Structural Approaches for Healthy Communities
Georgia Community Action Agency
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- CSI unites public policy research and grassroots advocacy to transform structural inequality and exclusion into structural fairness and inclusion.

How:
- Ideas
- Leadership
- Communications

- Describe CSI
Safe and healthy HOME
Clean Public spaces
Access to quality food that is affordable
Access to good hospital nearby
Quality jobs
Transportation system that can get you to all of these things
Good schools, etc.

These things make an intricate web that cumulatively contribute to the health of people and of whole communities. Beyond just the healthcare institutions.
Communities of color tend to be the least healthy

- A baby born to a Native American woman with a high school degree is almost 2x as likely to die during the first year of life as a baby born to a Hispanic woman with the same years of education (9.2 vs. 5.3 per 1000 live births)
- A Black man earning less than $10,000 has a life expectancy at age 25 that is 3 years less than a White man earning the same income
- The rate of new AIDS cases among adults/adolescents is 3x higher among Hispanics (26 per 100,000) than the rate among Whites (7 per 100,000).

Testimony of Marsha Lille-Blanton, Dr.P.D., Senior Advisor on Race, Ethnicity and healthcare, Henry J. Kaiser Foundation
Before House Committee on Ways & Means, Health Subcommittee (June 10, 2008)

Yet, as we know communities of color suffer from health disparities as a result of how they are positioned poorly in these systems and institutions. How do we explain this dynamic, and understand it in a way that leads us to solutions?
Structural Racism Defined

Structure is multi-institutional
The ways our public and private institutions interact to produce barriers to opportunity and racial disparities.

Intent to discriminate is irrelevant
Structures just do what they do and reinforce disinvestment and disparities.

• Structural racism is the way our public and private institutions interact that create pathways and barriers to opportunity. These barriers and opportunities are not neutral across race. In fact, they produce racial disparities.
• Structures often invisble, reinforcing disinvestment and disparities, without mal-intent necessarily
  • When we think about “racism” we often think about intentional individual acts of bias. That’s real, but structural racism occurs even unintentionally and even well-intentioned.
• The way these institutions – education, the economy, the environment – operate are not in isolation of one another. They operate interacting with one another, often reinforcing patterns.
  • i.e. how you decide to purchase a house. What that says about the neighborhood and opportunity structures.
• People of color are, more often than not, positioned poorly in these structures.
  • Near the worst schools, far from jobs, near environmental hazards, worst access to good and healthy affordable food.
• But it is important to understand that structural racism harms everyone by shrinking the tax base, under-funding public services, creating social tension, limiting economic growth, etc.
• It is also a tool that can tell us how and where to enter in our advocacy fights- what problems might need fixing to get to our goals; might not always be obvious. (If you’re basement leaks, you might go to the basement to seal it. The problem might be the roof- new roof or gutters).
• Questions for calling out SR: How are communities of color being harmed, disproportionately to others? What policies (themselves or implementations) need to exist or adjust to take that into account
Both our modern conception of urban, suburban, and rural is very recent, and is a result of policies post Depression that invested in homeownership and education thus creating the middle class as we know it today. This is not race neutral.

- If we look at the social programs of the early and mid-1900s, which built the middle class we know today and shaped our communities and regions, people of color were largely left out

1) Social security was first passed in the 1930’s. At the time it was a novel idea. Notion that the government had a responsibility to take care of you in your old age-you had paid your debt to society. Well, the two professions excluded from coverage were farm laborers and domestic workers. 80% of blacks were concentrated in these two professions at the time. Was not explicitly racist, but it’s impact was as such. Perfect example of how whites are also harmed in policies with racist impact.

2) The Federal Housing Administration, for example, which significantly changed the way Americans bought homes and built communities largely left out people of color
- Favored suburbs over cities, cars over buses, and White neighborhoods over diverse ones
- FHA manuals explicitly advised homeowners and brokers alike to avoid letting people of color into the neighborhood, labeling “pigpens and undesirable races as equally objectionable”
- The program also encouraged homeowners to write racially-restrictive covenants, blocking people of color from many communities
- Today, because black and brown communities have been under-capitalized, they were particularly vulnerable to predatory lending (50% of those with predatory loans could have qualified for prime loans and as you go up the income scale disparities between prime/subprime across race actually gets wider)
- Race is the single best indicator for loan quality

3) The GI Bill also helped to create the middle class by sending thousands of Gis to college, many were the first in their families to do so. People of color were largely excluded from the military, and when they did, veteran offices often funneled them to technical degree programs. This policy created a huge pathway to opportunity for upward mobility and wealth amongst whites while hampering opportunity for people of color.

