

What Is Structural Racism?

Some Thoughts for Anti-Racist Activists

By Richard W. Franke
<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker>
franker@montclair.edu

This brief essay is intended to supplement the report on

**Structural Racism in Ithaca City and Tompkins County:
Some Facts and Thoughts for Discussion in Our community**

That report can be accessed at:

<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker/FrankeStructuralRacismInIthacaCityandTompkinsCounty2017.pdf>

This essay can be accessed online at:

<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker/FrankeWhatIsStructuralRacism.pdf>

Last Updated: 26 Oct at 9:34 am, 11 March, 2019 at 9:48 am
5 February, 2018 at 11:43 am

What Is Racism in General? [Click on this link](#) to see our definition and thoughts in a pdf powerpoint.

<http://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker/whatisracism.pdf>

I. Thinking About Racism – To Act More Effectively

Racism is widespread, persistent, complex and always harmful. Overcoming racism is the single biggest challenge facing the social justice movement in the United States. This will require dedication, participation and a deep and ongoing analysis of how racism manifests itself, how it reproduces itself generation after generation and why it seems so impervious to attempts to dismantle it. While everyone of all backgrounds is needed in the struggle to overcome racism, white people bear a special responsibility since we live in a society organized heavily around white supremacy and we often benefit from white privilege. This is true in Ithaca and Tompkins County just as it is everywhere else.

One important step in preparing for action against racism is to develop the fullest possible understanding of this system – its practices and supporting ideas. Social scientists have found that many complex social phenomena – including racism – can be made more understandable if broken into categories. Figuring out the types of racism we confront can help guide us in developing actions to support or undermine that phenomenon more effectively. Setting up categories can even reveal – or at least highlight – types of racism that are not obvious without the aid of research. In my view, structural racism is one such type.

2. Why These Thoughts?

In December of 2016 Ithaca Showing Up for Racial Justice – Ithaca SURJ – asked me to help draft an overview of the extent and depth of structural racism locally in Ithaca and

Tompkins County. Currently this project is continuing with the participation of the *SURJ Structural Racism Research Group* composed of myself, Barbara H. Chasin, Lorien Hayden, Lauren Korfine, Ian Pendleton and Elan Shapiro. Our group so far has produced two documents, both of which contain lots of information but are under constant revision as new data become available:

1. Tompkins County One Page Structural Racism (Overview and Summary)

<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker/TompkinsCountyOnePageStructuralRacism.pdf>

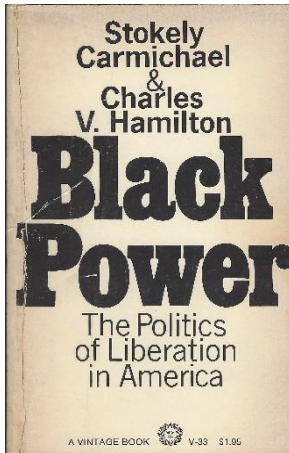
2. Structural Racism in Tompkins County – the 40-page documented report

<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker/FrankeStructuralRacismInIthacaCityandTompkinsCounty2017.pdf>

After taking on part of this project and discovering some systematic information in various census documents and other reports, I believe it would be useful to share a few of my thoughts about the meaning of the term structural racism. These thoughts are intended to promote further discussion along with the data we have gathered.

3. History and Background of Structural Racism

The origins of the idea of structural racism are generally considered to go back to the 1967 book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton. They argued (p. 4) that “Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks and acts by the total white community against the black community.” The community against community racism they proposed to call “institutional racism.” Today, this term is still in use and is usually considered to mean the same as structural racism – which is more commonly used now. The term “systemic racism” is sometimes also used.

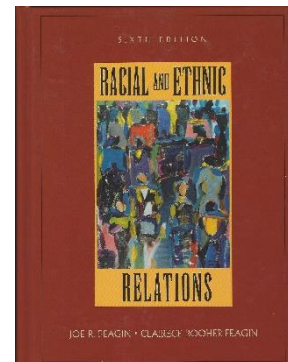


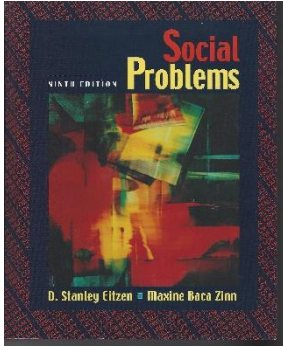
Carmichael and Hamilton give various examples of the two types of racism. Here is one of their most compelling statements (p.156) on institutional racism:

“Barred from most housing, black people are forced to live in segregated neighborhoods and with this come de facto segregated schooling, which means poor education, which leads in turn to ill-paying jobs.”

Much of the book consists of observations like this, often supported with specific data about the conditions of black life from the time. Racism is analyzed as a force of group dynamics producing harmful, unequal outcomes in most to all areas of life: housing, education, health, employment and the criminal justice system. A collection of essays on structural racism by Knowles and Prewitt has recently been adopted with a study guide by a Christian social justice group in Palo Alto. To access their guide and some initial thoughts, go to: <http://cultureand youth.org/racism/books-racism/institutional-racism-in-america/>.

