

RISE: ROCHESTER INITIATIVE FOR STRUCTURAL EQUALITY KEY MESSAGES

- RISE is a multifaceted, multiyear effort to raise awareness about structural inequality and seek solutions that lead to structural equality in the Greater Rochester community.
- RISE brings together a wide range of constituent groups and organizations to work together to move the Greater Rochester community to a position of national leadership in achieving structural equality.
- Moving toward structural equality is necessary to achieve improvements in areas such as poverty, education and housing that must occur for the Greater Rochester community to maximize its potential.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is structural inequality?

Structural inequality is a term that refers to how certain institutional policies and practices have had, and continue to have, a detrimental impact on racial and ethnic minorities.

What are some specific past policies or practices that have contributed to structural inequality?

Social Security

- The Social Security Act (of 1935) initially excluded agricultural and domestic workers. At the time, 75% of African Americans were still living in the South and were overwhelmingly employed in these two categories. These exclusions persisted until 1950. [Reference Source 1].

Impact: Despite the absence of race-based language in Social Security law, the reality was that a large proportion of American whites received a 15-year “head start” on accruing earnings in the Social Security system, versus those who labored in occupations excluded by the original act.

Housing

- Due to the property appraisal system created by the New Deal's Federal Housing Administration (FHA), properties located within white neighborhoods were assigned the highest value and least risk. Consequently, between 1934 and 1962, less than 2% of government-subsidized mortgages went to non-whites. [Reference Source 2].
- Forty-two percent of Americans' personal net assets (and 80% of low-income households' net assets) are from homeownership – the equity in their home. [Reference Source 3].

Impact: The primary avenue for wealth aggregation in the United States – homeownership – was historically skewed toward white families and away from families of color, partially explaining today's wealth gap.

Veteran's Opportunities

- While The GI Bill (in effect 1944-1956) has been regarded by historians and scholars as one of the most significant government interventions to assist millions of American families to enter or maintain middle class status, it has also been singled out as an example of a policy that ignored related, race-based, implications. The reality was that many of the institutions of higher education, and the neighborhoods that were financed by GI Bill mortgages, were only open to whites. [Reference Source 4].

Impact: The benefits of a government sponsored initiative, designed to advance the social and economic status of America's families, were severely skewed toward white families, and away from people of color, due to institutional discrimination.

What are some specific contemporary policies, practices or conditions that contribute to structural inequality?

Housing

- In 2007, higher priced ("subprime") mortgage loans comprised 27.6% of all mortgages to Latinos, 33.5% of all mortgages to African Americans and only 10.5% of all mortgages to whites. The average interest rate on these loans was 2.5 points higher for Latinos and 3.0 points higher for African Americans. [Reference Source 5].
- 85% of neighborhoods across the US with the highest default rates were majority black/Hispanic. Default rates are 3 times higher in minority census tracts than in white ones. [Reference Source 6].

Impact: Minorities are charged higher mortgage interest rates and are at a higher risk of losing their investment in housing.

Schools

- Because of segregated housing patterns, suburbanization, higher minority birth rates and a relaxing of federal intervention in the area of school segregation, children of color are more likely to attend schools with a substantial poor population. Specifically, for schools where 70-80% of the students are African-American or Latino, 81% of the students are poor. In schools where 90-100% of the students are African American or Latino, 84% of the students are from poor households. Note that 20% of all US public schools have populations that are 70% or greater students of color (almost all of them urban). [Reference Source 7].
- Another take on the same data: 6% of white children attend schools with a 70% or greater poor population; 40% of African American and 41% of Latino children attend such schools.

Impact: Because school districts rely largely on local property tax based financing, schools with poorer students will invariably be drawn from communities with a lower resource base—quality suffers and educational outcomes are generally lower.

Criminal Justice

- In 2007, 10.4% of all US black males 25-29 were in prison. For Hispanic males 25-29, the rate was 3.8%. For white males 25-29, the rate was 1.7% [Reference Source 8].
- Black males have a 32% chance of serving prison time at some point in their life. For Hispanic males, it is 17%; for white males 6%. [Reference Source 9].
- In 1986, before mandatory minimums for crack offenses went into effect, the average sentence for an African American convicted of a drug-related crime involving crack was 11% higher than for whites. In 1990, four years after the implementation of harsher federal drug laws, the average increased to 49%. [Reference Source 10].
- Due to felony convictions, 1.46 million African American men out of a total voting population of 10.4 million have lost their right to vote. [Reference Source 11].
- As of 2006, New York State prison population consisted of 50.4% African Americans - yet African Americans make up only 15.1% of the overall NYS population. [Reference Source 12].

Impact: The heavily disproportionate level of incarceration of African American males undermines the stability of African American families, denies citizenship rights to the incarcerated, and marginalizes a significant portion of America's human capital, thereby reducing the nation's global competitiveness.

