to see.

Dispelling invisibility...is not so much a matter of shedding light as it is one of choosing, deliberately, to look.”

(Hopper, 1996)
What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

A Dream Deferred
by Langston Hughes
We must work to bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice.
References


