**Meeting Goals**

1. Learn about the Boston team’s determinants of health work related to equity.
2. Explore the complex relationships between Structural Racism, Privilege, Policies, and Policymaking.
4. Engage teams in exercises to develop strategies that address/counter the effects of structural racism on health by identifying race-biased and privilege-focused policies and exploring policy improvements and innovations.
5. Network with colleagues and foster working relationships within PLACE MATTERS teams.
6. Provide a safe place to brainstorm new and innovative approaches.

**Overview & Purpose**

We are delighted you will join us for our Fourteenth Design Lab (DL) learning experience. Our national learning community will convene in Boston, Massachusetts to support the Boston team’s PLACE MATTERS efforts. We greatly appreciate the team’s hospitality and the time spent to organize the tour of their community. In addition, we extend a warm PLACE MATTERS welcome to our guest speakers and our first-time Design Lab attendees.

Building on all previous DL concept papers (Concept Papers from DL1 to DL13 are available online: http://jointcenter.org/hsi/pages/design-labs), the contents herein are intended to frame Design Lab 14 (Boston) and provide a brief overview of the PLACE MATTERS initiative for new Team members.

For team members who have been with us from the beginning, structural racism should be a familiar topic. They may also ask why we need to continue the discussion started at Design Lab 9. For others, it may seem like a subject that is too complex to cover in such a short time and it may not seem clearly applicable to their PLACE MATTERS work.

Given the nation’s ongoing economic crises, equity is a critical lens through which we should plan and examine decision-making. In addition, we need to take into account the role of structural racism in the production of inequities. Since the post-World War II period, we have witnessed great gains in wealth among middle-class families – although those gains were not shared by all groups – and they have played a key role in creating health inequities in our society. Current economic circumstances faced by families, communities, organizations, and government create monumental obstacles that could potentially alter the trajectory of racial inequality.

We know that there are structural and systemic policies in place that create inequities by denying whole segments of our population the opportunity to reach their full potential and access to the resources needed to do so. We must address this as a country, but if we allow decisions to be made without examining their equity impacts, we will exacerbate our current situation. During such times, many feel burdens, but unfortunately burdens and benefits are not equitably distributed. We can therefore choose to ignore the equity impacts of our decisions – potentially placing the burden on those that already have too many and
allowing racial inequality to widen – or we can face our past and work to equitably distribute both burdens and benefits, consequently changing our trajectory to achieve racial equity.

Design Lab 14 provides an important opportunity for peer networking and collaborative learning across PLACE MATTERS communities. Based on team progress, ongoing PLACE MATTERS work and the current national climate, CommonHealth ACTION and the Joint Center Health Policy Institute have developed plenary sessions and interactive exercises to explore and build strategies that address structural racism, particularly in the realm of policy.

**Operational Definitions of Racism**

One goal of this concept paper is to ground participants in a common language and the definitions that will support effective discussion of these challenging topics. While there are numerous definitions for each concept, we ask that you keep these definitions in mind when reading the concept paper and throughout your Design Lab conversations—even if they are different than your past learning, understanding, or current perceptions. This is not to say that one belief or understanding is more “correct” than another, but that these are the definitions that will frame this Place Matters dialogue on structural racism and support concepts within the Design Lab framework. In fact, it would be useful for you to think about the differences between the definitions we provide and your own beliefs.

First, it is important to recognize that we are talking about racism, not race. Race is “a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time” (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). Racism is a “system of privilege based on race” (Wellman, 1977).

Working definitions for Design Lab 14:

**Racism (VISIONS):**
- **Personal Racism:** individual attitudes, regarding the inferiority of people of color and the superiority of Whites, that have been learned or internalized either directly (e.g. negative experiences or explicit messages) or indirectly (e.g. imitation and modeling of significant others' reactions, emotional responses to the media; exposure to broad racial disparities). These attitudes may be conscious or unconscious and are learned from exposure to racism at primarily the institutional and cultural levels.
- **Interpersonal Racism:** actions that perpetuate inequalities on the basis of race. Such behaviors may be intentional or unintentional. Unintentional acts may be racist in their consequence.
- **Institutional Racism:** established laws, customs, traditions, and practices that systematically result in racial inequalities in a society -- the institutionalization of personal racism.
- **Cultural Racism:** the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one race's cultural heritage and values over that of another (Bryant, 2008).