Unemployment

- 2008 data on percent of families with an unemployed member: white families = 5.6%, African American families = 10.8%; Hispanic/Latino families=8.5%. [Reference Source 13].
- 2008 data on average duration of unemployment, by race: whites=17.9 weeks, Black/AA = 21.7 weeks, Hispanic/Latino = 16 weeks. (Note: the difference between whites and AA's is almost a full month). For males, the gap is slightly wider; white males average duration = 18.0 weeks, AA males = 22.2 weeks.
- 2008 data on the causes of unemployment: among white males, 28.1% of unemployed whites are new to the workforce or re-entering the workforce; among AA males, 37.1% are in this category. This group can be the hardest to employ due to a lack of any or recent work experience – the longer average unemployment duration for AA males is partly explained by this fact – they are about 33% more likely to have less work experience than their white counterparts. [Reference Source 14].
- In Rochester, the “official” white unemployment is 6.3% (white, non-Hispanic is 5.6%), and the “official” Black/AA unemployment is 17.2%, while the “official” Hispanic/Latino unemployment is 13.6% [Reference Source 15]. Rochester's racial/ethnic disparity gap is wider than the national averages.

Impact: Minorities face more barriers to finding employment and suffer longer periods of unemployment, after losing work.

Why is now the right time for RISE?

By 2050, the majority of the U.S. population will be comprised of people of color. We must begin the process now of ensuring that every opportunity for success is available to everyone starting today, and gain momentum over the next four decades. In addition, the Rochester community continues to lose ground in a number of key areas—population, income, jobs—and we need to start our own recovery. Addressing structural inequality is an imperative in that effort.

Will RISE focus primarily on correcting policy problems of the past?

No, RISE seeks to strike the proper balance between correcting past and contemporary policies that have contributed to structural inequality and preventing similar policies from being enacted. RISE focuses on achieving a better future.

What are the objectives and outcomes that RISE hopes to achieve?

In broad terms, there are three phases of objectives and outcomes:

Phase I: Creating awareness and acceptance that structural inequality exists.

Phase II: Promoting the translation of knowledge of structural inequality to actions aimed toward the achievement of structural equality. (Ending the perpetuation of policies and systems that can be shown to have disparate impacts on certain segments of the population is a key action during this phase.)

Phase III: Applying a structural equality analysis to new policies and practices.

Who should participate in RISE?

Businesses, educational institutions, not for profit organizations, churches and all other organizations that have a stake in the future of the Greater Rochester community should actively participate in RISE.

How does an organization get started?

A half-day orientation is planned to help organizations understand the issues of structural inequality, the importance of achieving structural equality, and ways they can participate in ongoing efforts. Organizations that want to initiate a structural equity initiative will receive guidance and potentially other assistance from the RISE organization. One project proposal will be selected for financial and in-depth support from RISE.

What organization is behind RISE?

RISE is a grassroots coalition that was developed under the auspices of Action for a Better Community, in coordination with the (national) Community Action Partnership.

What is the “business case” for participating in RISE?

Businesses thrive when everyone—their employees and the people in their community—are as productive as they can be. When people can't get ahead, even when they do everything right, the rest of a community's society has to carry them along. The situation is analogous to the high costs and other burdens placed on the healthcare system when the uninsured use emergency rooms for their medical care because they can't afford regular visits to a primary care physician. In addition, thriving communities—with an educated, prepared workforce—are the ones companies want to invest in. These are among the goals of RISE.

How will we know if RISE is successful?

Measures of success are being developed for different phases of the program. One metric that will be reviewed is the knowledge among constituents about structural inequality/structural equality as measured by pre- and post-surveys.

How did RISE get started?

RISE is a result of a Racial Equity and Society Seminar convened in October 2008 by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. Leaders from Action for a Better Community and similar organizations in other communities participated. One of the actions coming from that seminar was the development of an equity initiative in each attendee's local community—thus RISE.

Reference Sources:

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3. Federal Reserve Board Survey of Consumer Finances
4. Ira Katznelson (Columbia University) and Suzanne Mettlera (Cornell University) "On Race and Policy History: A Dialogue about the G.I. Bill" *Perspectives on Politics* (2008)
5. Pew Research Center study, 2009
6. *NY Times*, 5/15/09
7. 2005-2006 NCES Common Core of Data, as reported by Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee in "Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation and the Need for New Integration Strategies"]
8. The Sentencing Project; Bureau of Justice Statistics
9. The Sentencing Project; Bureau of Justice Statistics
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12. Correctional Association of New York
13. Bureau of Labor Statistics
14. Current Population Survey 2008, U.S. Census Bureau
15. American Community Survey 2006-2008, U.S. Census Bureau