Divided by

Design

FINDINGS FROM THE AMERICAN SOUTH

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ABOUT
E Pluribus Unum

E Pluribus Unum is an initiative created to fulfill America's promise of justice and opportunity for all by breaking down the barriers that divide us by race and class. In the initiative's first year, the E Pluribus Unum team traveled extensively across the American South to uncover and confront the challenges we face, to learn from people about what separates us and what can bring us together, and to find bold and effective solutions to tackle the modern legacy of Jim Crow so that an inclusive South may be born. Incubated by Emerson Collective and led by former New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, E Pluribus Unum seeks to create and amplify creative solutions for finding common ground. We do so by cultivating courageous leadership, changing narratives that perpetuate systemic and interpersonal racism, and championing transformative policy change, ultimately proving the American motto that 'out of many, one' — and we are better for it.

INTRODUCTION   *By Mitch Landrieu*

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson poetically wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal…" Yet, that equality has never been reality. Born in contradiction, the United States has been divided from its earliest days by anger, hate and fear.

We have yet to fully reckon with the insidious realities of race in our country. Our riches are rooted in the misery of enslaved people, who first arrived in America from Africa 400 years ago. Their descendants, though technically free, were treated as second-class citizens, subjected to Jim Crow laws and widespread de facto segregation. Today the inequities continue in neighborhoods, schools, voting precincts, public transit, banks, and at every step of the criminal justice system. You see, we were, and remain, divided by design.

Ignoring our reality makes us weaker. As President George W. Bush said at the dedication ceremony for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, "A great nation does not hide its history. It faces its flaws and corrects them."

If we do not reckon soon with our country's past, we face a future of even greater fissures and failures. The future belongs to open, inviting and inclusive communities. The fact is that America's racial profile is changing, and we are becoming more racially diverse than at any point in our history. This is especially true in the South. Given our past, I believe that we, as Southerners, have a special obligation to do more.

I launched E Pluribus Unum last year to help find common ground and to seek new solutions.

We can only fulfill America's promise of justice and opportunity for all if we break down the barriers that divide us by race and class. We have to redesign the systems that hold us back and keep us apart.

E Pluribus Unum believes that we are better together than apart. We know that cities and towns will only thrive if they find a way to unite around a common purpose, with shared responsibility and opportunity.

This report is the culmination of our team's travels to 28 Southern communities over the past year. At each stop, we interviewed people from all walks of life. Through these conversations, we identified key challenges and learned about what separates us and what unites us. We saw how deft local leaders are able to help residents reach common ground. We met countless angels among us who are doing the hard work of lifting other people up and moving them forward. Though we found that tremendous, unaddressed challenges remain in most Southern communities, a sense of strength and resolve shines through.

While our journey was sobering, it reaffirmed my belief that our diversity is our greatest strength. Regardless of our differences, we must all come to the table of democracy as equals. We must act as one nation, not two; indivisible with liberty and justice for all, not some. Through this work, we will ultimately prove our American motto, "E pluribus unum" — "out of many, one" — and we are better for it.

WHAT DOES "E PLURIBUS UNUM" MEAN?

"E pluribus unum" is Latin, meaning "out of many, one."

A long-held motto for the United States, the phrase was first included in a sketch for a national seal in 1776. Since 1782, it's been included in the official Great Seal of the United States, which is affixed on formal State Department documents. It is most often depicted alongside the bald eagle, as it was in Charles Thomson's 1782 seal.

The motto describes the concept of forming a new nation through the union of the 13 original colonies.[1] Some scholars believe that the nation's founders likely saw the motto on the title page of a reader's digest called "Gentlemen's Magazine", published in London.[2]

In 1786, the U.S. Mint produced the first coins marked with "E pluribus unum." Today, the motto can be found on U.S. currency, on official documents, and across federal buildings.

In a broader context, "E pluribus unum" connotes the many cultures of the melting pot of America coming together to form one union.

Portrait artist Du Simitiere's design for Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson suggested shield, Eye of Providence in radiant triangle, and motto, E Pluribus Unum, all used in final design. Drawn from original in Thomas Jefferson papers.

June 20—Secretary of Congress Charles Thomson united earlier suggestions, gave them fresh and novel arrangement, pleasing in its simplicity and lack of clutter. His design was first to foreshadow one Congress adopted.

First Great Seal, possibly engraved by Robert Scot of Philadelphia in 1782. Brass die of seal was in use almost 60 years.

OUR RESEARCH PROCESS

Beginning in September 2018, the E Pluribus Unum team hit the road to learn how residents of the American South experience issues of race and class in their communities. We visited places where neighborhoods are still highly segregated, and where leaders—officeholders, religious groups, and artists—are confronting challenges and advancing solutions to address division and disparity.

We met with people where they live, by traveling to 28 communities across 13 Southern states over the course of a year. We chose locations in each state for diversity of demographics, size, industry, and geography.

Our qualitative interviews capture the lived experiences of individuals in regards to race, economic opportunity, equity, and community violence.

To elicit candid responses and unique insights, our interview instruments used purposefully broad questions. We asked: What's working? What's not? Why? What solutions can bring people together? Where can we find common ground?

A team of researchers, comprised of social workers and public policy professionals conducted individual interviews sourced through partner organizations, such as the National Urban League, PolicyLink, and community organizations on the ground. Small group conversations, roundtable discussions and community listening sessions used the same interview instruments but in a facilitated setting, ranging from a dozen to more than 50 people from a cross-section of a community. Small group conversations focused more narrowly on specific sectors or demographics, such as coal miners and educators in West Virginia, youth and interfaith leaders in Kentucky, and community farmers in Tennessee. GBAO Strategies of Washington, D.C., designed and facilitated focus groups of the general population, broken down by race, gender, age, and education level.

At the end of the data collection process, a research team in partnership with Harvard University's Institute of Politics made up of both undergraduate and graduate students broke down the data into units, codes, and themes through the use of qualitative data analysis software. We conducted subsequent rounds of coding for further refinement, and cross-checked them to ensure reliability and validity of findings. To categorize the top themes identified by participants, we performed a thematic analysis and a frequency analysis.

Secondary data was examined from a wide variety of sources, including governmental data and reports, research journals, news magazines, organizational surveys, and reports and studies from nonprofit organizations. Our mixed-method research design employed an analytic strategy, using both qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate results and to help develop 15 insights representative of the themes identified in the data.

We take seriously our responsibility to listen with care and to conduct a robust and ongoing analysis of what we learned about communities, race, equity, economic opportunity, and community violence. After our year-long journey, we ended up with a significant amount of data that provides insight into how these issues shape people's lives and how we might move forward. It became clear that the work of the E Pluribus Unum team has become one of the most extensive and significant qualitative-research projects on race in the South to date.

The capstone of this research is a 1,800-person survey across the 13 Southern states we visited.
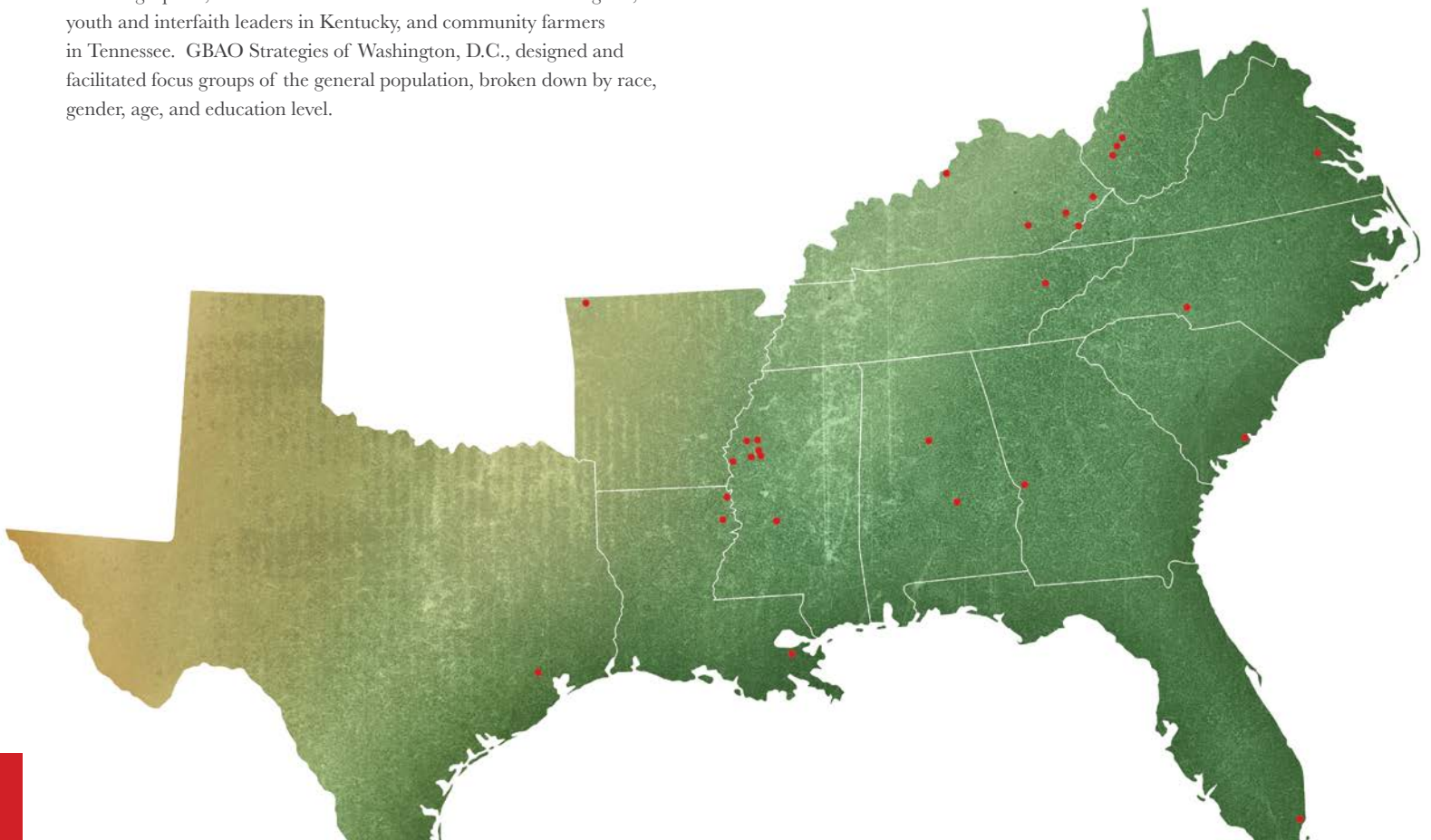
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across our travels in the South, we saw how race remains this nation's most traumatic issue. We also saw how one's socioeconomic status can be a major barrier to upward mobility. We heard and saw how the racial equity gap sustains division, keeping us apart and preventing us from moving forward together. From disparate incarceration rates to poor health and educational outcomes, the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow are visible everywhere you look—if you really look.

Though these effects are seen across the nation, people of color in the South, in particular, face the greatest disadvantage. Stark inequities in neighborhoods, schools, and job opportunities (often the result of purposeful decisions made decades or centuries ago) continue to play out every day in our communities, amplifying and extending those disadvantages for generations. The people interviewed by the E Pluribus Unum team generally agree on the barriers to economic opportunity in their communities. Nationally, the persistent wealth gap between white residents and black residents deeply affects the economy writ large, according to new analyses from management consulting firm McKinsey & Company.[3]

In nearly every town and city we visited, there was a strong sense of community, optimism, and shared values. The American South is truly rich and unique, with a diversity of history, culture, food, music, and geography. Southern neighbors feel a deep sense of place, whether they live in large cities like Charlotte and Louisville or in small towns that dot the Mississippi Delta and Central Appalachia. Witnessing the strong social networks at every stop, our world-famous Southern hospitality was evident. Two-thirds of the people we spoke with said activities and entertainment bring people together across race and class lines. They told us about the importance of sporting events, particularly football games, and festivals for the performing arts, food, music, culture, and heritage. Faith was also mentioned repeatedly as a factor that unites people and is at the center of community life, particularly in smaller communities. Communities often unite following tragedies, such as the death of a beloved community member or a catastrophic disaster like a fire or tornado.

There are also signs that black Americans are seeking out the South as a home. Recent census data suggests black Americans are returning to the South, with Atlanta, Charlotte, Orlando, and Dallas seeing big gains since 2010.[4]

Political leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone on discussions of race, economic opportunity and equity, because of their ability to change inequitable or discriminatory policies and to use the bully pulpit of political leadership to move peoples' attitudes. In the places where local leaders prioritize diversity and inclusion, people interviewed found more hope for the future. Media also plays a powerful role, in either challenging racism and cultural stereotypes or setting a permissive tone that allows these dominant narratives to continue unabated. To disrupt the narratives that maintain divisions, there is a real need to educate people on our country's true history, to let communities tell their own stories, and to facilitate sustainable dialogue around these issues.

When asked about what needs to change to ensure a better future for their communities, focus group participants discussed prioritizing economic opportunity and improving the education system. In individual interviews, many talked about a desire to directly address bias and racism, through honest conversation and engagement that allows the community to be a part of change. Participants also discussed the need for equitable educational strategies, courageous political leadership, housing affordability and stability, and challenges to institutions that perpetuate inequity and inequality.

We introduced the topic of reparations to about half of the focus group participants because of the national discussion around this concept. Within groups, reparations were seen as divisive (often along racial lines) though some people emphasized the importance of focusing on how we move forward from the past, because "we all want love, we all want success." Typical of the defensive reaction to reparations was the response of one white participant, who said, "My last name is Polish. I'm pretty sure we never had any slaves. I don't owe you anything. You can't hold someone today accountable for something that happened 150 years ago. If you try to do that, you're going to have problems."

Overall, it was more common for white respondents to resist the very idea of reparations. Black respondents were more likely to ask for a public discussion on the lasting impacts of the past that led to the lingering racial wounds that still need to heal, and a white population that still needs to be educated about America's racial history. There was consensus among all respondents that reparations should not be direct financial payments made to individuals. Instead, they should be made in the form of investments that can lift up the entire black community, like investments in schools, job training, affordable housing, public transportation, or small-business loans.

RACE

Race remains the issue that no one wants to address, even though it permeates almost every aspect of society – especially in the South. In our pursuit of community opinion, we found remarkable consistency across the South about the contemporary impacts of race. When individual interview and small group participants were asked about the community impacts of race and racism, more than one-quarter (28.7 percent) focused on personal experiences with acts of racism, 18.3 percent on segregation, 9.8 percent on the historical impact of racism in their communities, 7.7 percent on privilege, and 7.4 percent on the lack of dialogue about racism in their communities. Here's what else we heard:

+ Interviewees regularly experience racism at both the individual and systemic levels in their communities. This was a dominant theme among people interviewed.

+ Segregation has a lasting presence and emerged as a common denominator across all of the communities we visited.

+ Black and white respondents have almost diametrical views on the historical and present-day impacts of racism on society. A number of black respondents said that racism's historical impact is continually disregarded by the media and by white people, and that they still constantly battle stereotypes in the workplace and in social interactions, citing personal, matter-of-fact experiences as evidence of the enduring impacts of racism. The majority of our white respondents did not claim any responsibility for racist systems; many blamed black residents for the challenges facing their community.

+ Often the racism that communities of color experience is more implicit than explicit, causing inconspicuous damage over a long period of time. While attitudes of many white people may not be overtly racist, the institutional biases built into the majority-white social and professional structures have damaging results. Interviewees cited racial discrimination during first impressions when applying for jobs, negative interactions with police officers, and broad disparities in how communities treat drug use between races and how they associate different races with criminality.

+ White respondents were often pessimistic about the path forward on race. Some expressed a zero-sum mentality. To them, as black Americans have made inroads politically and socially, this comes at the expense of white people. When discussing the nation's racial history, many white respondents flatly rejected the idea that we should spend any more time or effort discussing it.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Economic opportunity in the American South varies widely, often between urban and rural areas. Over the past 50 years, a number of large Southern cities have transitioned to non-agricultural based commercial and industrial business sectors, spurring more diverse economies and tremendous economic growth. But many rural communities have not had the opportunities or resources to make this critical pivot.

With each community we visited, we witnessed firsthand what makes their economy unique. In our focus groups, we saw more unity than division on the topic of economic opportunity. Nearly one-third of interviewees (31.5 percent) cited race as a barrier to economic opportunity. Other barriers included education (32.8 percent) and the "who-you-know" economy or barriers due to a lack of networks (27.1 percent). Here is what else we saw and heard:

+ White and black Southerners share the same goals of having access to opportunity and wanting to work hard. We heard how Southerners, regardless of race or class, want a better future for themselves and their families. Southerners are willing to work two, three, or even four jobs to achieve this, often at the cost of spending time with and caring for family and neighbors.

+ Residents across many Southern communities face the same headwinds of a "who-you-know" economy that is network-based and only benefits the few. That led to feelings of being in an economic system that is rigged against them and won't allow someone to get ahead no matter how hard they work. This is particularly pronounced for black Americans, who cited significant economic and opportunity gaps.

+ In some rural areas, participants had a pessimistic outlook about their community's economic future. We heard from parents who do not want their children to continue to live in these communities because there are no clear opportunities for success, and from residents who saw sluggish economies as an intractable problem that can't be changed in meaningful or broad-based ways.

+ Among young people, we heard about the consequences of low wages. They voiced the belief that it is acceptable to work more than one job if you're doing it to get ahead, but not if you have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Those who said they were working multiple jobs were proud of the work ethic it demonstrated, but they also lamented how their devotion to work cost them precious time with their families and their communities and made it difficult to make a difference in the lives of others.

EQUITY

To have an honest conversation about race and the path forward, we believe there must be a common understanding of the concept of equity. For our purposes during this research, we defined equity for each participant as "the fair opportunity for everyone to attain their full potential regardless of demographic, social, economic or geographic status." When asked about equity in their communities, 17.3 percent of interviewees focused on racial inequity, 15.8 percent on socioeconomic inequity, and 15.8 percent on an overall lack of equity. Here's what else we heard:

+ Interview and focus group participants often described persistent racial and socioeconomic inequities when asked about their experience broadly with equity. Some described lingering educational inequities between white and black residents in their communities while others focused on the generational inequities of a system designed to keep black people disenfranchised.

+ Often, respondents equated equity with home ownership and having a stake in something. Our definition of equity helped participants to better understand the concept, but most were skeptical of their community's ability to achieve equity in practice.

+ In cities that led equity initiatives from their City Halls, there was a greater baseline of support and understanding for the concept — an important finding. In New Orleans and Louisville, where the City had led public discussions about "leveling the playing field" through racial equity plans for city government and public schools, people had a clearer understanding of the term equity without needing as much of an explanation or definition. That suggests that it's valuable for officials to lead these sorts of conversations.
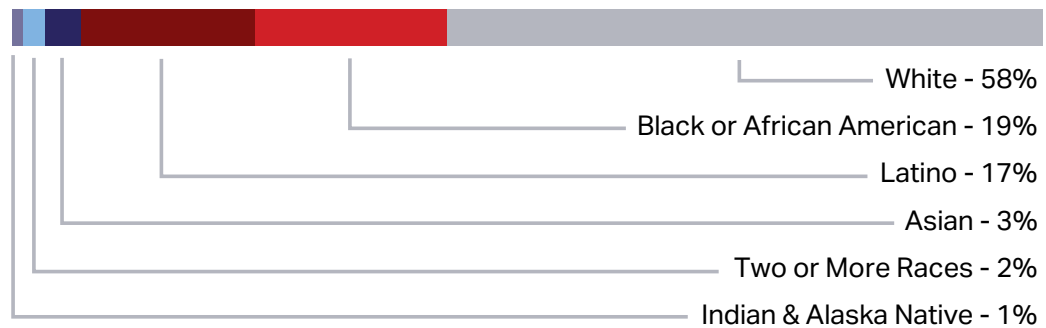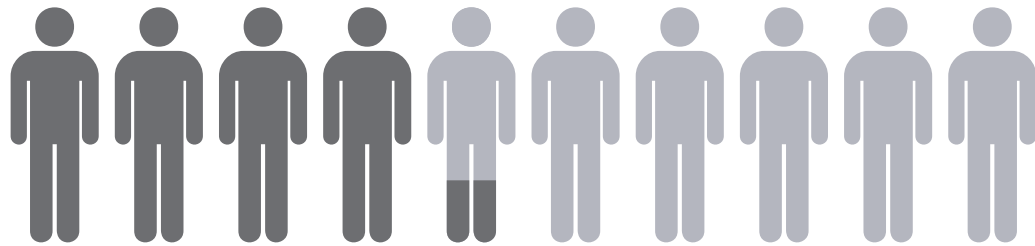
COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

Community violence is defined as "interpersonal violence perpetrated by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim but can lead to a lingering and devastating traumatic impact." In the American South, race and violence are oftentimes impossible to untangle. This history of mass racial violence is well-documented. It stretches back to the arrival of Europeans on the shores of this nation and their treatment of Native peoples, continued through enslavement of black people, Jim Crow era lynchings, disenfranchisement, and segregation. It continues today through street violence, police brutality, and the media's portrayal of black men and youth.

When asked about community violence, nearly one-fifth (18.3 percent) of interviewees described it as a relevant issue where they lived; 15.4 percent focused on systemic violence perpetrated against low-income communities and communities of color; 13.1 percent focused on law enforcement effectiveness and community relationships; and 8.3 percent on the impact of race as it pertains to violence. This is what else we heard:

+ Collectively across the South, both black and white respondents believed that violent crime is more frequent in black neighborhoods but exists everywhere. Parents, regardless of race, fear for their children's safety.

