



Racism in twenty-first century America is harder to see than its previous incarnations because the most overt and legally sanctioned forms of racial discrimination have been eliminated. Nonetheless, subtler racialized patterns in policies and practices permeate the political, economic, and sociocultural structures of America in ways that generate differences in well-being between people of color and whites... This contemporary manifestation of racism in America can be called "structural racism."

Structural Racism and Community Building
The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change

INTRODUCTION

In 1946, community leaders undertook the first modern-day study of racial inequality in Jacksonville. Today, more than 50 years later, Jacksonville remains home to a public high school named for a leader of the Ku Klux Klan and has a third of its elected City Council members intolerant enough to oppose appointing a Muslim to the Human Rights Commission.

Race is among the toughest -- if not *the* toughest -- challenge for communities. So much is invested in the status quo, and the path to change is not clear. The conversation too easily becomes accusatory, punitive and personal.

Yet Jacksonville, for all of its shortcomings, has taken steps down that path to change that are both bold and innovative. In addition to a rich body of research, the community has for the last five years maintained an annual report card on improvements in race relations. It also has Project Breakthrough, which is both a resource for and an emblem of community change.

Project Breakthrough: *Changing the Story of Race in Jacksonville* was conceived in 2006, with the encouragement and support of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville and the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. It did not involve a study or a survey. Instead, it looked at the manner in which the very infrastructure of our lives, our history and our culture serves to perpetuate racial inequality. This is "structural racism."

The goals of Project Breakthrough have been to establish a common understanding of the ways in which seemingly innocuous everyday practices and traditions exacerbate the gap in access to opportunity for different people, and to integrate the concept of structural racism into Jacksonville's lexicon and decision-making processes. Since work began in late 2008, Project Breakthrough has introduced scores of community leaders to the concept of structural racism and engaged them in large and small-group conversations on the topic. It has introduced tools that can help institutions and organizations identify and correct the policies, practices and belief systems that perpetuate racial inequality.

This report looks at the work of Project Breakthrough to date and explores future directions.

WHY ARE WE STILL TALKING ABOUT RACE?

After decades of study, generations of changing attitudes and the election of the nation's first African-American president and Jacksonville's first African-American mayor, many may wonder why continued conversations about racial inequity are needed. But consider what the most recent Race Relations Progress Report for Jacksonville (2010) reveals about equitable opportunities in Jacksonville:

(Source: Race Relations Progress Report for Jacksonville, Florida, 2009, Jacksonville Community Council Inc.)

Blacks and whites have very different perceptions about the state of race relations in Jacksonville.

Is racism a problem in Jacksonville in 2010?

Whites saying yes	48%
Blacks saying yes	80%

Whites navigate the educational system with far greater ease than do non-whites.

Percentage of students who graduated from high school in the 2009 school year:

Whites	80%
Blacks	66%
Hispanics	69%

Percentage of adults 25 and older with a Bachelor's degree or higher in 2009:

Whites	29.3%
Blacks	16.2%
Hispanics	22.0%

Whites find housing more affordable than do non-whites.

In 2009, who was "burdened" by housing costs - that is, they paid more than 30% of total monthly household income for housing?

	<u>Homeowners</u>	<u>Renters</u>
Whites	37%	49%
Blacks	50%	64%

Many of these disparities, it can be argued, are the result of "structural racism" -- that is, a "system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity."¹

Structural racism emanates from the manner in which we allocate social privilege. In this culture, at this time, white privilege is the dominant frame. This is evidenced in the outcomes in all opportunity areas—from health, to education, to employment, to wealth.

Structural racism is nurtured by our national values, including personal responsibility, meritocracy and equal opportunity. "In a perfect world, with all else held equal, the ideal represented by these national values would translate directly into the reality of daily experience for all Americans. In our imperfect world, with its many inequities, however, these values inevitably lead to different outcomes for different individuals.... Where one starts out in life affects where one ends up to a greater degree than our national sense of economic mobility would have us believe."²

¹ *Structural Racism and Community Building*, The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change

² *Ibid*

And structural racism is fed by our contemporary culture with its galaxy of cues and bits of information that form and inform our attitudes, from the way groups are portrayed in the media, to the way we allow ourselves to talk about people of different groups.