**Structural Racism** describes the ways in which history, ideology, public policies, institutional practices, and culture interact to maintain a racial hierarchy that allows for the privileges associated with “whiteness” and the disadvantages associated with color to endure and adapt over time. The structural racism framework takes a step back from institutional racism, and recognizes the racialized cultural and historical context in which institutions and individuals are unavoidably embedded (Lawrence, Sutton, Kubisch, Susi, & Fulbright-Anderson, 2004).
Four domains and systems of Privilege (Alan Johnson):

- Dominance: the default is for power to be held by the dominant group (whites, men, etc.); therefore, most power is held by privileged groups.
- Obsession with control: control over dominant and subordinate groups is necessary to maintain systems of privilege. Dominant groups use the perception of their greater capacity for control to justify their superior position and related privilege.
- Identification: the dominant group is “the standard” and superior; subordinate groups are “the other.” What is associated with the dominant group is positively valued in the culture, including control and power.
- Centeredness: In media coverage, conversation, meetings, etc., members of the dominant group are placed at the center of attention (Johnson, 2006).

Privilege and Structural Racism

Before addressing structural racism, we must discuss what allows it to persist throughout our ideology, our culture, and our public policy decisions: privilege. Privilege allows us to attribute positive outcomes solely to individual actions, and vice-versa with negative actions, without acknowledging the context in which a person grows up and lives their life. By focusing on individual attributes as the reason for success or failure, we are not having an honest conversation about what precedes those individual actions. Opportunities arise throughout an individual’s life, but it is in the unfair distribution of opportunity, and the preparedness to seize the opportunity, that we see the evidence of structural racism.

Structural Racism: A Systems Perspective

Privilege allows structural racism to persist by affecting the way we conceptualize, talk about, and try to combat it. To fully address the issue, we must first change the way we think about the development of structural racism. We can accomplish this by utilizing a systems-thinking perspective. A systems-thinking perspective helps to show the depth and complexity of the connections that link structural racism, privilege, and policy. To elucidate the use of systems-thinking as a frame for structural racism, we will share three examples. These examples demonstrate how to identify structurally racist policies and how seemingly race-neutral policies can promote privilege and create additional unfair and unearned advantages.

A system can be defined as an interdependent group of agents working together as a whole (Menendian & Watt, 2009). Systems-thinking dictates that outcomes are not the result of a linear progression of events or individual behavioral choices. Instead, outcomes are borne out of multiple and multi-faceted relationships. This illuminates that systems are more than just the sum of individual parts. According to the Kirwan Institute, “outcomes are a product of mutual, multiple, and reciprocal interactions within the system” (Menendian & Watt, 2009). Using a structural racism lens, poor health outcomes among African Americans are not simply the sum of structurally racist policies in housing, education, transportation, employment, and finance. The historical and current relationships are so intertwined that we cannot separate out which factors directly cause the most harm. The interactions of culture, ideology, public policy—throughout the expanse of time—have allowed for the promotion of white advantage over the disadvantage of color.

When it comes to cause and effect, we can observe the most proximal relationship as a starting point, but we cannot allow ourselves to stop there. While we search for intentional discrimination as an obvious barrier borne from structural racism, we must also examine privilege.
To illustrate the interconnectedness of structurally racist policies and privilege, the connections among housing, employment, and education policies serve as useful examples. It is important to place policy into historical and cultural contexts. Unfortunately, we do not have the time to discuss the history of white privilege vis-à-vis the disadvantage of color; keep that in mind as we progress through this first example.

Similar to today, the Great Depression created many challenges and opportunities. Many people needed help to secure capital to purchase a home and begin the process of creating generational wealth. However, the benefits of homeownership were not experienced by all segments of the population due to racially discriminatory practices. In a time when everyone needed help to purchase a home, people in certain areas were barred from obtaining loans. These discriminatory practices, adopted from individual property holders influenced commercial mortgage lenders and the Federal government. Property holders promoted segregation in housing through the use of racial covenants. Validated in 1926 by the Supreme Court, racial covenants were put into practice to keep specific blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Jews out of white neighborhoods. Research of King County, WA in 2005 found 416 deeds that still contained racially restricting language (Lind). Many of these covenants confined minority populations to neighborhoods inside of central cities. Here we can see how privilege perpetuated structurally racist policies. Privilege allowed whites to make racial covenants, and allowed lenders to adopt the practice without questioning the validity or implications. This created a policy environment in which loans were not made available in areas with predominantly black or other minority populations.