+ When discussing disparities in the criminal justice system, most groups in most cities conceded that young black men face harsher penalties and more sensational media coverage than white defendants, even when charged with the same crimes.

+ There is an overriding fear of law enforcement that's rooted in a deeply painful history made worse by high profile police misconduct and shootings. That weakens community-police relations and serves as a barrier to building trust.

+ Race-based stereotypes create prevalent, disproportionate perceptions of violence, crime and drugs.

More than 4 in 10 Southerners are People of Color

White - 58%
Black or African American - 19%
Latino - 17%
Asian - 3%
Two or More Races - 2%
Indian & Alaska Native - 1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau
(Population); 2015 ERS County
Typology Codes. USDA Economic
Research Service using data from
Bureau of Economic Analysis and U.S.
Census Bureau (Metro/Nonmetro).

Rising Generations in the South are more Racially and Ethnically Diverse

Increase in residents of color leading to an increasingly diverse South
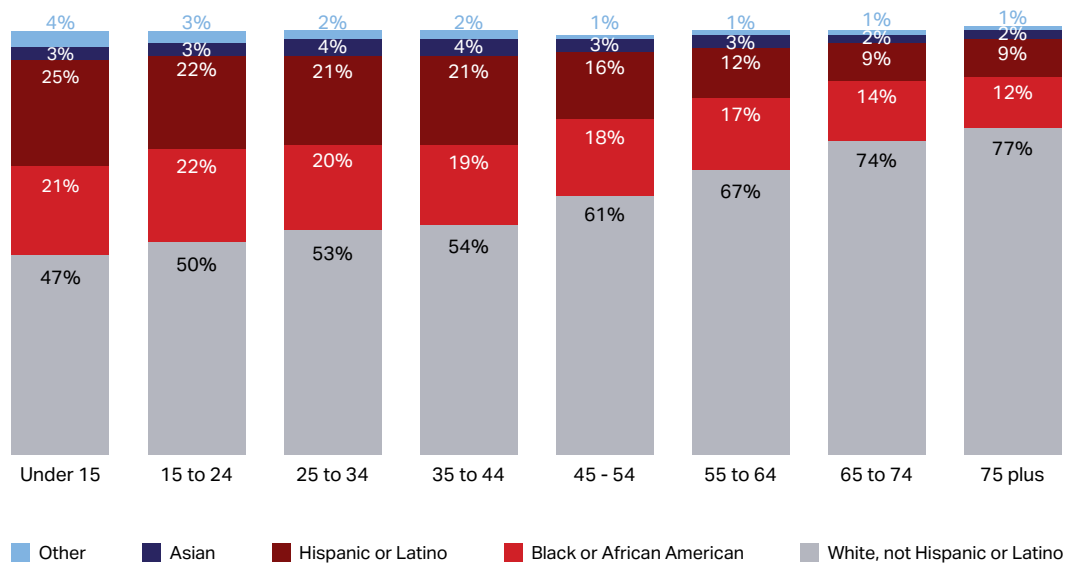
Source: MDC calculation of 2016 data
using Economic Modeling Specialists
International (Q1.2017)

	Under 15	15 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 - 54	55 to 64	65 to 74	75 plus
Other	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Asian	3%	3%	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%
Hispanic or Latino	25%	22%	21%	21%	16%	12%	9%	9%
Black or African American	21%	22%	20%	19%	18%	17%	14%	12%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	47%	50%	53%	54%	61%	67%	74%	77%

Other Asian Hispanic or Latino Black or African American White, not Hispanic or Latino

Industries Employing Southerners Have Become More Diverse

Jobs in industries 1967, 2016

South, 1967

- Mining and construction
- Manufacturing
- Trade, transportation, and utilities
- Finance, insurance, and real estate
- Services
- Total Government

South, 2016

- Mining and construction
- Manufacturing
- Trade, transportation, and utilities
- Financial activities
- Other Services
- Government
- Information
- Professional and business services
- Education and health services, leisure and hospitality

Importing Talent Has Boosted the South's Education Profile

Share of residents with a bachelor's or advanced degrees has increased in recent years

- Statewide total
- Born in state of residence
- Born outside state of residence
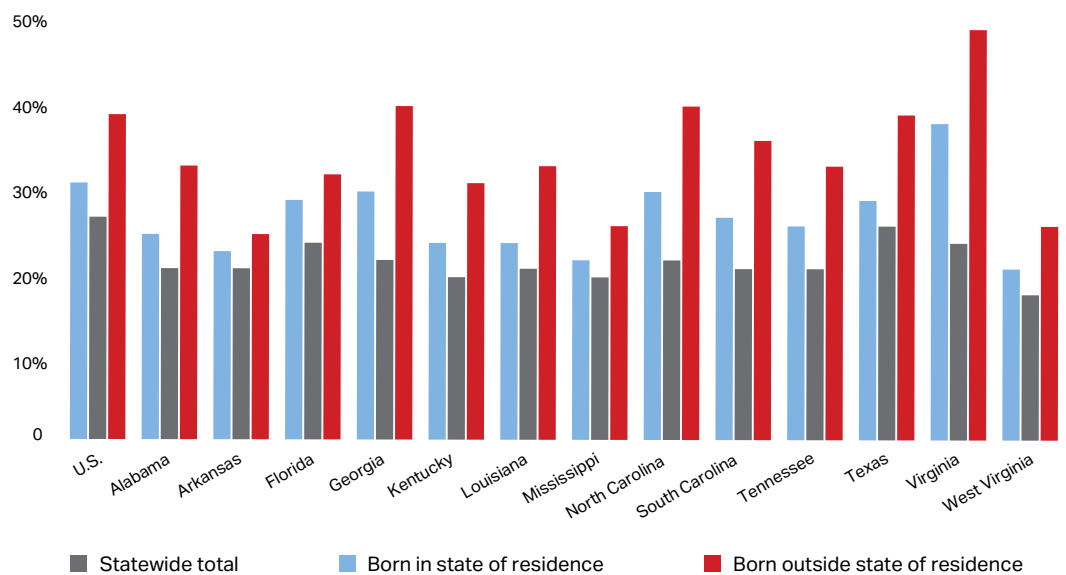
Southern States Lead Nation in Share of Adults 25 to 64 Years Without Education Beyond High School

PERCENT OF HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE OR LESS, POPULATION 25-64 YEARS

- 26% - 30%
- 31% - 35%
- 36% - 40%
- 41% - 45%
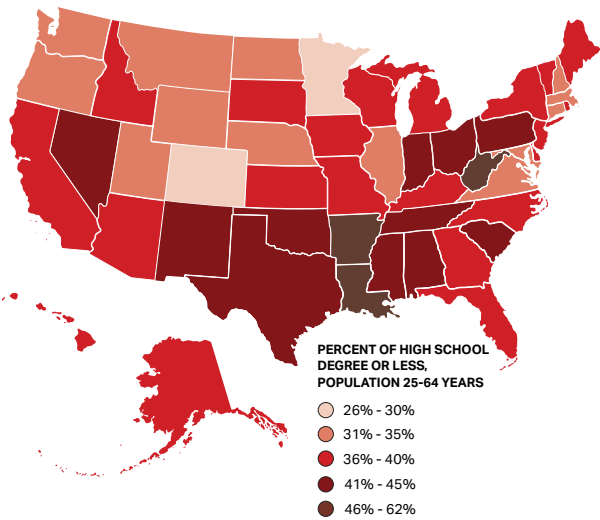- 46% - 62%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau/American Fact Finder. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS FOR THE POPULATION 25 TO 64 YEARS. 2012-2016 American Community Survey

Southern States Lead in the Share of Youth 16 to 24 Years Not Attending School or Working

PERCENT OF YOUTH NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AND NOT WORKING, POPULATION 16-24

- 8%
- 9% - 11%
- 12% - 13%
- 14% - 17%
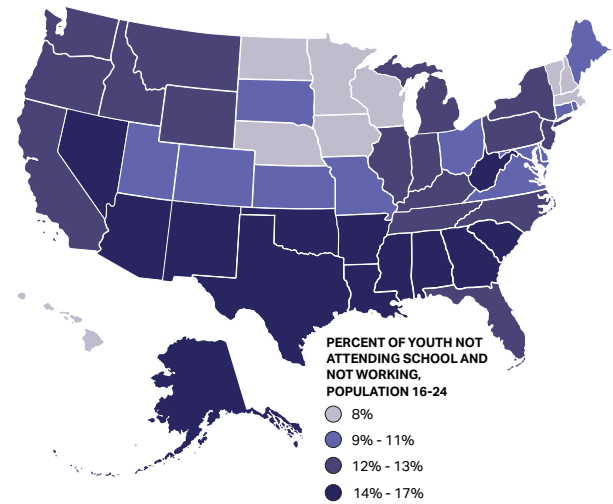
Source: National KIDS COUNT

Wages of Southern States Still Trail the Rest of the Nation

Southern States v. Non-Southern States
2016 Median Annual Wage
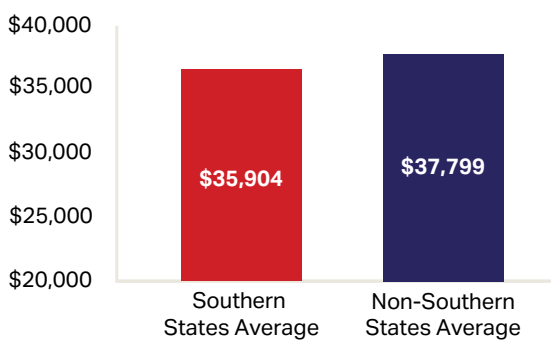
Source: NSC analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics

Southern States with More Skilled Workers Have Higher Population Growth

Percent of Population Change 1990-2007

- Less Than 5%
- 6% - 20%
- 21% - 35%
- 36% - 50%
- 51% - 70%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau /American Fact Finder. Population Growth, Southern Region, 1990-2007

Share of Adults with Only a High School Education Differs by Race & Ethnicity

ASIAN

BLACK

LATINO

WHITE

% High School Degree or Less by Race & Ethnicity

- Less than 35%
- 36% - 45%
- 46% - 60%
- 61% - 75%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau/American Fact Finder. Sex by Education Attainment for the Population 25 Years and Over. 2012-2016 American Community Survey
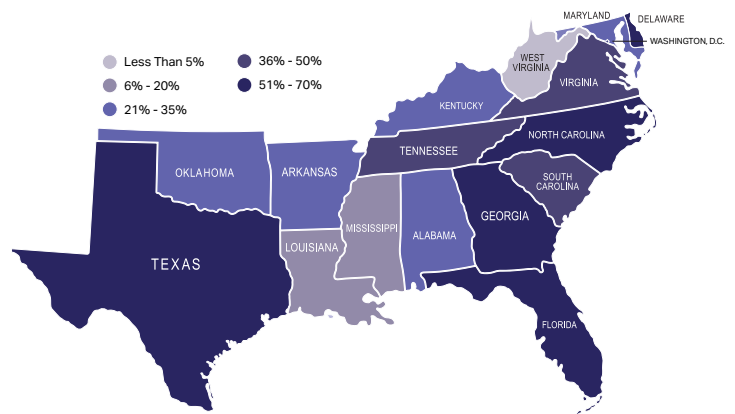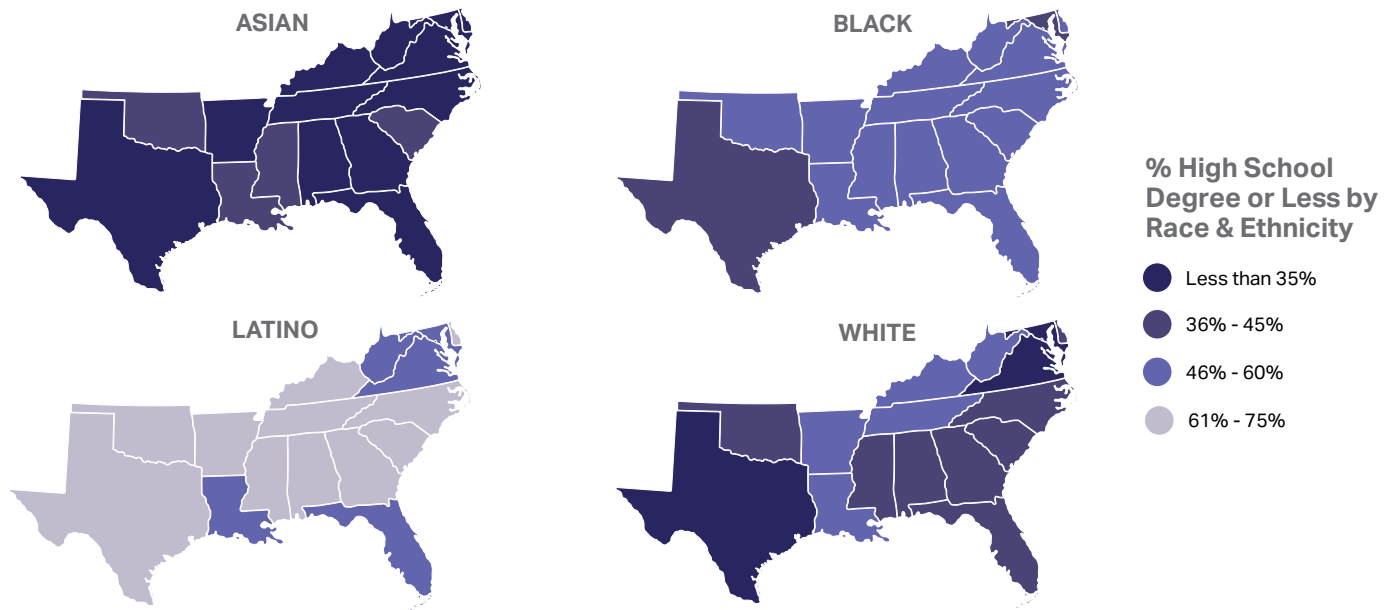
Most Persistently Poor Counties are in the South

Counties with Persistent Poverty

Persistent Poverty Counties
- Nonmetro County
- Metro County
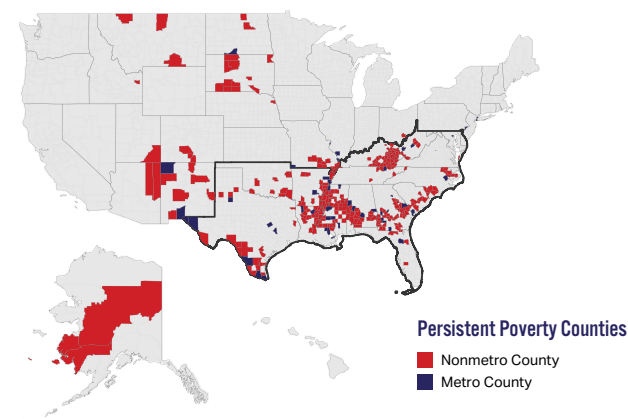
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Historical County Level Poverty Estimates Tool (1960-2010); U.S. Census Bureau/ American Fact Finder. Selected Economic Characteristics. 2012-2016 American Community Survey

Southern States Lead the Nation in Incarceration Rates

Incarceration rates per 100,000 people

State	Rate
Louisiana	1,143
Georgia	1,004
Alabama	987
Texas	890
Florida	868
Tennessee	848
Mississippi	843
Virginia	786
Kentucky	783
Arkansas	777
South Carolina	736
United States	693
North Carolina	654
West Virginia	646
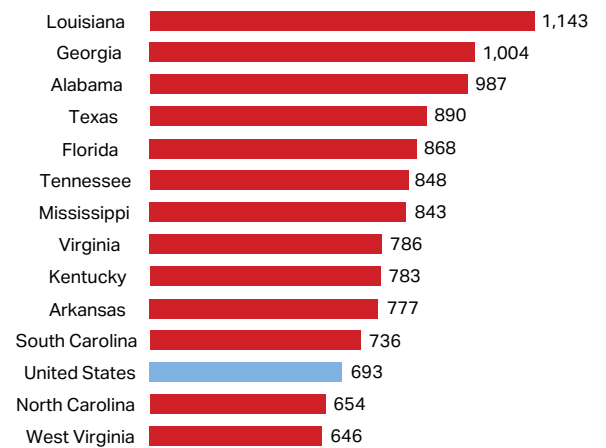
Source: Prison Policy Initiative. States of Incarceration: The Global Context. 2016.
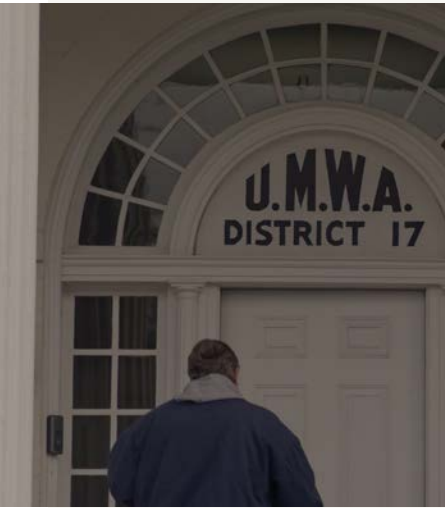
OUR FINDINGS
Key Insights

Despite differences in demography and geography, we heard similar themes relating to race and class across all of the communities we visited. We have organized those themes into 15 insights across three main chapters:

– **The Enduring Legacy of Racism**
– **Barriers to Opportunity**
– **Building a Shared Future**

01

Many white people lack an understanding of the scale of racism in America, including our racial history and how it still permeates today's institutions.

As a result, racism is often too narrowly defined as overt individual actions rather than systemic injustices. Residents pointed to the importance of creating a culture of responsibility—particularly among white people—in order to begin addressing social divisions. However, many white people do not feel like they bear the responsibility of addressing an issue they view as obsolete. Some white residents are aware of the inherent advantages that stem from their racial identity, while others fiercely reject the notion that they could be a part of the problem. Most white people we spoke to described racism as personal acts of malice, while most people of color spoke of the more harmful impacts that they face within biased systems.

We also conclude that segregation continues to exist at a widespread level and there is a lack of dialogue around racism in many communities. Too often, individual stories of "making it" are lifted up (e.g. President Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey) without sufficient attention paid to the structural barriers that people in marginalized groups must overcome to be successful. Furthermore,

conversations about race and inequity rarely turn into action or results, so people get stuck in the cyclical nature of the discussion without a clear path forward.

Based on our travels and existing bodies of research, it is clear that the perception of slavery's legacy differs significantly based on racial and partisan lines. According to a December 2018 survey by Winthrop University, more than half of black Southerners report that they have been discriminated against in the last year because of their race, while only 18 percent of white Southerners report such discrimination.[5]

Compounding this is the idea that most Americans say the legacy of slavery still affects black people today. In early 2019, Pew Research Center asked adults about the legacy of slavery and found that 63 percent believe that it still affects the position of black people in American society today, either a great deal or a fair amount. However, the findings revealed that the impact of slavery on black Americans' livelihood today is viewed quite differently by race. Of black respondents, 59 percent said that slavery has had a great deal of impact on their lives.[7] Of white respondents, only 26 percent shared this view.[8] Similarly, Latino and Asian American respondents only marginally agreed more than white respondents at 29 and 33 percent, respectively. When considering the question by political party, 43 percent of Democrats and those that lean Democratic said slavery has had a great deal of impact, compared to only 17 percent of Republicans and those that lean Republican.

"I can't think of a way that race has not impacted my experience. It's either greeted me at the front door, or greeted me on the way out."

**BLACK MALE, 38
JACKSON, MS**

"Maybe race has affected my life and I just wasn't aware of it, because minorities were not treated real good for years, and I may have benefited from that. I hope I didn't. But I suspect that there may have been a job or two over the years that I got that maybe someone else should have gotten simply because I am a Caucasian male."

**WHITE MALE, 58
CHARLESTON, WV**

02
Education and equality go hand in hand.

Southern citizens view education as a critical tool for upward mobility; it is well-documented that the education one receives and the ZIP code one is born in are strong indicators for later life outcomes. Underfunded public schools are themselves a system of oppression for students most frequent in low-income communities and communities of color. According to a study conducted by researchers from the Economic Policy Institute and Stanford University, poor black children are much more likely to attend high-poverty schools than white children. They found that 81.1 percent of poor black children attended high poverty schools in 2013, compared with just 53.5 percent of poor white children.[11]

The United States as a whole is experiencing a growing divide in educational investments and outcomes based on family income. There is a widening gap between the investments that high-

and low-income families make in their children. According to a study by The Hamilton Project, over the past four decades, high-income families have gone from spending slightly more than four times as much as low-income families to nearly seven times more. In a study of U.S. Census data, The Brookings Institute found that while the gap in high school completion is closing, black and Latino students are still less likely than their white counterparts to have a high school diploma.[13]

Entrenched patterns of segregation and the stark racial divide embodied by public schools cause a lack of collective willingness on the part of residents to contribute to the greater public good by funding education. Chronically failing public schools are viewed not only as a deterioration of investment in the common good, but as a tool for intentionally perpetuating patterns of disadvantage along racial lines.

Ultimately, the erosion of quality public education is a product of longstanding racial injustices, a cause of ongoing racial and economic inequality, and a force of division in communities.

"When you have schools that are either 98 percent Caucasian or 98 percent children of color, ultimately those schools don't end up getting the same level of resources and those students don't have the same level of opportunities."

**WHITE MALE, 36
CHARLOTTE, NC**

"Nobody's willing to pay taxes...It's, you know, 'I've got mine. Why, why should I give more to benefit everybody else?' I think it's holding the South back, that lack of emphasis on education."

