

Structural Racism & Black Mental Health

Sarah Y. Vinson, M.D.

Medical Advisor, African-American Behavioral Health Center of Excellence

Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics, Morehouse School of Medicine

Our
Part

Matters
of
Health

How Far
We've Come?

Why it
Matters...

Where We
Started

AGENDA

Definitions

Intro.



**Full
Disclosure**

**What's
Ahead**

**Dark-skinned black
woman in a racist,
colorist sexist society . . .
who was also raised in
the south**

Lived in a majority white rural emerging suburb

Close connections to family in segregated communities

Graduate of Historically Black College and University (HBCU) for undergrad

Medical school, residency and two fellowships at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

**Community Psychiatrist,
Educator, Physician Advocate,
Entrepreneur and Intrapreneur**

**Beneficiary of program for "minority
and rural students"**

**Research Honors and Chapman
Humanism from Med. School**

**Trained at Harvard program then
successfully completed 2 fellowships
at Emory**

What's Ahead

Define key terms


Identify examples of historical and structural aspects of racism against Black Americans

Explore ongoing iterations of racism and discrimination in contemporary American society


Examine ramifications in Black mental health and substance use disorders.

Discuss ways to be part of the solution

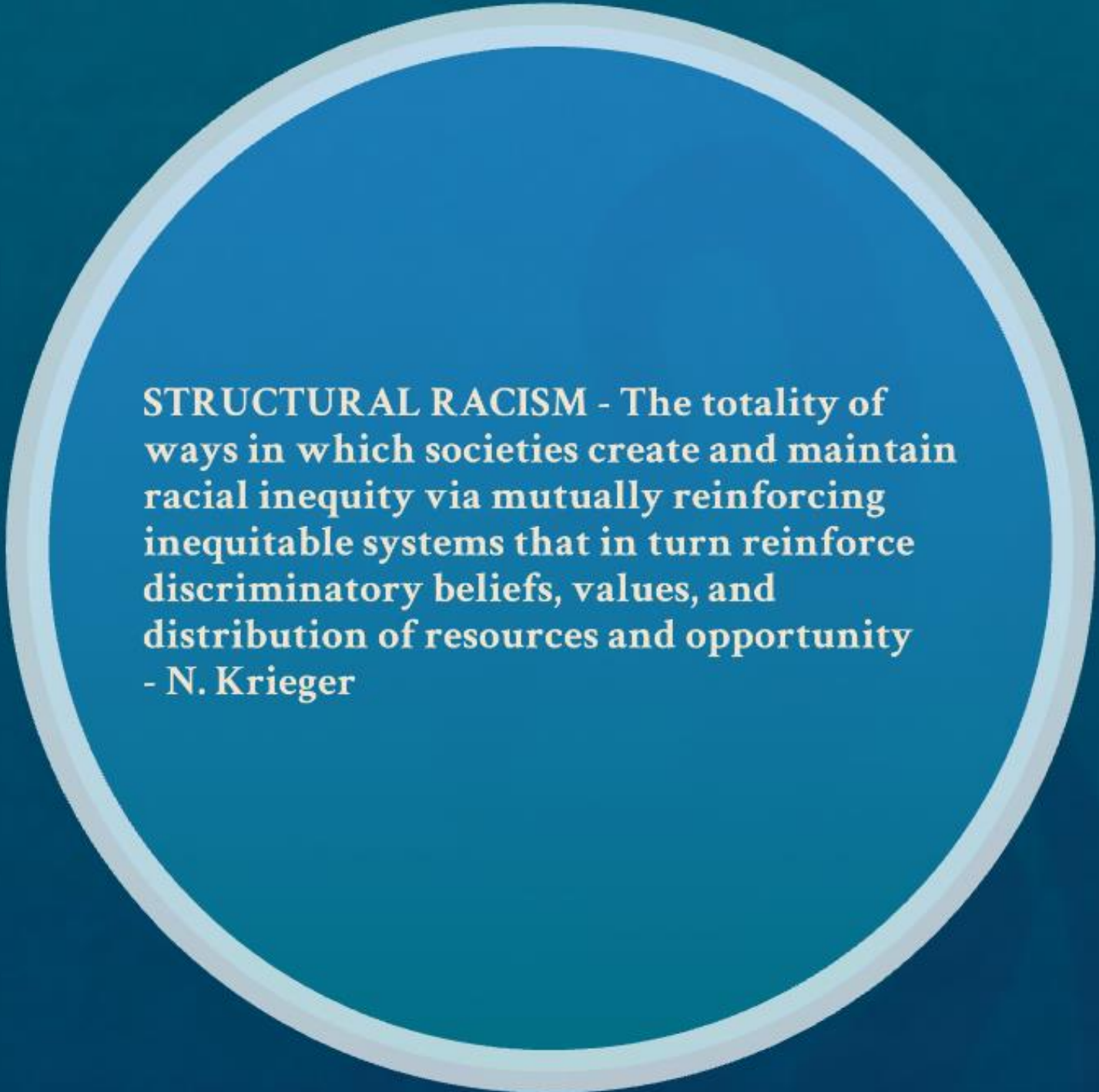




RACE - A **power** construct of
collected or merged
difference that lives socially.
-Ibram X. Kendi



**RACISM - A marriage of racist
policies and racist ideas that
produces and normalizes racial
inequities
- Ibram X. Kendi**