Carmichael and Hamilton are cited frequently in widely used textbooks on race and ethnic relations and social problems textbooks. Some distinguish “micro” from “macro” racism – the latter being equated with institutional racism. Other authors refer to “structural discrimination,” “racism-in-the-head versus racism-in-the-world,” (Eitzen and Zinn 2003:226) “subtle” racism, cumulative racism; or they contrast overt with covert racism. Some employ colonial theory. Yet others have developed complicated and refined sets of categories (Faegin and Faegin 1999:21).





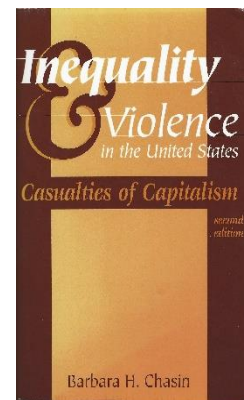
Influential social problems textbook authors D. Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn (2003:227) identify three basic characteristics of what they call “institutional discrimination:”

- Historical influences from the past on the present – slavery and the idea of blacks as 3/5 of a person in the U.S. Constitution;
- Absence of intention – no actual prejudice is needed – it is a “normal” outcome of the system;
- The various components of structural racism are interrelated and reinforce each other – the Carmichael and Hamilton note about housing, education and jobs quoted earlier is a classic example.

4. Interpersonal-Organizational-Structural: A View from Violence Studies

As noted in Section I above, breaking down a social phenomenon into categories or subcategories can be useful for developing our understanding.

Sometimes categories or subcategories from one area of society can usefully be adapted to another. I believe this is the case with sociologist Barbara H. Chasin’s categories for thinking about violence. After teaching and researching violence in the U.S. for many years, Chasin identifies three types of violence: (2004:14 – 17)



- **Interpersonal violence:** “Identifiable persons injure others and are usually aware that they have done so; in most cases their targets are intentional;”

- **Organizational violence:** “a result of an explicit decision made as part of individuals’ roles in formal institutions such as bureaucracies. Obvious examples are the military and the police;”
- **Structural violence:** “an outcome of many years of decision making by those in positions of power. Structural violence occurs when people are harmed because they lack access to resources available to others.”

Chasin noted that the media and U. S. culture in general pay attention mostly to interpersonal violence so that organizational – and especially structural – forms are not as deeply embedded in people’s consciousness. One purpose in writing her book was to emphasize the need to understand structural violence – a kind of violence that actually harms many more people than either of the other two types. Here – on the next page – is Chasin’s summary table of the types of violence and selected characteristics that help to define each. We have labeled it Table I.

Table I helps us to see various sociological characteristics of violence divided into types. One of the most important distinctions is shown in Row 1: the interpersonal type of violence that most people think of first produces the fewest victims. Moving down the table to rows 2, 3 and 4, we see differences in the relations between perpetrators and victims. In row 5 we see important differences in time between the decision to commit an act of violence and the act itself.

TABLE I: SOME TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THREE TYPES OF VIOLENCE

Row	Characteristic	Type of Violence		
		Interpersonal	Organizational	Structural
1.	Number of victims	Few	Many	Many
2.	Victim(s) can identify perpetrator(s)	Usually	Rarely	No
3.	Perpetrator(s) can identify victim(s)	Usually	Rarely	Very rarely
4.	Characteristics of perpetrator(s) and victim(s)	Similar or identical social class	Different classes	Different classes
5.	Time between decision(s) and violence	Short – often less than one day	At least months	Months to years
6.	Number of decision makers	One or a very few	A very few	Cumulative effect of many decisions
7.	Examples 1	Killer shoots people in fast food restaurant	Pharmaceutical company markets a known unsafe product	Chicago heat wave victims in 1995
8.	Examples 2	Gang member attacks competitor in drug dispute	US military invades Iraq, March 2003	18,000 die annually from lack of health insurance

Source: Adapted from Chasin, Barbara H. 2004. *Inequality and Violence in the United States: Casualties of Capitalism*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books. Second edition. Page 16.

Of great importance is the number of decision makers combined with the time dimension (Row 5). Note that for interpersonal violence the time difference is short whereas for structural violence it can be months to years. As for the decision makers, they are often the perpetrators themselves – although not necessarily – whereas for structural violence the decision leading to the violence is the “cumulative effect of many decisions.” This “cumulative effect” is a key feature of structural violence.

I think Chasin’s typology can be usefully adapted to thinking about racism. In the definitions above, substitute the word “racism” in place of violence and we get a framework that helps us understand – and perhaps more effectively fight against – various types of racism. Let us look now at Table 2 in which we have made the substitutions. We have also changed the two examples to include materials from the SURJ report on structural racism in Ithaca and Tompkins County where available and have put in national examples where needed.