**WHITE MALE, 52
MONTGOMERY, AL**

03
We continue to lead deeply segregated lives.

The legacy of segregation is palpable across the American South and has enormous implications for how people lead their daily lives. From redlining and housing policy to physical separations by highways or railroad tracks and transit policies, physical separation is a real-life consequence of decades-old decisionmaking. An overwhelming number of residents interviewed stated that they are segregated not only where they live, but also where they work. Residents also noted the clear and often abrupt divides between neighborhoods along racial lines, and the concentration of poverty in predominantly black neighborhoods.

According to the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, a typical white person in America lives in a neighborhood that is 75 percent white and only 8 percent black. But a typical black person in America lives in a neighborhood that is only 35 percent white and 45 percent black. When drilling down further, people of color are overrepresented in high-poverty census tracts. In the U.S., a low-income black person is more than three times more likely than a white person is to live in a neighborhood with a poverty rate of 40 percent or more, and a low-income Latino person is more than twice as likely to live in such a neighborhood.[16] These statistics show that racial residential segregation and racialized concentrated poverty persist today.

Residential segregation matters because where you live affects your access to education, employment, transportation, healthcare, and so many other aspects of daily life that are often taken for granted. In a report by The Century Foundation, researchers found that the separateness of black and white families has contributed to the enormous racial wealth gap and the unequal access to good public education.[17] Higher levels of education and income typically translate into higher levels of wealth and less exposure to concentrated poverty.[18] For black people, residential segregation by race imposes an additional penalty.[19] Black households headed by an individual with a bachelor's degree have just two-thirds of the wealth, on average, of white households headed by an individual who lacks a high school degree.[20] While median income for black households is 59 percent that of white households, black median household net worth is just 8 percent of white median household net worth.[21]

> "But because of the way this city is sort of segregated, most whites don't necessarily have to deal with black folk on a daily basis. And so, that in essence breeds this sense of racism because we don't deal with each other, but it's not always racism, sometimes it's just, I don't know you and I don't deal with you."
>
> **BLACK MALE, 43**
> **KNOXVILLE, TN**

> "When folks feel like they only belong in certain parts of town…it should be painful for an entire community if people don't feel the freedom of movement within their own communities."
>
> **WHITE FEMALE, 34**
> **CHARLESTON, WV**

04

The legacies of the Confederacy and Jim Crow are still widely felt by residents in the South, but the degree to which there is contemporary impact is not agreed upon.

Though many agree that the hate-filled history of the Confederacy and the Civil War in the South continues to be a visible source of tension, residents do not always see value in revisiting it. Many in Montgomery and Richmond, both former capitals of the Confederacy, cited their community history related to the Civil Rights Movement as a source of pride, while others said discussions focused too much on negativity.

We also saw time and again that Confederate symbols and monuments, and political rhetoric about the identity of a place, often prioritize and commemorate a one-sided history that disregards the lasting institutional effects of racism. The unwillingness of many (particularly white) people to confront a hate-filled history—including its close ties to heritage, and its lasting impact on modern institutions—has hindered the development

of more contemporary Southern identities associated with openness and reconciliation. Groundbreaking research from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has noted that much of this may stem from the fact that our schools are failing to teach the hard history of African enslavement. Only 8 percent of high school seniors surveyed can identify slavery as the central cause of the Civil War.[22] Two-thirds (68 percent) don't know that it took a constitutional amendment to formally end slavery.[23] Forty percent of teachers believe their state offers insufficient support for teaching about slavery.[24]

SPLC has also reported on the impact of Confederate statues and memorials that dot the country's landscape. Many Americans have different understandings of history, particularly the values and hopes of the Confederacy. The falsehoods behind the "Lost Cause" must be counteracted with factual narratives of history. While more than 100 monuments and other Confederate symbols have been removed in 22 states, since June 2015, most prominently in New Orleans, there are more than 1,700 symbols of the Confederacy in public spaces including school names, statues and monuments.[25] To this day, the Confederate flag maintains a publicly supported presence in at least five Southern states, and 11 states have 23 Confederate holidays or observances in their state codes — nine of which were paid holidays in 2018, according to SPLC.[26]

"To understand the South and Southern history, you have to understand the history of race, of slavery, of the Civil War, of reconstruction, of Jim Crow, of the Civil Rights Movement. It's still around us...You know, the past is not dead. It's not even the past."

**WHITE MALE, 52
MONTGOMERY, AL**

"I just think that people get angry about the Civil War. And there's no common communication or trying to get together to talk to each other about it... I know they wanna tear down monuments because people think that it's offensive to African Americans. But I don't think we need to tear them down and forget how far we've come with history."

**WHITE FEMALE, 53
RICHMOND, VA**

"I think a lot of the black people here are still angry over what happened. It didn't happen to them, the white people here didn't do it to them, but they're still angry about what happened to their ancestors. And they're...they dislike white people because of it a lot of times."

**WHITE FEMALE
MONTGOMERY, AL**

05

Political leadership and media have power and some are setting a permissive tone for racist behavior and reinforcing stereotypes.

While citizens of the American South acknowledge that racial divisions in their communities are not new, they shared that they have experienced a recent growth in the outward expression of racial animosity as a result of the national political climate. This viewpoint is in alignment with a 2017 Pew survey in which 60 percent of Americans say President Donald Trump's election has led to worse race relations in the U.S. Most of the increase in negative opinions has been among Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents.[27]

Another viewpoint shared was that the election of President Obama caused some white people to fear the loss of their position of power in society. Some respondents drew a direct line between the election of the nation's first black president and the election of a man who they characterize as emboldening and encouraging the racist behavior of those who feel threatened by perceived shifts in racial power dynamics.

The media was also cited as a major driving force for perpetuating stereotypes. The media tends to distort perceptions of black men. News and opinion media over-represent the proportion of black families receiving welfare by 18 percentage points.[28] That is, black families represent 60 percent of welfare recipients in news and opinion media but make up just 42 percent of welfare recipients, according to official government reports.[29] News and opinion media are also 1.32 times more likely to associate black family members with criminality compared to white family members.[30]

These false and negative representations lead to tangible consequences for people of color. Damaging perceptions of violence contribute to a desire to isolate, wall off, or "contain" the communities that are understood to be problematic — particularly black communities. So it's easy to see why politics and media were ultimately mentioned as things that divide communities by race and class and negatively impact state and local power dynamics.

"It has not surfaced in the past until Trump was elected. And I think his election has emboldened the racists—people with a racist attitude, economically, educationally otherwise—to become more pronounced, more aggressive."

**BLACK MALE, 78
RICHMOND, VA**

"I feel like the white community feels like this country...in the past, felt like this country was just theirs. And they began to be threatened when black people started coming up. Like, we've had a black president. That empowered us, and it seems like now white people are scared that, 'Oh, my God, black people are starting to come up now. You know, everything's black... Black people are taking over.'"

**BLACK MALE
MONTGOMERY, AL**

06

Communities of color, low-income individuals, and those living in the margins have seldom been in control of telling their own stories.

When white people and mainstream media control the overriding narrative, black people are disenfranchised. In both the interviews and focus groups, common narratives seemed to drive the perception of the "other." People's lives are impacted due to these perceptions socially, economically, educationally, collectively, and individually.

As an example, perceptions of black criminality were a recurring theme in our discussions. Dominant media narratives based on perceptions of marginalized groups are often inaccurate, one-sided and damaging. For example, Color of Change reports note that news and opinion media in the U.S. are almost 1.5 times more likely to represent a white family as an illustration of social stability than a black family.[31]

Many people we talked to expressed frustration that the challenges facing their communities continue to go unaddressed or unnoticed by those in positions of power, and even more so by liberal media outlets. A report by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation noted that "while creating more understanding than conservative commentary, traditional liberal narratives focusing on the role of race are not as successful in shifting opinion."[32]

"One of the biggest impacts of the real crime that exists in the city is that it has created some imaginary boundaries for people. Some of those people who are employees of the organizations or entities who control the systems in the state, they have some legitimate fears. But they also have some imagined fears, based on the perception of crime."

**BLACK MALE, 38
JACKSON, MS**

"The vision of particularly the white population that allows them to feel good about themselves and sleep at night is in part creating this myth around black criminality. And that has been a myth that has been built since the Civil War, right?"

**WHITE MALE, 41
JACKSON, MS**

"If young black and poor children don't see anything about themselves on television and video games except as aggressor or violent criminals, what does do to them internally?"

**BLACK FEMALE, 67
JACKSON, MS**

"We want safe places. We want healthy spaces. We want the same things. And so, I think so often that stereotype that has been perpetuated, has done a disservice to African Americans and to people of color, and it is our responsibility saying, how do we tell that story? How do we tell that narrative and not depend On someone else to tell that story and that narrative for us?"

**BLACK MALE, 50
RICHMOND, VA**

07

07

Honest and fact-based conversations about the depth of the challenges presented by racism and classism seldom take place and rarely lead to action.

Having honest conversations about race and class was overwhelmingly cited as a solution to many of the issues communities face. Yet these conversations about race and class rarely take place. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, when Americans do discuss race and race relations, these conversations are occurring within family and friend networks.[33] Most black and Asian adults (63 percent and 66 percent, respectively) say race or race relations come up in their conversations with family and friends at least sometimes, compared to about half of white and Latino adults.[34] But black adults are more likely than other racial or ethnic groups to say these topics come up often; 27 percent of black adults say this compared with just 11 percent of white, 15 percent of Latino, and 13 percent of Asian adults.[35]

Most participants we spoke with were aware that these conversations necessitate personal discomfort, vulnerability and deep empathy. A number of white participants stated that white people that have never been exposed to conversations about race have the most difficulty engaging in dialogue. Many withdraw from conversations around the topic and feel alienated by unfamiliar language or terms used to discuss issues of race and inequality (e.g., "white privilege"). When candid conversations do occur, they rarely turn into action.

"It makes me uncomfortable talking about it, because you have to walk on eggshells and watch what you say. And because people... you might not mean something offensively, but someone's going to take it that way...A lot of people are trying to forget it."

**WHITE FEMALE
RICHMOND, VA**

"Most of the core of this work is building empathy. And so, I think you build empathy on a couple of different levels. And I think it starts first with a being actually in a relationship or being with someone else that is of another to you, relative to you, and actually sitting down and talking to them and learning more about them and they learn about you."

BENTONVILLE, AR

"I think that white people think the discussions about race are a trap. I think that white people think that they can never win, and I think that white people are very invested in winning."

**WHITE TRANS MAN, 37
LOUISVILLE, KY**

"When we sit around that table, we talk and find out, we learn each other too. You learn that this person is just like you."

**BLACK FEMALE, 69
DREW, LA**

"And so, what I have found is, and this is just my little bitty experience, is any kind of conversations around race have to be in tandem, or alongside of other conversations, right, done in subtle ways, because folks get so entrenched and get offended by those conversations. Because, nobody wants to be labeled a racist. Right?"

**BLACK MALE, 49
LAKE PROVIDENCE, LA**

08

Rapid population growth, changing economies, and shifting demographics in some thriving Southern cities have reinforced stark racial and economic divisions between people — exacerbating long-standing issues related to inequality of opportunity, tension between groups, and distrust of local government and institutions.

While some Southern metropolitan areas continue to grow and expand, low-income people in these cities continue to face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, transportation and affordable housing. There is a feeling that those who are marginalized are being left out of newfound prosperity.

Residents asserted that highly educated and well connected white residents mostly reap the benefits of economic growth. Many talked about the need for cities and local governments to have dedicated, ambitious strategies around equity of opportunity.

In places facing significant economic and social challenges, residents described the pride they feel in being part of a resilient community. They also shared their hopes for a more inclusive future, and their frustration with the oversimplification and vilification of their circumstances by outsiders. People feel pushed out of the places they call home, due to limited possibilities for themselves and their families. However, many feel a deep commitment to the South.

Residents identified the following as the key drivers of barriers to opportunity in their communities: systemic and institutional challenges, racism, a lack of relationships that support building opportunity within the community (both among community members and in relationship to government), lack of awareness, lack of trust, lack of empathy, and feelings of distrust and powerlessness.

"We're attracting people that are filling these needs but we're not really catering to people who are already living here."

**BLACK FEMALE, 39
CHARLOTTE, NC**

"There's so much opportunity if you're in the right place at the right time and you know the right people."

**WHITE FEMALE, 29
BENTONVILLE, AR**

09

People want financial security, but the barriers to accessing good work look different in every city. It is often the unfair influence of the "who-you-know" economy, and the numerous effects of racial discrimination and exclusion in the workplace that diminish access to true economic opportunity.

Our interviewees described how much a good job means to an individual, a family, and a community. Even where a community's economy was doing well, interviewees discussed the unintended consequences of having to work multiple jobs to get by. Residents point to the limited upward mobility they experience, and the importance of ZIP code and personal networks in determining who gets ahead. The perception that "who you know" is a major predictor of who gains access to jobs and economic opportunity

reinforces the perceived power of the exclusive "good old boys club," which favors white men with money to spend and connections.

Many black residents recounted experiences of employment discrimination. Their experiences suggest that people of color and low-income individuals in professional settings risk being tokenized and often face overt racial or class discrimination at work. Furthermore, the following are seen as key barriers to access to economic opportunity: racial discrimination, education/skill level, networks (who you know), economic/workforce development efforts, a lack of diverse industry, and low wages.

Black-white wage gaps are only growing larger. As of 2015, relative to the average hourly wages of white men with the same education, experience, metro status, and region of residence, black men make 22.0 percent less, and black women make 34.2 percent less.[36] Generally speaking, black women earn 11.7 percent less than their white female counterparts.[37] Black men's average hourly wages were 22 percent lower than those of white men in 1979, and by 1985 the gap had grown to 27 percent.[38] Men's black-white wage gaps remained fairly stable from 1985 through much of the 2000s, gradually trending upward to 31 percent by 2015.[39]

> "We talk about the good, old boys club. And basically, this system that if you're not related to a person who already has a position of power or have certain connections to them, you kiss their ring, you have allegiance to them, you can't get anywhere."
>
> **BLACK FEMALE, 30**
> **CHARLESTON, WV**

> "Mainly, the have-nots are people who live in what we call the inner city. They have a high school diploma or not. Most don't have education beyond that. And, you know, when I was growing up, it used to be you could graduate from high school and get a job at one of the plants, so you could get a job that would put you in the middle class right out of high school. Those jobs don't exist anymore."
>
> **BLACK FEMALE, 66**
> **KNOXVILLE, TN**

> "You don't know whether it's because you were not qualified or because [you're] black. That's always a question."
>
> **BLACK FEMALE, 66**
> **RICHMOND, VA**

10

Many attribute poverty to laziness or individual failings and decry those who receive government assistance, rather than asking why or taking to task the systems that perpetuate and benefit from poverty.

Common narratives around race and class distract us from calling out the structural forces that serve as barriers to opportunity and intensify inequality. Heavily racialized perceptions of poverty also distort facts about who is poor in this country and serve to divide class interest along racial lines.

The Pew Research Center found that public opinion is sharply divided when considering views of Americans living in poverty. About 51 percent of Americans believe that the government can't afford to help those in need, whereas 43 percent say the government should help these people even if it means that the government increases its debt.[40]

Researchers tested these perceptions and found that when white Americans perceive threats to their status as the dominant demographic group, their resentment of people of color increases.[41] In the study, when white Americans were made aware that they would no longer be

the dominant demographic group in the coming decades, they became more resentful and their opposition of federal entitlement programs (e.g. welfare) increased.[42] The researchers discovered that attitudes among whites and communities of color about welfare diverged in 2008 — the same year as the Great Recession and the presidential election of Barack Obama.[43] This research suggests that whites' perceptions that people of colors' social standing is rising can produce periods of "welfare backlash" in which adoption of policies restricting or curtailing welfare programs is more likely.

Black and white respondents in our interviews and focus groups offered varying reasons for why black people may have a harder time breaking out of poverty than white people.

This tracks findings from Pew, who found that among those who said being black hurts a person's ability to get ahead, black adults were much more likely than white adults (84 percent vs. 54 percent) to say that racial discrimination is a major reason for this disparity.[44] Black respondents were also more likely to say that less access to high-paying jobs and good schools are major obstacles for black people.[45] White respondents, in turn, were more likely than black respondents to say that family instability and a lack of good role models are major reasons why it may be harder for black people to get ahead; black and white adults who said being black hurts a person's ability to get ahead were equally likely to say a lack of motivation to work hard is a major reason (22 percent).[46]

"So there's really a disdain for people who are impoverished. And it seems as though people here live in a bubble and not thinking about greater issues of this country with inequity and class differences and how poverty is such a huge, huge issue that affects so many people across race, across spectrum of well, ethnic groups."

**BLACK FEMALE
MONTGOMERY, AL**

"There's a big, 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' sort of mentality. You know, no handout, no welfare sort of mentality. And I don't think there's a commitment to see why these problems happen."

**WHITE MALE, 36
KNOXVILLE, TN**

"White folks who were poor or working poor were vehemently opposed to anti-poverty programs. Because I think among a lot of white folks, there is a misconception about who these programs benefit."

**WHITE MALE, 23
MONTGOMERY, AL**

11

11

Pain and trauma caused by racial inequities are mutually reinforcing, creating ripple effects across generations.

Southern residents we talked to are very attuned to the ways in which traumatic experiences, driven by racism and poverty, are absorbed and passed down from one generation to the next; this social context often molds the horizons and lifelong trajectories of young people. The emotional and psychological toll of decades of exclusion, hatred, and violence experienced by communities of color and economically marginalized communities has long gone unacknowledged, and therefore unaddressed.

"Another barrier is just the mentality, it's the mentality of living under this weight of racism for half a century and just you can't get away from that, you cannot get away from it. There's a lot of distrust."

**BLACK FEMALE
CHARLOTTE, NC**

"I do a lot of work with generational trauma…and one of the characteristics is ever-present anger. Like, low-grade anger, but most of it is because of cut off opportunities."

**WHITE FEMALE
RICHMOND, VA**

"What you see now is a product of a system. There are things embedded in that system that dealt with self-perception for African Americans, and the culmination of those things is—'How do I view myself in relationship to others, and how do I view others?'"

**WHITE FEMALE
SUNFLOWER COUNTY, MS**

12
For many people of color, efforts made toward equity, inclusion, and integration have often come with deep costs, both hidden and overt.

Many older black residents in Southern communities, while acknowledging the new economic opportunities afforded by desegregationist policies, are still mourning the loss of black institutions that served as pillars in their communities. Others are attuned to the ways black businesses and neighborhoods were displaced or destroyed in the name of "urban renewal" projects that did not benefit them.

For many people of color, inclusion in practice partly means conforming to the "white world" — to its institutions and manners of speaking — rather than carving out alternative institutions and ways of life.

Finally, across the South, faith institutions and community groups are filling a critical gap left by the decades-long disinvestment in other forms of traditional community-building and advocacy, such as nonprofit organizations.
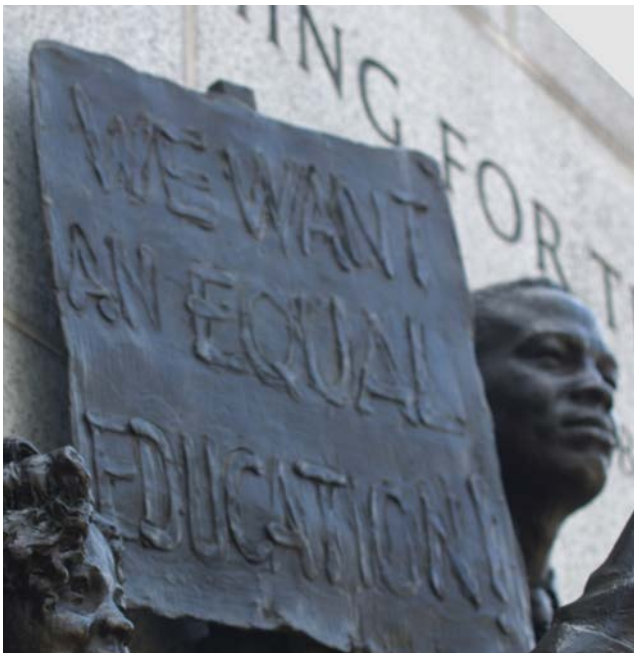
"We lost community when they integrated. Had we kept the segregation mentality and integrated education, we'd have been all right, but because they gave up so much for what they thought was integration, the town has been into a deterioration."

**BLACK MALE, 73
TALLULAH, LA**

"We should have kept our businesses, we should have... The reason we wanted integration was to have opportunities. That was the basis for it. Not to just disregard everything that we have worked so hard for, or our parents have worked so hard for."

**BLACK FEMALE, 75
RICHMOND, VA**

"I think as an African American society the things that worked in our community, they took it away from us. Some of our high schools, you know, we had a predominantly black high schools, OK, integration, fine. But these things were working for the community, people were together, now people are just pulling apart and we as a race we pull against each other. So, it's a hindrance."

**BLACK FEMALE, 67
RICHMOND, VA**

13

Exposure to different cultures and ways of life helps people develop an awareness of others and of possibilities for the future, furthering their acceptance of differences and ability to pursue their full potential.

Particularly for young people in the American South, exposure to different kinds of people and life opportunities is often cited as an important factor in supporting them to realize their full potential.

At the community level, physical and social segregation based on race and class means many lack exposure to diverse people and groups — an issue that reinforces dependence on stereotypes about others and perpetuates unequal access to opportunities.