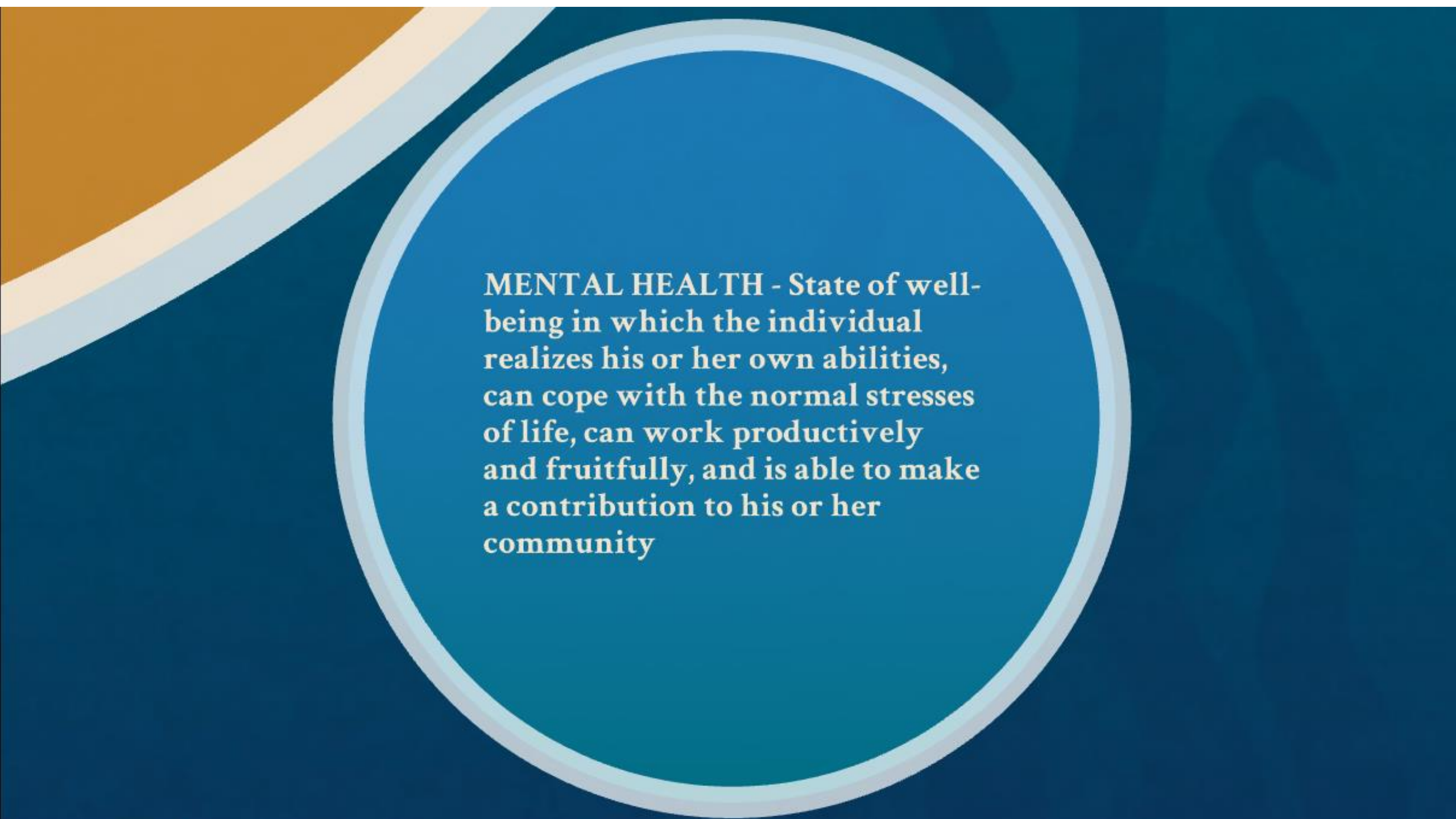


STRUCTURAL RACISM - The totality of ways in which societies create and maintain racial inequity via mutually reinforcing inequitable systems that in turn reinforce discriminatory beliefs, values, and distribution of resources and opportunity
- N. Krieger



**RACIAL DISPARITY - A
difference in health status by
race**

**RACIAL INEQUITY - Disparities
in health that are a result of
systemic, avoidable, and unjust
social and economic policies and
practices that create barriers to
opportunity**



MENTAL HEALTH - State of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community

A Vital Sign

Real for
You

SDOH &
Social
(In)Justice



If you're treated a certain kind of way, you become a certain kind of person. If things are described to you as being real, they're real for you whether they're real or not.

- James Baldwin

[Clark Doll Experiments \(click to view\)](#)



Social factors play an important role in the development and maintenance of both wellness and illness



**The
Determinants'
Determinants**

**The
Breakdown**

**The
Foundation**

**The
Outcomes**

**And structural racism
shapes every system in
America driving inequities,
not merely disparities**

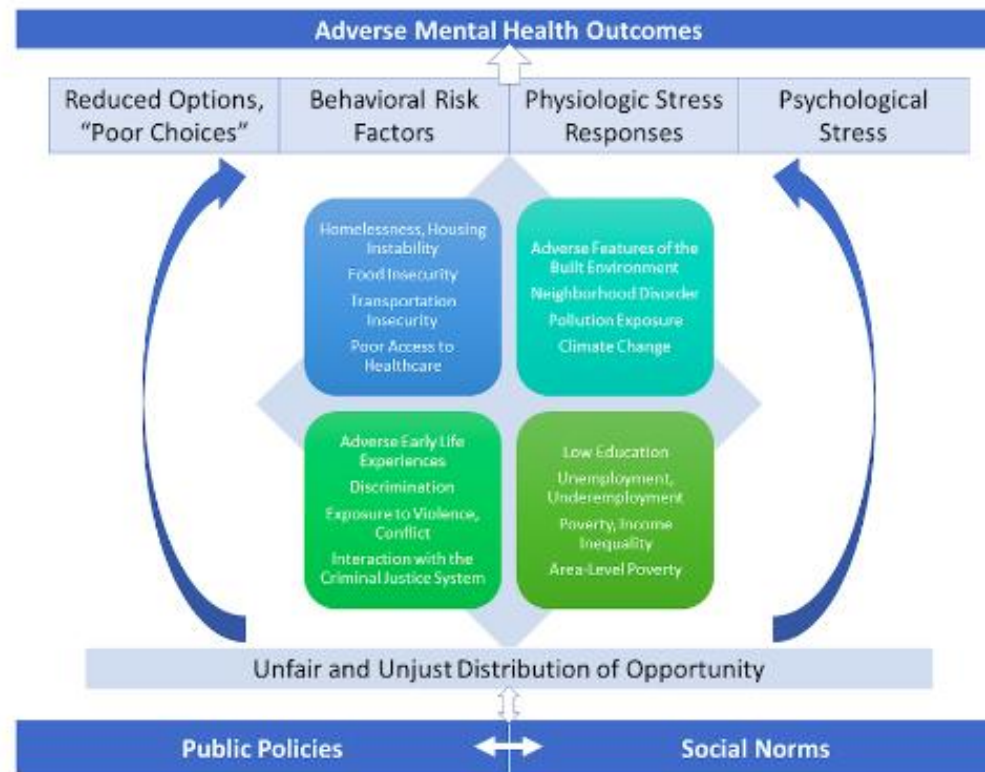


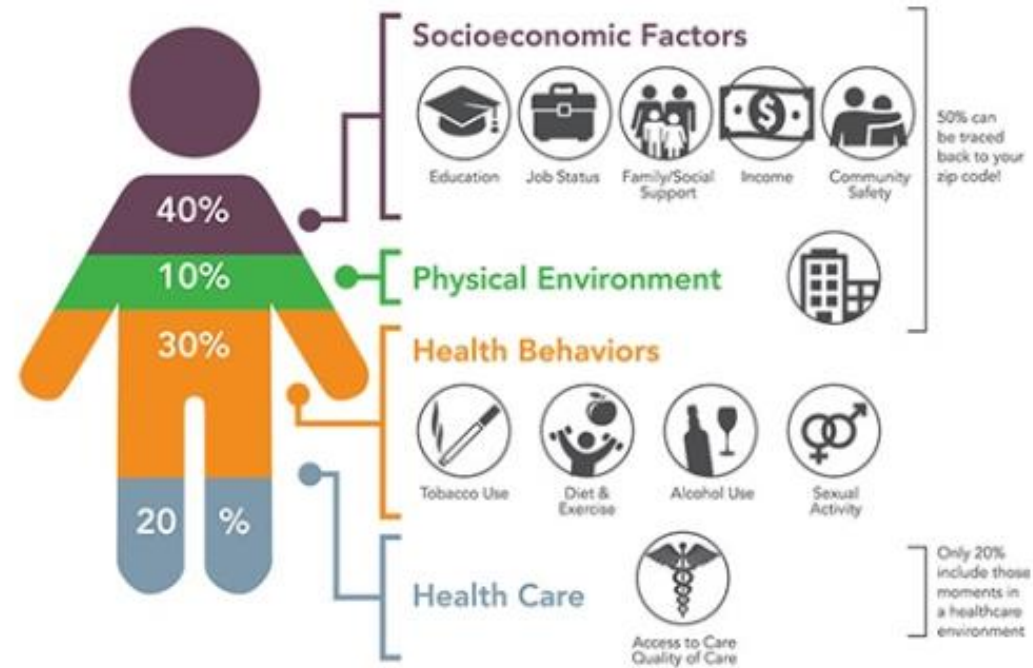
**The
Determinants'
Determinants**

**The
Breakdown**

**The
Foundation**

**The
Outcomes**





Source: Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement, Going Beyond Clinical Walls: Solving Complex Problems (October 2014)