Note first that interpersonal racism displays the same basic characteristics of interpersonal violence. This should not surprise us when we recall that racism is an underlying cause of much violence in the U. S. In example 1 we refer to the harassment of Epiphany Kearney, on Bus 57 of the Ithaca City School District in 2006 to 2008, in which a young African-American female student was taunted, tripped, and threatened with death by white male students. Note that this case follows other of Chasin’s characteristics: the perpetrators and victim can identify each other (Rows 2 and 3) and they are of similar class but different races. We don’t know how much time elapsed between the planning and implementation of the harassment, but it was probably not much.

TABLE 2: SOME TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THREE TYPES OF RACISM

Row	Characteristic	Type of Racism		
		Interpersonal	Organizational	Structural
1.	Number of victims	Many – possibly most – People of Color	More than a few	Many – possibly most – People of Color
2.	Victim(s) can identify perpetrator(s)	Usually	Sometimes	No
3.	Perpetrator(s) can identify victim(s)	Usually	Sometimes	Very rarely
4.	Characteristics of perpetrator(s) and victim(s)	Similar or identical social class/different race	Usually different races	Both same and different races
5.	Time between decision(s) and violence	Short – often less than one day	Can vary a lot	Months to years
6.	Number of decision makers	One or a very few	A very few	Cumulative effect of many decisions
7.	Example 1	Harassment of Epiphany Kearney in Ithaca ²	Homestead Act, FHA, Redlining, Racial Covenants and GI Bill generate whites-only asset growth ⁶	Tompkins County AA home ownership 27.7% vs. 63.2% for whites ⁵
8.	Example 2	Racial “micro aggressions” ¹	National AA incarceration rate about double that of whites in war on drugs ⁴	69.4% of Ithaca AA die before age 75 vs. 36.9% of whites ³

¹ See Section 4.1 of this document
² Structural Racism Report Section 9.1.1
³ Report Table 6.1
⁴ Report Section 8

⁵ Report Table 5.1
⁶ Shapiro 2004:190; Williams 2003; Section 5 of this paper

The decision makers were few – the actual perpetrators. Additional information and some references are included in our SURJ *Report* Section 9.1.1.

4.1 Micro Aggressions and White Privilege as Interpersonal Racism

Nothing about the harassment of Epiphany Kearny was “micro” except perhaps for the response of the Ithaca City School District which seemed to have trouble figuring out how to stop the harassment. However, within the local Tompkins County racial justice movement, activists are increasingly aware of a phenomenon that in the racism literature has come to be called “microaggressions.”

Two of the key studies of racial microaggressions were led by Columbia University Teachers College counseling researchers and practitioners Derald Wing Sue and colleagues. They define racial microaggressions as

...brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group (Sue *et al* 2007:273).

Though the term had first been suggested in 1970, systematic research into racial microaggressions only began after the year 2000. Sue and colleagues have more recently developed subtypes of these microaggressions, and have looked at both African Americans and Asian Americans as frequent victims. Among the verbal examples for African Americans are white statements such as: “You speak so well,” “You are so articulate,” “You are a credit to your race,” questions that reveal the white person’s assumption that a particular African American can respond to questions about what all African Americans feel (Sue *et al* 2008:331 and 333). Among the non-verbal examples: being followed around in a store by security or management personnel, being presumed to be a janitor or other low-level employee (Sue *et al* 2007:276), a white cashier who puts

change back on the counter instead of into the hand of the African American who had put the first payment into the cashier's hand, the white person who crosses the street to apparently avoid directly passing an African American on the sidewalk (in the case of white females, sometimes includes clutching the purse) and many others (Sue *et al* 2008:333).

By their very nature, microaggressions are mostly one-on-one encounters. According to Sue and colleagues, various studies indicate that racial microaggressions may be more psychologically and even physically harmful to people of color than overt acts of racial hatred (2008:331). Since the white perpetrators are often unaware of their actions, victims are presented with a series of dilemmas: whether to point out the problem (when this is possible) – which can result in the white perpetrator acting defensive and or hostile, to just let it go – which can lead to feelings of anger and remorse by the victim – and self questioning whether the victim is exaggerating the problem. This can lead to high blood pressure, anxiety and other problems. And unlike interpersonal violence that occurs only occasionally for most people (See Table I, Row I), one study cited by Sue *et al* indicated that in a one-year period 96% of African Americans reported experiencing some form of racial discrimination – including microaggressions (2007:277).

In Ithaca, partly in response to the Epiphany Kearney incidents, the local Multicultural Resource Center has developed a program of racial “talking circles.” In the circle I attended, I was surprised at how many personal stories were told of what I now realize were microaggressions. Reducing these is somewhat on the radar of local anti-racist white activists, but the widespread nature of the microaggressions and the fact that

whites are often unaware of them makes it a real challenge to accomplish significant reductions.

We should note that conservative authors have attacked the microaggression research, usually with the claim that it trivializes the general understanding of racism and/or fosters the development of a “culture of victimhood” and “self-victimization.” Interested readers can find a detailed summary of that literature in the Wikipedia entry on micro aggression. We should also note that microaggressions can be inflicted on the basis of gender, sexual orientation or other characteristics.