Research from Pew suggests that finding common ground may be key to improving race relations. More than half of Americans (55 percent) say that, when it comes to improving race relations, it is more important to focus on what different racial and ethnic groups have in common; 44 percent say it's more important to focus on each group's unique experiences.[47] Asian people (58 percent), black people (54 percent), and Latino people (49 percent) are more likely than white people (39 percent) to say it's more important to focus on the unique experiences of different racial and ethnic groups.[48] Still, 4 in 10 or more of these racial and ethnic minorities say the better approach to improving race relations is to focus on what different groups have in common.[49] Another recent study found that increasing interracial contact is best at reducing racial anxiety.[50]

And the American Psychological Association noted in a report that "one of the best ways to change attitudes is through intergroup contact."[51] Attitudes are not simply about the way you think about a group; they are also about how you feel about a group. In America, white people have been able to change their minds about racism faster than they have been able to change their deep-seated, and often unconscious, feelings.[52]

"There were no doctors in my neighborhood, no lawyers in my neighborhood, you know, everybody just kind of followed the same kind of model."

**BLACK FEMALE, 31
MONTGOMERY, AL**

"Most whites don't necessarily have to deal with black folk on a daily basis. And so that in essence breeds this sense of racism because we don't deal with each other, but it's not always racism, sometimes it's just, I don't know you and I don't deal with you."

**BLACK MALE, 43
KNOXVILLE, TN**

"Because kids will only become what…they'll be what they see. And so if they only see their neighborhood and they only see drug epidemics, and then they go to the school and they are only around people who are dealing with the same thing, and then if they go to a house that their parents don't necessarily own, there's a lot of trauma in that of keeping the lights on."

**BLACK MALE, 29
CHARLOTTE, NC**

14

Where local political, community, and philanthropic leaders openly prioritize racial diversity and inclusion, there is more hope and optimism in their community's future among residents.

Residents across the South consistently cited political leadership and effective government as critical avenues for creating systemic change to issues of race and class. Political leaders are using their convening power to prompt communitywide discussions about race and healing. In the places where leaders openly embraced the concepts of racial equity and diversity, there is more awareness and openness to the concepts across the community.

On the flip side, many residents expressed frustration with a lack of transparency from their local governments, as well as the lack of concrete outcomes to show for a variety of discussions and equity planning processes, such as more community development investment, affordable housing, and equitable transportation planning. Racial disparities across areas like housing and education further contribute to the lack of trust, particularly among communities of color.

Many black interviewees also acknowledged the legacy of fear of law enforcement, rooted in a deeply painful history, which has been replicated or reinforced by police violence in recent years. More transparency, engagement from political leadership, and policies like body-worn cameras were discussed as ways to improve police-community race relations.

"I was at a meeting with some person a few years older than me, and they said, 'We've been meeting forever,' and we have. We're gonna always have to meet because time brings about change. The population is changing. We need new leadership who understand the burden that you have been bearing. And you've got to communicate that to them and then get a response."

**BLACK MALE, 50
RICHMOND, VA**

"I'm most proud of the changes that the city of Charlotte is making with the new city manager, the new mayor, and the leadership that's in place. They are really moving Charlotte forward, trying to get us up to date with the 21st century by implementing programs that's going to be more inclusive for the entire community."

**BLACK FEMALE, 67
JACKSON, MS**

"I'm proud of the fact that we have a black mayor, a young black mayor, who's doing his best to move things forward. Our schools could use more work as most schools in urban areas. But I'm basically proud that we are headed in the right direction."

**BLACK FEMALE, 66
RICHMOND, VA**

"Police brutality is nothing new but this has gone way back. So, the fear of police sirens and red lights as a child. I mean I can remember running because I heard a siren flare up and saw the red lights and I fell. And I'll never forget this. I probably have remnants of the scars on my knees."

**BLACK FEMALE, 60
RICHMOND, VA**

"Mayor Rogero has changed things in the area a lot. Through her leadership she has kind of pushed the envelope a little bit in terms of diversity. So she has been very deliberate about it, and I think that's what it takes."

**LATINA FEMALE, 55
KNOXVILLE, TN**

15

Opportunities for people to connect and find a common purpose across racial lines are often centered on cultural and sporting events.

Across regions and demographic groups, most residents agreed that they are frequently brought together by sports, arts, common cultural interests, and events. Sports came up most often as a unifying force. According to a 2011 ESPN survey, 72 percent of respondents believed that sports do more to unite people across racial lines, whereas only 6 percent believed that sports do more to divide people across racial lines.[53]

Many local arts and cultural organizations pointed to a lack of resources or tools necessary to ensure these spaces are utilized to their fullest potential. Most wish there were more opportunities, outside of school and the workplace, that focus on bringing diverse groups of people together and providing the space for people to connect across cultures and identities. Some people also pointed out the barriers to participating in such enriching opportunities, including expense and transportation.

Faith was the next most noted theme, but both as something that unites and divides communities along racial lines. Tragedy was also noted as something that consistently brings people together.

"So, they don't go anywhere, they're stuck in there, looking at the TV. They don't go to concerts of cultural images. And I'll tell you something else. When I'm at the white...predominantly white school, I have been to the University of Richmond to see a performance of dancers, the whole school goes."

**BLACK FEMALE, 75
RICHMOND, VA**

"If you are talking about diversity coming together, there's still not a lot of that happening unless you're talking about game day football basically. High school football is still a great time."

**WHITE MALE, 54
KNOXVILLE, TN**

"But to me recreation, schools, schools are very important and I guess the sense of community. But when your community is divided racially, African-Americans, some Caucasians live in the housing projects. You have a lot of Hispanics who rent and then you've got the older folks who are white who have lived there their whole life. You've got a great divide in the community and it's hard to bring them all together."

**WHITE MALE
JACKSON, MS**

A Look at our Journey, Region by Region

Birmingham **AL**

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Founded during Reconstruction, Birmingham is located in the north central region of Alabama, and is an important hub within the Deep South, Piedmont, and Appalachian regions of the nation. It developed as an industrial center, based on mining, the new iron and steel industry, and rail transport. Birmingham gained national and international attention as a center of activity during the Civil Rights Movement. Today, banking and healthcare are major economic drivers.

Today in Birmingham, 75.4 percent of the population is people of color.[54] Racial economic gaps are wide and persistent. The median hourly wage for white workers is $20 while people of color only earn $14.[55] Birmingham is facing a serious skills gap. While 37 percent of jobs require some college education, 58 percent of white residents and only 23 percent of black residents are prepared to compete for those jobs.[56]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Birmingham, we hosted three focus groups to hear the opinions of non-college-educated black and white residents and college-educated black residents.

+ College-educated black participants shared conflicted feelings about Birmingham as they believe that the ongoing revitalization of the city has real benefits, and though they were doing well economically, they see the larger black population being driven out of their communities as developers gentrify their neighborhoods. As one participant observed, "They are not focused on rebuilding communities, they're focused on building hotels and buildings." Non-college-educated whites also spoke of gentrification, but only saw the benefits of it such as construction, new restaurants and businesses, remodeled buildings, and vastly transformed neighborhoods where microbreweries and development have replaced blight and dangerous "downtown" areas.

+ When we asked what divides Birmingham, the college-educated black group quickly highlighted race. And when asked for examples of how race divides, one participant quickly and half-jokingly responded, "How much time you got?" The group focused on institutionalized racism that segregates the city, outsiders who own businesses and control the purse strings of development, and the "who-you-know" economy that prevents black residents from accessing information about opportunities. According to the non-college-educated black group we spoke with, for them to succeed, they must play by a different playbook, that "blacks have much worse consequences when they make a mistake." To succeed in Birmingham, it is about "who you know," according to black respondents. Whether it is church, school, work, or where they live in the city, these participants indicated that there is very little substantive interaction between black and white residents.

+ The non-college-educated white residents did not see race as much of a factor in any of the issues facing the community. When asked about economic opportunity, responses centered on personal responsibility: "It depends on your personal drive," "Opportunity is not equal, but you can do well if you work hard and are kind," "The people left behind are the people who don't want to work," and, "It is easier to be lazy than hardworking." When asked specifically about the impact of race on the community, participants were dismissive and felt that racism was largely a thing of the past. They view white and black people as having the same challenges, and believe that divisions are really sowed by the media, which wants to drive a divisive narrative.

+ Non-college-educated black participants expressed major concerns about dangerous crime spreading across the community, and a police force that they feel singles out black people and treats them as criminals. They shared that crime affects all aspects of their community, driving away development, killing job opportunities, and leading to increased discrimination against black people in the form of racial profiling. The breakdown in the criminal justice system was reported to have gotten so bad that one participant noted, "It feels like we are going back to the '60s with Jim Crow. We have laws that target black people."

+ Discussion of reparations further reveals the massive gulf in perceptions. When we raised the idea of reparations, black participants associated it with a repayment for the crime of slavery and Jim Crow. They thought that ideas like increasing access to capital or providing land were justified and could help people to "catch up." They felt that black people deserve a "hand up, not a handout," and that reparations would lead to a better shot at a college education, getting a loan, or the boost needed to break a vicious cycle of inequity. White participants, on the other hand, adamantly opposed reparations. One said, "I don't feel like it's something that should be a necessity. I have sympathy, but I'm not directly responsible."

+ White participants suggested they were not interested in dealing with the past when it came to race, whereas black participants wanted a discussion of the past in order to continue trying to heal the wounds and educate the white population about our racial history.. They also emphasized the importance of focusing on how we move forward because "we all want love, we all want success."

Montgomery

AL

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Montgomery is the state capital of Alabama. A city deeply rooted in history, it was the birthplace of both the Confederacy and the Civil Rights Movement and includes many landmarks to both periods. Montgomery's population is becoming more diverse. The city's white population has decreased by 30 percent since 2000, but it has experienced significant growth among communities of color, putting it on pace to become a city with a people of color majority.[57] Montgomery elected its first black mayor in fall 2019. Six of every ten jobs in Montgomery are held by workers living outside of the city limits, and there are wide gaps in earnings by race and gender.[58]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Montgomery, we held one-on-one discussions with residents at the Southern Poverty Law Center's Civil Rights Memorial and a community roundtable with civic leaders from the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church. Focus group respondents were non-college-educated black and white residents.

+ Residents of both races voiced great pride in Montgomery's history, citing the city's role in the Civil Rights Movement in particular, including the stop where Rosa Parks boarded the bus and sat silently in protest, and the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached.

+ Both racial groups were largely negative about the city's direction; they broadly agreed that the crux of interrelated city problems included low wages, crime, and challenged schools. Black participants identified several positives like signs of economic growth, new cultural attractions, and satisfaction with overall pace of life. White participants generally viewed Montgomery as a hollowed-out city where current residents are "living on the ruins of our fathers," where "anything that is worth anything is gone," and where one mother said she prays her children will move away so they do not raise their own children here.

+ White participants see the desegregation of schools and neighborhoods, the rapid rise of black political power in the city, and black voters becoming a majority, as the roots of virtually all problems in the city. They expressed no real optimism for the future.

+ When asked what unites residents, both groups cited workplaces, churches, public events (especially fairs and football), food, and responses to disaster.

+ The black participants identified race as a powerful force of division here, but see progress being made and view the city's Civil Rights history as a social and economic boon that defines the city. Still, they felt that they must constantly battle stereotypes in the workplace and in social interactions, and that there is racial tension. One black man noted that, "I feel like the white community feels like this country… in the past, felt like this country was just theirs. And they began to be threatened when black people started coming up. Like, we've had a black president. That empowered us, and it seems like now white people are scared that, 'Oh, my God, black people are starting to come up now. You know, everything's black... Black people are taking over.'"

+ The white participants voiced that black people are to blame for the challenges in the black community. Their justifications included standard tropes such as "black-on-black crime" ("you don't see white people killing white people"), babies having babies and poor parenting, laziness, bad tipping, and a need

for better role models than just "athletes and rappers." They lamented the city's Civil Rights history, expressing anger that too many black people are upset about a racist history that doesn't impact them personally, leading them to hold the past against present-day white people who were not responsible. White participants noted they saw no value in discussing or dwelling on the legacy of racism and were unhappy about the city's new memorial to lynching victims, saying it "pours salt in the wounds" and is an affront to white people. Many made it clear that black people just need to "get over it" and move on.

+ The black participants forcefully rejected the notion that racism is a relic of the past, citing their own living relatives who suffered under Jim Crow as well as the continued racism they experience every day. They agreed that both races have to "use the past as a foundation to move forward," and that they have to find some agreement on the impact and legacy of historic racism before they can work together on the things they all value (e.g.jobs, schools, and a brighter future for their children). But, in order to achieve that, they must bridge the divide of politics, education issues, negative attitudes about the city's Civil Rights history, and how the media sensationalizes black crime while ignoring white crime.

+ The white group did not identify inequalities in economic opportunity and argued that it is hard for everyone in a city because of declining property values and no new businesses. Black participants said there is a well-established, two-tiered system in which jobs and opportunity are based on "who you know" and the quality of your education. One young white male admitted, "White folks who were poor or working poor were vehemently opposed to anti-poverty programs. Because I think among a lot of white folks, there is a misconception about who these programs benefit." A black participant said, "…there's really a disdain for people who are impoverished. And, it seems as though people here live in a bubble and not thinking about greater issues of this country with inequity and class differences and how poverty is such a huge, huge issue that affects so many people across race, across spectrum of well, ethnic groups."

+ Both groups agreed that the best path forward starts with fixing the schools. There was also agreement on the need for higher wages and a stronger police department to tackle crime. The black group also focused on addressing the corruption and "good old boy" network in local government and eliminating some of the institutional barriers limiting opportunities for black men, specifically those held back in getting opportunities because of racist stereotypes and criminal records from their youth. When asked how to deal with the city's past, the white group viewed any meaningful discussion of the legacy of racism as not just pointless or counterproductive, but as an implicit attack on them, personally and collectively.

Northwest Bentonville

AR

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Northwest Arkansas is a rapidly growing region that boasts the corporate headquarters for Walmart, Tyson Foods, and J.B. Hunt, as well as the University of Arkansas. The region is experiencing tremendous population growth among people of color. Since 1980, this region's share of people of color has increased from 3.1 percent to nearly one-quarter of the population today, seeing strong growth among Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander communities.[59] However, there is a distinct inequity among wages. The median wage for workers of color is $6 less than those of their white counterparts.[60] In Northwest Arkansas, 33 percent of jobs require some college education, and despite a major state university in the area, only 40 percent of white people and black people would be eligible for these jobs.[61]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Bentonville, we conducted individual interviews with community leaders at Fellowship Bible Church. We also hosted a roundtable of leaders working on race and equity issues at Arvest Bank. Focus groups were conducted with both black and white residents in the Northwest Arkansas region, from Bentonville to Fayetteville.

+ Both focus groups were positive about economic growth and quality of life (boosted by the strong corporate presence and an anchoring university), translating into better schools, improved healthcare availability and lower crime. In discussions with community leaders, though, we heard that with growth comes uncomfortable change for a lot of people in the region and that the benefits are not evenly distributed by race, gender, or class. We heard from many respondents that the rapid growth and expanding economic opportunity is leaving some people behind. The black focus group in particular felt it was important to highlight not just the benefits, but also the costs, of the region's rapid growth, particularly the challenges of low-income workers to find affordable housing. They highlighted the difference between young people whose parents can subsidize their rent, their car payments, and their education, versus those who have no accumulated generational wealth to fall back on to support them.

+ In our interviews, residents expressed their pride in the region's growing diversity, which has been fueled by an influx of corporate investment. Still, black participants in focus groups mentioned that there is a lack of diversity, which was underlined when one black woman jokingly noted that the city's entire black population was in the room. Participants highlighted a variety of ways in which this lack of diversity impacts them, from children who are the only black student in their class, to a lack of viable dating options, to an inability of employers to recruit a more diverse workforce. Black-owned small businesses are seen to be at a disadvantage, because they do not have enough other black-owned businesses in the area to build the kind of self-supporting network and infrastructure that participants see elsewhere in large Southern cities. Participants also noted there is a lack of diversity among local leadership, including local government, businesses, and community boards, which highlights that while this region may not be a hostile place for people of color, it still struggles to address system and institutional barriers to equity and inclusion.

+ White residents praised the diversity of their community, mentioning specifically the presence of black, Latino and Marshallese communities. They affirm their belief that Northwest Arkansas offers ample opportunity to anyone willing to work hard and they see no barriers for non-white workers or residents. They largely rejected the notion that racism is an issue in their community.

+ Black residents said they see relatively little overt racism, but the more subtle racism still inflicts damage and places limits on both individuals and the black community as a whole. There was broad agreement that President Donald Trump has made the heated racial climate worse, with concern that his attacks on Latino community members could be a harbinger of attacks still to come on people of color. They still see institutional biases built into the social and professional structures of a region where white people have always been the majority and where institutions and customs are shaped around them. Institutional bias examples cited included first impressions when applying for a job, interactions with police, and the disparity between how drugs are treated among racial groups in the respective communities.

+ Both groups see common challenges based on economic class. While the black group identified many challenges unique to their community, several argued that families of similar economic status of all races face similar challenges like finding a quality education, gaining better wages, and "climbing the ladder." White participants echoed this sentiment. As one person in the black group said, "If you take away the generational wealth, a lot of the challenges are the same." The white group reiterated their belief that anyone who wants a job can find one in this area and pointed to the presence of a small number of black or Latino families in wealthy neighborhoods as proof that all residents can succeed.

+ When asked how to move Northwest Arkansas forward, the white group focused on several broad priorities, including better infrastructure to support continued growth, increased wages, access to better healthcare (which several argued is already on its way), and more resources for addressing opioid and methamphetamine addiction in the community. Black participants, on the other hand, were very focused on increasing diversity for a variety of reasons, including building stronger networks for black-owned businesses and keeping their children in the area after they graduate. They also noted expanding employment opportunities and access to capital for communities of color.

+ The black residents strongly felt that we must directly deal with the past in order to move the community forward on the issue. They also voiced a need for honest and fact-based conversations about the impact of racism today. One black participant said, "Most of the core of this work is building empathy." They pointed to the continued presence of Confederate symbols, including statues and flags, and suggested that white residents who are not consciously bigoted do not realize the extent to which the abuses of the past, and visible reminders of them, still haunt black residents of the area to this day.

FL

Miami

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Miami is the cultural, economic and financial center of South Florida, with a diverse, international population. Miami's metropolitan area is home to 6.1 million people and is the seventh-largest in the nation. Since 1980, the population of people of color grew from 80.6 percent to 88.1 percent of Miami's population.[62] The city is a majority-Latino city, with 70 percent of its population being Latino.[63] Cuban Americans still comprise over half of the city's population, at 54 percent.[64] Despite its overwhelming diversity, income inequality is prevalent. In Miami, the median hourly wage for white residents is $26, while people of color only earn $13.[65] Forty-one percent of jobs require at least some college education.[66] And while 71 percent of the white population meets this necessity, only 18 percent of black and 48 percent of Latino residents can compete.[67]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Miami, we conducted three focus groups and heard the opinions of college-educated residents ages 35-55 – each group including one black, white and Latino residents.

+ The Latino group recognized the importance of their community's increased population and economic and political growth in the region, but identified divisions within their community in regards to politics, country of origin, and language. The white group embraced the cultural diversity of the city and were much less likely than the white participants from the other cities we visited to focus on race in discussions regarding politics, opportunity, or the future of the city. Black participants saw race as an everyday issue and obstacle, and voiced that the dominance of a non-white cultural, economic, and political group has done little to alleviate the racism and structural barriers they face.

+ All of the groups had common concerns related to the region's rapid growth, including primarily traffic congestion and the cost of living, and its impact on schools as well as the character of local communities. Many in the black group felt that this growth was coming at their expense through gentrification, pushing property values higher and pushing longtime residents out of urban areas. One of these areas is Wynnwood, which has nurtured generations of black families and business but is now being transformed into a trendy, high-rent district. In the white group, several participants discussed the joy they found in exploring the city and how the area's development had produced several "up-and-coming areas" with new restaurants and shopping, with Wynnwood offered as a prime example.

+ All three groups identified race as a key variable that divides the city, despite its celebration of diversity. Black participants discussed race primarily in terms of continued geographic segregation and the tendency of people from all races to "stick with their own." The white participants discussed racial profiling, and were focused on the city's failure to truly move toward a diverse and multiracial melting pot. The Latino group felt that their community faced little discrimination in Miami and expressed no reservations about their relationship with the white community.

+ The Latino group did express they felt that black residents were "racist against whites and Hispanics" and that there are higher levels of poverty and violence in poor black neighborhoods than in poor Latino neighborhoods, because black people lack a sense of responsibility and "pride of ownership" in their communities. The Latino and white groups acknowledged that black residents face more overt racism and police abuse than their communities.

+ All three of these college-educated groups saw plenty of economic opportunity in Miami, but they also saw some critical obstacles. There was broad agreement that an inability to speak Spanish put any job applicant at a disadvantage, regardless of race. The white group noted the tremendous challenges facing anyone without a car, in large part due to the lack of adequate public transit. All groups noted how hard it is for low wage workers to live and commute in Miami given the skyrocketing cost of living. While acknowledging that "this market is very conducive to minorities," the black group agreed that black people in their city still have a steeper hill to climb than others because so much opportunity is based on "who you know," and in a city still widely segregated by wealth and race, they are far less likely to have relationships with those who wield professional or political power.

+ The discussion around equity was centered on the importance of "who you know" and all three groups agreed that the importance of such relationships means it is impossible for everyone to have a fair opportunity to achieve their full potential. The white and black groups agreed that there were big divisions in opportunity based on race and wealth, while the Latino group was less convinced that race played a role and were more focused on politics and money as key dividers.