White privilege allowed discriminatory attitudes to influence policy development. The practice of discriminatory lending was so firmly entrenched in popular and policy culture, any policy that was created to increase homeownership without specifically addressing the barriers of race was virtually useless. The post-World War II time period, 1949-1964, was very important in that it was the first time middle-class families had the opportunity to generate wealth, mostly through homeownership (Shapiro, 2004). With people of color structurally excluded from homeownership and unable to move to new areas due to racial covenants, segregation established deep roots that not even the banning of overtly racist practices could uproot.

Simultaneously, two things were happening that solidified segregation even further. The 1956 Interstate Highway act allowed white people to move farther out from the inner cities, but Federal transit policy did not immediately follow. It was not until 1964 and 1970 that Congress contributed significant money to urban mass transit. But, in a decision that has had far-reaching effects, the money administered by the department of Housing and Urban Development starting in 1974, separated urban transit from the larger Federal transportation strategy (Shoup & Lang, 2011). Employers, noticing that many of their employees were leaving the city, and looking to take advantage of cheaper land and access to highways, moved out of the inner cities (Wilson, 1996). The cumulative effects of these actions were that jobs left the inner cities, but people of color were neither able to move to because of racial covenants nor were they able to travel to employment due to a lack of access to urban transit. These policies created the contexts within which whites were able to accumulate wealth while communities of color were pushed into poverty.

In addition to the aforementioned housing and transportation policies, what happens when a policy is introduced to fund public schools based on property taxes raised from local school districts? Districts receive money from the state, and then are able to exercise local control over additional funds for their
schools. However, when this policy is implemented within a structurally racist context, the policy itself may result in harmful racial bias. This is a real world example that can be seen in the Supreme Court case, *San Antonio v. Rodriguez*. The plaintiffs used two neighborhoods in the San Antonio metro area to demonstrate the disparity in school funding. The Edgewood neighborhood had a population that was 90% Hispanic and 6% African American. It also had the highest property tax rate in the metro area, yet it generated only $356 per student ($26 coming from tax revenue). In contrast, Alamo Heights, a northern inner-ring suburb, whose population was 18% Hispanic and 1% African American, generated $594 per pupil, with $333 coming from tax revenue. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the defendants, citing that the policy itself was not discriminatory in nature (Sutton, 2008).

Sometimes, we do not have to investigate the historical context of a policy to understand its racial implications. One such example is the practice of redlining. It is also an unfortunately useful example to show how disadvantage can accumulate across time. The presence of historically racist lending policies laid the foundation for the relatively recent phenomenon known as “reverse redlining”. Reverse redlining led communities of color to be some of the hardest hit by the economic and housing crises. In 1933, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) was created to regulate the housing industry and increase homeownership. Areas were rated based on lending risk, with “high-risk” communities outlined in red. Areas that had a high proportion of black residents were labeled as “high-risk.” This practice was not based in any type of official mandate, but was adapted from commercial mortgage lenders that were influential in the policy creation process. This exemplifies that even when institutions do not explicitly discriminate, practices based on discrimination can work their way into policies, creating structural barriers to opportunity. Over time, other bills were passed that should have alleviated the disadvantage faced by blacks, such as the GI Bill, but because they were passed into a structurally racist environment they did not achieve their goal, and in fact helped to reinforce the two worlds of privilege for whites and disadvantage for people of color (Wessler, 2009).

This foundation of structurally racist housing policy led to chronic disinvestment in areas that had a majority black population. It was in this environment that the Financial Modernization Act of 1999 was passed. The Act was a de-regulatory bill that allowed financial institutions to offer products and services within one company (e.g., savings and investments) that prior to that was not allowed. Industry advocates supported this policy because it allowed them to consolidate their services instead of needing to establish different companies to offer specific products and services. This bill virtually eliminated consumer protections by permitting collaborations between banks, securities firms, and insurance companies. These newly consolidated institutions were able to lend money, and were exempt from previous laws constructed to prevent discriminatory and predatory lending. Taking full advantage, banks and other entities began to sell subprime mortgages heavily targeted at communities of color that had been distressed by decades of disinvestment (Wessler, 2009). Here we can see the inequitable distribution of benefits and burdens. Blinded by white privilege, the authors of the Act saw the opportunity to accumulate vast amounts of wealth, at the expense of those already facing substantial burdens.