An alternative approach to microaggression research is to flip the experience to the perspective of whites. Retired Ithaca school teacher Roberta Wallitt (2010:24 – 26) summarized “White Privilege,” in a short essay used in the Ithaca area Martin Luther King Community Build in 2010-2011. Her first – and overall – statement is “I have the privilege to go through my day never thinking about being White.” Wallitt’s statement helps draw attention to a fundamental racial difference: we whites only occasionally have to confront our privileges – whereas people of color are frequently exposed to their vulnerable place in our society – much in the form of microaggressions. Wallitt’s essay is based on the famous “[Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)” developed by Peggy Macintosh in 1989. Her document remains one of the key sources for understanding racist microaggressions even though she does not use that term. An updated essay on practical aspects of dealing with racial microaggressions by Ruth Terry appears in the October 2019 issue (No. 91) of [YES Magazine](#).

5. Organizational Racism: The Process of Creating Vast Wealth Differentials

Section 4.2 of the Structural Racism Report documents enormous differences in white/black wealth and considers some of the debate about its causes. Using the concept of organizational racism and looking at how wealth and asset creation has developed across U. S. history since the end of slavery, we can summarize the creation of the racial wealth divide as basically a four-stage process of white privilege and black exclusion.

5.1 Stage I: The Homestead Act

The Federal Homestead Act of 1862 offered 160-acre plots to individuals who would occupy and farm the land for 5 years after which they could receive title to the land. This land, of course, had been violently stolen from indigenous peoples, themselves victims of genocide that was justified by racism.

Over the 76-year tenure of the Act, 3 million people applied for homesteads and almost 1.5 million households got title to 246 million acres of land – an area equal to almost the size of Texas and California combined (Williams 2003:3; Shapiro 2004:190).

The implementation of the Homestead Act coincided with the period of southern white terror that effectively closed off

access to homesteads by recently

emancipated slaves. This organized

white terror continued on a

significant scale into the middle of

the 20th century. Ithaca and Upstate

New York were not free of it.



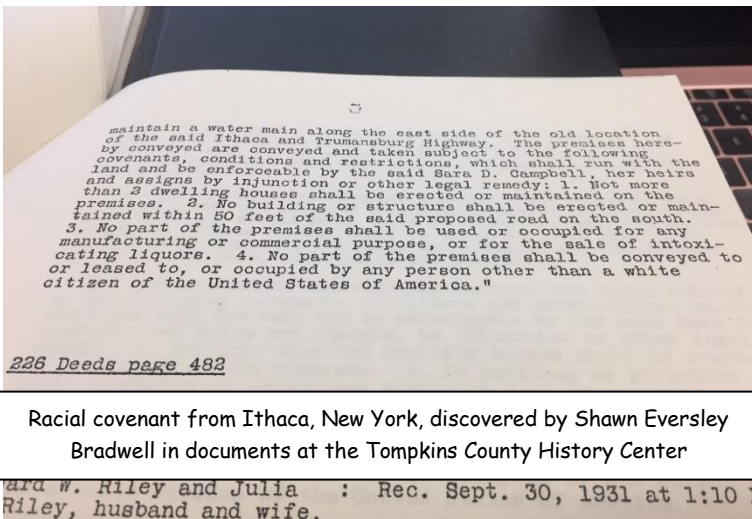
FIGURE 6 Ku Klux Klan rally in Ithaca, New York (1925). Photograph courtesy of the HCTC. Collection No. P1-5.

Source: Bradwell 2015, Page 176

Estimates of African-American homestead ownership deeds run from about 4,000 to about 5,500 ((Williams 2003:5). Federal failure to enforce African-American rights in the

immediate aftermath of emancipation can be considered a form of organizational racism: local terror groups were left to rule once Reconstruction was ended. Because homesteaders received title to the land, the 1.5 million – almost all white – households could transfer ownership as an asset to their offspring. Researcher Trina Williams estimates that up to 46 million whites over age 25 in the U. S. in 2000 are descendants of these homesteaders – about 1/4 of the adult population of the U. S. in that year.

5.2 Stage 2: FHA – Redlining + Restrictive Covenants



In Section I of the *SURJ Report*, we briefly described the process of redlining and its coordination with the creation and implementation of the 1930s Federal Housing Authority to exclude African Americans

from its benefits, thereby helping to create an exclusionary white middle class. Another practice – restrictive covenants – worked effectively in tandem with redlining to exclude non-white home owners from white neighborhoods. Along with the redliner’s pen came recommendations to support the practice of home owners in any particular neighborhood to join together to pledge to maintain the racial purity of the neighborhood. A restrictive covenant can be described as “a private contract entered into by neighborhood property owners stipulating that the property could not be sold or rented to certain minority groups” (Schaefer 2000:219 as quoted in Chasin 2016). For a

while these agreements were also applied to some white ethnic groups such as Jews. Some covenants specified that “negro” janitors, servants or chauffeurs could live in basements, barns or garages of the white home owners (Chasin 2016). Real estate associations nationwide generally supported these covenants that prevented unknown numbers of non-white families from purchasing homes in white neighborhoods over a period of four decades – beginning in about 1910. In 1948 the U. S. Supreme Court declared the covenants a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, rendering them legally unenforceable. Voluntary associations persisted in many parts of the country, however. Title VIII of the 1968 Federal Civil Rights Act – also known as the Fair Housing Act – made restrictive covenants illegal, strengthening the tools with which anti-segregationists could challenge these practices.

