



RACISM MAKES THE US SICK / RACISM AS A THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH

Resources for Further Learning

OVERVIEW: SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEATH & HEALTHCARE

[How Racism Is Bad for Our Bodies.](#) Jason Silverstein, The Atlantic, March 12, 2013

A growing literature shows discrimination raises the risk of many emotional and physical problems. Discrimination has been shown to increase the risk of stress, [depression](#), the [common cold](#), [hypertension](#), [cardiovascular disease](#), [breast cancer](#), and [mortality](#). Recently, two journals -- [The American Journal of Public Health](#) and [The Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race](#) -- dedicated entire issues to the subject. These collections push us to consider how discrimination becomes what social epidemiologist Nancy Krieger, one of the field's leaders, terms "[embodied inequality](#)."

[The State of Black Milwaukee in National Perspective: Racial Inequality in the Nation's 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas In 65 Charts and Tables.](#) Marc V. Levine Professor Emeritus and Founding Director University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development, July 2020

At this moment of national reckoning, with cities across the country grappling with the state of racial injustice in their communities, it is important to have a solid base of comparative and historical data to guide actions and policies. In 65 charts and tables, this study aims to provide that comparative base, examining how Black communities in the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas fare on measures such as residential segregation; income, poverty, and intergenerational economic mobility; employment and earnings; the racial composition of private-sector economic decision-makers; mass incarceration; educational attainment; school segregation; and health care outcomes.

Our particular emphasis is on Milwaukee, which we argue represents the archetype of modern day metropolitan racial apartheid and inequality. And our findings are devastating: on virtually all key measures of Black community well-being, Milwaukee ranks at or near the bottom when ranked against other large metropolitan areas. Moreover, when we examine historical trends in some key areas, the results are equally grim: Black Milwaukee is generally worse off today than it was 40 or 50 years ago. This study documents how poorly Black communities across the nation's largest metro areas were faring – even before the COVID-19 economic collapse. But **no metropolitan area ranks as consistently poorly, across the board, on indicators of Black community well-being as does Milwaukee.**

[Trump's presidency may be making Latinos sick](#) – W. Wan and L. Bever, NY Times, July 19, 2019

Researchers have begun to identify correlations between Trump's election and worsening cardiovascular health, sleep problems, anxiety and stress, especially among Latinos in the United States. A study using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found the risk of premature birth was higher than expected among Latina women [following Trump's election](#). The new study is particularly powerful, experts say, because unlike ailments such as depression or stress that can be hard to quantify, births come with hard data.

[A 'Rare Case Where Racial Biases' Protected African-Americans](#) –Austin Frakt and Toni Monkovic, NY Times, Updated Dec. 2, 2019

Fewer opioid prescriptions meant fewer deaths (possibly 14,000), but the episode also reveals how prevalent and harmful stereotypes can be, even if implicit.

“Starting in the 1990s, new prescription opioids were [marketed more aggressively](#) in white rural areas, where pain drug prescriptions were already high. African-Americans received fewer opioid prescriptions, some researchers think, because doctors believed, contrary to fact, that black people 1) were more likely to become addicted to the drugs 2) would be more likely to sell the drugs and 3) had a higher pain threshold than white people because they were biologically different. A fourth possibility is that some white doctors were more empathetic to the pain of people who were like them, and less empathetic to those who weren't.”

[Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites](#) K.M. Hoffman, S. Trawalter, J.R. Axt, and M. Norman Oliver. PNAS April 19, 2016 113 (16) 4296-4301.

This work examines beliefs associated with racial bias in pain management, a critical health care domain with well-documented racial disparities. Specifically, it reveals that a substantial number of white laypeople and medical students and residents hold false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites and demonstrates that these beliefs predict racial bias in pain perception and treatment recommendation accuracy. It also provides the first evidence that racial bias in pain perception is associated with racial bias in pain treatment recommendations. Taken together, this work provides evidence that false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites continue to shape the way we perceive and treat black people—they are associated with racial disparities in pain assessment and treatment recommendations.

[Car deaths of black Wisconsinites surge as Milwaukee deals with reckless driving epidemic, report finds](#)

Black Wisconsinites were once statistically less likely to be victims of fatal car crashes than other groups, but after just a five-year period, from 2013 to 2018, they are now killed at roughly twice the rate of white and Hispanic residents. [Editor's note: This article posits three factors for this change, including the removal of driver's education as a public school course. However, it does not question the role played by the increasingly overt racism since the 2016 presidential election and the resulting stress on black drivers. The co-founders of Nurturing Diversity Partners live in the neighborhood experiencing the biggest increase in reckless driving. We believe the racial stress we are witnessing here could be a cause and should be studied.

