

REDUCING RACIAL DISPARITIES IN OUR COMMUNITY

A NINETY-NINE GIRLFRIENDS "SPOTLIGHT" REPORT

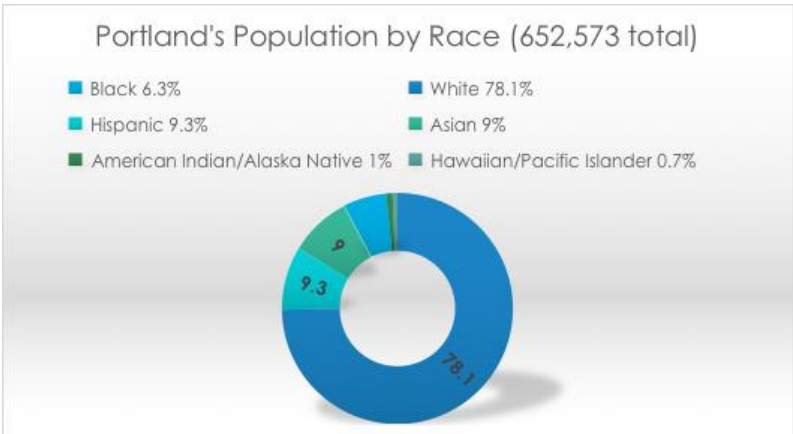
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"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".
Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 1968

In 2020, ninety-nine girlfriends undertook an effort to educate its membership about critical issues affecting our community. This report focuses on reducing racial disparities. The timing of our study coincided with the murder of George Floyd, a Black man, by a White Minneapolis police officer. Floyd's death was a stark reminder of the work that remains to address racial injustice and confront a painful legacy of systemic racism.

Our report also coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19, a disease that has disproportionately infected and killed members of Black, Native and Latinx communities, magnifying the deep social inequities that cause people of color to be poorer, sicker and less safe than their White peers.



TODAY'S DISPARITIES = THE SCARS OF RACISM

Today's racial disparities are a consequence of centuries of discrimination. Oregon has a particularly bleak history [as the only state to enter the Union with a racial exclusion clause explicitly banning Blacks](#). Likewise, the City of Portland was once known as the most segregated city in the north.

Even with the statewide racial exclusion clauses repealed, discrimination continued to reign unchecked for decades. For many years, [Portland used exclusionary zoning and racially restrictive covenants to enforce segregation](#). In 1919, the Portland Realty Board adopted a rule that made it “unethical” for an agent to sell property to a black or Chinese person in a white neighborhood. This language stayed on the books until 1956.

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During the 30s, 40s and 50s, city efforts to rezone large areas of Portland from multi-family to single-family zoning increased the stranglehold on minority Portlanders. This large-scale rezoning effort was accompanied by the infamous practice of redlining, which meant that banks favored borrowers in single-zoned, racially homogenous areas, leaving minorities with little or no access to financing, or financing with significantly inferior terms than those offered to White peers.

In the 1950s, the federal urban renewal program and the creation of the interstate highway system cleared out areas of Portland neighborhoods designated as “slum and blight.” Projects like Interstate 5, Emanuel Legacy Hospital and the Veterans Memorial Coliseum displaced many black residents from North/Northeast Portland, such as the Albina District, while predominantly White neighborhoods remained largely preserved.

The consequences continue to be felt by communities of color to this day. Shockingly, a recent study revealed that the wealth gap between Black and White households [remains as wide today as it was in 1968. In Portland, less than 30% of Blacks own their home, compared to 56% of Whites and Asians](#). In 2011, the City of Portland, City of Gresham, and Multnomah County conducted a joint study that found that communities of color were more concentrated in areas with reduced access to transit, schools, grocery stores, sidewalks, and other indicators of opportunity.

Black, Hispanic and Native American populations are more likely to suffer from health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure than Whites. A growing body of research shows that these health disparities are not genetic, but rather the result of generational poverty, lack of quality healthcare, and living in neighborhoods with higher exposure to pollution.

According to the [Indian Leaders Roundtable](#), Native people count disproportionately among the urban poor and experience the highest rates of homelessness, poverty and unemployment

of all ethnic groups. Depression and addiction impact the Native population in numbers far exceeding the norm.

MULTNOMAH COUNTY IS NO EXCEPTION

To this day, race remains an indicator of outcomes in Multnomah County. In 2014, the Coalition of Communities of Color and Portland State University published a [joint report highlighting the disparities in our own community](#). Their findings included:

- Communities of color earned half the incomes of Whites
- Poverty levels among communities of color were double those of Whites
- The collective child poverty among communities of color was 33.3%, almost 3 times that of White children
- Nearly a third of communities of color did not graduate from high school, compared to 7% of Whites
- Unemployment among communities of color was 35.7% higher than Whites.
- Black youth were 6.5 times more likely to be charged with a crime than White youth, and 33% more likely to be held in detention
- African American and Native American children were disproportionately removed from their homes and placed in foster care
- African-Americans faced disparities for health outcomes like diabetes, stroke, and low birth weight, and access to health insurance, prenatal and mental health care

COVID-19, NOT THE "GREAT EQUALIZER"

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted racial disparities both locally and nationally. Because Black, Hispanic and Native American people are overrepresented in essential jobs, or jobs that cannot be done remotely, these communities face a greater risk of infection. The same populations are more likely to suffer from underlying health conditions, while simultaneously being more likely to be uninsured, and lack access to quality healthcare. Lower wages and less wealth accumulation further compound their situation, making it more challenging for these groups to adapt to and recover from the economic fallout from the pandemic.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, Hispanics represent a third of COVID-19 cases, but only 13% of the population.