Similar processes of exclusion operated throughout the 1930s and after including in many New Deal programs. Various federal welfare and employment programs were routinely administered via state and/or local bodies made up entirely of whites and – in the case of the Southern states – openly racist bureaucrats. Exclusion of non-white persons and families was the norm. In addition, Social Security, one of the single most important basic income support programs, effectively excluded up to 65% of African Americans (although also many whites) through not covering farm laborers or maids – two job categories heavily African American. This exclusion was only abolished in the early 1950s, but even then African Americans had to pay in for 5 years to acquire eligibility (Katznelson 2005:43).

5.3 Stage 3: The G. I. Bill

In 1944 Congress passed the *Servicemen’s Readjustment Act*, more popularly known as

the GI Bill of Rights, or the GI Bill. Between 1944 and 1971, this Act resulted in a \$95 billion welfare program for returning soldiers. One of the Act's principle analysts summarizes its importance:

With the help of the GI Bill, millions bought homes, attended college, started business ventures, and found jobs commensurate with their skills. Through these opportunities, and by advancing the momentum toward suburban living, mass consumption, and the creation of wealth and economic security, this legislation created middle class America. No other instrument was nearly as important (Katznelson 2005:113).

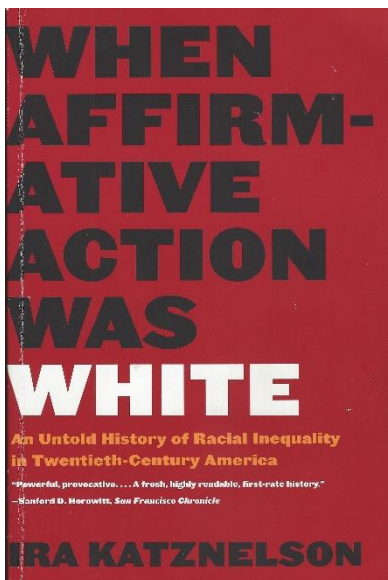
A few facts about some achievements of the Bill during the 1940s and 1950s support the quote above: (Katznelson 2005:114 – 117)

- 40% of 13 million new homes
- Tripling of college graduates to 500,000
- 400,000 new engineers
- 200,000 new doctors
- 200,000 teachers
- More than 200,000 new farms and businesses
- 90,000 scientists
- 5.6 million attended vocational training schools learning carpentry, refrigeration, plumbing, electricity, automobile and airplane repair, and other trades.

The creation of middle class America, however, was largely a white event. Although the GI Bill helped many African Americans, and did not explicitly exclude people of color, the overall effect of its mode of implementation was to exacerbate racial inequality.

In housing, for example, the Veterans Administration – tasked with implementing the GI Bill – was not allowed to actually make mortgages. Rather, it guaranteed them (Katznelson 2005:139). But the real estate industry and private banks refused to offer mortgages to African Americans. This example of organizational racism thus perpetuated and expanded the structural racist inequalities that had already been put in place by the FHA red lining and restrictive covenants. And this process was not limited to the South. In New York and northern New Jersey suburbs, “fewer than 100 of the 67,000 mortgages insured by the GI Bill supported home purchases by non-whites” (Katznelson 2005:140).

From the bulleted list above, we can see that a major effect of the GI Bill was to enhance the educational skills and credentials of millions of Americans. At the college level, Southern segregated schools meant that African Americans could only use the facilities of the historically black colleges, not one of which had a doctoral program or a certified engineering program (Katznelson 2005:133). Few if any had adequate library resources while the lack of nearby housing accessible to people of color meant that tens



of thousands who might have applied could not. Northern universities did little more. In 1946, of the 9,000 students at the University of Pennsylvania – one of the least restrictive Ivy League colleges – only 46 were black (Katznelson 2005:130). In the trade and vocational schools more than 3.5 million GI Bill recipients were helped with both tuition and later job searches. However, one study found that only 1% of the 350,000 blacks who

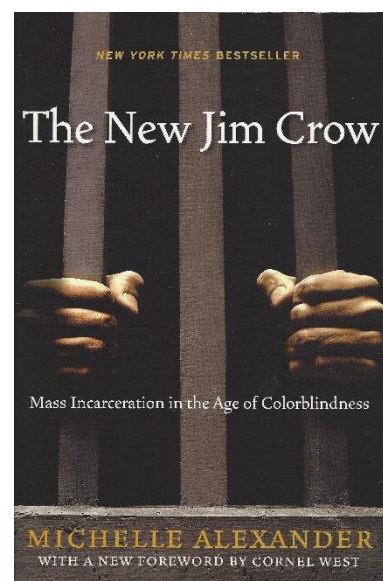
had been drafted into the military from farms received vocational training (Katznelson

2005:135). A mass of other data from various reports supports the conclusion of Columbia History and Political Science Professor Ira Katznelson (2005:141) regarding the GI Bill that “The differential treatment meted out to African Americans sharply curtailed the statute’s powerful egalitarian promise and significantly widened the country’s large racial gap.”