+ The black group viewed rising gun violence as a clear and present threat to the city. Though none of them felt personally threatened by it, they were worried that it reinforces stereotypes about the black community and some complained that it never gets adequate political or media attention outside of the black community. They voiced that Miami has always accepted, even ignored, acts of violence when the victim is black. The Latino and white groups were more concerned with the constant news coverage of violence than the violence itself, with the white group calling it "sensationalized" and the Latino group reporting they were becoming numb to it.

+ The white group discussed the demographic and cultural shift of the last several decades, including signs that were ubiquitous in the '80s and '90s, reading, "Last white person in Miami, grab the flag on your way out." This group agreed that while time has healed some wounds, the white population of the Miami area is very different than it was several decades ago. They suggested that the vast majority of those white residents who did not want to live in a cultural melting pot have either died or moved out of the area, with Hurricane Andrew in 1992 being the catalyst for many of them to leave Miami for good. They believe that the white residents who reside in Miami today appreciate its melting pot character or have come to embrace it.

Columbus

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Columbus, GA was an important manufacturing base for the Confederacy. Following the Civil War in the spring of 1866, the Ladies Memorial Association of Columbus advocated for the establishment of a Confederate Memorial Day which today is observed in 12 southern states.[68] Today, Columbus is the third largest city in the state. Nearby Fort Benning, which supports more than 120,000 active-duty military, family members, reserve component soldiers, retirees, and civilian employees daily, is the city's largest employer.[69] Its population of nearly 200,000 is slightly more black than white.[70] Twenty-five percent of the county's black families live in poverty, compared to 8 percent of its white families.[71] The county has a higher income inequality rate than the state's average.[72] While the median income for a household in Columbus is $42,600, there is a significant racial income inequality.[73] Black households make an average of $31,900 while white households make an average of $56,300.[74]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Columbus, we hosted focus groups where we heard the opinions of college-educated African Americans and white residents, both with mixed age and gender among the respondents.

+ Both groups cited a few positives about present-day Columbus: growth and development, a slower pace of life, no congestion, kid-friendliness, close access to cities like Birmingham and Atlanta, and a decent cost of living. But both groups were very concerned about high sales and property taxes, crime, poor schools, and local politics. There was a clear sense of resignation among residents in regards to change in the area, and that there is little to entice young people who grow up here to remain in the area. Several of the white respondents indicated that they planned to leave as soon as they could.

+ When asked what brings people together, we received very little response. The universal answers of football and performing arts were offered, but even these got pushback from several black respondents, who noted that tailgates are almost entirely segregated, and that white and black people rarely attend the same concerts or festivals. Both groups shared that most churches in the area are segregated, and that few residents would look to churches as places to bring people together, with most congregations focusing more on what separates them from others in the community than on common values or goals.

+ The white group was very clear that there are jobs in Columbus for those willing to work hard and start at the bottom. In contrast with the black group, they expressed that advancement is possible for those who "work hard and play by the rules," regardless of race or "who you know." But several middle-aged white participants told stories of friends whose jobs paid too little, or who had lost jobs recently and had been unable to find equivalent jobs or salaries, with companies preferring to replace older workers with cheaper, younger workers.

+ Both white and black groups talked about how much they value hard work and want to see an economy where it is rewarded. Unfortunately, that is not the reality they see, with wages stagnant or declining as costs increase in every facet of their lives – especially health care, housing, and education.

+ Respondents explained that working two jobs is not viewed negatively because it shows work ethic and a willingness to sacrifice to achieve your goals. However, participants were concerned that so many in their community have no choice, and settled on a critical distinction: it is laudable to work two jobs to get ahead, but it is not fair to have to work two jobs in order to make ends meet. As one black woman said, "It's OK if it's a choice, but it shouldn't be a necessity."

+ When discussing the concept of equity, the black group thought it was a nice idea but simply not realistic and shared examples of the inherent lack of equity in schools, the workplace, taxes, property values, violence, incomes, policing, and virtually every other aspect of their lives in Columbus. The white group fully rejected the concept from the outset, saying it was reminiscent of socialism and ignores the natural inequality of life. They also objected to the lack of a work component or something that explicitly states that any individual must be willing to work in order to make the most of any opportunity.

+ Both groups agreed that violence was a major concern in Columbus but that it was mostly concentrated in specific communities and mostly involved crimes "among the same people on the same people," as one white woman said. The black group was pessimistic about the ability to reduce violence, attributing it to the same structural social, educational and economic obstacles defined at the outset. The white group emphasized the need for more police at the beginning of the discussion but were skeptical of the impact more police or more active policing would have on violent crime and ultimately put the on us on poor black neighborhoods "to come together and make it stop."

+ Both groups struggled to identify things that made them optimistic about the future of the Columbus area, but both black and white young people felt less constrained by the deep racial divide that the focus group participants deemed immutable. The black group referred to younger people as "more color-blind," while the white group said they are more likely to "get along" and to work together to solve problems. The white group suggested that the best long-term hope would be to break down the segregated school system so that poorer children could have a chance at a high-quality education.

KY

Louisville

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Just across the Ohio River from Indiana, Louisville is Kentucky's most populous city and shares a mix of Southern and Midwestern identity. Like many areas in the South, Louisville has a long history of racial segregation and inequity. As the home of boxer and activist, Muhammad Ali, and celebrated mid-century monk and author, Thomas Merton, Louisville also has a great legacy in peace, racial tolerance and social equality. The Louisville metro area is a growing and diversifying region. While it remains a majority white area (78 percent), it is attracting more and more people of color, with the Latino community being its fastest growing group.[75] Like many cities in the South, the unemployment rate for black workers (13.9 percent) is more than twice the rate for white workers (5.7 percent), while the median wage gap between white, black and Latino residents is 33 percent.[76] Racial segregation persists in Louisville with different races and ethnicities largely concentrated together.

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Louisville, we held discussions with residents, focus groups and roundtable discussions with community leaders and local civic organizations. We visited with Interfaith Paths to Peace to learn about their work in promoting peace, human rights and justice through interfaith dialogue. At Backside Learning Center, we talked about the contributions of the immigrant community at Churchill Downs and learned about its adult education programming and after-school and summer services for youth. We visited AMPED, an after-school music program, to hear directly from young students on the west side about the challenges they face.

In Louisville, we also conducted three focus groups with college-educated black and white residents and non-college-educated white Millennials.

+ All three focus groups generally felt good about the city's pace of growth, which has brought more activities and diversity while maintaining its cost of living. They view Louisville as a "small big city" that has a lot of the advantages of a big city without all its problems. The Kentucky Derby is a source of pride that brings people together, and there is also a sense that family and friends provide a tight community. The college-educated white group noted they feel that everyone in the city knows each other. But this theme was negatively received by the black and white Millennial groups who feel they are left on the outside of this "good old boy" network.

+ Despite positive feelings about Louisville's growth and progress, black participants have a much less confident outlook and feel that the playing field remains very uneven. They reported that Louisville is still segregated, which impacts numerous aspects of life. They are also very concerned about violence in black neighborhoods and the lack of affordable housing. One black participant pointed out, "We are building more hotels than affordable housing."

+ The black group reported that segregation is still present in the school system and noted that white teachers do not understand the challenges facing black youth and do not relate well to black children. They were frustrated that "the best teachers get moved to the better schools," and that "the school system is not built with blacks in mind." The white Millennial group also felt the school system divides the community, and they feel teachers do not make enough money to give everything they can to their students. As one participant put it, "Kids don't learn well on empty stomachs, and teachers don't teach well if they are struggling." The older white group also found problems with the schools, but instead said their concerns were tied to "...losing identity because kids from the same neighborhood now go to different schools."

+ The older white college-educated group expressed very positive views of Louisville's economy and equality of opportunity, whereas the college-educated black and non-college-educated white Millennial groups felt that economic opportunity depends on who you know. The black participants noted that they do not know white people who can provide good job opportunities, and the white Millennial participants indicated that they lack the networks that come with a college degree, meaning they "need two jobs to make ends meet." They summarized their frustration with sharp clarity: "This is not the American dream." "You should not have to kill yourself to live." And, "Two jobs – this is the gig economy."

+ The black group shared how race has impacted their lives and some ideas on how to address the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow and ongoing racism. When asked about reparations, some thought it would be helpful and could come in the form of money or affirmative action, but others indicated that it was a diversion and that "nothing they give us will make up for what they did to us." There was a prevailing sentiment in the group that we need to acknowledge the sin of slavery before we can truly move on, and they share a concern with other black participants we have heard from that President Trump has made racists feel more comfortable to be racist.

+ The college-educated white respondents recognized that segregation still exists, but felt that it is not necessarily a problem they need to fix. This group felt very little impact of race as a factor in the community and they believed that racism was mostly "an older generation thing" that is getting much better. As one white male said, "I think that white people think the discussions about race are a trap. I think that white people think that they can never win, and I think that white people are very invested in winning." They were sensitive about others calling them racist and became very defensive when asked about reparations. Some views expressed by this group included "It wasn't me who owned slaves."

+ The white Millennial group shared a greater understanding of the problems caused by the country's racial history and shared a desire to make progress on the racial divide. They see racism persisting, and it upsets them, discussing how "all people are deserving of respect and dignity." They expressed understanding and want to make change: "There is a lot of anger in the black community because of how they have been treated. I can understand that anger. I hope we learn and do better", and, "I have to check my white privilege." The Millennials were hopeful because they see change happening. But there were also clear signs of how far they are willing to go, and they were divided about whether to talk about the past or move on, and some were sensitive to being held responsible for the sins of their ancestors.

+ In Louisville, public discussion about racial equity has been commonplace, and nearly all participants spoke about equity in terms of fairness and equal access to loans, jobs, and opportunities. They also cited the school system's racial equity plan that is designed to "even the playing field."

Finding Common Ground in Times of Need

After his community's mosque was vandalized, Tarik Nally fell more in love with the place he called home.

"The city of Louisville was so strong and powerful," Nally said, describing how 2,000 people gathered in 2015 to clean the 33 hateful messages sprayed in red paint across the white doors, walls and sidewalks of the Louisville Islamic Center.

"It was one of the times I was most proud of Louisville," said Rhoden Streeter, Vice President of the group Interfaith Paths to Peace, which for 23 years has brought people of different faiths and philosophies together to work toward greater tolerance and peace in the city. Soon after the mosque cleanup, Nally joined the group as well.

In early 2019, in response to another bigoted act of vandalism, a large number of people again showed up, with paint rollers, buckets, and supplies. This time, volunteers cleaned graffiti from the walls of the Swaminarayan Temple, after a teenager used black paint to spray anti-Hindu sentiments, denounced by Mayor Greg Fischer as "repugnant messages of hate."

Those incidents galvanized Interfaith Paths to Peace to work for more equity and tolerance in their communities, as a way to avert the next crisis. "Forty-eight hours after a crisis is over, it's forgotten," said Interfaith board member Allan Wells.

Last year, an African American pastor, the Rev. Kevin Cosby, was pulled over in his Audi for two inflated traffic charges. Community members rose to his defense, citing a 2016 University of Louisville study that found that local police were nearly twice as likely to search cars driven by a black driver. The following month, two elderly black shoppers died after being gunned down in a Louisville Kroger store by a white man, in a hate crime that made national headlines.

Interfaith Paths to Peace is working to reconcile the inequities of history, to create more diversity within local leadership, and to combat the city's lack of educational and career opportunities. They have launched projects to help eliminate food insecurity and cash bail, and to boost access to the internet and better public transportation. An Interfaith anti-violence program goes into schools to train students in conflict resolution.

"We're at a point in America where things need to be rethought," Nally said. "The big question here is: 'Is every person in Louisville given an opportunity to find and have a purpose?'"

E PLURIBUS **UNUM**

LA

New Orleans

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

New Orleans is a city rich in culture and traditions, a blend of the best aspects of several diverse cultural and ethnic groups over its 300-year history. And like many cities in the Deep South, it has deep-seated issues around race, equity, poverty and violence. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina exposed many of these issues for the world to see. Nearly 15 years later, New Orleans has turned a corner in its recovery from that storm and is building a stronger and more resilient community. Yet inequity remains. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 population estimates, there are now 91,274 fewer black residents living in New Orleans than there were in 2000, with the share of the 2017 population that was black down to 59 percent.[77] Racial economic gaps are wide and persistent in New Orleans. The median hourly wage for white workers is $24 versus $15 for people of color.[78]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In New Orleans we held focus groups where we heard the opinions of college-educated black and white residents and non-college-educated black residents.

+ A central theme across all three groups was that New Orleans has major problems and racial divisions in key aspects of city life, including crime, education and economic opportunity. However, all three focus groups equally valued their local culture rooted in diversity, and spoke enthusiastically and with similar language about the food, music, Mardi Gras, festivals, and the friendly people that make the city special.

+ Gentrification was central to all discussions of factors impacting the community. Both black and white participants talked extensively about its negative consequences. Even though they recognize the benefits associated with building businesses and increasing prosperity in different neighborhoods, they believe strongly that the growth disproportionately favors whites and the wealthy, while longtime residents (particularly black residents) are being displaced by rising housing costs in gentrifying areas.

+ Racial inequality was mentioned as touching all aspects and issues here, affecting black residents daily and acknowledged by whites as a central factor to local life. Whether it is violence, policing, schools or economic opportunity, black and white participants focused on the discrimination against black residents and the lack of resources available to them. As one black participant put it, "You get paid more to work in the jail than in the schools." Black participants highlighted that President Trump has made racists feel more comfortable and they feel his actions and rhetoric empowered racists who had previously kept their racism behind closed doors.

+ For black participants, public schools were highlighted as a prime example of where the system is stacked against them from the onset. We heard that if you do not receive a quality education, you will be stuck here. They noted that in New Orleans, all public schools are now charter and their children are at the mercy of the school lottery for them to be admitted to a good charter school. But many white residents can afford private school.

+ Black and white participants were deeply bothered by crime, and they want youth to have better opportunities that will keep them busy and prevent them from getting involved with the wrong crowd, because "once you're in the criminal justice system, you can't get out." Black participants were adamant about the need to educate black youth and to empower them to do well. White participants attributed the crime to economic inequality, the legacy of Katrina, and the lack of resources in the city for mental health.

+ When discussing law enforcement, there was a sense that things have improved with the police over the years, but both groups felt they still need to do a better job getting to know their communities. Participants expressed that it is critical for the police to get properly trained and build relationships with the community, so they can understand the people and truly improve public safety.

+ There is broad agreement that living costs are going up while salaries are stagnant, and that economic opportunity is only available to those with a good education (mostly white people). Participants emphasized that "who you know" is essential to getting real opportunities. For black residents, their absence in good schools and prosperous neighborhoods means that they do not know the people who provide the good economic opportunities, and the good jobs go to the educated, transplants, and whites, while black residents end up with lower paying jobs. The hospitality industry is highlighted as the prime example of available jobs that do not pay enough for people to live in New Orleans. Transportation is another factor affecting the community's racial divisions, since with limited public transportation options, people must have a car to get to good jobs. The bus system is seen as inefficient.

+ There were mixed perspectives on the removal of Confederate monuments in New Orleans: black participants expressed ambivalence and the white participants were very supportive. In both black groups, some participants felt it was a waste of time and resources that did not change anything because "people will still hate you if there is no monument there." One participant added that his school changed its name from a slaveowner's name to Frederick Douglass a long time ago, yet it did not do anything to improve the school. Others pushed back on these comments, because they felt it is important to educate people about the history and help white people understand that the Confederacy was wrong. Some felt that it was never an issue until "out-of-towners" brought it up, but other participants disagreed because "we should care about our ancestors," and people need to know who Robert E. Lee really was.

+ The white participants were fully supportive of the monuments removal, referring to it as a great moment and a huge issue. They said it was time to move into the 21st century, and they noted that New Orleans was very different from its suburbs, like Metairie, which is "racist and Republican." This group of white college-educated people were positive about racial reconciliation and were also very receptive to the idea of reparations. They were aware of public discussion on reparations, and they found it very reasonable considering the history of slavery and Jim Crow. In the words of one participant, "Corporations and wealth were built on the backs of black people, and they should pay black people back for this."

Teaching Our Full History

A few years ago, as controversies erupted across the South about Confederate monuments, author and educator Freddi Evans traced the confusion to its most basic root: an inaccurate understanding of history.

"In place of the truth — that the Civil War was fought over slavery — the 'noble cause' narrative won out. It was everywhere. It was in textbooks."
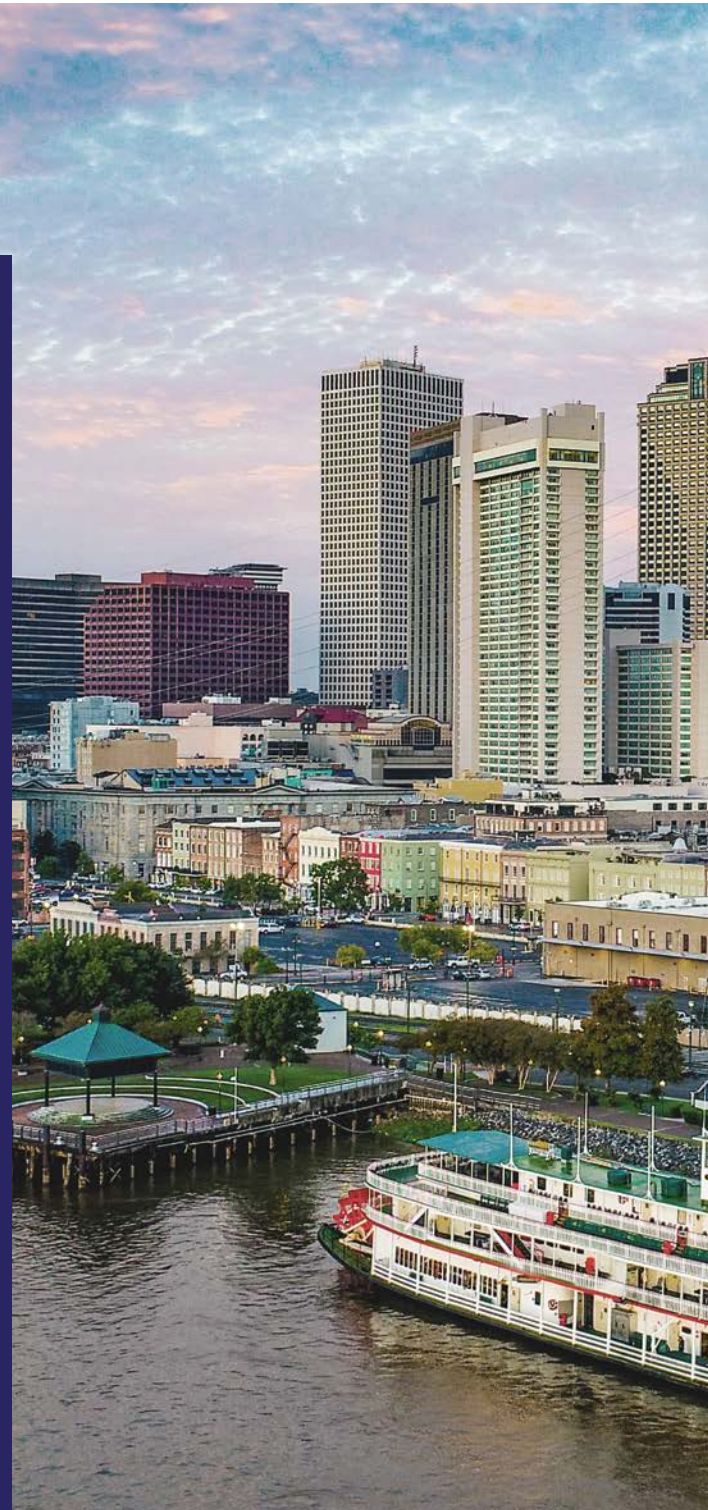
People in power, former Confederate leaders and their family members, had changed the narrative, erected monuments, and shifted how history was taught. Today, after a century of misinformation, only eight percent of high school seniors surveyed by the Southern Poverty Law Center can identify slavery as the central cause of the Civil War.[79]

As she researched her books, about Congo Square and other parts of New Orleans history, Evans repeatedly saw how the past had been skewed. "I just cannot say enough about how much information has been left out of history," Evans said.

She lists just a few examples about New Orleans: Newspaper accounts that paint a distorted picture of the enslaved people who danced and sold goods at Congo Square. Books without mention of the city's immigrant groups and the contributions that they made to the city. Creole cookbooks with no credit given to the black cooks at the base of the city's signature cuisine.

"We also don't acknowledge that New Orleans was the nexus of the slave trade," said Evans, who helped to write the text for a new series of historical markers about slavery in New Orleans, the city where more enslaved people were sold than anywhere else in America.

She explains that students who aren't taught authentic history can't properly interpret the world around them and can't see when history repeats itself. "Whoever controls the storyline controls the history," Evans said, "but they also control how we discern the events in front of us, in today's world."

"The Talk"

Nine-year-old Dwayne is a straight-A African American student in what's considered to be a good New Orleans school. He's quiet, thoughtful. But he is wary around police.

"I don't trust the cops," he said, citing the recent movie, "The Hate U Give," where a police officer shot and killed a young man who had picked up a hairbrush during a traffic stop.

Dwayne didn't always feel that way. "I wanted to be a police officer. But I don't want to be a follower," he said, explaining how he had watched quieter officers act badly behind more bold colleagues in his New Orleans neighborhood.