Healthy Growth & Development

Safety

Consistent, Invested Caregiver for Children

Financial stability

Food Security

Housing Security

Inclusion

Perinatal and Pre-natal Health

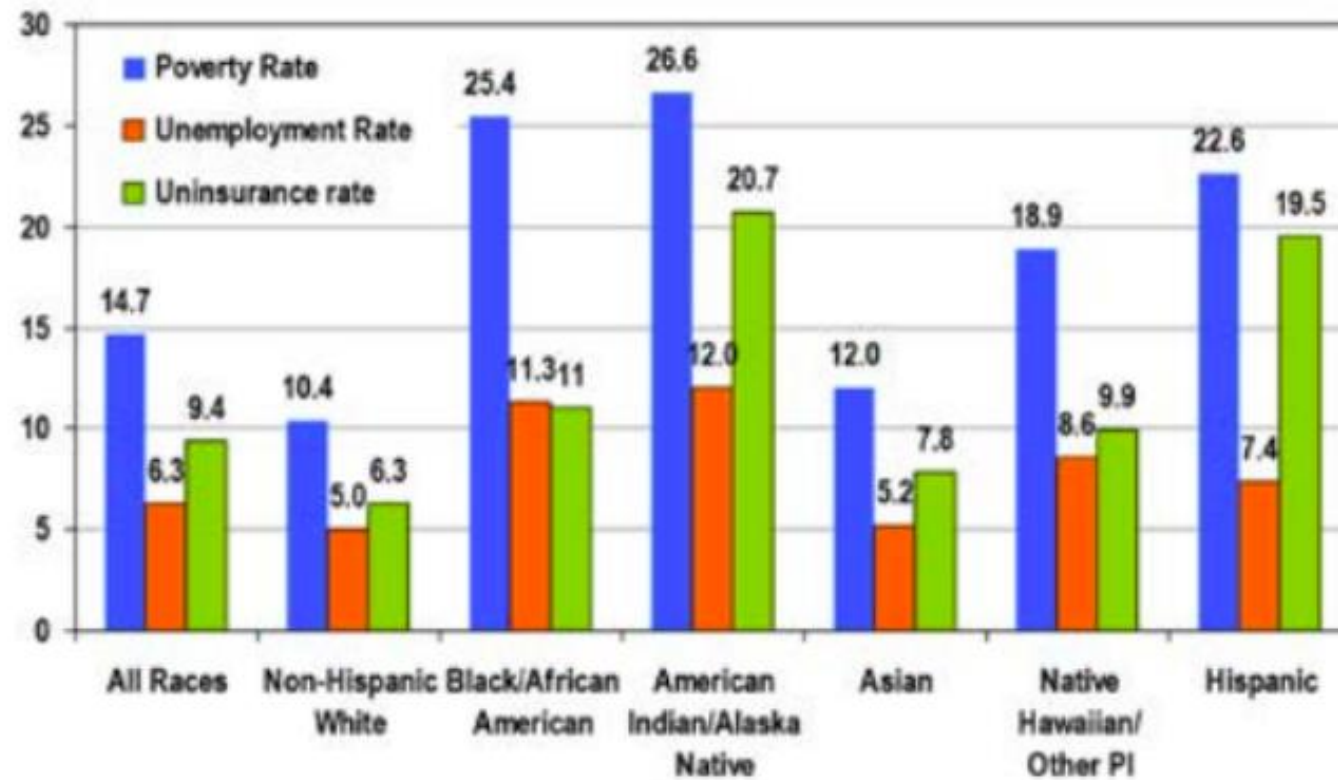
Educational Opportunities

Access to appropriate care



Disparities or Inequities?

Figure 2.1: Poverty, Unemployment, and Health Uninsurance Rates by Race/Ethnicity, United States, 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2015 American Community Survey.

Once and for all
I will state this
principle:

- Dr. Franz Fanon

A given society is
racist or it is not.

Where it started . . . in the U.S.

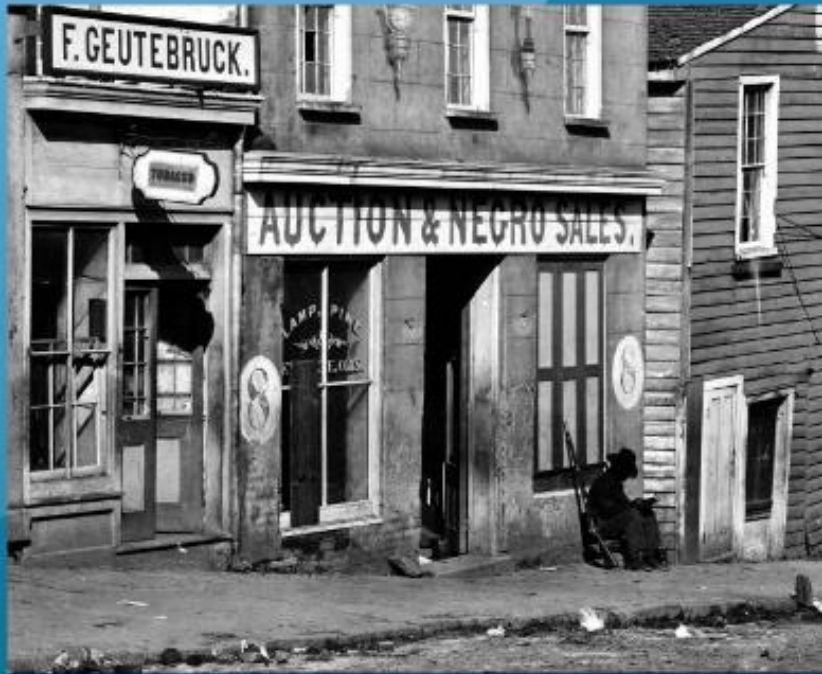


**People
for Profit**

[Why America Needs a Slavery Museum \(click to view\)](#)



People for Profit



Race-based caste system seen in
every U.S. territory,
but with more demand
in the South

Human
Chattle

Continuity of
Thought

Compromise
of Humanity

By the Numbers

By 1815, the domestic slave trade had become a major economic activity in the United States, lasting until the 1860s.