5.4 Stage 4: Mass Incarceration

Following passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing provisions in Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which banned redlining and restrictive covenants, it seemed an opening had been created for People of Color to participate more equally in the U.S. political and economic system. They were still at significant disadvantages from the accumulated past practices of the Homestead Act, redlining, and restrictive covenants but they could demand enforcement of new federal laws in fighting for a better life. Then came the War on Drugs and mass incarceration.

The War on Drugs began in the early 1970s – almost immediately after passage of the civil rights acts of the 1960s. As noted in Section 8 of the *SURJ Structural Racism Report*, from 1971 to 2012 the U. S. prison population increased by 800% and African Americans (mostly male) were 40% of the inmates while only 13% of the overall population. The mass incarceration program included extremely long prison sentences – via extensive use of felony convictions. The use of extensive felony convictions led to elaborate and harmful post-



imprisonment consequences – lifetime ineligibility for numerous government programs that might offer a leg up in employment or a chance to accumulate wealth. The cruelty of this program is matched by its long-term effect on African-American men and communities. Looking back on mass incarceration and the War on Drugs now, following the widespread impact of Michelle Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, and several other books and articles it seems that the U.S. system almost pounced on African-American communities to prevent the civil rights acts from having much effect. (For updated prison statistics, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2017.html>)

6. Structural Racism – Outcome of the Other Forms and the Four-Stage Sequence

Looking back over more than a century and a half of historical information as summarized in sections 5.1 through 5.4, we can see that interpersonal and organizational racist beliefs and practices – whether conscious and overt or unconscious and unintended – have locked into place structures that limit the ability of people of color – particularly African Americans – from joining the American middle class. Once cemented into place, these structures perpetuate themselves without the need for open bigotry (although that bigotry may sometimes surface as well). We thus propose the following definition of structural racism:

Structural racism is a set of consequences within society that lead to racially unequal outcomes in people’s lives via the ordinary daily workings of society. These unequal outcomes are caused by the accumulated history of racist oppression from slavery through Jim Crow, as well as past and continuing discrimination in housing, health, jobs and other areas of life.

Most – maybe all – of the statistics in our *SURJ Report* on structural racism in Ithaca City and Tompkins County fall within this definition – from health to housing to income to poverty to political participation to education. But we might still ask just how does structural racism perpetuate itself – especially considering the claim here that structural racism takes place “via the ordinary daily workings of society.” To answer this question, let us look at one of the best studied examples: wealth-home ownership-inheritance.

7. Perpetuating Structural Racism: Home Ownership and Inheritance Facts and Practices

In looking back over the past century and a half – from the Homestead Act through restrictive covenants, FHA redlining, Social Security discrimination, the discriminatory implementation of the GI Bill and the recent mass incarceration – we can surmise that much of the racist structures built over this time period are connected to home ownership. As can be seen in the *SURJ Report* – Table 5.1 on home ownership – Ithaca City and Tompkins County have low overall rates of home ownership compared with the national average of 71% for whites and 41% for African Americans. The generally low Ithaca rate is probably a byproduct of the large student population. However, the black ownership rate in Ithaca is 54% that of whites (19.7% versus 36.6%), while nationally African Americans own homes at 41% versus 71% for whites, a ratio of 58% –comparable figures. Keep in mind – as described in Section 4 of the *SURJ Report* – that home ownership ranks as the most significant variable connected with overall wealth.

Brandeis University sociologist Thomas Shapiro has looked at a range of research and data about black-white home ownership and wealth, and through the Brandeis University

Heller School's Institute on Assets and Social Policy has also conducted original research of his own on 137 selected families in Boston, St. Louis and Los Angeles – about half white and half of them black (2004 and 2017). This research spans 29 years from 1984 to 2013. Looking at representative national data Shapiro finds that as of 2013, the median net wealth of white families is \$142,000 as contrasted with \$11,000 for African Americans and \$13,700 for Hispanics (Shapiro 2017:16). This means that whites have almost 13 times the wealth of African Americans, a figure similar to that presented by Pew Research as we noted in Section 4.2 of the *Ithaca City and Tompkins County Report*. How do such stark differences play out across time? How does wealth inequality by race perpetuate itself by the daily workings of society?

In his earlier study, Shapiro (2004) found that the key lies in the processes of inheritance and gifts. White families essentially pass on the wealth developed over 150 years of white privilege – compared to people of color – in the form of inheritance at death or ongoing parental help for white adults during the grandparents' lifetime. For example, Shapiro (2004:67) found that 24.4% of white families inherited an average of \$144,652 on the death of a parent. Five percent of black families received an average of \$41,985. This difference – \$102,167 Shapiro labeled “the hidden cost of being African American.” (It could also be called the “asset value of whiteness.”) Another study found that 28% of whites received bequests compared to 7.7% of blacks. The average white family inheritance was \$52,430 versus an African-American average of \$21,796 – a dollar difference of about \$30,634 (Shapiro 2004:69).