RACISM AS PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

[County Executive Chris Abele declares racism a public health crisis](#)

Video and text of press conference includes the official signing of the declaration and overview of its components, as well as speeches by the County Executive and other elected officials who initiated the county's equity plan.

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Racism and Health](#)

The CDC— as the nation's leading public health agency— has established this web portal to serve as a hub for its activities, to promote a public discourse on how racism negatively affects health, and to communicate potential solutions.

[New health indicators for America: aiming to shift practice](#), [The Lancet](#), February 01, 2020

34 indicators in total—including 15 novel ones—have been recommended by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) **in a new report** published on Jan 22. The document aims to inform the US Government's Healthy People initiative, which each decade sets national goals and objectives for health promotion and disease prevention. The final version, Healthy People 2030, is due to be released by the Department of Health and Human Services later this year.

The new health indicators focus specifically on wellbeing and equity, and examine “poverty, racism, and discrimination as root causes of health inequalities”. They move away from directly measuring the health-care delivery system's capabilities and associated metrics, to quantifying how “people live their lives in the US—shaped by the broad context of policies, systems, social structures, and economic forces”.

Radio Program

[Is Systemic Racism A Public Health Crisis? Milwaukee Says 'Yes'](#) Meghna Chakrabarti, WBUR, May 30, 2019

Milwaukee County declares racism a public health crisis and wants to push the plan nationwide. Interviews with Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele and Dr. Camara Phyllis Jones of the American Public Health Association.

Books

[American Poison: How Racial Hostility Destroyed Our Promise](#) – Eduardo Porter (March 2020)

A sweeping examination of how American racism has broken the country's social compact, eroded America's common goods, and damaged the lives of every American—and a heartfelt look at how these deep wounds might begin to heal.

[Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America's Heartland](#) – Jonathan M. Metzl (2019)

A physician reveals how right-wing backlash policies have mortal consequences – even for the white voters they promise to help. The author shows these policies' costs: increasing deaths by gun suicide, falling life expectancies, and rising dropout rates. White Americans, Dr. Metzl argues, must reject the racial hierarchies that promise to aid them but in fact lead our nation to demise. Named one of the most anticipated books of 2019 by Esquire and the Boston Globe.

[A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault on the American Mind](#) – Harriet A. Washington (2019)

From injuries caused by lead poisoning to the devastating effects of atmospheric pollution, infectious disease, and industrial waste, Americans of color are harmed by environmental hazards in staggeringly disproportionate numbers. This systemic onslaught of toxic exposure and institutional negligence causes irreparable physical harm to millions of people across the country—cutting lives tragically short and needlessly burdening our health care system. But these deadly environments create another insidious and often overlooked consequence: robbing communities of color, and America as a whole, of intellectual power.

BIAS IN HEALTHCARE PROVISION & ACCESS

[The Black Mortality Gap, and a Document Written in 1910](#) (New York Times, Sept. 1, 2021)
Some clues on why health care fails Black Americans can be found in the Flexner Report.

An excellent review of how the history of medical education and regulation led to discrimination and exclusivity in healthcare.

In the early 1900s, the U.S. medical field was in disarray; medical schools were flooding the field with unqualified doctors — and pocketing the tuition fees. Dangerous quacks and con artists flourished. The 1910 Flexner Report blasted the unregulated state of medical education, urging professional standards to produce a force of “fewer and better doctors.”

And so emerged a vision of an [ideal doctor](#): a wealthy white man from a Northern city. Control of the medical field was in the hands of these doctors, with professional and cultural mechanisms to limit others. Elite white physicians now faced less competition from doctors offering lower prices or free care. They could exclude those they felt lowered the profession’s social status, including working-class or poor people, women, rural Southerners, immigrants and Black people.

To a large degree, the Flexner standards continue to influence American medicine today.

[Black Doctor Dies of Covid-19 After Complaining of Racist Treatment](#) (New York Times, Dec. 2020)

Susan Moore, the patient, said the white doctor at the hospital in suburban Indianapolis where she was being treated for [Covid-19](#) had downplayed her complaints of pain. ... “I was crushed,” she said in [a video posted to Facebook](#). “He made me feel like I was a drug addict.”

In her post, which has since circulated widely on social media, she showed a command of complicated medical terminology and an intricate knowledge of treatment protocols as she detailed the ways in which she had advocated for herself with the medical staff. She knew what to ask for because she, too, was a medical doctor. But that was not enough to get her treatment and respect she said she deserved. “...If I was white,” she said in the video, “I wouldn’t have to go through that.”