Nationwide, [COVID-19 infects African Americans at rates 2.5 times greater than Whites](#). In Oregon, the Latinx community has been hit the hardest. According to the Atlantic's [COVID-19 Tracking Project](#), Hispanics/Latinos account for over 40% of Oregon's COVID-19 cases, but only 13% of the population. The migrant community is especially vulnerable to the virus due to crowded housing conditions and a shortage of healthcare information and services in Spanish. Additionally, undocumented workers do not qualify for healthcare or jobless benefits and may be hesitant to seek help because of fear or distrust of government.

WILL THE SUMMER SLIDE BECOME THE COVID SLIDE?

The effects of the COVID-19 school closures will intensify existing educational inequities. Children from low-income communities - who are disproportionately children of color - are already more vulnerable to the “summer slide,” when students lose some of the academic gains made during the school year. One study on the summer slide found that children in 3rd to 5th grade on average lost 20% of their school-year gains in reading.

Estimates from [a recent study on the expected COVID-19 slide](#) suggest that students will return to school with about 70% of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year, and less than 50% of the learning gains in math. The COVID-19 slide will likely impact children of color disproportionately. Some of these children have had to manage the online curriculum without adequate technology or internet access, oftentimes without parental support, given that communities of color are overrepresented in essential jobs and jobs that cannot be done remotely.

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In Multnomah County, 50% of K-12 students are now young people of color. While graduation rates are increasing for children of color, a gap remains between on-time graduation for White students versus students of color. Will COVID-19 widen this gap? Only time will tell.

There are proven strategies for closing the opportunity gap. These include the expansion of early childhood education programs, family engagement, and early literacy support. For older students, targeted college and career-planning, mentoring programs, and financial assistance are equally important. Prioritizing math and science early in the education of these students can help address the STEM opportunity gap.

Another strategy to improve the educational outcomes for students of color is to hire teachers of color. However, massive budget cuts expected as a result of the pandemic [endanger a recent statewide effort to recruit for diversity and retain new teachers of color](#).

SCRATCHING THE SURFACE OF BIAS

Today most Portlanders share the belief that race is a social construct. Even so, negative racial stereotypes are deeply woven into our shared cultural heritage and can subconsciously inform our decisions, leading to implicit bias. This unconscious bias thrives when people have to make snap decisions with limited information. This has particularly devastating effects in the areas of law enforcement, medicine and education, where one wrong decision can have life-long or even fatal consequences for a person of color.

Implicit bias is malleable. Studies have shown that with intention and practice, we can correct our course. One effective way to identify and combat racial disparities is to disaggregate data by race. A few poignant examples include:

- A 2016 report found that [Black people made up 27% of Multnomah County's jail population](#), while only comprising 5% of the overall population. The same report found Black people to be 4.4 times more likely to be convicted of a crime, 7 times more likely to be sentenced to prison, and 4 times more likely to be required to pay a fine as part of a judgment.
- Also in 2016, the Portland Police's Gang Enforcement Team was found to have stopped Black drivers at rates 7 times higher than their overall proportion of drivers in Portland.
- Students of color are up to 3 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White counterparts. Black boys face exclusion rates almost 3.5 times the rate of White students.

SEEING CLEARLY: USING A RACIAL EQUITY LENS

There are proven strategies to reduce racial disparities and overcome bias. Often referred to as "racial equity toolkits," these strategies are designed to integrate explicit consideration of racial equity in decisions. Cornerstones include understanding historical context, checking for both explicit and implicit bias, using disaggregated data to track trends over time, and recruiting for diversity. ⁱ

Many organizations, such as Ninety-nine girlfriends, offer implicit bias training for its members. Large organizations and local and state governments increasingly have stated equity goals. Such institutions include Metro, Multnomah County, Portland Public Schools and the City of Portland.

In 2018, the Oregon Legislature created a taskforce to examine racial disparities in housing and recommend solutions to eliminate discrimination and remove barriers to homeownership. Oregon's Student Success Act is required to be implemented with an equity lens and stipulates that funding go towards increasing educator diversity.

Oregon has expanded COVID-19 testing criteria to prioritize Latinx and other minorities, and Oregon's Occupational Safety and Health Administration has introduced measures to protect migrant farmworkers.

The 2020 race for Multnomah County's District Attorney centered on the need for criminal justice reform and reform efforts sparked by George Floyd's death are currently in the works for the Portland Police Bureau, as well as the State of Oregon.