Data collected by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research over several decades reveal a stagnation at about \$30,000 in the racial dollar difference in

inheritance. Between 1984 and 2011, white inheritance transfers occurred in 46% of households compared with 10% among African Americans. Among the actual inheritors, the median amount for whites was \$83,692 compared with \$52,240 for African Americans (Shapiro 2017:135) a difference of \$31,452.

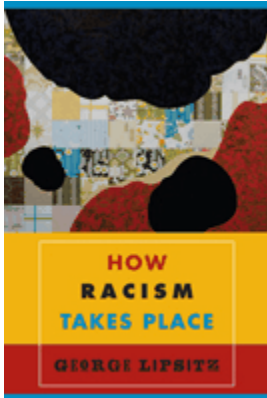
In addition to inheritance on the death of a parent, younger white households receive assistance from living parents or grandparents for down payments on “starter” homes, furniture, cars, TVs, childcare and children’s schooling and other household needs. Shapiro goes on to show that parental giving transfers large amounts of money, especially within white families – from parents to their adult children. By contrast younger black wage earners are more likely to be giving money to their elders to help them with their lives rather than receiving from them. The effect of this situation could be to enhance the distance between white and non-white net worth over the generations.

8. Reinforcing the Structures of Structural Racism

It should be noted that “continuing discrimination” is included in the proposed definition of structural racism appearing above in Part 6. While structural racism can perpetuate itself without “help” from ongoing discrimination, that ongoing discrimination can strengthen and supplement the natural tendencies structural racism exhibits. This appears to be the case with home ownership – and therefore the ability of families to transfer wealth across generations via gifts and inheritance.

In his book on *How Racism Takes Place*, political scientist George Lipsitz (2011:8 – 9)

provides an overview of how the economic infrastructure in segregated African-



American neighborhoods stacks the deck to limit and/or undermine the ability of black families to purchase homes, to undermine the process by which those homes increase in value and thereby to undermine the ability to build up bank accounts or inheritance funds.

Many black neighborhoods, for example, lack bank branches, making it difficult for them to open and maintain savings or checking accounts, certificates of deposit, individual retirement accounts, home improvement loans and access to prime rate mortgages. Instead, residents of these neighborhoods often can find only payday lenders, pawn shops, check-cashing establishments. When seeking to insure their homes, African Americans face higher prices and often find it difficult to locate an insurance agent nearby who will provide them with proper services. Numerous studies document extensive discrimination within the insurance industry (Lipsitz 2011:10 – 11). Similar patterns are the case with mortgages where rejection rates are high for minority borrowers along with demands for greater documentation and longer waits for approval. Even well-off black families continue to face problems with the real estate and insurance industries in cities across the U. S. The effects of these loan and insurance industry practices are to maintain and reinforce the structural racism already embedded from past practices such as redlining and restrictive covenants. This can be seen in data from a 2016 study by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. The survey showed that in 2015 18.2% of African-American households had no bank accounts whatever, compared to 3.1% of white. Additionally,

31.1% of African Americans and 15.6% of white households were “underbanked,” meaning they supplemented their bank accounts with other financial services such as check cashing companies, payday loans and pawn shop loans (FDIC 2016:1;15 – 16). For those households having savings accounts, Federal Reserve Bank data indicate white households have a median account balance of \$7,140 while African Americans hold a median of \$1,000 and Hispanics \$1,500 (Value Penguin 2014).

On one positive note, Lipsitz (2011:12) describes a study that found improvements in the rates of loan approvals when more black loan officers were hired in a neighborhood. As in the private sector, the implementation of government programs such as the G. I. Bill by essentially all-white staff is recognized to have played a role in undermining the benefits black families could get access to.

9. A Second Look at the Data

With our hopefully expanded understanding of the place structural racism holds in the overall conceptualization of racism, we now proposed to summarize the main findings from our *SURJ Report*. Table 3 compares whites in Ithaca City and Tompkins County with African Americans:

Table 3
Summary of Some Elements of Structural Racism
in Ithaca City and Tompkins County
African Americans compared to whites

- Have about half the income Table 4.1
- Are 3 times as likely to be on food stamps Table 4.2
- Are 1.5 to 3 times as likely to be unemployed
(depending on the overall unemployment rate) Table 4.3
- Twice as likely to depend on public transportation
to get to work Section 4.5
- Half as likely to own a home Table 5.1
- 3 times as likely to be on a waiting list for public housing Section 5.1
- Almost twice as likely to die before reaching age 75 Table 6.1
- Twice as likely to have low birth weight babies Table 6.1
- Two and one-half times as likely to be hospitalized for asthma Table 6.1
- Twice as likely to be hospitalized for diabetes Table 6.1
- Twice as likely to be hospitalized for drug-related conditions Table 6.1
- More likely than whites to suffer various additional
medical disabilities Table 6.1.1
- 85% as likely to graduate from Ithaca high school Table 7.1
- More than 4 times as likely to be arrested and/or incarcerated Section 13
- 3 times more likely to be on parole Section 13
- More than twice as likely to be suspended
from grades Pre-K to 5 [Village at Ithaca](#)
- More than 4 times as likely to be suspended
from grades 6 to 12 [Village at Ithaca](#)
- 5 times as likely to NOT be registered to vote Section 9
- More likely to donate blood Section 9
- Are likely to have lower levels of interracial trust Section 9