After Dr. Moore, 52, complained about her treatment, she received care that she said “adequately treated” her pain. She was eventually sent home, and on Sunday, just more than two weeks after posting the video, Dr. Moore died of complications from Covid-19....

Dr. Moore’s case has generated outrage and renewed calls to grapple with biased medical treatment of Black patients. Voluminous research suggests that [Black patients often receive treatment inferior to their white counterparts](#), particularly when it comes to relieving pain.

[When race matters: disagreement in pain perception between patients and their physicians in primary care.](#) J Natl Med Assoc. 2007 May;99(5):532-8.

This study finds that physicians are twice as likely to underestimate pain in blacks patients compared to all other ethnicities combined.

[The disturbing reason some African American patients may be undertreated for pain](#) (Washington Post, April 2016).

Written for the general public, this article has links to various scientific studies, including the one immediately below with a graph of the biased, unfounded responses of doctors in training.

[Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites.](#) Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA

This work reveals that a substantial number of white laypeople and medical students and residents hold false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites and demonstrates that these beliefs predict racial bias in pain perception and treatment recommendation accuracy. It also provides the first evidence that racial bias in pain perception is associated with racial bias in pain treatment recommendations.

[Racism, Hazing And Other Abuse Taints Medical Training, Students Say](#) (NPR, June 2020) Studies show that students of color and those who are LGBTQ are more likely than other classmates to experience mistreatment during their training. [Research published earlier this year in JAMA Internal Medicine, for example,](#) suggests that minority students are more likely to face discriminatory comments, public humiliation and inappropriate sexual advances during their medical education.

MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH

[Nothing Protects Black Women From Dying in Pregnancy and Childbirth: Not education. Not income. Not even being an expert on racial disparities in health care.](#) [Nina Martin](#), ProPublica, and Renee Montagne, [NPR News](#), Dec. 7, 2017

In depth story of the early post-partum death of Shalon Irvings, PhD, highly accomplished black woman, herself an epidemiologist at the CDC focused on racial disparities in healthcare – along with a very complete description of the social determinants of health impacting black women and mothers. Very well-written for the layperson; a complete, detailed description of why and how the shockingly high rates of black maternal mortality happen.

[Severe sociopolitical stressors and preterm births in New York City: 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2017.](#) N. Krieger, M. Huynh, W. Li, P.D. Waterman, & G.Van Wye

Severe stressors can induce preterm birth (PTB; gestation <37 weeks), with such stressors including social and economic threats, interpersonal violence, hate crimes and severe sociopolitical stressors (i.e., arising from political leaders' threatening rhetoric or from political legislation). We analysed temporal changes in risk of PTB among immigrant, Hispanic and Muslim populations targeted in the US 2016 presidential election and its aftermath.

Results Comparing the period before the US presidential nomination to the post-inauguration period, the overall PTB rate increased from 7.0% to 7.3%. Among Hispanic women, the highest post-inauguration versus pre-inauguration increase occurred among foreign-born Hispanic women with Mexican or Central American ancestry. The post-inauguration versus pre-inauguration PTB rate also was higher for women from the Middle East/North Africa and from the travel ban countries, although non-significant due to the small number of events.

Conclusion Severe sociopolitical stressors may contribute to increases in the risk of PTB among targeted populations.

[**Black women \(in Wisconsin\) are five times as likely to die in childbirth. Here's what that looks like in Green Bay. Kynala Phillips, https://madison365.com/, July 21,2021**](#)

Emily Jacobson, [a white woman who is] a Brown County Supervisor and founder of Green Bay Doulas, has seen the struggles Black women face up close. Doulas are [trained professionals](#) who provide emotional and physical support during childbirth. Jacobson said that most of the Black women that she works with hired her to act almost as a “bodyguard” against any discrimination during the birthing process.

[**Trends of Suicidal Behaviors Among High School Students in the United States: 1991–2017**](#)
Oct 2019 Journal of Am Pediatrics

Longitudinal mega-study to determine if racial and ethnic subgroups of adolescents are at high risk for engagement in suicidal behaviors. Results suggest that, over time, black youth have experienced an increase in suicide attempts, which is troubling because attempts are the most prominent risk factor associated with suicide death. For black boys, a significant increase in injury by attempt occurred, which suggests that black boys may be engaging in increasingly lethal means when attempting suicide.