It has been called the Second Middle Passage.

- Less than 5% percent of Africans brought to the Americas were actually brought to the modern day U.S.
- Less than 400,000 people were brought to what is now the U.S., but by 1860, the number of enslaved black people was 4,000,000
- By 1822, half of NY city's exports were related to cotton
- \$\$\$, Power and the 3/5ths compromise - 50/72 years between Washington and Lincoln the U.S. had a slaveholder as president

Alexander H. Stephens

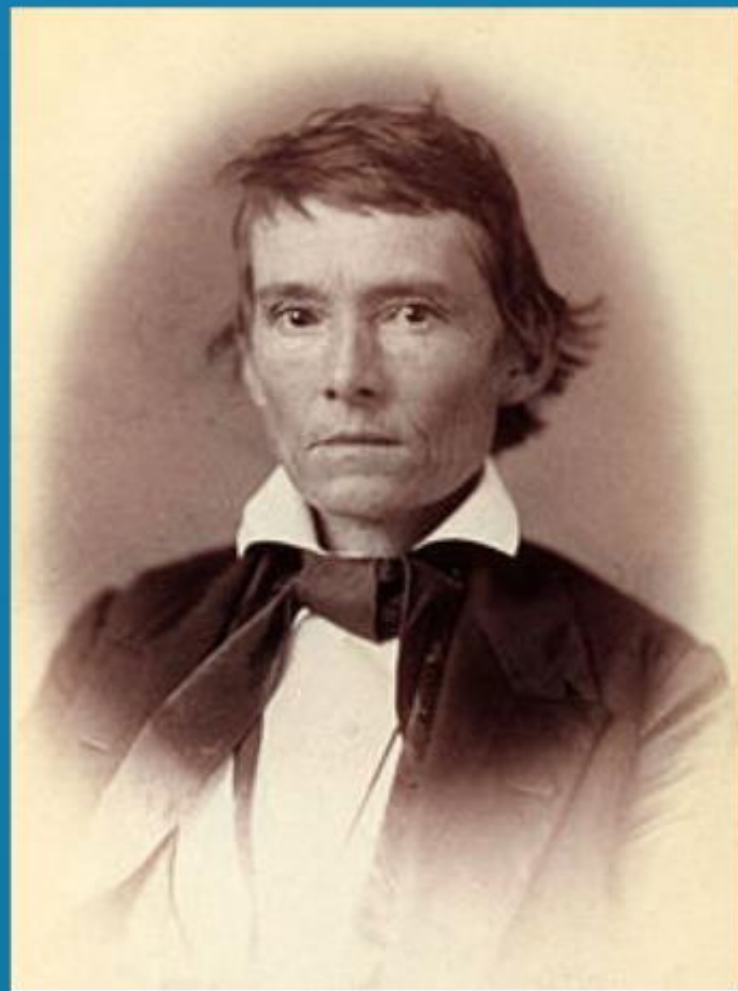
Vice-President of the Confederacy
(1862-1865)

And afterward also...

Elected to the U.S. Senate - though not seated
(1866)

Elected and served as U.S. House Rep. for Georgia
(1873-1882)

Elected and served as the Governor of Georgia
(1882-1883)

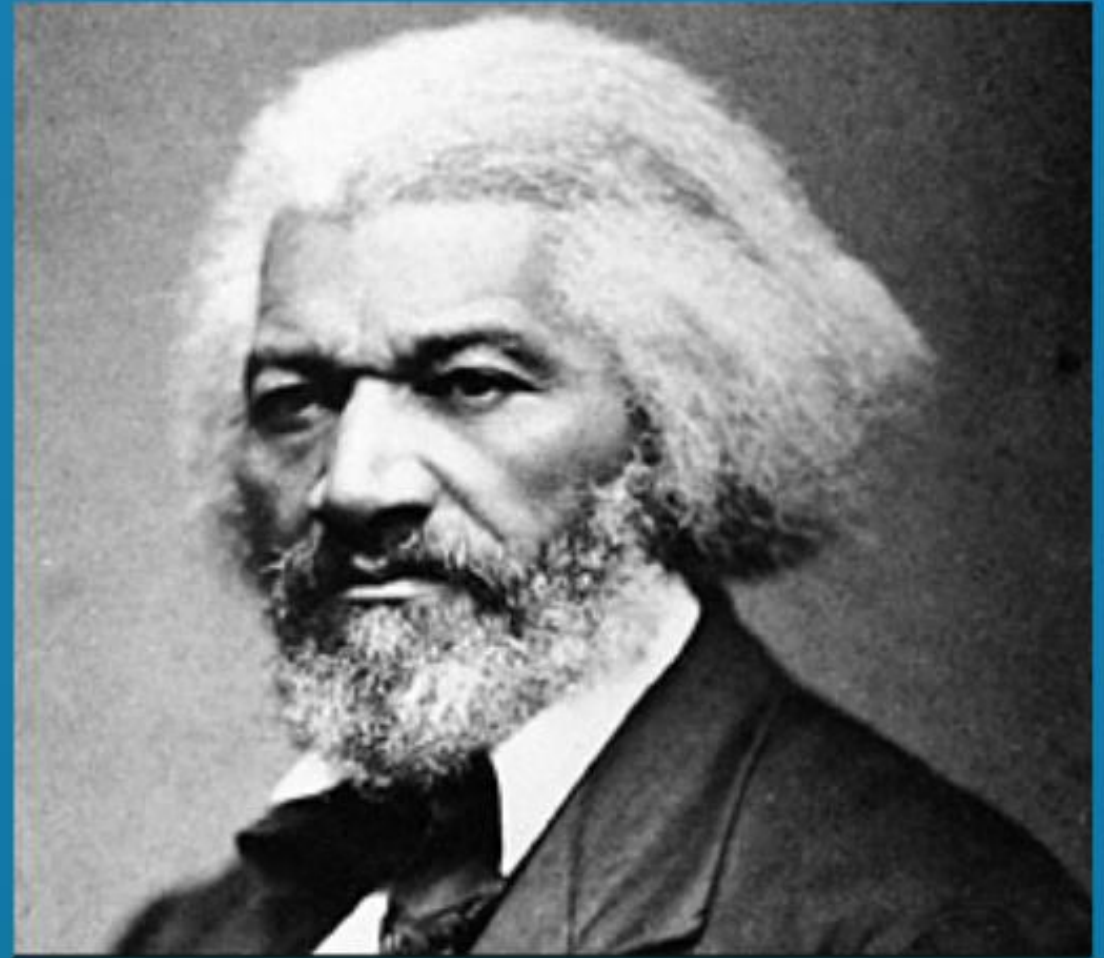


"The new Constitution has put at rest forever all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institutions—African slavery as it exists among us—the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. . . The prevailing ideas entertained by [Jefferson] and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old Constitution were, that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally and politically. It was an evil they knew not well how to deal with; but the general opinion of the men of that day was, that, somehow or other, in the order of Providence, the institution would be evanescent and pass away...

"Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error... Our new Government is founded upon exactly the opposite ideas; its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition."