"I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day...White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks."

Peggy MacIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," - *Peace and Freedom*, July-August 1989

PROJECT BREAKTHROUGH -- HOW THE WORK BEGAN

In early 2005, the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change invited representatives of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville (and seven other community foundations from across the country) to South Florida to participate in a four-day, intensive seminar on structural racism. Participating were Foundation President Nina Waters, then-Board Chair Bill Scheu, and Henry Thomas, Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of North Florida.

At the time, The Community Foundation was preparing to launch Quality Education for All, a 10-year initiative to improve the graduation rate, reduce the dropout rate and narrow the achievement gap among Duval County Public School students. The research conducted for the initiative made clear the significant racial disparities in academic achievement among Duval County students. Consequently, the structural racism perspective resonated deeply with the Foundation team.

The Foundation subsequently recruited a second team of leaders to participate in a similar Aspen seminar, this time sending Linda Lanier, Executive Director of the Jacksonville Children's Commission; Davalu Parrish, President of The Bridge of Northeast Florida, which works with at-risk children and youth; and Duval County School Board member Brenda Priestly Jackson. This team's experience validated that of the original team, and the Foundation began conversations with Aspen about bringing the structural racism project to Jacksonville in a more significant way.

At that time, Aspen had not introduced the structural racism work in a single community. All of its work had been done in seminars, with representatives of multiple communities learning together. Aspen was intrigued at the prospect of bringing the structural racism work to a community and having multiple players within that community address the issue simultaneously.

In 2006, Aspen agreed to undertake this work in Jacksonville, in partnership with The Community Foundation. The Foundation provided a grant to OneJax, the successor organization to the National Conference of Community Justice and Jacksonville's foremost nonprofit champion for equity and inclusion, to implement the program. The Jacksonville Human Rights Commission agreed to be a partner.

GETTING STARTED

Through the collaborative agreement among the Foundation, Aspen, OneJax and Jacksonville Human Rights Commission work began in July 2007. It was important for OneJax/Project Breakthrough leadership to experience Aspen's structural racism training in order to do important groundwork to develop knowledge around the issue. Additionally a strategy for introducing structural racism to the Jacksonville community was developed.

It was during this period that Project Breakthrough leadership created a library of all previous studies conducted on race relations in Jacksonville, from the 1946 *Jacksonville Looks at Its Negro Community* to the 2009 *Racial and Ethnic Disparities Report* produced by the Jacksonville Children's Commission. (Attachment 1)

In June 2008, Project Breakthrough hosted a kickoff dinner to introduce the initiative to the community. More than 450 people attended the *Dinner With a Difference*.

By fall 2008, the Project Breakthrough leadership hosted its inaugural Aspen-led seminar on structural racism for a cadre of Jacksonville leaders. With great care they identified a select group of individuals in the upper echelons of community leadership and strategically approached them with invitations to participate. This group included the mayor, the sheriff, the president of a local college, the former sheriff, the president of a local bank and the chairman-elect of the local Chamber of Commerce. Once on board, these leaders then reached out and invited other community leaders. In the end, a group of 27 individuals agreed to participate. The 3 1/2-day seminar began November 5, 2008.

During the seminar, participants were introduced to the concept of structural racism, and some of the underlying assumptions were challenged, creating a rich and sometimes intense exchange of ideas. At the conclusion of the session, the participants identified three major goals:

- To introduce a common frame for understanding the causes of Jacksonville's - and the nation's - racial disparities;
- To promote a common language for thinking, talking and problem-solving around Jacksonville's racial disparities;
- To build and support a critical mass of those committed in word and deed to changing the story of race in Jacksonville by dismantling structural racism.