Sources Cited:

- Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press. Revised edition: 2012.
- Bradwell, Sean Eversley. 2015. Seeing is Believing: Archival Imagery and Counter-Narratives. *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*, Vol. 4 No. 2, July, 2015:172–188.
- Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles V. Hamilton. 1967. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Chasin, Barbara H. 2004. *Inequality and Violence in the United States: Casualties of Capitalism*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books. Second edition.
- . 2016. Restrictive Covenants. In Lomotey, Kofi, editor. *People of Color in the United States: Contemporary Issues in Education, Work, Communities, Health, and Immigration*. Santa Barbara, CA. ABC-Clío/ Greenwood. Volume 2, pp. 285-290
- Eitzen, D. Stanley and Maxine Baca Zinn. 2003. *Social Problems*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Ninth Edition.
- Feagin, Joe R. and Clairece Booher Feagin. 1999. *Racial and Ethnic Relations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Sixth Edition.
- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). 2016. *2015 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households*. Washington, DC: FDIC Division of Depositor and Consumer Protection.
<https://www.fdic.gov/householdsurvey/2015/2015report.pdf>
- Katznelson, Ira. 2005. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Knowles, Louis L. and Kenneth Prewitt, editors. 1969. *Institutional Racism in America*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Access a Palo Alto group's study guide to this book that was developed for white people to come to a better understanding of structural (institutional) racism:
<http://cultureandyouth.org/racism/books-racism/institutional-racism-in-america/>
- McIntosh, Peggy. 1989 [and 2010]. Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. Wellesley Centers for Women. This link following has notes based on experiences using this document for anti-racist discussions.
https://www.wcwonline.org/images/pdf/Knapsack_plus_Notes-Peggy_McIntosh.pdf
- Lipsitz, George. 2011. *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Download chapter I for free at the Temple University Press website:
http://www.temple.edu/tempress/chapters_1800/2089_ch1.pdf
- Lopez Bunyasi, Tehama. 2018. Structural Racism and the Will to Act. *Radical Teacher: A Socialist, Feminist, and Anti-Racist Journal on the Theory and Practice of Teaching*. No. 10 (Winter 2018):33 – 45.
<https://radicalteacher.library.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/radicalteacher/article/view/358>
- On page 36 she has a map of food deserts in Washington D.C. – one important indicator of structural racism about which the essay also has additional interesting and valuable information.

- Schaefer, Richard T. 2000. *Racial and Ethnic Groups*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. Eighth Edition.
- Shapiro, Thomas. 2004. *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 2017. *Toxic Inequality: How America's Wealth Gap Destroys Mobility, Deepens the Racial Divide, & Threatens Our Future*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sue, Derald Wing, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin. 2007. Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice. *The American Psychologist* 62:271 – 286. <http://world-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/7-Racial-Microaggressions-in-Everyday-Life.pdf>
- Sue, Derald Wing, Kevin L. Nadal, Christina M. Capodilupo, Annie I. Lin, Gina C. Torino, and David P. Rivera. 2008. Racial Microaggressions Against black Americans: Implications for Counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development* 86:330 – 338. Summer 2008. http://library.standrews-de.org/lists/courseguides/sas-specific_topic-research/diversity-readings/microaggressions_black.pdf
- Terry, Ruth. 2019. Racial Microaggressions are Real: Here's How to Navigate Them. *YES Magazine*. https://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/racist-racial-microaggressions-20191022?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=YTW_20191025&utm_content=YTW_20191025+CID_5a6c345cd6d17fad0fc4925074f811bf&utm_source=CM
- Value Penguin. 2014. Average Savings Account Balance in the U.S.: Statistical Breakdown. [Median Savings Balance by Race. <https://www.valuepenguin.com/banking/average-savings-account-balance>
- Village at Ithaca. 2017. Ithaca City School District Equity Report Card: Key Metrics. (2016) <https://public.tableau.com/views/SampleERC10/Welcome?%3AshowVizHome=no>
- Wallitt, Roberta. 2009. What It's Like to Be White in Ithaca. In Barbara H. Chasin, Kim Fontana, Richard W. Franke, Jake Isenberg, Karl Madeo, and Elan Shapiro. 2010. *Martin Luther King Community Build Alternate Discussion and Action Guide*. Pages 24 – 25. <http://msuweb.montclair.edu/~franker/MLKAlternateDiscussionGuide06December2010.pdf> Scroll down to page 24 for the Wallitt piece.
- Williams, Trina R. 2003. Asset-building Policy as a Response to Wealth Inequality: Drawing Implications from the Homestead Act. St. Louis: Washington University Center for Social Development. Working Paper No. 03-05. <https://csd.wustl.edu/Publications/Documents/WP03-05.pdf>