- Cornerstone Speech in Savannah, GA 1861

"I have observed this in my experience of slavery, - that whenever my condition was improved, instead of its increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom. I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceased to be a man."



- Frederick Douglass

vs. Where We Remain

School to
Prison

Media

All Lives
Matter

Redlining

Louisiana

Louisiana



Angola Prison Farm



80%

School Segregation

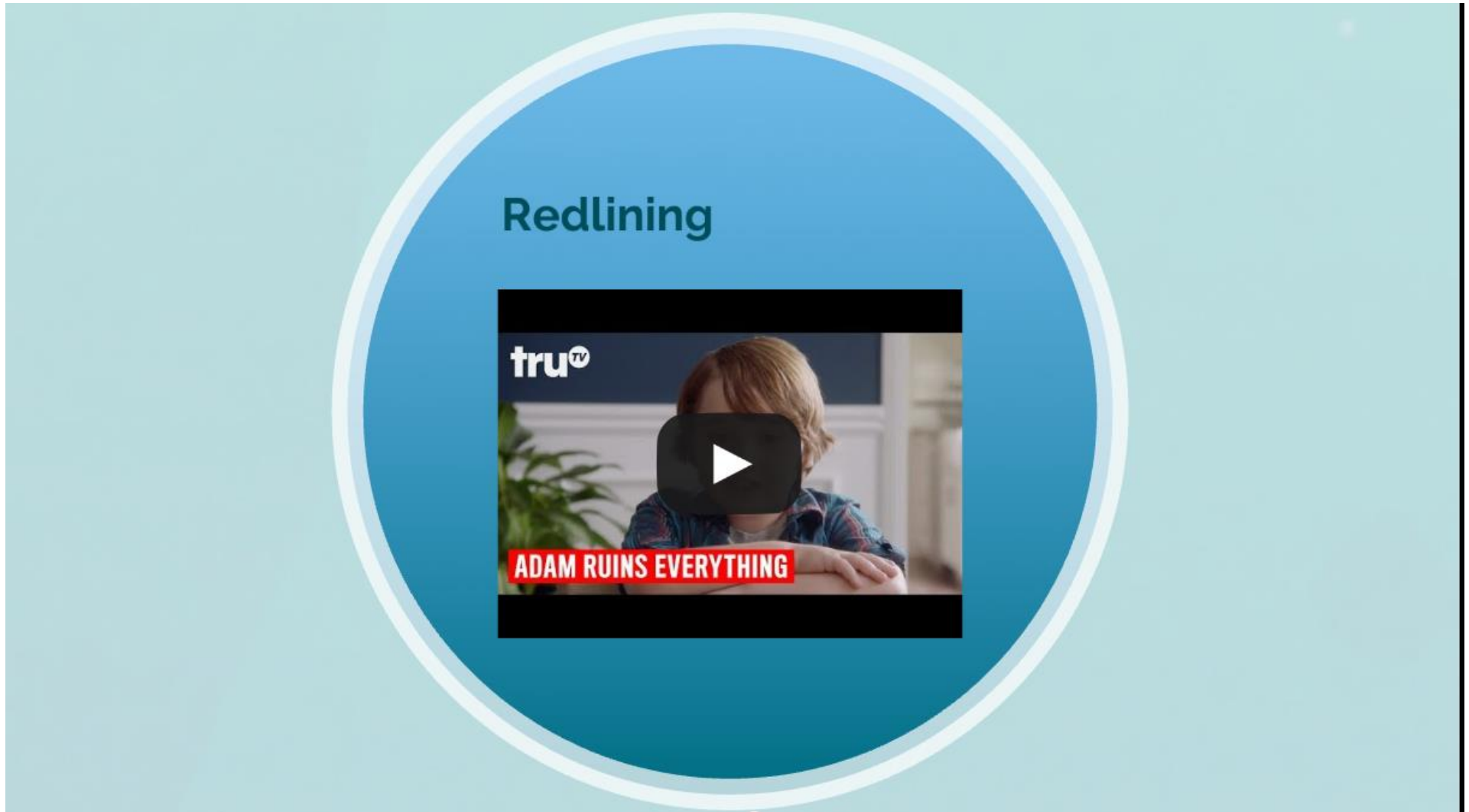
In the U.S. in **2017**, **7/10** black students attended majority black schools, and **7/10** black students attended high poverty schools.

- Economic Policy Institute

Infant Mortality

In Louisiana, the rate of infant mortality among non-Hispanic black infants is more than double the rate of non-Hispanic white infants.