Participants began meeting regularly – continuing their own education and looking at areas of greatest need. Two of the seminar participants – nonprofit executive Audrey Moran and Circuit Court Judge Brian Davis have assumed volunteer leadership roles as Project Breakthrough co-chairs.

Some initial accomplishments of the Project Breakthrough team include:

- Racial Equity Workshops for Leadership Jacksonville's Understanding Each Other Program Day for the Classes of 2010 and 2011, explaining how communities, institutions and organizations can use tools to identify and address structural racism.
- Racial Equity Seminar for Media Professionals in August, 2010 with senior management, editors, producers, content managers and reporters representing more than 17 local news outlets to develop standard media practices and guidelines for stories involving structural racism.
- Series in the fall of 2010 for reporters, editors and other employees of the *Florida Times-Union*. This series to continue in 2011 to include all staff with plans to broaden to other media outlets.
- Dropout Prevention Training Sessions in Racial Equity and Society for Duval County Public School teachers, administrators and guidance counselors using "Bring Your 'A' Game," a drop-out prevention tool.

While these efforts proved successful, the team decided to examine more closely the role played by structural racism in the community's individual institutions. They soon realized that their work needed to be more focused as dismantling structural racism in Jacksonville is a huge and multidimensional challenge. The community's broad approach to combating racism had traditionally been "a mile wide and an inch deep"; the Project Breakthrough team decided to try the opposite: a more narrowly focused "inch wide, mile deep" approach. This would allow participants to identify the interdependent effects of structural racism, prioritize them, and make recommendations that are bite-sized, achievable, measurable and impactful.

They agreed the top priority should be education, because this is where their work could achieve the greatest initial impact. By influencing the public and private education system, they reasoned, they could start to break the cycle and take manageable first steps. Their intent was to dismantle structural racism, first in the education system and ultimately in the community as a whole.

Aligning and Collaborating with Other Community Efforts –

Following the decision to focus on education, the team sought out local organizations with which to collaborate. There was no shortage of educational and other stakeholders eager to participate. These include:

- City of Jacksonville
- Council on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys
- Duval County Public School System
- *Florida Times-Union*
- Jacksonville Public Education Fund
- Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI)
- Northeast Florida Community Action Agency
- Reclaiming Young Black Male initiative
- Teach For America
- United Way of Northeast Florida

The Project Breakthrough team formed a work group and began the task of gathering information in the public schools. They noted that the system-wide graduation rate in Duval County High Schools is about 70%. But among young black males it is significantly lower, ranging between the low to upper 50 percentages between 2002 and 2009. They agreed to make a priority of closing this gap within the next five years.

NEXT STEPS

- Continue the working group to:
 - Examine how public policies, social and institutional practices and cultural representations contribute to structural racism.
 - Determine ways of dismantling structural racism.
 - Continue to enlist allies who have the power to influence.
 - Continue investigating sources of retrenchment.
 - Determine and implement strategies.
- Convene a Racial Equity Seminar focused on the educational system

Listing of Previous Studies Which Had a Focus on the Issue of Race.

It should be noted that many of the recommendations were similar and repeated numerous times over the 62 years.

- **1946 Jacksonville Looks at its Negro Community**
The Council of Social Agencies
- **1991 The Jacksonville Vision**
Jacksonville Insight
- **1992 Recommendations for Community Healing**
The Mayor's Council on Community Reconciliation
- **1994 Report to the Mayor and City Council**
Jacksonville Human Rights Commission
- **1999 A Comprehensive Examination of Race in Jacksonville:
A Report to the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission**
NE Florida Center for Community Initiative @ UNF
- **2002 Beyond The Talk – Improving Race Relations**
Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI)
- **2006 Blueprint for Prosperity: Raising the Income of Duval County Residents**
City of Jacksonville & the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce
- **2006 Reducing Murder: A Community Response**
Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI)
- **2008 Infant Mortality Study**
Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI)
- **2009 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Report**
Jacksonville Children's Commission