

## STRUCTURAL RACIALIZATION

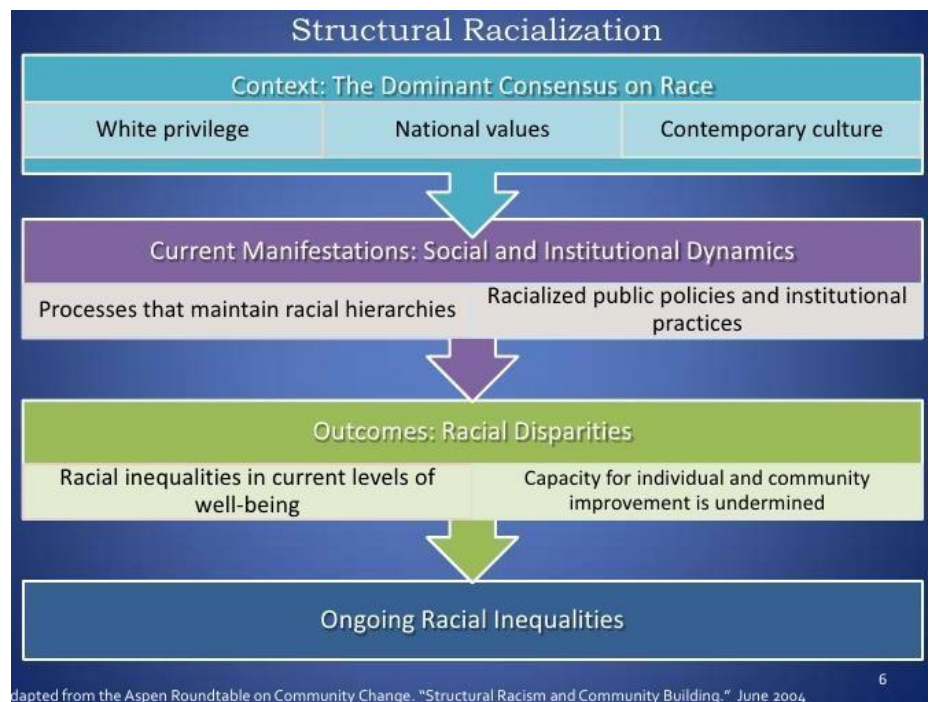
Why do racial disparities in wealth, income, health, education, and in myriad other measures of social welfare, persist in the United States, despite the fact that segregated schools and racial discrimination in employment, housing, government programs, and public accommodation were outlawed many years ago? Why do large numbers of people of color still live in hyper-segregated communities despite fair housing laws? Why do these patterns persist even though most people state that they do not hold racist views?

Structural racialization is a theory that helps us to understand these phenomena. Structural racialization posits that these conditions perpetuate themselves, and that they do so, not as the result of present racist

intent, but rather as the result of the cumulative impact of systems and structures that have been in place for many years. Professor John Powell, Director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California, Berkeley, is one of the foremost writers on structural racialization. He explains that the term “racialization” is chosen over the term “racism” because

these disparities persist in the absence of overt racism and that they cannot be overcome merely by ensuring that public policies are race-neutral. Powell writes: “the most deleterious racial effects in the US today come from the interactions of institutions and structures along with social bias, rather than from individual prejudicial intent”

Structural racialization theory argues that these patterns of disparate wealth, education, and so on are self-perpetuating patterns. For example, wealthy families are able to pass wealth to their children and the children are able to invest that wealth to gain more wealth; conversely, those at the lowest income levels have no savings to invest and often rely on expensive credit



to meet basic needs, perpetuating their lack of wealth. The cliché “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” is in fact the reality.

Structural racialization theory explains the inextricable link between location and opportunity. John Powell writes, “Where one lives affects educational opportunities, job opportunities, wealth creation, health risks, access to public services, and investment by public and private investors.” Without access to good schools and good jobs, all but the most extraordinary or most lucky residents living in the poorest and most segregated areas are destined to stay there.

“Race neutral” policies reinforce this disparity of opportunity. For example, school funding based on the local tax base may be facially race neutral but the result of that policy is that poor areas have poorly funded schools.



Federal housing policy in the post-war years provided housing loans to Whites but not Blacks, and not in areas with Black residents, driving housing segregation, which present anti-discrimination laws have proven ineffective to undo. Thus the original racist motive persists in racial impact.

Structural racialization theory draws upon the ideas of implicit bias and systems thinking. It recognizes that everything is both cause and effect. Underfunded inner-city schools result in poor performance by children of color; in turn this reinforces resistance to school integration by families in better-performing schools, who fear that including such children will lower the quality of their own schools. Similarly, lack of access to AP courses limits the college options for these children and prevents them from breaking out of the cycle of poverty. Structural racialization means that myths are reinforced – e.g. segregation is bad for our neighborhood – and thus interferes with effective efforts to end racial disparities. Understanding all of these dynamics is essential for ending racial inequities.