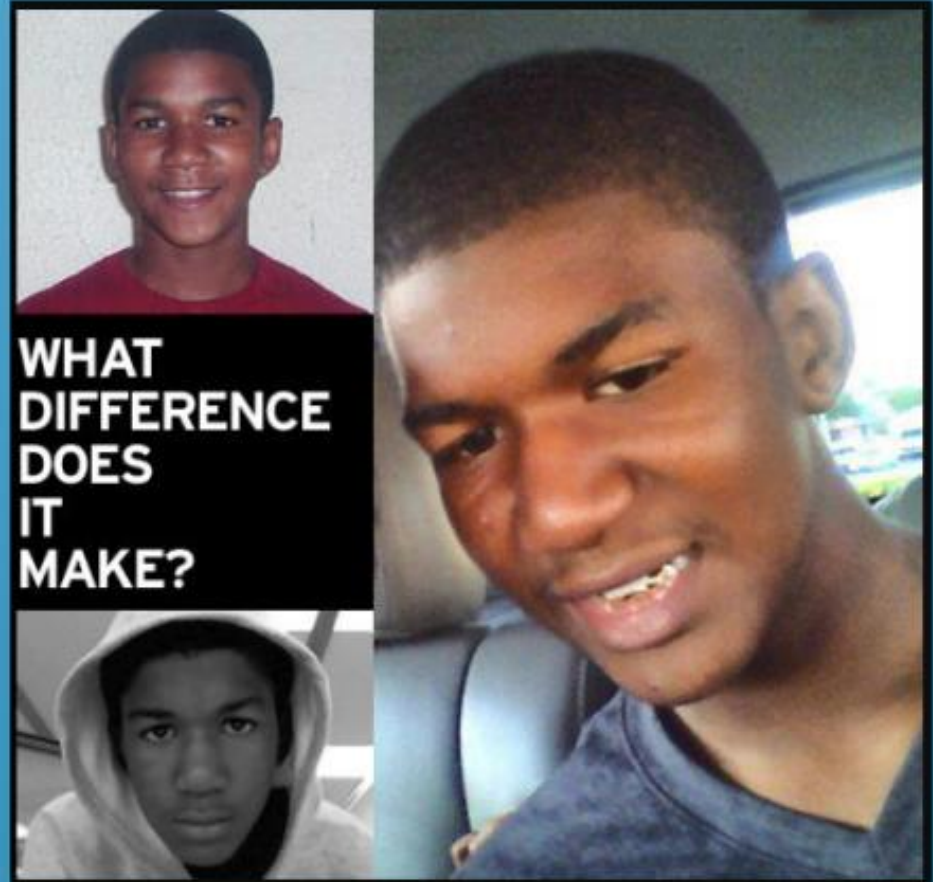
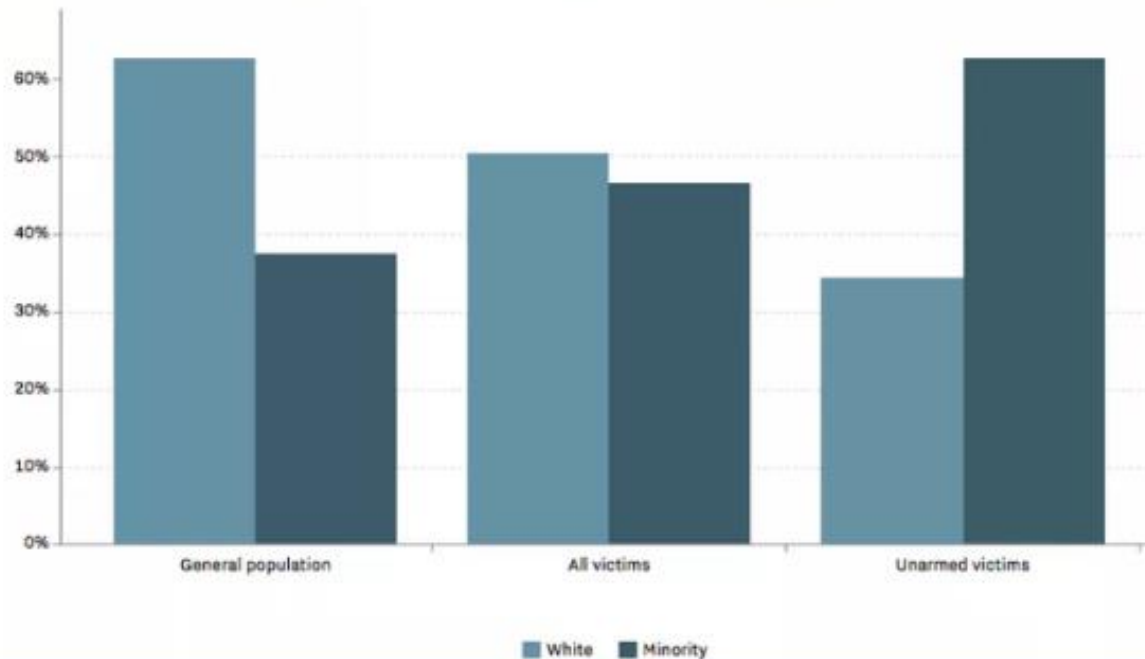
Adam Ruins Everything – The Disturbing History of the Suburbs | truTV (Click to View)



Or Do they?

Unarmed victims of police killings are more likely to be minorities

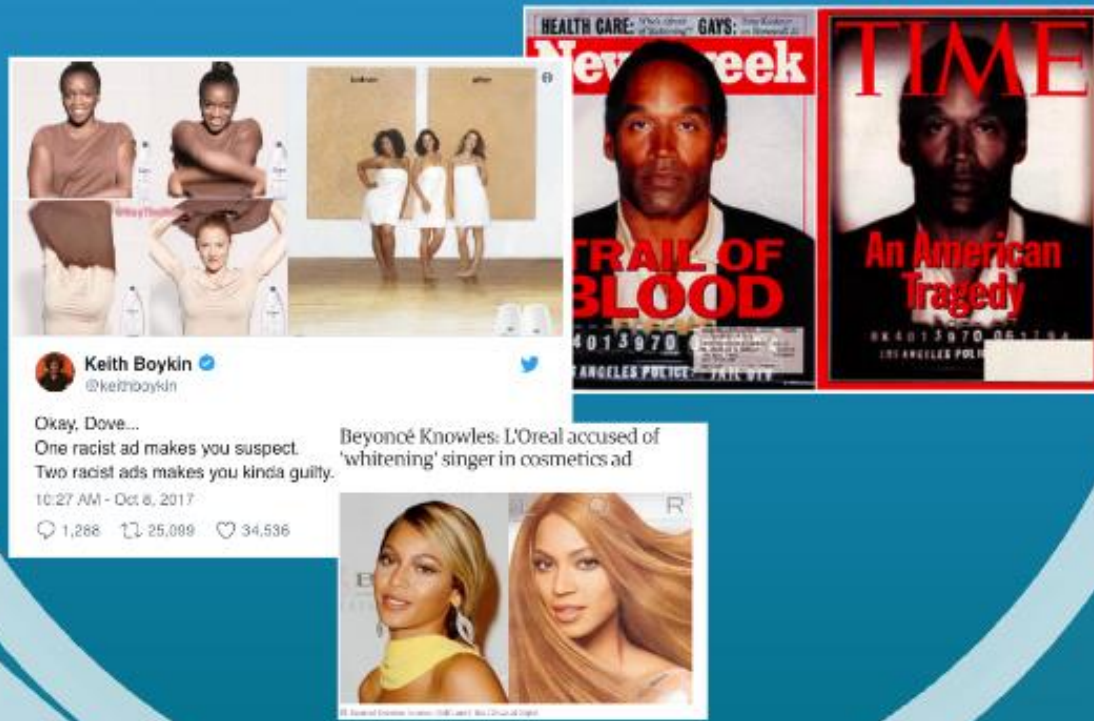
Racial demographics in percent of general population in 2014 and people killed by police from January to May 2015



The Narrative



Messages of Inferiority Abound...





Mentally Ill vs Inherently Angry and Violent

**In the
News**

**In
Court**

Theater Shooting Suspect Was Brilliant Science Student

July 21, 2012 10:27 AM

Share 4 Tweet 2 Like 5 View Comments



James Holmes (credit: CBS)

Police: Michael Brown Struggled With Officer Before Shooting

Brian Kelly (Twitter: @borkelly)