The Bush-era tax cuts, the dismantling of the estate tax, and the recent continuation of tax cuts for the wealthy, implicitly promote white advantage. Any policy in which the benefits are not equally distributed should raise a red flag for advocates and warrant further examination. When it comes to tax cuts such as these, the people receiving the benefits are overwhelmingly white. As a result, wealth becomes even
more concentrated at the top, government revenues are reduced, leaving those who depend on government services, overwhelmingly people of color, struggling to survive.

**Your Call to Action on Structural Racism**

Through these examples, we can conclude that an important component of the systems perspective is that the disadvantages we see for people of color today are not the result of a singular policy, or the actions of a single individual. In fact, they rarely are. Our policy and legal decisions have made sure that blatantly racist policies and practices are a thing of the past. What we have not done as a society is acknowledge the lasting effects of structurally racist policies that persist due to white privilege.

If we fail to examine the equity impacts of policy, structural racism will persist. The public policy foundation we have built is structurally racist, and if any policy does not take that into consideration, then it will likely be structurally racist. In order to break the cycles that systematically stunt the opportunities in all domains for people of color, and put the country on a trajectory towards racial equity, we must: 1) acknowledge the fact that new policies must address the history of structural racism; and 2) ensure that policy impacts are examined from numerous perspectives and address the relationships that systematically deny opportunity.

While the blame for structural racism does not fall on the shoulders of individuals, the opportunity to change the system and its structure is in our hands. Interpersonal racism still exists, but it is not the primary driver of the systematic denial of opportunity for people of color (Menendian & Watt, 2009). That being said, we will never break the cycle if individuals do not become conscious of their responsibility as individuals to be part of something bigger than themselves. A system that produces such large differentials in advantage and disadvantage will not change on its own; there is no incentive for it to do so. As Paul Johnson says in his book, “people will always take the paths of least resistance,” which in this situation is inaction (Johnson, 2006). For many people, the system works satisfactorily and there is no reason to work to change the system—individuals can afford to continue along our current trajectory. As the Place Matters community, however, we cannot. We must be the actors that initiate and when necessary carry out the change, not just in one sector, but at key points in the system that will facilitate real and lasting equity.
PLACE MATTERS FRAMEWORK – BRIEF RECAP

PLACE MATTERS is a national initiative of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Health Policy Institute (HPI) designed to improve the health of participating communities by addressing social conditions that lead to poor health.

The Joint Center Health Policy Institute (HPI) approach to reducing/eliminating health disparities involves identifying the complex underlying causes of health disparities and defining strategies to address these root causes. A growing body of research clearly supports the notion that interventions targeting social determinants of health can indeed modify patterns of health, illness, and health disparities. Systematic and evidence-based translation of this knowledge into policy and practice remains limited. Targeting upstream causes of health and measuring the indicators associated with social determinants of health are at the heart of our PLACE MATTERS work. Over a period of three to five years, PLACE MATTERS participants should be able to demonstrate and document progress, as well as the reasons for progress, toward redressing the social conditions associated with health inequities—and thereby toward reducing health disparities.

PLACE MATTERS’ unique emphases:

1. Engage communities of color with poor population health status;
2. Support multidisciplinary teams vis-à-vis a national learning community (supportive laboratory);
3. Reduce/eliminate health inequities by addressing social determinants of health (i.e., actions should specifically address social issues at their roots, e.g., housing policies, etc.);
4. Develop benchmarks and other means to monitor progress that demonstrates the effectiveness of addressing social determinants of health; and

This Design Lab will indeed be another valuable opportunity for our PLACE MATTERS learning community and will serve as a critical building block in each Team’s work to address the social factors that produce poor health outcomes, thereby creating health equity. We hope you will find this working meeting productive and invite you to leverage your participation in PLACE MATTERS to enhance your efforts and to strengthen your capacity to improve the health and well-being of your community. We invite DL14 participants to arrive prepared to:

- Further develop Team communications strategies that frame social determinants of health (to be well prepared, we encourage all participants to review all preparatory meeting materials in advance);
- Engage in teamwork, taking advantage of formal and informal opportunities to solidify Team activities and to advance strategic action plans;
- Enhance existing logic models to include communications activities;
- Consider opportunities associated with the recession to strengthen the safety nets available to your communities; and
- Seek opportunities to network with PLACE MATTERS sites to benefit your local PLACE MATTERS work.

We look forward to seeing you in Boston!
REFERENCES