Through both cinema and news coverage of high profile shootings and deaths, there's no avoiding the dangers inherent in encounters between law enforcement officers and people of color. Even the U.S. Attorney General, Eric Holder, sat down to have "the talk" with his 15-year-old son, after teenager Trayvon Martin was confronted and killed by a neighborhood vigilante in 2012.[80] "I am his father, and it is my responsibility, not to burden him with the baggage of eras long gone, but to make him aware of the world he must confront," Holder said.[81]

In New Orleans' Seventh Ward, a father with three teenagers said that he hadn't sat down with his children to give them explicit instructions about police stops, because he saw it as part of a larger, ongoing process. In this world, where his children could encounter racism from the wrong police officer, at a job, or at school, his goal was

to help them become confident and develop good judgment. "They need to know how to think on their own," he said. "Unfortunately, during traffic stops, that can be a life or death matter."

A few minutes away, in New Orleans' Ninth Ward, Quiatta Joseph and her family know the issue well, through the stories of people like Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and Philando Castile. Each time, Joseph discusses racism and police stops with her two children, a teenage son and daughter.

Yet, if one of her children were stopped, Joseph wouldn't want to immediately assume that the officers were at fault, she said. "I'd want to know two things: What were you doing? And who were you with?"

Beyond that, however, Joseph's protective nature takes over. She tells them to call her as soon as they are able to.

She also tells them that it's important to keep their hands visible and to drop anything they're carrying. When she was a teenager, her friends were talking on the phone with a friend of theirs, only to hear gunshots: their friend had been shot dead by a police officer in the city's Lower Ninth Ward. It was the advent of the Nextel "chirp" phone, she said, and people believed that the officer had mistaken their friend's black walkie-talkie-style phone for a weapon.

Joseph shuddered. "I get chills just thinking about it," she said.

Delta

Including Northeast Louisiana

MS

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

In January 2019, we traveled across the Mississippi Delta. In Mississippi, we visited Greenville, Indianola, Cleveland, Moorhead, and Drew and in Louisiana, we visited Tallulah and Lake Providence. Since 2000, the overall population declined by one-fifth across the Mississippi Delta, with the white population declining the most, by over one-third.[82] This is an economically depressed region, with unemployment high at over 18 percent and particularly high among the black population, with nearly 1 in 4 out of work.[83] There are wide gaps in earnings by race with black people earning approximately $13,000 less than whites in Sunflower and Washington counties in Mississippi.[84] In East Carroll Parish of Louisiana, the wage gap between white and black people is nearly $18,000.[85] The Delta could face a skills gap if it does not increase educational attainment for all residents.[86] Delta communities are deeply segregated with different races and ethnicities largely living in different parts of the city, creating instances where white people may not interact with black people at all.

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In the Delta, we hosted individual interviews across the region; small group discussions in Lake Providence, LA, and Greenville and Cleveland, MS; and a large community listening session in Tallulah, LA. We visited the Sunflower Freedom Project to talk with youth.

In Greenville, MS, we conducted two focus groups of non-college-educated black and white residents from across the region. We also engaged mayors from across the region to discuss their priorities for the Delta.

+ Both groups shared a number of concerns including crime, drugs, low wages, schools, roads, and the loss of small businesses. Their concerns about the economy were focused on the idea that "there is nothing for the kids to do" or "nothing to keep young people here." Older residents seemed to feel tied to the region by family, social relationships and homes that have lost too much value to sell, but their children do not feel the same limitations and are leaving for better opportunities. Both groups identified poverty and the lack of economic opportunity in the region as a challenge that increasingly forms commonality between white and black residents.

+ Race was identified as a key variable dividing the community from the very outset of both groups, and there was a shorthand for discussing it: downtown (black) versus country and suburbs (white) and public schools (black) versus private schools (white). There aren't urban areas in this part of the state, but "downtown" represents a political boundary of local government controlled by black people. A major source of concern for the white group was the racial dynamics of local politics and the shift in political power in some areas where white people have fled.

+ When asked about economic opportunity , the groups identified healthcare, certain trades and the two remaining packing plants in the region as opportunities for average people to still make a decent living. However, they felt that these opportunities are not available to those who work hard and prove themselves; instead, they are available to those who "know the right people." Some of the white women pointed to the area's embrace of gaming combined with the loss of manufacturing and plants as a negative; "A lot of the downfall started when the casinos came in," said one white woman.

+ Both groups agreed that they are trapped in a dynamic wherein employers and talented young people will continue to pass over the Delta for cities like Jackson and Memphis while workers in the Delta are paid far less than workers in those cities for the same job. They said even low wage jobs like fast food pay less in the Delta than in these more prosperous areas.

+ Black participants experience continued segregation in neighborhoods, schools and everyday life here ("they sit on their side and we sit on our side"), and expressed little hope for any changes in these circumstances. They felt that white people begin life with an advantage which extends to schooling, job opportunities and lifelong economic opportunities like home ownership, but did not discuss racism as a structural problem in their lives. Instead, they focused on how black people tear each other down, and the self-inflicted wounds of drugs and violence in their community.

+ The white group was willing to discuss racism; "It's hereditary in this area," said one participant. However, they explicitly disavowed any racial animus of their own, while equating black people to poverty, poor parenting and bad neighborhoods. When the discussion of race turned to whether we must acknowledge the region's past or simply try to move forward to a better future, the white participants voiced animus about those who seek to focus on the past, insisting they are simply making excuses and need to get over it: "I never owned a slave, and neither did my parents or grandparents, and I don't know anyone who was ever a slave, so let's move on," "I'm sure some of our ancestors were slaves back in Egypt or something, but we don't hate the Egyptians," and, "Reparations was not broached with this group because of their outright rejection of any value from seeking to reconcile the past."

+ When asked the question of how to deal with the region's legacy of racial discrimination, the black group agreed, "You have to use the past as a lesson for the future." Most respondents struggled with supporting the concept of reparations and how it could possibly work, and one young woman immediately dismissed it as "impossible" and unrealistic.

+ Both groups decried the rise in senseless violence, particularly shootings. The black group saw senseless violence as a byproduct of young people with no respect for themselves or others and blamed parents having to work multiple jobs. They also mentioned the lack of corporal punishment. The white group put some of the blame on a growing drug trade, but they also saw it as primarily a problem of young people having no economic prospects, acting out of desperation and hopelessness. And they put a great deal of the blame on a local mental health system that is severely underfunded, producing an increase not only in gun crimes, but also domestic violence, drug abuse and increased dangers in the workplace.

Jackson

MS

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Jackson is the capital of Mississippi and a Deep South city rooted in its racial history. It recently opened the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. Jackson and its neighboring towns have become increasingly segregated over the past few decades. Since 1980, Jackson's white population has significantly decreased, by about 72,000 people, while it has seen growth among people of color by about 43,000 people.[87] The city is 78 percent black.[88] Economic vitality is unequal in Jackson as unemployment is nearly three times higher among black workers (11 percent) than their white counterparts (4 percent).[89] In Jackson, 7 out of 10 jobs in the city are held by workers living outside of the city limits.[90] Jackson will face a skills gap if it does not take steps to increase educational attainment among black residents. Sixty-four percent of white residents have some college education, but only 26 percent of black residents do.[91]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Jackson, we held individual interviews as well as small group discussions with higher education leaders. We visited with city leadership. And we held three focus groups among non-college-educated black women, black men and white men.

+ Residents shared that Jackson's history of segregation and more recent political polarization make it difficult to bring people together to find solutions. Still, we heard frequently about the resiliency of this community and its enduring commitment to creating a more equitable and vibrant city for all.

+ During our visit, residents told us how racial division has created sharp inequities in education, housing and public transit. This has been exacerbated by suburbanization, a shortage of private investment, and brain drain leaving the city.

+ The election of Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba in 2017 was repeatedly identified as an important change in political leadership for Jackson because he is seen as being part of a new generation of young leadership that can lead the city forward.

+ In discussions, a sharp line was drawn between Jackson and its surrounding suburban areas, particularly nearby Pearl. Virtually every topic, from crime to economic opportunity, was divided into two separate and parallel discussions. "Jackson" was shorthand for black, while "Pearl" was white. For all three groups, it was reported that Jackson is beset by crime and violence, with failing schools and little economic future, while Pearl has better schools, fewer concerns about personal security, and limited, but notable signs of economic growth and opportunity. As one black woman said, "All of the rough stuff is in Jackson; all the growth is around Jackson."

+ The white men with whom we spoke argued that racism is strong in Jackson, but minimized both the racist legacy of their region and the notion that racism plays a significant factor in determining outcomes for black residents today. One white man said, "I think there's just widespread sense that on the side of white, wealthy, particularly older folks, that black people are not to be trusted, that they're not willing to work hard enough, that they're incompetent." Black participants rejected the idea that the past is the past. For them, overt systemic racism remains a part of their daily lives – in the workplace, in schools, in interactions with police, in everyday experiences at retail outlets, and just walking down the street in a predominantly white area. As one black man said, "I can't think of a way that race has not impacted my experience. It's either greeted me at the front door or greeted me on the way out." The black men argued against tackling the past – not because they agreed with the white premise that it's not an issue, but because they had seen no evidence in their own lives that discussion of the clear evidence of racism produces any promise of change.

+ Discussion of crime was very much focused on in our discussions in the predominantly black areas. The white men's group we spoke with expressed concerns about crime in "downtown" areas reaching out into suburbs and hurting economic growth, because white people don't want to live and work in areas that are perceived as unsafe. The black men's group felt that Jackson was not a place that people want to move to, because it lacks economic opportunity, natural resources and cultural attractions to create significant migration or to attract major employers. All three focus groups articulated that economic opportunity is directly linked to "who you know, not what you know."

+ When asked what unites people, respondents offered common refrains such as sports, large public events, and tragedy. When asked what divides the community, race was the most common response, along with politics and crime (which were inextricably linked to race). Schools and wealth disparities were also noted. The white men's group was also very focused on media – traditional media as well as social media – as a source of division, saying they only promote negative stories, noting that the media never shows a white police officer helping a black man but always goes into overdrive when a white cop kills a black man.

+ There was agreement across groups that there is little economic opportunity in Jackson despite the presence of major employers like Nissan and supporting suppliers. Especially for the black groups, they communicated that the only way up is to get out of Jackson. There was a large amount of resentment of government handouts from white residents and "good old boy" cronyism from black residents, yet from both groups there is real appreciation for those who work hard to make ends meet. Virtually all participants felt that the low wages that make working multiple jobs a necessity for so many represent the type of structural obstacles that have condemned this entire region to a lower quality of life.

+ Both black participant groups made it clear that they still experience racism in the course of their daily lives, and that there is prejudice infused throughout this community, from unequal schools and police treatment, to local politics, and even churches. They largely agreed that President Trump's rhetoric has provided implicit permission for overt acts of racism and discrimination. As one black woman said, "the only difference is that they don't wear sheets anymore." The white men acknowledged that racial tension has increased lately and agreed with the black groups that they see less black-white social or professional interactions than they have in years past. But they blamed that on former President Obama for inciting black anger and fanning racism.

"I can't think of a way that race has not impacted my experience. It's either greeted me at the front door, or greeted me on the way out."

**BLACK MALE, 38
JACKSON, MS**

"I think there's just a widespread sense that on the side of white, wealthy, particularly older folks, that black people are not to be trusted, that they're not willing to work hard enough, that they're incompetent."

**WHITE MALE, 36
JACKSON, MS**

"One of the biggest impacts of the real crime that exists in the city is that it has created some imaginary boundaries for people. Some of those people who are employees of the organizations or entities who control the systems in the state, they have some legitimate fears. But they also have some imagined fears, based on the perception of crime."

**BLACK MALE, 38
JACKSON, MS**

"The vision of particularly the white population that allows them to feel good about themselves and sleep at night is in part creating this myth around black criminality. And that has been a myth that has been built since the Civil War, right?"

**WHITE MALE, 41
JACKSON, MS**

"If you are talking about diversity coming together, there's still not a lot of that happening unless you're talking about game day football basically. High school football is still a great time."

**WHITE MALE
JACKSON, MS**

"If young black and poor children don't see anything about themselves on television and video games except as aggressor or violent criminals, what does do to them internally?"

**BLACK FEMALE, 67
JACKSON, MS**

Charlotte

NC

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

North Carolina, a state that once sent more Confederate soldiers into the Civil War than any other Southern state, has moved to embrace its diversity, a step which Charlotte's population reflects. In 1980, Charlotte was a majority-white city. But by 2010, people of color had gone from one-third to over half of the population.[92] The economic vitality of this city is threatened by racial inequality. Black unemployment is more than 2.5 times the rate for white workers.[93] There are also wide gaps in earnings by race and gender. White workers earn $27 per hour compared to just $16 for black workers and $12 for Latino workers.[94] Charlotte's regional economy would be $25 billion stronger with no racial income gaps.[95] The skills gap will continue to grow if Charlotte does not take steps to increase educational attainment among black and Latino residents.[96] Approximately 42 percent of jobs in Charlotte require some college education. While 69 percent of whites meet this requirement, only 30 percent of black people and 42 percent of Latino people are educated enough to compete.[97]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Charlotte, we conducted interviews with individuals with the help of Charlotte's Community Building Initiative (CBI), a nonprofit established in 1997 by government and civic leaders to achieve racial and ethnic inclusion and equity. Leaders from CBI and City Hall helped to organize a small group discussion at City Hall. Rev. Jacotran Potts also took us on a tour of several communities.

We conducted three focus groups composed of college-educated black men and non-college-educated black and white women.

+ While the black men were generally positive about the city's direction and viewed the rapid growth in the area as a good thing, the black women were deeply pessimistic and viewed the same growth almost universally as a negative. The white women fell somewhere in between, generally positive about the city's growth at the outset, but much more mixed as the conversation shifted to racial dynamics.

+ All three groups did come to an agreement on two challenges facing this community. The first was the rapidly increasing cost of living that poses a threat to low-income families and those on fixed incomes. The black women said this was pushing longtime residents out of their homes and neighborhoods. As one black woman said, "We're attracting people that are filling these needs but we're not really catering to people who are already living here." The second concern of broad agreement was the continuing influence of a "good old boy" network in politics and business that erodes trust in local politics and makes it harder for entrepreneurs and small-business owners outside of that network to advance.

+ All three groups identified race as a powerful dividing line here, along with related issues of segregated neighborhoods, schools, crime, politics, and religion. The college-educated black men, who were very optimistic about racial dynamics and economic opportunity, also identified race as a clear dividing line.

+ For these residents, economic opportunity is less about the availability of jobs and more about the growth in the region and the range of white collar, blue collar and service jobs available. Wages, benefits, the ability to meet basic living standards, access to a quality education, and skill training for higher-paying jobs were the focus points of discussion. There was broad agreement among all groups that economic opportunity in this area is tilted heavily toward the wealthy, while the two black groups agreed that whites also have a structural advantage in accessing economic opportunities. There were also discussions across all three groups about the division between natives of the area and newcomers, with accompanying concerns about how the huge influx of "transplants" threatens to destroy the city's Southern character and to displace "locals."

+ Both black groups felt it was important to highlight not just the benefits, but also the costs of the region's rapid growth; particularly, the challenge of low-income workers to find affordable housing. Both groups highlighted the difference between young people whose parents can subsidize their rent, their car payments and their education, versus those who have no generational wealth to fall back on. The white group expressed a shared belief that the region's growth meant that there were ample opportunities available to anyone who was willing to work hard to take advantage of them, while sharing similar concerns about housing prices and the impact of rising housing costs on predominantly older residents with fixed incomes.

+ In both black groups, there was discussion focused on police misconduct and violence toward young black residents of the city, with the shooting of an unarmed black male that was related to protests, and the local rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Among the white women, the discussion was primarily about how violence is largely contained to specific, predominately non-white, sections of the city. The white women felt that BLM protests were a cause for concern for the community and a very large and dangerous force in the city threatening their personal safety.

+ Among these groups, there was agreement that black and white families face similar challenges like earning good wages and securing a good education and affordable healthcare. But they also identified challenges unique to black families like the challenge of teaching their sons how to deal with police, mental health, and structural biases in the media and in hiring processes. The white women felt that black families face unique struggles, but they contended that black people enjoy unique advantages as well.

+ The black men's group strongly advocated for a direct conversation about the city's history of racism as necessary for real progress. One man suggested, "You have to be aware of the past in order to move forward." The black women, on the other hand, were largely in agreement that not much can be done about racism here. One black woman said, "Another barrier is just the mentality. It's the mentality of living under this weight of racism for half a century and just you can't get away from that; you cannot get away from it. There's a lot of distrust." The white women were optimistic about the city's economic future but pessimistic about a path forward on race, with black residents gaining a foothold in the corridors of power and making widespread gains in the workplace and in small business ownership. They believed that discussion of the city's racist history would be harmful and suggested that the only productive path forward on the issue is for the black community to "get over it."

"As an African American male, race is something that plays a part in my everyday life, I would say, my everyday existence...I challenge their notions, their stereotypes, their expectations of what a young black male is supposed to be, in every, like, form and fashion and there seems to be a bit of a push back of attempt to put me in my place and remind me that there are glass ceilings for me."

BLACK MALE
CHARLOTTE, NC

"When you have schools that are either 98 percent Caucasian or 98 percent children of color, ultimately those schools don't end up getting the same level of resources and those students don't have the same level of opportunities."

WHITE MALE, 36
CHARLOTTE, NC

"Because kids will only become what...they'll be what they see. And so if they only see their neighborhood and they only see drug epidemics, and then they go to the school and they are only around people who are dealing with the same thing, and then if they go to a house that their parents don't necessarily own, there's a lot of trauma in that of keeping the lights on."

BLACK MALE, 29
CHARLOTTE, NC

"We're sort of dealing with the outfall of inequitable pay and unfair wages by providing housing for the working poor without asking the question of why are the working poor....'Oh, you could get a job in tech if you had stayed in school. So, you're a hotel worker, so just suck it up."

WHITE MALE, 63
CHARLOTTE , NC

"Another barrier is just the mentality, it's the mentality of living under this weight of racism for half a century and just you can't get away from that, you cannot get away from it. There's a lot of distrust."

BLACK FEMALE, 30
CHARLOTTE, NC

"We're attracting people that are filling these needs but we're not really catering to people who are already living here."

BLACK FEMALE, 39
CHARLOTTE, NC

"I would say the activities, like, there's a lot of different cultural festivals and things like that, that you can attend and get to meet different people and learn different cultures and things like that."

CHARLOTTE , NC

Charleston SC

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Charleston is the largest city in South Carolina. Historians estimate that nearly half of all Africans brought to America as slaves arrived here, making it the only major antebellum city that had a majority-enslaved population.[98] In 2015, a white supremacist entered a black church and murdered nine black parishioners. This resulted in the Confederate flag's removal from the State Capitol and the ignition of a major nationwide debate about Confederate statues. In the last three decades, Charleston has become more diverse. Since 1980, the population that identifies as people of color grew from 33.4 percent to 36.8 percent.[99] Since 2000, Charleston's Latino population has had the largest growth.[100] The median wage for workers of color is $6 less than the median wage for white workers.[101] Impairing Charleston's future is the 38 percent of jobs that require some college education.[102] While over 50 percent of whites meet this benchmark, only 25 percent of black people and 44 percent of Latino people can compete.[103]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Charleston, SC, we conducted focus groups with non-college-educated white, black, and Latino residents.

+ All three groups agreed that while there is a tremendous amount of economic opportunity in Charleston these days, that opportunity is very unequal. "Old money" and "northern money" dominate the local economy, and especially the booming real estate market. They shared that new companies coming to the region, such as Boeing and Volvo, have created high-paying jobs, but otherwise, most companies come down to the ubiquitous "who you know" rather than merit. They all shared concern about locals not getting a fair shot at many of the new jobs coming to the area. The white and Latino groups insisted that work ethic and determination could make up for this inequality and that there was plenty of opportunity for those "willing to work." Both of those groups shared a view that black people are not "willing to work" and "think they deserve everything for free," in the words of one Latina woman.

+ The black group, on the other hand, reported seeing no realistic path to overcoming the inequality and systemic racism in Charleston, and were unwilling or unable to discuss how to end the racism that has always been a part of their daily lives. Instead, they were very focused on factors they could directly impact, individually and as a community: education, parenting, self-respect, and supporting black businesses. Education was by far their top priority for building a better future.

+ All three groups agreed that gun violence has gotten much worse in the area recently. Most participants attributed this to a combination of drugs and a lack of opportunity or alternatives for poor, mostly black children. In terms of solutions, there was agreement on the importance of improving schools; better education overall and career training, and more after-school programs to give children structure and alternatives. There were also calls across groups for more police on the street and stronger penalties to "crack the whip" on criminals. However, there was less enthusiasm for treatment programs, especially within the Latino group, due to concerns about who would pay for the programs. This group suggested that they didn't want to pay for benefits that would go to disproportionately black communities.

+ The black group shared how race defines and limits their lives, with a focus on discrimination in housing, employment, education, healthcare, and police violence. Multiple participants talked about being passed over in hiring decisions for less qualified white persons and then being told they were "over-qualified," a term they felt had clear racial implications.

+ The Latino group discussed a shared resentment of black residents, and they complained about black peoples' "attitudes" — labeling them disrespectful, saying they "always complain about everything" and "like to be loud and profane." They felt black residents "play the race card" whenever things don't go their way, and suggested that most of the challenges the black community faces are the ones they bring on themselves.

+ The white participants were less open to discussing racial issues than the other groups, and felt that black people are to blame for the poverty facing their communities. Some framed racism as largely a creation of the media, politicians, and black religious figures who stoke it because they are profiting from it. They also suggested that efforts to address racism make it worse and contribute to the fact that "blacks are angry all the time." On the question of economic opportunity, the white group felt that generational poverty within the black community was "learned behavior" and that "the door is open for everyone who is willing to work."