August 10, 2014 11:31 AM

Share 19 Tweet 22 Like 11 View Comments



Sentencing Outcomes and Shade

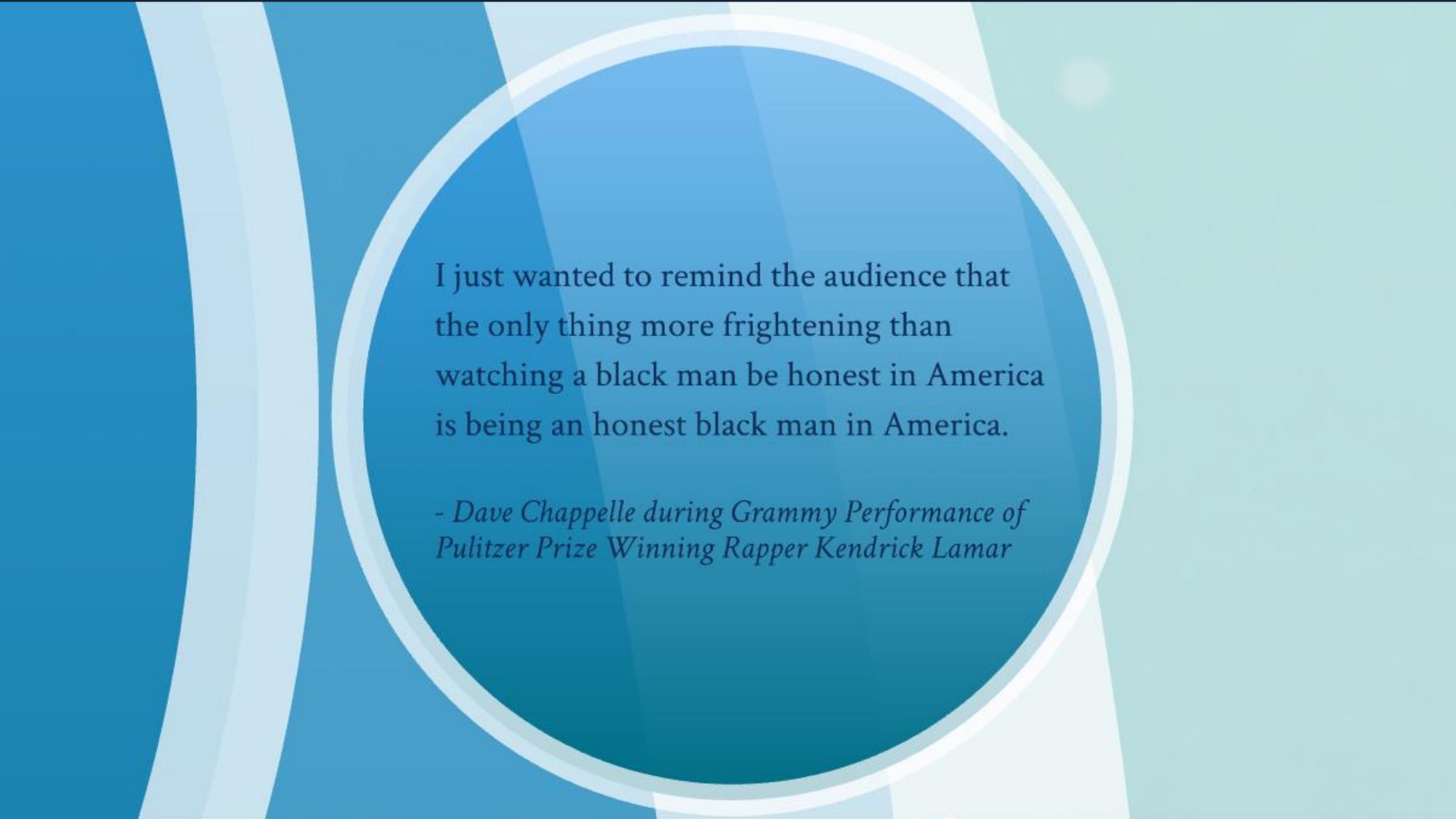
Data shows higher sentences for blacks compared to whites

Showed this difference was more pronounced for medium and dark-skinned blacks as opposed to lighter-skinned blacks

Difference held true and increased slightly after controlling for Socioeconomic Status

- Burch, T. (2015), *Skin Color and the Criminal Justice System: Beyond Black-White Disparities in Sentencing*. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 12: 395–420.





I just wanted to remind the audience that
the only thing more frightening than
watching a black man be honest in America
is being an honest black man in America.

*- Dave Chappelle during Grammy Performance of
Pulitzer Prize Winning Rapper Kendrick Lamar*

Lesley Stahl: Have the public schools in Michigan gotten better?

The U.S. Secretary of Education: I don't know. Overall, I-- I can't say overall that they have all gotten better.

Lesley Stahl: The whole state is not doing well.

The U.S. Secretary of Education: Well, there are certainly lots of pockets where this-- the students are doing well and--

Lesley Stahl: No, but your argument that if you take funds away that the schools will get better, is not working in Michigan where you had a huge impact and influence over the direction of the school system here.

The U.S. Secretary of Education: I hesitate to talk about all schools in general because schools are made up of individual students attending them.

Lesley Stahl: The public schools here are doing worse than they did.

The U.S. Secretary of Education: Michigan schools need to do better. There is no doubt about it.

*Lesley Stahl: Have you seen the really bad schools?
Maybe try to figure out what they're doing?*

*The U.S. Secretary of Education: I have not-- I have not-- I
have not intentionally visited schools that are
underperforming.*

Lesley Stahl: Maybe you should.

The U.S. Secretary of Education: Maybe I should. Yes.

23 %

60 %

The AA Community

- When Blue Collar Jobs Disappear
- The War (on Some) Drugs (Users)
- ACEs and Inter-generational Trauma
- Ramifications of Racism
- When the Trauma's Not Post

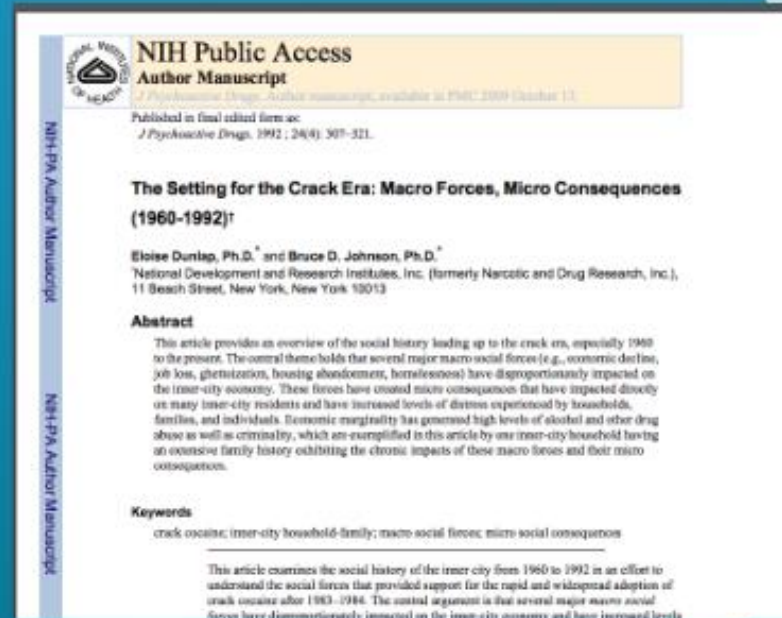




**Striking
Parallels**

Striking Parallels

As the unemployment rate increases by **one percentage point** in a given county, the **opioid-death-rate rises by 3.6 percent**, and **emergency-room visits rise by 7 percent**.