[**Pediatric asthma is a growing problem in Milwaukee. Is 'indoor air' to blame?**](#) Stephanie Blaszczyk, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, July 18, 2019

In Wisconsin, approximately 400,000 adults and 100,000 children have asthma, and as many as one in four kids in Milwaukee Public Schools have asthma. And while the burden of asthma is high all around, it is not equally shared. Certain sub-populations, including African Americans and Hispanics, have dramatically increased risks of hospitalizations and fatalities due to asthma. Americans spend 90% of their time indoors. Medical studies are now examining the indoor air quality in children’s homes and daycare centers, especially in poor and marginalized communities, as an important factor in asthma overall and in the racial disparities in children’s well-being.

Tracking the Growth of Special Education in Flint

The percentage of students who qualify for special education services in Flint has grown from 13.1 percent in the school year before the water became contaminated to 20.5 percent last school year.

- 2012-13: **13.1%**
- 2013-14: **15.1%**
- 2014-15: **15%**
- 2015-16: **16.7%**
- 2016-17: **17.4%**
- 2017-18: **19.8%**
- 2018-19: **20.5%**

Source: Michigan Department of Education

[**The Impact of Racism on Children’s Health.**](#) Perri Klass, M.D., NY Times, Aug. 12, 2019.

A new statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics looks at the effects of racism on children’s development, starting in the womb.

[**In Flint, Schools Overwhelmed by Special Ed. Needs in Aftermath of Lead Crisis**](#) Corey Mitchell, Education Week, August 26, 2019

This story details the local and national economic and human impacts of Flint’s lead crisis, focusing on the schools — another horrifying example of how racism makes our society sick AND expensive and impoverished. It doesn’t mention race explicitly, but we already know that connection (see all above).

Videos

[**Unnatural Causes**](#) Feature documentary (\$295 streaming rights) and [trailer](#)

[**Kira Johnson’s story**](#) – Charles Johnson shares the tragic story of his healthy wife Kira's death hours after giving birth, because she wasn’t seen as a “priority” in hospital while bleeding internally.

[**The Naked Truth: Death by Delivery**](#) – Fusion TV’s searing episode exposing the cost of racism in America, as it’s being paid by black women, children and families.

EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Early Data Shows African Americans Have Contracted and Died of Coronavirus at an Alarming Rate

– Akilah Johnson and Talia Buford (April 3, 2020)

No, the coronavirus is not an “equalizer.” Black people are being infected and dying at higher rates. Here’s what Milwaukee is doing about it — and why governments need to start releasing data on the race of COVID-19 patients.

The Pandemic’s Missing Data – Aletha Maybank, Chief Health Equity Officer, the American Medical Association

We desperately need to release the statistics on race and equity. Here’s why this impacts us all.

A Crisis Within a Crisis: COVID-19 Disproportionally Impacts Milwaukee’s Black Neighborhoods

Syndicated, Milwaukeeindependent.com (April 3, 2020)

‘Woe Is You,’ White People Say. What We Need Is a Remedy.

Think about why the virus is poised to rip through black neighborhoods like mine. – Jeremiah Bey Ellison, member of the Minneapolis City Council. (April 15, 2020)

I thought about the disproportionate number of black folks dying from the coronavirus because they had asthma, diabetes or hypertension. Because they had limited access to affordable, healthy food. Because they lived near factories. Because they couldn’t afford to visit a doctor or because they couldn’t afford to miss work. Because their blood pressure was perpetually too high from a lifetime of being stressed out by all of the above. I thought about how predictable this all was. How preventable.

Articles about COVID-19 by

Reggie Jackson

Co-Founder and Lead Educator/Consultant, Nurturing Diversity Partners

[The Impact of Racism Is the “Other Coronavirus Crisis” for People of Color](#) –March 27, 2020

[The Next Challenge of the COVID-19 Fight in Milwaukee](#) – April 3, 2020

[NDP Statement Concerning the Coronavirus Pandemic’s Severe and Selective Impacts on Marginalized Communities](#)

BEYOND THE US – AN INTERNATIONAL VIEW

[The pandemic is a portal](#) – Arundhati Roy, Financial Time International (April 3, 2020)

The novelist on how coronavirus threatens India — and what the country, and the world, should do next

Coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to “normality”, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists.

And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically,

pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

[Brief video clip](#) of the author reading the above essay. Suzanna Arundhati Roy is an Indian author best known for her novel *The God of Small Things*, which won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997 and became the best-selling book by a non-expatriate Indian author. She is also a political activist involved in human rights and environmental causes.