+ The black focus group felt that there was a need to teach the history of Jim Crow and Charleston's unique role as a hub of the slave trade in order to learn from these mistakes. One woman told a story of developing lessons about black history for her kids, realizing the local schools refused to address it. The Latino group dismissed the idea of teaching more about slavery and black history immediately saying, "Everyone's suffered; don't dwell on it." The white group responded by defending the Confederate flag and symbols, insisting that any teaching about the wrongs that were done to black people must be balanced with lessons about "all the good things that were done for them" since that time. Members of the white focus group chalked up the desire to revisit things the past to profiteering off of racial division.

+ The black participants debated the issue of reparations, ultimately embracing the idea and the rationale, but all except one participant rejected the idea of direct financial reparations. This participant suggested that reparations should be made in the form of investments in systems that can lift up the entire black community: schools, job training, affordable housing, public transportation, small-business loans and support, etc. The Latino group rejected the idea of reparations saying, "There's lots of cultures that have been in slavery." The white group was unwilling to discuss it, arguing that any direct responsibility for slavery or its effects died with the last slaves and slaveowners generations ago, and that any attempt would result in a white backlash.

Knoxville

TN

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

As one of the largest cities in the Appalachian region, Knoxville has positioned itself in recent years as a repository of local culture. Knoxville is home to the University of Tennessee, the headquarters of the Tennessee Valley Authority, and several national and regional companies. It is near the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, a federally funded research and development center. Knoxville's population is becoming more diverse, with 28 percent identifying as other than white.[104] Median wages are significantly lower for people of color than for their white counterparts in Knoxville, with white people earning over $5,000 more than black people and Latino people.[105] Since 2010, the poverty rate has increased for white, black, Latino, and mixed-race residents.[106] Knoxville may face a skills gap if it does not increase educational attainment for black and Latino residents. Nearly 60 percent of jobs will require some college education, but only half of black residents and just over 40 percent of Latino residents meet this job requirement.[107]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Knoxville, we conducted individual interviews and hosted small group discussions with food policy experts at the United Way, community and civic leaders at Urban League of Greater Knoxville, and the leadership of the Change Center, all working to tackle many of the same challenges E Pluribus Unum seeks to address.

We also conducted focus groups with college-educated black and white residents and non-college-educated white residents.

+ Knoxville residents reported a steady pace of development and growth in economic opportunity. In individual interviews and in the black focus group, respondents noted that despite feelings of being better off now than years past, there are mixed feelings about living in Knoxville due to major crime problems, continued racial profiling, and a growing affordability crisis. White participants spoke glowingly of living in an area close to beautiful nature with economic benefits, without the problems associated with growing too fast. The biggest problems white participants voiced were regarding potholes, concerns of future traffic congestion, rising healthcare costs, and crowded hospitals.

+ Residents in Knoxville expressed that they lead socially and geographically segregated lives, leading to the prominence of media-driven narratives about certain places in the city and different social groups.

+ Black participants unequivocally felt blatant discrimination in professional settings where they saw less qualified whites getting jobs, specifically citing job descriptions that require a college degree. They believe economic opportunities come down to "who you know" and whether someone in a position of power will advocate for you.

+ In contrast, white participants see a great deal of economic opportunity in Knoxville. They feel that employers are hiring and paying good wages, and that Knoxville is growing at the right pace, resulting in a strong real estate market. White participants did express some economic concerns, but this was primarily about the cost of healthcare and lack of investment in public education. When asked about opportunity equality between races, both college-educated and non-college-educated whites said it was equal, and that people have become more "open and tolerant" on race.

+ All participants in Knoxville believed that violence frequently stems from the methamphetamine and prescription drug crises, stating that drug usage leads to crimes, domestic violence and shootings. Both black and white groups felt that violent crime is worst in the "black parts" of town, but the problem exists everywhere. Because of this, parents (regardless of race) fear for their children's safety. When asked what they are seeking from the police to address violent crime, black participants felt that the police have an important role to play, even after criticizing frequent racial profiling and

poor treatment of black youth by Knoxville police. The predominant feedback was that additional police would be a great help to the city, but that they must have the "right agenda" and truly want to relate to the kids instead of just showing them "who is boss."

+ For black participants, race permeates all aspects of life, whether it is discrimination in the workplace, disparities in public schools, the impact of segregated neighborhoods, or simply different social circles and segregated churches. When asked about what divides the community at the beginning of the focus group, one participant responded: "Come on! Race!" Another black participant added, "Because of the way this city is sort of segregated, most whites don't necessarily have to deal with black folk on a daily basis. And so that in essence breeds this sense of racism, because we don't deal with each other, but it's not always racism, sometimes it's just, I don't know you and I don't deal with you."

+ Participants highlighted that the education system serves as a place where the racial divide and stereotypes are perpetuated, and that there is a general disrespect toward black students.

+ The non-college-educated white group expressed that things have gotten better in Knoxville over the years, because black people are more accepted today, and "people aren't burning crosses in yards anymore." They pointed to "doctors of all races" as evidence that racism is behind us and that black people are wrong to think white people are still prejudiced. Some in the white group dismissed systemic injustices between policy and black residents, saying police are just doing their job, saying, "If you aren't doing something wrong, the law isn't going to mess with you." Another individual suggested that today's divisions in Knoxville are driven by the media and movements like Black Lives Matter.

+ Some participants in the college-educated white group noted that "there is an undercurrent of prejudice in the South," and they pointed to racist parents who passed it down to their children. They also noted that blatant racism is no longer socially acceptable, so white people often take their racist comments "behind closed doors." But some of the college-educated whites felt it was important to emphasize that things have changed, and there is a difference between the "melting pot" of West Knoxville and the less enlightened, poorer suburban farming communities, emphasizing that divisions are less about race and more about socioeconomic status and class.

+ Black participants reiterated the challenges resulting from the "good old boy" culture, but they placed a lot of hope in the future for opportunity and improved race relations. When asked about the future, white participants were optimistic because they see the community "coming together," mainly associated with attracting economic development and growth.

"Mainly, the have-nots are people who live in what we call the inner city. They have a high school diploma or not. Most don't have education beyond that. And, you know, when I was growing up, it used to be you could graduate from high school and get a job at one of the plants, so you could get a job that would put you in the middle class right out of high school. Those jobs don't exist anymore."

BLACK FEMALE, 66
KNOXVILLE, TN

"There's a big, 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' sort of mentality. You know, no handout, no welfare sort of mentality. And I don't think there's a commitment to see why these problems happen."

WHITE MALE, 36
KNOXVILLE, TN

"Here, everything costs literally hundreds of dollars whether it be cheerleading or basketball or track or football or basketball. And with three kids in school trying to do three different sports and each one is a $300 to $500 investment, it makes it hard, it makes it hard."

BLACK MALE, 40
KNOXVILLE, TN

"Because we are men and because we look out for ourselves. And when we're looking out for ourselves always you cannot have equity because you're not worrying about that other person. You don't care what happens to them. You cannot have equity there. I think it is only when we have as much concern for someone else as we have ourselves that we can have really equity as I would see it. Again, and I agree, you can have the laws on the books but that doesn't mean that there's equity because I can meet the law sometimes and still not have equity there. It has to be a change of heart on the part of man for there to be equity."

KNOXVILLE, TN

"But because of the way this city is sort of segregated, most whites don't necessarily have to deal with black folk on a daily basis. And so that in essence breeds this sense of racism because we don't deal with each other, but it's not always racism, sometimes it's just, I don't know you and I don't deal with you."

BLACK MALE, 43
KNOXVILLE, TN
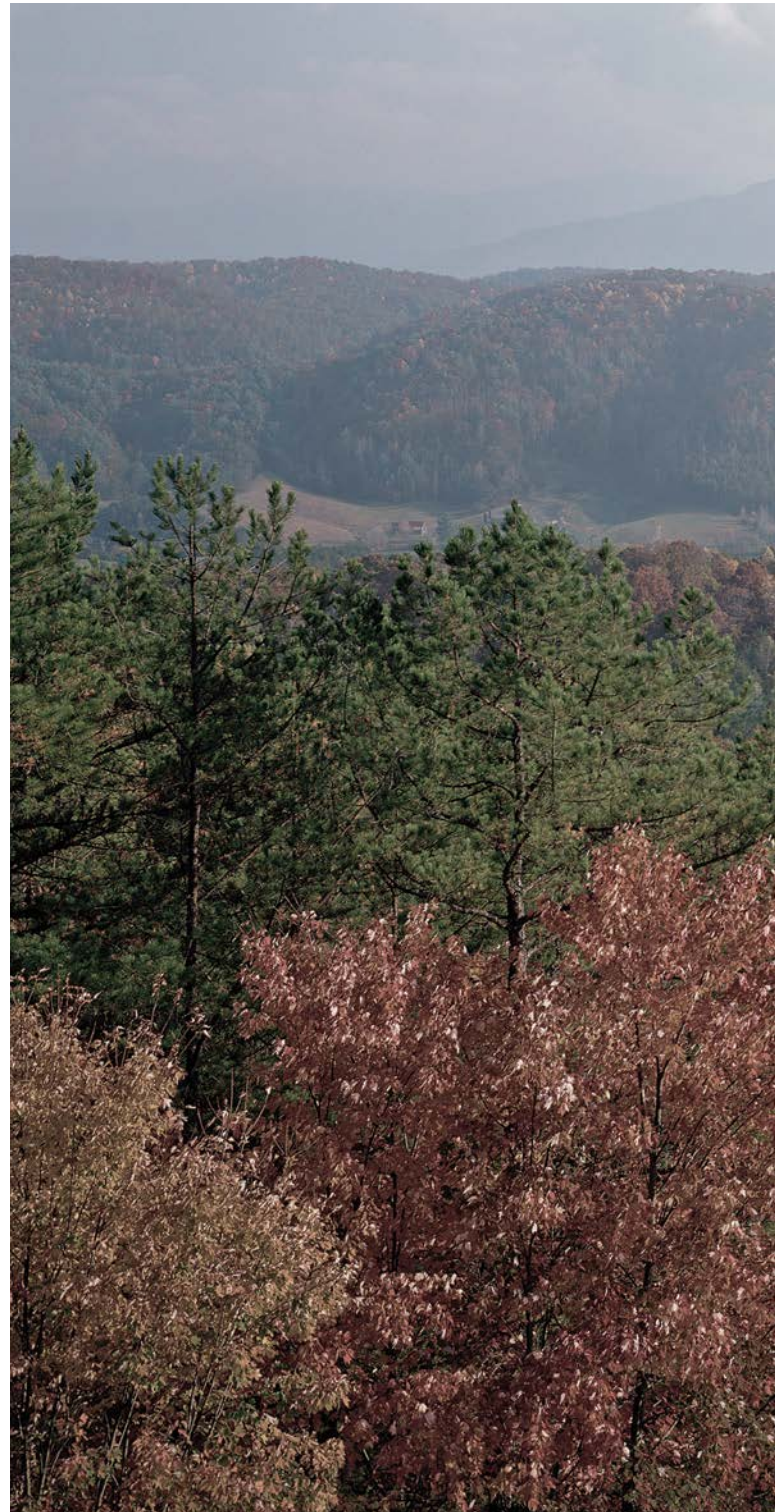
Changing the Narrative in Knoxville

The gray-haired grandfather walked onto the stage to tell one of the shared stories of Knoxville.

"My granny was the only person around who knew how to cure things," the elderly character told the audience. "She could sweet talk a baby out of its mother, she could make a tincture and a tonic for whatever ailed you. When asked how she knew what she did, she'd always say, 'I listen to what the water tells me.'"

That scene opened "What the Water Tells Me," an original 2018 "hiphopera" created by a collaboration between the Cattywampus Puppet Council, known for its lifesize puppets, and the Good Guy Collective, a group of veteran Knoxville hip hop artists.

Southerners and people of color have not always been able to control narratives of home and family. It's not easy even for talented groups like Cattywampus and the Good Guy Collective, which face tight resources despite the successes they've had — especially in their work with youth.

Yet they continue, because they are driven by the stories of Knoxville, told through art.

"I grew up in low-income communities my whole life," said Jarius Bush from the Good Guy Collective. "Music was always a tool to express this, and ultimately feel empowered. Now we're finally deciphering how we can impact our community through our work." The collective works with classes of third to fifth grade students to make music about both the joys and inequities of life.

Recently, Cattywampus recruited middle school interns who created a youth-led parade focused on the intersecting identities of being black and LGBTQ. "They made art for the parade, plus they learned cultural organizing and how arts can be a tool for change in our communities," said Rachel Milford, artistic and executive director of Cattywampus, who was impressed by the young people's ability to distill today's world. "The way they're looking at issues, thinking about justice and equity and what that really means — it's incredibly inspiring."

Bush and Milford believe that, through art, Knoxville can both confront new challenges, like rising gentrification, and historic challenges, like neighborhood segregation. "Art allows us to look at the way things are now, and then imagine other possibilities," Milford said. "It's a vehicle to come together and heal. And part of that is telling our stories. How do we get a point where we can work together as a community in a united way?"

TX

Houston

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

With a population of 2.3 million people, Houston has been described as the most racially and ethnically diverse major metropolis in the country. The city's economy has a broad industrial base in energy, manufacturing, aeronautics and transportation. Houston is a city where the population is more than half people-of-color: 43.9 percent are Latino, 22.7 percent are black, and 25.5 percent are white.[108] Over the last two decades, Houston has experienced a 10 percent decline in its white population while its Latino population has grown over 25 percent.[109] There are an estimated 600,000 undocumented immigrants in the Houston area, comprising nearly 9 percent of the city's metropolitan population.[110] The median hourly wage for white workers is $30 per hour while people of color only earn $15 per hour.[111] Today, 37 percent of jobs here require some college education.[112] While 65 percent of white workers meet this requirement, only 27 percent of black workers and 25 percent of Latino workers have the necessary education to compete.[113]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Houston, we held three focus groups comprised of white, black and Latino residents, all under the age of 35.

+ All three groups felt that Houston's growth has created greater economic diversity and opportunity for most workers. But there was still a concern about the lack of quality jobs that provide a middle-class income, benefits, or the potential for promotion or career growth. Both the black and the Latino groups voiced concern about the persistent poverty afflicting historically non-white neighborhoods in Houston. Some of these historically low-income neighborhoods have been gentrified, but that has only pushed more residents of color into the remaining areas where poverty, poor schools, few jobs, and higher crime have not been impacted by the city's growth.

+ Property ownership was identified as a critical component of economic opportunity and wealth since affordable housing became a critical issue. The white focus group felt that economic opportunity is far from equal in Houston, although they focused more on gender and class than race as the variables. They also agreed that "who you know" is central to getting a professional start, and that the city's dominant oil and gas industries remain almost exclusively the domain of white men.

+ All participants felt that it is unfair and unacceptable if a worker needs to work more than one full-time job to pay the rent and put food on the table, but it is okay if that worker is working more than one job to provide beyond their most basic needs and to get ahead. The idea of getting ahead on one job is a rarity reserved for those with advanced professions or those few who can land a white collar job that provides benefits and professional advancement.

+ When presented with our definition of equity, all three groups dismissed it as unrealistic. The black group labeled it a fairytale and did not see this as a realistic goal to address the inequalities they had previously articulated.

+ All three groups discussed the threat of violence, and specifically gang violence, in their broader community. The prevalence of sex trafficking in the Houston area was also a concern, especially among the white women we spoke with. All three groups discussed the issue of violence from a perspective distanced from the day-to-day threat of violence that they hear about through the media. While the black group shared that they did not face the threat of daily violence, they did express deep distrust of police. They shared personal stories of negative interactions with law enforcement and were unanimous in rejecting an increased police force as a solution for violence.

+ When discussing the role of race in city dynamics, the black group spoke of the impact it has in the workplace, the lack of investment in non-white schools, and the disproportionate application of criminal justice resources in their communities. This group was optimistic about their own economic prospects, but they noted that most white people who they knew to be successful had inherited wealth and/or received professional opportunities through their family connections, whereas virtually all successful black people they know are the first in their family to achieve any real measure of economic prosperity. They see themselves as similar pioneers in their own lives and expressed a commitment to use that success to lift their family and friends.

+ The Latino group expressed a view of race as a "black versus white" issue and said they did not see racism in their own lives, although several shared they had faced racist language in their youth but rationalized it as "kids being kids." Other members of the group equated poverty and poor parenting with the black community and attributed poor blacks' economic plight primarily to irresponsible personal choices rather than larger structural causes. The white group talked about the importance of Houston's diversity, but when the discussion drilled down to race, most admitted they rarely interacted with non-whites in a meaningful way, largely staying in their self-described "bubbles." They felt that there is not much racial tension in Houston and that black and Latino families face the same challenges as white families within this community.

+ Regarding Houston's future, black participants said they are focused on supporting small businesses and making the investments others refuse to make. Latino participants said education was key, but also expressed a desire for investment in public transit to better connect people to the places they work, and to alleviate congestion. White participants talked about traffic and a need for more infrastructure improvements to address the risk of flooding, as well as diversifying the local economy beyond fossil fuels.

+ In terms of moving forward on the issue of race, the black group felt that we need to face our collective history of racial division and abuse head on, while the white group felt there is nothing to be gained from reopening old wounds and we need to focus on a shared future instead. The Latino group felt that there is a lot of negative emotions tied up in the battles of the past, and that we are better off just focusing on the future.

Richmond

VA

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Virginia is a state that has informed our nation's history significantly since our founding. This year, Virginians remembered the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to their state. The city of Richmond, as the State capital and the former capital of the Confederacy, held discussions and events to mark this milestone. Richmond is a majority-people-of-color city, ahead of the national curve in demographic change with 48 percent black and 12 percent identifying as other than white.[114] However, unemployment is more than three times higher among black workers (14 percent) than their white counterparts (4 percent).[115] The wage gap is also a major barrier for Richmond's economic vitality with white workers paid approximately $20,000 more per year than black and Latino workers.[116] Richmond's metro economy could be $14 billion stronger without racial income gaps.[117] More than 1 in 6 young people of color are neither working nor in school.[118] And, more than 3 out of 4 jobs in Richmond are held by workers living outside the city limits.[119]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

In Richmond we conducted individual interviews and led several small group discussions, both with Richmond Hill and Initiatives of Change. At the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney and Mayor Landrieu discussed how local leaders can tackle critical social issues including racism and racial disparities, the history and symbolism of monuments, how to chart a path toward dismantling inequities, and how their two cities can learn from each other.

We also conducted focus groups with non-college-educated black and white residents and college-educated black residents, all under the age of 35.

+ Participants from all three groups shared that growth has created jobs, but has not increased wages, and combined with rising housing costs, many described feeling economically vulnerable. It was voiced that the jobs created have not been in fields likely to create decently-paying jobs. The college-educated black group pointed out that they know very few people who have been able to get jobs in the fields in which they majored in college. They felt that economic growth has been very specifically focused in wealthier white areas of the city, the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) area, and the suburbs. While the college-educated group was more optimistic and saw some economic opportunity (particularly in growth of small, locally-owned businesses) both black groups described a stagnant economy that offers few opportunities. The non-college group saw overt racism in hiring practices that further limit their opportunities, while the college-educated groups were more apt to describe themselves as limited by the city's broader economy.

+ The majority of participants communicated that when a city like Richmond experiences growth and gentrification, there is money to be made in real estate and other opportunistic investments. But they also recognized that such investments require existing resources. As a result, they see the wealthy in the community disproportionately benefitting from the current economy, while the poor continue to suffer from low wages and the impact of gentrification on housing prices and dislocated communities. There was broad agreement that Richmond has very little middle class left; as one non-college black man succinctly put it, "You either got it or you don't." Those who worked multiple jobs were proud of the work ethic it demonstrated, but they also lamented the cost to other priorities in their lives, such as engagement with their community and making a difference in the lives of others.

+ Violence was a more immediate concern for the non-college black participants than either of the other two groups, but there was agreement across the groups that violence is getting worse in Richmond. The college-educated black group was clear that there are certain areas of the city they avoid because of the threat of random violence, explaining how they will reroute their GPS if it takes them through those parts of the city. All three groups mentioned a rise in gang-related violence, and there was strong agreement that social media has directly led to a rise in violence among younger people because it provides a new forum for expressing insults and disrespect. The prospect of an increased police force was universally rejected, with white and black respondents both reporting that the relationship between Richmond police and the black community is very problematic.

+ All three groups felt that race remains a dominant issue in Richmond, mainly due to the city's past and the current Confederate monument debate. Both black groups discussed the racial disparities in job opportunities and quality of education available to black and white residents, exacerbated by the continued geographic segregation. The groups felt they faced racism in hiring practices, although the impact was felt much more acutely in the non-college group. All three groups felt the greatest impact is related to the poor condition and lack of investment in Richmond Public Schools versus the quality and abundance of resources available to suburban schools.

+ The non-college white participants acknowledged the economic and opportunity divide between white and black residents, but some used stereotypes when discussing issues in the black community such as: "poor parenting" and generational poverty based on bad choices. Some participants minimized the role of race in the divide, by suggesting that the real culprit is income, and that blacks "just happen to be more likely to be poor." A few raised the idea of reverse racism; one young man said, "I couldn't get a job in a black barbershop, so how is that different?"

+ Among all the groups there was little optimism shared for the future, with a belief that the challenges of geographic segregation, low wages and a lack of investment in critical needs such as education and infrastructure will stay the same. The most common suggestions for moving Richmond forward focused on investment in public schools within the city, roads and other infrastructure projects, and more affordable housing. Also mentioned as important ways to ensure more time for family and community bonding were family-friendly economic policies, and community-based efforts rallied around racially-unifying themes such as music, food, and sports.