And
Differences

And Differences

Cocaine-related overdose deaths among non-Hispanic blacks are on par with overdose deaths caused by heroin and prescription opioids among whites

...yet have received much less government attention, funding for treatment, physician advocacy or sympathetic media coverage



Mass Incarceration/ war on drugs (Click to view)



Potential M.H. Impacts

Past-month illicit drug use

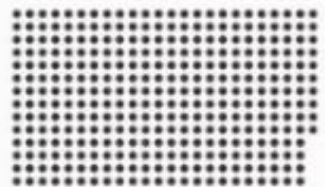
2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health



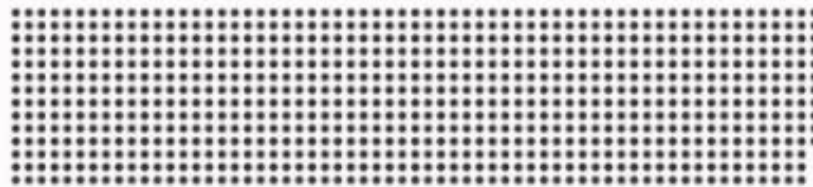
Drug-related arrests per 100,000 residents of each race

2013 FBI Uniform Crime Reports / US Census Bureau

WHITE 332



BLACK 879



Vox

Racial disparities at arrest, indictment, conviction and severity of sentence

Trauma and dehumanization

Lost learning and/or vocational opportunities

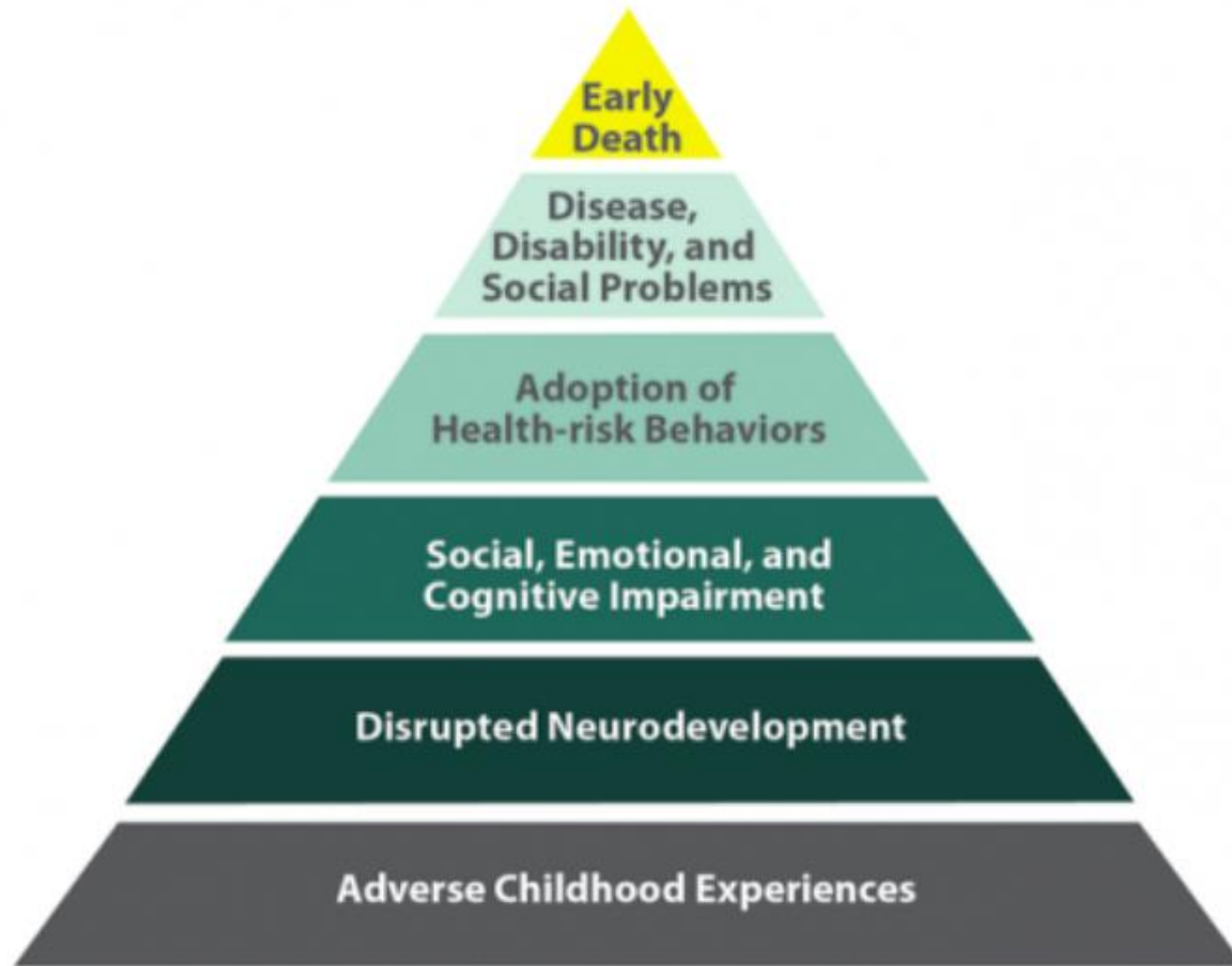
Fraying of social nets/supports

Un or suboptimally treated mental illness

Intergenerational impacts

Harsher penalties if/when there are future arrests

Double or Triple Stigma



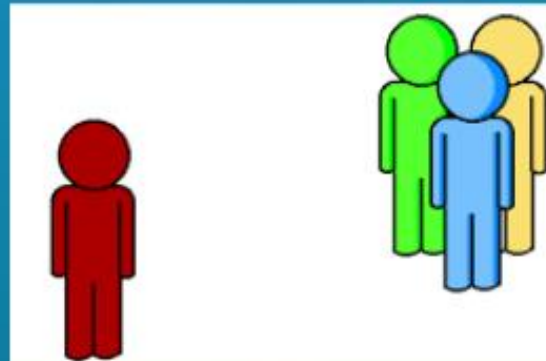
Mechanism by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan



*Having an **ACE score of 4** increases the likelihood of becoming an alcoholic by **700 percent** and the risk of attempted suicide by **1200 percent***

*People with an **ACE score of 5** or higher are **seven to 10 times more likely** to use illegal drugs, to report addiction and to inject illegal drugs*

Social Exclusion, Discrimination & Hostility



Treatment
Seeking and
Experiences

Stress of
Racism

Treatment Seeking and Experiences

- Stressor that can drive m.h. symptoms
- Wealth and income gaps -> cost barriers to treatment
- Exposures to racism in clinical settings
- Inequities in Access
- Fear of Double Stigma
- Cultural Chasms

Stress of Racism



Video shows 10-year-old boy stopping basketball to hide from police car (click to view)



A Call to Action



Your Lane

All hands on Deck . . .



Raymond Santana

Start where you are.

Use what you have.

Do what you can.

- Arthur Ashe



Taking Action



One last definition...

ACTIVIST - One who has a record of power or policy change.

Common Pitfalls



"I don't see Race"

Conflating Training with Action

Failing to Measure and Manage

Race "neutral" reforms -> Racist Systems 2.0

No Seats at the table

A Seat but no voice

The "Minority Tax"

Taking Action



Question "Disparity"
Where's the Racial Inequity?

Avoid Erasure of Context
Examine systemic drivers.

Leverage your Privilege & Resources
Own your part of the problem and solution

Prepare for Retrenchment
The current system has served some quite well

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of **political warfare**.

- Audre Lorde

The Most Searched: A celebration of Black History Makers (click to view)

Still I Rise