4) The Federal Highway Act, which was “race-neutral” on its face, cut through vibrant Black neighborhoods, displaced hundreds of thousands of mostly black families, and largely subsidized suburban sprawl
• Policies impact where people have been able to locate, and this statistic shows how people of color, regardless of their individual wealth, tend to live in high concentrated poverty areas.

• As you can see, although black and Latino communities only made up 1/4 the US population in 2000, more than 3/4 of the people living in concentrated urban poverty were Black or Latino.

• That means that even a middle or upper class black or Latino family is more likely to live in neighborhoods with poor public infrastructures, probably have failing public schools, probably live far from good jobs, and are likely subject to environmental conditions that compromise their health.

(The definition of communities of concentrated poverty is that 40% of the people living in the area are under the poverty line (20% in rural areas).
Hospital flight

- Hospitals across the country are closing, particularly in poor neighborhoods where they are most needed. This not only reduces hospital beds, but reduces the network of primary care physicians and other medical professionals who need a hospital nearby to stay in business.

Paucity of doctors, dentists, clinics

Concentrations of uninsured or under-insured

Unhealthy physical environments

- Communities of color often are exposed to the worse environmental hazards and do not have greenspace to exercise.

Stress
• Why is looking only at class, “universal policies” not enough?
  • Again, we certainly have plenty of class-related problems, but if we dig deeper, we see that how much money someone makes doesn’t tell the whole story
• Asset wealth (or net worth) – in your home, you car, stocks, or other investments – is often a stronger predictor of well-being and economic mobility than income
  • Assets are used to buy a home, send a child to college, start a business, or fall back on in hard times

• On the right, I have a graph of wealth by income and race
  • What is immediately visible are the huge disparities between Black and White wealth at every “class” level
• So, on average, a White “middle class” family is more than 3x as wealthy as a Black “middle class” family
• Research shows that savings rates are equal across race.
• Clearly, there is something more going on here
  • What we have to look at is the intersection between race and class, which offers a fuller picture
  • The reason for this huge disparity – which is actually widening – is that the majority of asset wealth is inherited and White wealth from a generation ago was created through policy
  • Why universal solutions that don’t tae into account how race plays out will not help all to the same degree
Statistics between women who suffer from infant mortality also tell a story. These are statistics comparing infant mortality rates between women with a college degree with without it. Maternal education is the only measure of socioeconomic status (SES) collected for national vital statistics on infant mortality. Census data supports a correlation between level of education and household income-- on a population level, fewer years of education equals lower income. (Source: http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/7/21/93949/9072/752/554524)

According to the national center for health statistics at the Center for Disease and Control, the infant mortality rate for black college graduates is 10.2% compared to only 3.7% among white counterparts. Moreover, infant mortality rates among black college graduates is still slightly more than white women without a high school degree.
We need a structural approach based on smart communications strategies, innovative policy ideas that build structural fairness and inclusion and leaders of color at the grassroots who are equipped to generate and advance new ideas in collaboration with others.
In addition to the fact that a class lens is not enough, we need to deal with race head on to solve our most pressing problems for two big reasons:

**A) People of color are the miner’s canary, signaling where we need focus and create solutions** (Describe analogy of miner’s canary)
- People of color and poor people are usually first and hardest hit, but it signals where systems are broken for everyone. Example, current economic crisis.
  - Up to 35% of those with sub-prime loans could have qualified for normal, prime mortgages.
  - Blacks and Latinos are much more likely to have sub-prime mortgages than their White counterparts even when they have the same income. In fact, there is a larger sub-prime-prime gap between Blacks and Whites at higher income levels.