"I'm a student of urban planning, and in my studies of that here in this city, race played quite a specific role on how we rated neighborhoods, on what neighborhoods were deemed slums, on what neighborhoods were razed, on what neighborhoods got sewage, plumbing, etc. And it still continues to this day."

**MALE
RICHMOND, VA**

"I just think that people get angry about the Civil War. And there's no common communication or trying to get together to talk to each other about it... I know they wanna tear down monuments because people think that it's offensive to African Americans. But I don't think we need to tear them down and forget how far we've come with history."

**WHITE FEMALE, 53
RICHMOND, VA**

"It has not surfaced in the past until Trump was elected. And I think his election has emboldened the racists — people with a racist attitude, economically, educationally otherwise — to become more pronounced, more aggressive."

**BLACK MALE, 78
RICHMOND, VA**

"We want safe places. We want healthy spaces. We want the same things. And so, I think so often that stereotype that has been perpetuated, has done a disservice to African Americans and to people of color, and it is our responsibility saying, how do we tell that story? How do we tell that narrative and not depend on someone else to tell that story and that narrative for us?

**BLACK MALE, 50
RICHMOND, VA**

"It makes me uncomfortable talking about it, because you have to walk on eggshells and watch what you say. And because people... you might not mean something offensively, but someone's going to take it that way...A lot of people are trying to forget it."

**WHITE FEMALE
RICHMOND, VA**

"You don't know whether it's because you were not qualified or because [you're] black. That's always a question."

**BLACK FEMALE, 65
RICHMOND, VA**
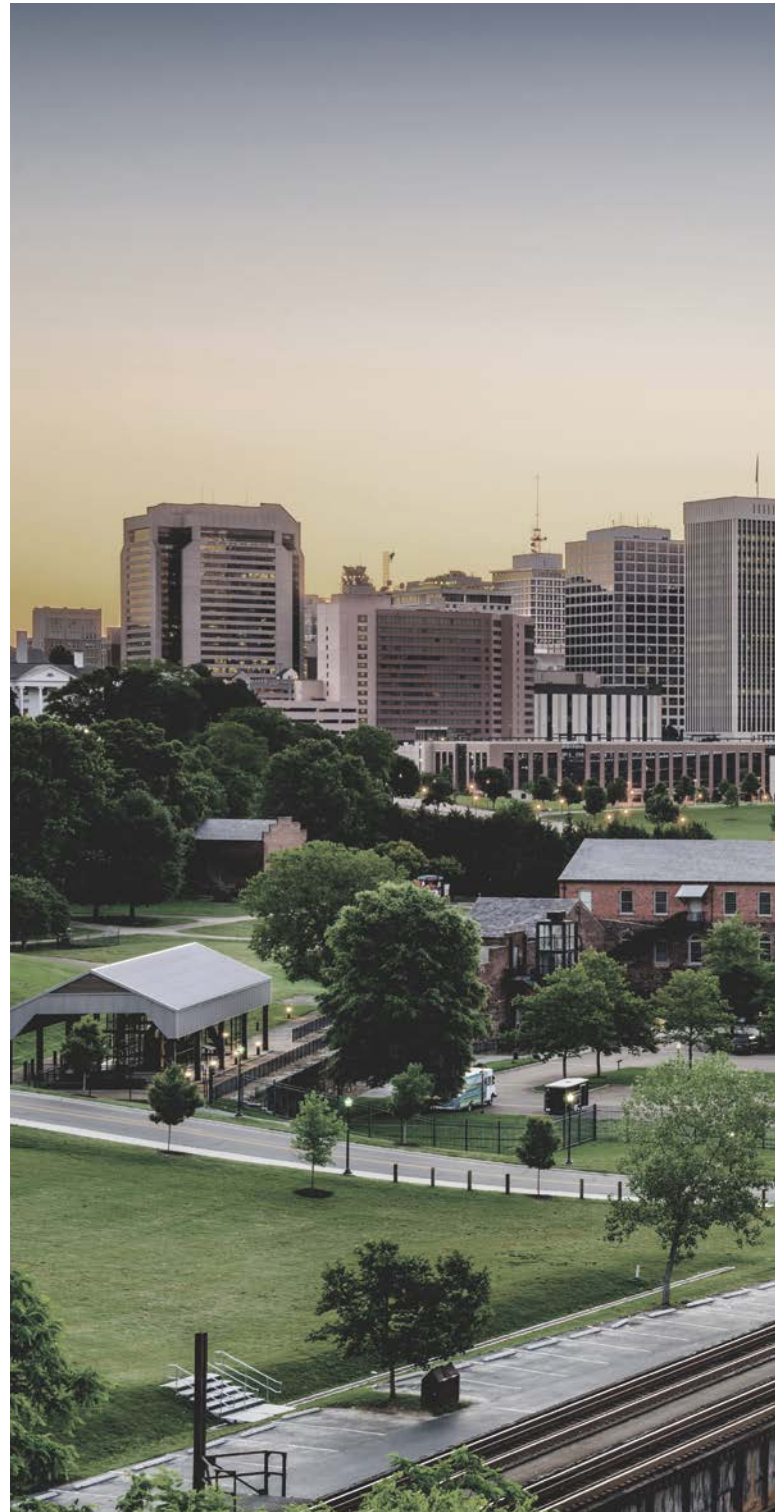
Mayors Lead

Earlier this year, Mayor Levar Stoney went before the Richmond City Council to present his Fiscal Year 2020 budget. He addressed matters of equity, ranging from much needed sidewalk and street repairs to the city's long-neglected public schools.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this budget marks a new beginning," Mayor Stoney told the Council. "With this budget, we have an opportunity to invest in our children, our families, and our neighborhoods, to build the city we all deserve."

In a growing number of Southern cities, the push for progress is coming from City Hall.

In Louisville, Mayor Greg Fischer told reporters that cities are the prime place for conversations about how racial equity is tied to economic progress, because 85 percent of this nation's goods and services come from urban centers. "We need to acknowledge inequality exists – whether racial or economic," Mayor Fischer said. "We need to have a common belief that we're all interconnected and that we're all on this journey together. That is the strength of our country."

In Jackson, Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba sees inequity behind every unresolved constituent problem. "Ultimately what you learn is that your problem isn't simply just a problem with a pothole, your problem is that you have no control over the decision-making process that leads to a pothole being fixed," he said.

Often, progress forward starts with a look back, to acknowledge the roots of today's inequities.

Mayor Vi Lyles, of Charlotte, North Carolina, tells audiences how her father was in the military when the GI Bill was implemented. "But men of color weren't

eligible for the house and educational benefit," she said. "I talk about that because I believe that it's really important for us to understand our history so that we don't take for granted circumstances of today that were created by policies and laws of yesterday." With that in mind, Mayor Lyles has focused on affordable housing, jobs, and transportation "to make Charlotte an equitable place for all."

And soon after Randall Woodfin was elected mayor in Birmingham, he unveiled his economic development plan, which envisions a similar endpoint: "Birmingham will become a hub for qualified, diverse talent, propelling shared prosperity through innovation and inclusive growth."

In Richmond, Mayor Stoney characterized his city's past as "good, bad and ugly," as he outlined the roots of Richmond's segregated neighborhoods, income disparities, resource-starved schools, along with the Confederate statues that line Monument Avenue.

"Whether it's the monuments, whether it's housing, whether it's schools, this is all intentional," Mayor Stoney said. "Our job as public servants today is to continue to unwind what was intentionally bound together a long time ago."

To break from that history in Richmond, Mayor Stoney has focused intentionally in a different direction, on municipal policies, plans and budgets. Within the city's 2019 approved budget were significant outlays for improved public transit, affordable housing, public schools, an eviction-diversion program, and raises for police, firefighters, and teachers. "This is an investment in the city's future," Mayor Stoney said, once the budget was approved by the Council. "It's about time the city steps up, and we've done that."

Central Appalachia

Charleston, WV
Perry County, KY

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Central Appalachia is a part of the country deeply rooted in its own history, identity and sense of place. West Virginia formed in 1863 after the western region of Virginia broke away to protest the Old Dominion's joining of the Confederacy.[120] Charleston, West Virginia's population is slowly diversifying, with 78 percent identifying as white.[121] The median wages in Charleston vary considerably by race and ethnicity, with whites earning approximately $14,000 more than blacks.[122] Cutbacks in the coal industry have impacted the community tremendously with 1 in 5 living in poverty.[123] In eastern Kentucky, Perry County has experienced a population downturn in recent years, but its number of people of color has risen slightly.[124] In Kentucky, the statewide median wage is just over $29,000 but in Perry County, it is $2,500 less.[125] Six in 10 jobs in Kentucky require at least some college, but only 4 in 10 Perry County residents have any college education.[126]

WHAT WE DID & LEARNED

Over the course of a week, we visited several cities and towns from Charleston, West Virginia through eastern Kentucky. Along the way, we held in-depth discussions with residents, and conducted focus groups and roundtable discussions with community leaders and local civic organizations. We heard about the hardships and resilience of coal miners who are looking for ways to transition to the new economy. In West Virginia, we learned about a school in St. Alban's using innovative, trauma-informed approaches to education, a drug court program in Boone County that is giving people a second chance, and a community health center in Williamson that is an anchor for revitalization. We visited the Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky, to learn about the storytelling they've done for more than 30 years. In Hazard, we held a roundtable with educators working to create new pathways to economic opportunity in a longtime mining community visited by former Senator Bobby Kennedy over 51 years ago.

In Charleston, WV, we held three focus groups with mixed gender black residents and non-college-educated white men and women. In Perry County, KY, we spoke with one focus group of non-college-educated white men and women.

+ Across all three groups in West Virginia we heard deep-seated pessimism about various aspects of the region's present and future. Opinions were almost universally negative about the impact of the opioid epidemic, crime, collapsing industries like coal, and a general lack of opportunity. And when asked to map a better future, all three groups could not articulate a path to a brighter future for their community absent a "white knight billionaire" coming into the region and building an entire new labor-based industry from scratch, despite the lack of trained workers, quality schools, infrastructure, or any other factor to attract new business to the area.

+ All three groups struggled to identify things that unite their community. But each was quick to point out that they feel pitted against one another and physically segregated. As one black woman said, "It should be painful for an entire community if people don't feel the freedom of movement within their own communities." Some participants felt that the disconnection between white and black residents has resulted in a lack of awareness of each other's accepted differences.

+ In regard to racial attitudes, one black woman felt that President Trump has contributed to the lack of community harmony here. She said, "The man in the White House is driving it. It's everywhere you go."

+ Across Central Appalachia, participants shared that the collapse of manufacturing, coal and other blue collar industries has had a tremendous impact on the region, leaving very few jobs to enable families to meet basic needs, and even with two working parents. The resulting need to work multiple jobs to make ends meet is now accepted as a way of life. They discussed that West Virginia has the lowest wages of any state in the country and saw working multiple jobs as a necessity for those determined to work for a living rather than "abusing the system."

+ The breakdown of the family unit is a major concern for the residents, arising from crime and drugs. All three groups, but particularly the black group, saw a cyclical dynamic between the rise of drugs and associated violent crime and the breakdown of traditional family units, which has increased the number of at-risk and under-supervised youth. It was expressed that another common challenge for both white and black families is the lack of quality jobs and insufficient educational opportunities in the area.

+ White participants felt that the opioid epidemic has wracked their community, placing blame on pharmaceutical companies and weak political leadership who ignored the problem. Similarly, the black group of participants described opioids as a problem that was originally contained within the white community but has now spread to impact their own families as well. With few decently-paying jobs for young people, rampant drug abuse and addiction that threatens safety, and few social bonds to bring communities together, all three groups painted a bleak picture of the area's future. When asked to explain why they themselves remained, they pointed to family (especially older parents) and a sense of personal roots, but they also mostly said they hoped their own children would leave the area.

+ In the eastern Kentucky focus group, race was not seen as much of an issue. Although race has in fact been a statewide issue — notably in nearby Corbin, where there is a history of violent racism — these participants shared that they rarely interact with non-white residents. They spoke negatively of Corbin and wanted to make clear that things were different in their town.

+ People from the region saw the drug epidemic everywhere, and everyone knew somebody affected, sharing stories about "walkers" and "zombies" wandering around on crystal methamphetamine or needles filling the ditches on the sides of roads. Discussions about violence revert to the drug crisis, reflecting the changing impact that drugs have had on the community. Participants shared that in the "old days," violence meant two drunks getting into a fistfight, but nowadays, violence means getting shot or robbed by someone who needs money to buy drugs. The group expressed a desire for investment in prevention and rehabilitation efforts to address the problem, including therapy options for people with depression, anger management programs, and better education for kids to keep them away from drugs.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

As part of our effort to listen directly to communities and to develop informed strategies for uniting people around common purpose, E Pluribus Unum conducted a large-scale survey of black, white, and Latino residents in the American South. This quantitative research built upon the findings from our interviews and focus groups conducted in southern communities over the past year, and further reveals the challenges ahead as we seek to break down the systemic barriers that divide the South along racial lines.

White respondents have very different perceptions of the economy and race relations from black residents. There is very little recognition among white Southerners that the playing field has been tilted toward them in a way that has provided significant socio-economic advantages over the course of generations. Most black respondents, on the other hand, report that they have experienced discrimination because of the color of their skin, and still feel the systemic biases and obstacles resulting from the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation across the South. Latinos in the South are largely concentrated in Texas and Florida, and their views and experiences fall generally in the middle of the polarized views of black and white Southerners.

Despite the major differences in personal experience and perceptions among different racial groups, it is particularly striking that all three groups have similar views on the importance of equity, and they largely share a common belief that diversity strengthens a community more than it divides a community. This research suggests there is a path to a more prosperous future for all groups across the South, but it will require serious efforts to expose each other to the lived experiences of others in their own communities. This recognition and empathy represents the first step in overcoming barriers that are rooted in hundreds of years of history.

A comprehensive analysis of the E Pluribus Unum's Southern Survey is available at unumfund.org. Primary takeaways from our inaugural survey include:

There are clear racial divides in opinion regarding the causes of socioeconomic discrepancies in America.

White residents believe the economy is getting better, and they feel an improvement in their own financial situation, whereas Black residents overwhelmingly believe economic conditions are worsening and that their own personal situation is not improving. This leads to vastly different conclusions about why so many people across the South live in poverty:

+ 76 percent of black residents attribute poor economic situations to a lack of opportunity, and just 16 percent attribute them to poor life choices.

+ 42 percent of white residents attribute poor economic situations to a lack of opportunity, while a plurality of 44 percent attribute them to poor life choices.

+ 55 percent of Latinos attribute poor economic situations to a lack of opportunity, while 35 percent attribute them to poor life choices.

There are clear racial divides in opinion regarding the causes of socioeconomic discrepancies in America.

Most black respondents (69 percent) and nearly half of Latino respondents (48 percent) report that they are sometimes or very often discriminated against because of their race, compared to 31 percent of white respondents. For black respondents, the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation remains very present today, whereas for white respondents, it is something from the past that is no longer relevant:

+ 83 percent of black respondents say this legacy makes it harder for black people to get ahead in America today, compared to 36 percent of white respondents who disagree with this concept.

+ 72 percent of black respondents support financial reparations for the direct descendants of slaves, compared to 22 percent of white respondents who do not support reparations.

+ Latino respondents hold mixed views and largely fall in the middle of these opposing opinions (55 percent say the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation make it harder for blacks to get ahead; 48 percent support reparations).

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127   This survey of 1,800 adults fielded September 29-October 7, 2019, and was conducted by landline and cell phones in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The survey included representative samples of black respondents, Latino respondents, and white respondents across these states (600 interviews per racial group), and the margin of error for each group is +/- 4 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. Hispanic respondents were given the option of taking the survey in English or Spanish.

A majority of Southern white respondents do not accept the idea that they have more economic opportunities than black respondents and Latino respondents, and they reject claims that systemic barriers, historical legacies, or discrimination impact black respondents' and Latino respondents' economic conditions today.

Nearly all black respondents (90 percent) and almost two-thirds of Latino respondents (64 percent) think that white respondents in the United States have more economic opportunities than black respondents and Latino respondents, but only 44 percent of white respondents share this view. In addition to denying this notion of white respondents having an advantage, Southern white respondents differ strongly on the impact that history and current events have on the financial situations of black respondents and Latino respondents:

+ 37 percent of white respondents think that the legacy of slavery and systemic racism plays a significant role in the fact that black respondents do not enjoy the same economic conditions as other Americans today, compared to 82 percent of black respondents and 62 percent of Latino respondents.

+ 45 percent of white respondents think that discrimination against immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and South America plays a significant role in the fact that Latino respondents do not enjoy the same economic conditions as other Americans today, compared to 73 percent of black respondents and 62 percent of Latino respondents.

Racial reconciliation and progress will require education that brings people together around a shared understanding of our history and commitment to the values that will ultimately lead to policies that overcome today's barriers.

As E Pluribus Unum seeks to inform the public about the reality of a South "divided by design," it is critical to correct false historical narratives designed to perpetuate an unequal status quo. For example, this survey shows a plurality of Southerners across races say that the Civil War was not fought primarily over slavery – a fallacy taught to generations of Southern students that prevents us from learning the lessons of our past and moving forward with a shared commitment to equity, making equal opportunity a reality for everyone, regardless of race. There is evidence that ongoing efforts to establish equity as a shared goal and to educate Southerners about it have powerful potential. In our focus groups across 16 Southern communities last year, most participants did not understand 'equity' as fair opportunity – except in areas such as New Orleans and Louisville, where there had been a prominent public discussion of equity in these terms. When provided this definition in our survey, large majorities embraced it as a critical step in moving our country forward:

+ 95 percent of black respondents say equity is important (including 74 percent very important).

+ 91 percent of Latino respondents (including 60 percent very important).

Despite the widely divergent views expressed across racial groups, there are shared cultural experiences and some common ground on the value of diversity and equal opportunity.

While de facto segregation of communities remains widespread across the South, and this research shows that those of different races and ethnicities lead very different lives, there are increasing opportunities for dialogue and shared experiences. Most black respondents, Latino respondents, and white respondents report that they frequently interact with people of other races at work, school, and community cultural events such as sports, festivals, and fairs. And while their sharply divergent views on the continuing legacy of slavery and Jim Crow make progress challenging, there are shared values that serve as a foundation for more cooperation and shared purpose. Black respondents, Latino respondents, and white respondents all say they place a high value on diversity and giving everyone equal access to quality education and economic opportunity:

+ 86 percent of Latino respondents, 84 percent of black respondents, and 83 percent of white respondents agree that, "diversity is good for a community and makes the community stronger" (including a majority of each group who strongly agree).

+ 96 percent of black respondents and 93 percent of white respondents and Latino respondents agree that, "in order for America to reach its full potential, all Americans regardless of race, must have equal rights, the same economic opportunities, and the same access to quality education" (including over three-quarters in each group who strongly agree).

THE ROAD AHEAD: PUTTING INSIGHTS INTO ACTION

Driven by what we have heard and learned, E Pluribus Unum will launch in 2020 a series of programs and initiatives to (1) cultivate courageous leaders who are committed to realizing an inclusive vision for a new South, (2) champion transformative policies to reverse the enduring harms of America's Jim Crow era past for those who continue to experience them today, and (3) change narratives that perpetuate systemic and interpersonal racism in order to shift people's attitudes and behaviors.

Cultivate Courageous Leadership

We talked to and learned from residents, including elected leaders, who are deeply committed to strengthening their communities and are working in creative ways to address issues of race and class. Our research has taught us that people place a great deal of hope in their local political leadership, particularly young leaders who openly prioritize diversity and building more inclusive systems. We also heard how leadership has the potential to set a permissive tone for perpetuating the harms of racism. Entrenched distrust and disappointment in leadership bred by persistent racial disparities and perceived lack of transparency can have a deeply harmful effect on residents' hope for their community's future. Our future work will ensure Southern leaders are empowered to act on issues of race and class in new ways.

Champion Transformative Policies

The vestiges of America's Jim Crow era are vivid to those who continue to experience them through unequal access to opportunity, democracy, safety, and protection under the law. The issues we seek to change have plagued our communities since our country's founding. We do not claim to be the first to take an interest in breaking these barriers; rather, we are committed to supplementing the deep knowledge in this field with insights shared with us by communities across the South. We also hope to accelerate reform by building greater public awareness and influencing action around transformative policy and political change at the local, state, and federal level.

Change Narratives

Too many people in our country lack an understanding of the scale of racism present in America, including our racial history and how it still permeates today's institutions. Racism is often narrowly defined as overt individual actions rather than systemic injustices. This is because race is not easy to discuss openly. But without doing so, scholars argue that racism will still persist. We must teach the lasting impact racism has had on our institutions and persistently advance intentional efforts toward creating racial equity. Our work will focus on empowering storytelling that highlights the impacts of racial injustice in our institutions to provide fuller context needed so that positive change can happen, holding the media accountable when it broadcasts implicit racial bias in its reporting that furthers racial stereotypes, and on ensuring that our full and accurate racial history is told and not whitewashed because it is inconvenient or too difficult to acknowledge.

While our initial travels are complete, our journey continues. If successful, we will see change at the national, systems, and local levels in the following ways:

At the national level: In national public discourse, issues of race and class are discussed in more nuanced and thoughtful ways that do not exacerbate social divides but rather build common ground.

At the systems level: Leaders, at all levels, set new, ambitious priorities and enact substantial changes in policy to redesign institutions and support more equitable communities.

At the local level: Residents have a deeper understanding of systemic racism and the ways in which they can act on issues of racial and economic equity every day.

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