DOING THE WORK

Today, organizations such as the [Meyer Memorial Trust](#), [NAACP](#), [The Collins Foundation](#), [Urban League](#), and the [Coalition of Communities of Color](#) are thought-leaders in the field of racial equity, working not only on targeted efforts, but widespread systemic change.

The [Albina Vision Trust](#) is a recent initiative to revitalize the [former district of Albina](#), once the center of Portland's Black population that was largely wiped out by projects such as Interstate 5, Emanuel Legacy Hospital and the Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

Ninety-nine girlfriends has funded several organizations dedicated to reducing racial disparities. These are [Kairos PDX](#), [Adelante Mujeres](#), [Red Door Project/Evolve](#), [Open Signal/Black Filmmakers Project](#), [Red Lodge Transitions Services](#), [Virginia Garcia Health Foundation](#), [Oregon Tradeswomen](#), and [Metro East](#).

Organizations that provide culturally-specific services to the Latinx community include [Latino Network](#), [Oregon Latino Health Coalition](#), [Oregon Latinx Leadership Network](#), [Familias en Acción](#), [El Programa Hispanico](#), [Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber](#), [¡Salud!](#), and [Innovation Law Lab](#).

[NAYA](#) provides culturally-specific services to the Native American community, including educational programming and summer camps for kids.

Organizations dedicated to reducing racial disparities in incarceration, policing, and protecting the civil rights of Oregonians include [Oregon Justice Resource Center](#) and the [Oregon Innocence Project](#), [ACLU of Oregon](#) and [Partnership for Safety and Justice](#).

In the field of education and youth services, [Stand for Children](#), [All Hands Raised](#) and [Self Enhancement, Inc](#) are working to level the playing field for students and youth of color.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

We are still far from Dr. Martin Luther King's vision of the promised land, where race no longer drives outcomes and limits potential. But Oregon's journey, from one of the most racist states of the north to one where racial equity is now a widely shared vision, should inspire hope and optimism.

There is much work left to be done. Ninety-nine girlfriends has the power and the resources to be an important part of that process in Portland and Southwest Washington.

REDUCING RACIAL DISPARITIES- REFERENCES & RESOURCES

OREGON HISTORY

[The Racist History of Portland, the Whitest City in America](#), The Atlantic, 2016
[Oregon Black History Timeline](#) YouTube video by Walidah Imarisha
PDXtalks YouTube video, [Why Aren't There More Black People in Oregon: A Hidden History](#), Developed by Walidah Imarisha for Oregon Humanities' Conversation Project with support from Portland State University's Black Studies Department
[Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Disinvestment](#), 1940-2000 by Karen Gibson
[A Short History of Oregon Tribes in the Contemporary Era](#), by David Lewis, Ethnohistory Research, LLC
[Historical Context of Racist Planning](#), City of Portland report

WEALTH GAP

[Recent Trends in Wealth-Holding by Race and Ethnicity](#): Evidence from the Survey of Consumer Finances
[Racial Wealth Gap Worse for Families with Children](#), Study from Duke Sanford School of Public Policy
[The Black-White Economic Divide is as Wide as it Was in 1968](#), Washington Post, 2020

EDUCATION

[The COVID-19 Slide](#): What summer learning loss can tell us about the potential impact of school closures on student academic achievement, April 2020 Study by NWEA Research
The All Hands Raised Partnership: [Education, Equity & Excellence from Cradle to Career](#) Chapter 04, Spring 2019
All Hands Raised Community Data: [How does race relate to Third Grade Reading? Does K-3 reading matter?](#) Ask the 70% of inmates who can't read. From the Foundation for Excellence in Education
All Hands Raised Community Data: [How does race relate to Eighth Grade Math? Summer Slide Statistics](#), from Scholastic post: How to Prevent Your Kids from Losing What They Learned in School During Summer Vacation
[Summer Learning Loss](#): What We Know and What We're Learning, NWEA Research, 2018
[Exclusionary Discipline in Multnomah County Schools](#): How suspensions and expulsions impact students of color
Oregon High School [Four-year Graduation Rates Trends Last In, First Out Isn't Equitable for Teachers of Color](#), Opinion by Toya Fick, The Oregonian, 2020

HEALTH

["A Terrible Price": The Deadly Racial Disparities of COVID-19 in America](#), New York Times, 2020

[For Latinos and COVID-19, Doctors Are Seeing an "Alarming" Disparity](#), New York Times, 2020

[Financial and Health Impacts Vary Widely by Race and Ethnicity](#), Pew Research Center Report, 2020

[Think Out Loud: Communities of Color and COVID-19](#), OPB 2020

HOUSING

[Portland Demographics and Housing Stock](#), City of Portland Housing Bureau Report

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

[Blacks overrepresented in every part of Multnomah County's Criminal Justice System, Report Finds](#), The Oregonian, 2016

Bryan Stevenson Ted Talk: [We Need to Talk About an Injustice](#), 2012

[Justice Disparate by Race in Oregon](#), InvestigateWest, 2017

OTHER RESOURCES

[Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile](#), Report from Coalition of Communities of Color and Portland State University

[Portland Indian Leaders Roundtable](#), 2017