**B) Race is often used as a wedge to undermine progressive social policies**
- We can look at parallels between past attempts for comprehensive healthcare with the current debate.
- When Harry Truman was in office, tried to establish a single-payer healthcare system, to realize the last element of the New Deal, in 1946. However, Southern Democrats were crucial to bringing the proposal down because they believe it would have forced the region to racially integrate its hospitals. Even though the many whites in the south stood to benefit from medical care, even more so than whites in the north.
- Today, one of the biggest argument some are using to undermine current proposals for comprehensive healthcare is that undocumented immigrants (“Illegal aliens”) will benefit.
- Rep. Steve King of Iowa: "If anybody can, with a straight face, advocate that we should provide health insurance for people who broke into our country, broke our law and for the most part are criminals, I don’t know where they ever would draw the line," he said.
- Part of “dealing with race head on” means recognizing the ways in which race can help us to design better and more effective policy and talking race explicitly.
  - As I mentioned earlier, universal policies will not reach all communities equally because of structural arrangements, and when we don’t talk about it explicitly we lose.

Unless we are willing to confront these sentiments by speaking productively and progressively about race while showing how we are all hurt when some of us are left most vulnerable, and how addressing what affects the most vulnerable helps everyone, we will not win.

Our research has shown that not only is talking about race explicitly possible, but it is more effective at outperforming conservative messages on policies like healthcare and banking regulation than messages that did not.
Bold Ideas for Structural Transformation for healthier communities

Disasters often seem like natural, unpredictable events that will inevitably devastate communities.

Response and recovery efforts are incredibly important. But an approach that focuses narrowly on these issues is not structural.

* It doesn’t address how the way in which communities are constructed makes them vulnerable to disasters (natural, public health) AND
* It doesn’t address how increasing access to opportunity could reduce vulnerability
A structural approach to disasters would give residents of the low-income communities and communities of color that are most vulnerable to disaster to drive planning.

Residents would identify the challenges that make their communities vulnerable and help to develop strategies for addressing them.

Building in a meaningful, authoritative voice for residents of low opportunity communities not only produces better, more informed policy; it also helps communities to build the capacity to influence policymaking over time.
None of us can do this alone. It’s going to take us working creatively and in partnership to get this done.

A structural approach would recognize that an event—whether an earthquake, hurricane or pandemic—becomes a disaster when a community lacks the infrastructure necessary to prevent catastrophic outcomes (preparation, response).

What kind of infrastructure?

Health care—Where high-quality, affordable health care services are available, residents are more likely to secure care on a consistent basis. This not only leads to better public health outcomes, but also prevents the development of serious public health threats, like pandemic disease.

Transportation—under normal circumstances, public transportation that is planned with the interests of people of color and low-income Americans in mind can create jobs in communities where there have historically been too few and connect residents of low-opportunity communities to health, educational and job opportunities in the region.

Under extreme circumstances, transportation can allow for emergency evacuation. Hurricane Katrina underscores the importance of this. When the storm struck, the city did not have enough buses to transport residents who lacked access to private transportation.

Jobs—under normal circumstances, jobs with good wages and benefits help residents and their households cover housing, health, education and other costs of living and to build wealth over time. Jobs also enable communities as a whole to thrive by fueling economic development.

This translates into greater access to insurance coverage, which can protect investments in property under extreme circumstances. Individuals with jobs are also better able to adjust when threats arise, by leaving their homes and finding temporary shelter elsewhere, for example.

Broadband—Access to high-speed Internet allows people to access the wide range of educational content and employment opportunities (not to mention entertainment) that is available on the Web. It enables even poor, isolated communities to overcome geographic and cost barriers. Under extreme circumstances, broadband also allows for what experts call “interoperability”—the ability of public safety officials to communicate with one another under extreme circumstances.

Together, these and other types of infrastructure create a network of opportunities that helps to protect communities from natural and public health threats.
Any questions before we try it on?

Now that we’ve given a basic overview of a structural approach and considered one example of a structural solution, are there any questions before we work together as a group?
How To Use a Structural Lens

1. What is the problem that engages us most?

2. Name at least 3 institutions contributing to or with power over some aspect of the problem.

3. What is the political and cultural landscape of the problem? (history, popular views, discourse)

4. Who are the primary opponents, proponents and “skeptical but gettables”? What are their interests? What is a common thread that links these constituencies?

5. What are the possible starting points? Which institution or institutions? Would that starting point get us to more opportunities for transformation?

6. What will be the reaction/retrenchment?

7. How will we know if we are headed in the right direction?
SOLUTIONS THAT WORK FOR EVERYONE

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