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# Racial Equity 101

## Philadelphia's Focus on Racial Equity in Government

## WHAT IS RACIAL EQUITY?

Racial equity is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, racial equity means **closing race-based outcomes gaps so that race can no longer predict one's success**. As a process, racial equity means **including people who are most harmed by inequities in decision-making processes that govern their lives**. When racial equity is achieved everyone benefits from a more just and equitable system.

## WHY FOCUS ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PHILADELPHIA?

Like many U.S. cities, Philadelphia experiences deep race-based disparities across all indicators of well-being. These disparities are the result of individual, institutional, and structural racism that has disadvantaged Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) families. These disparities have real consequences for the quality of life of all residents.

In Philadelphia, racial inequities appear across all measures of well-being and outcomes including in housing, poverty, and health care access:

**Individual racism** is bigotry or discrimination by an individual based on race.

**Institutional racism** includes policies or practices that work better for white people than for people of color, often unintentionally.

**Structural racism** is a history and current reality of racism across institutions—combining to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color.



**Housing segregation.** Philadelphia continues to be segregated along racial lines. One race or ethnic group represents the majority population in 79% of the City's 384 residential census tracts. Research indicates that Black and Hispanic people who live in highly segregated neighborhoods have lower housing quality and less access to good jobs and education.



**Poverty.** Philadelphia remains the poorest big city in America. More than 23% of Philadelphia residents live in poverty, more than twice the national average. Black and Hispanic residents are twice as likely to live in poverty than non-Hispanic white residents. Poverty levels are highest in North and West Philadelphia. Residents of high-poverty neighborhoods also have the highest rates of housing cost burden,



**Access to health care.** Hispanic adults are more likely to be uninsured compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Approximately 1 in 6 adults in Philadelphia reported not having access to a primary care physician. Due to lack of access to and poor quality of primary care, rates of hospitalizations for conditions such as asthma and diabetes are higher among Black residents.

“Our Administration wants to ensure that City government is focused on true equity—rather than just fairness or equality. Our policy-making, service delivery, and distribution of resources must account for the different conditions of the communities we serve.”

-Mayor Jim Kenney

## ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

From the founding of the country, government at the local, regional, state, and federal level has played a role in creating and maintaining racial inequity. A wide range of laws and policies were passed relegating BIPOC to second class citizenship. This included laws determining who could vote, who could be a citizen, who could own property, where one could live and more. Many issues tied to racial inequity are within the power of city government to change.

## CENTERING RACE & INTERSECTIONALITY

The City of Philadelphia is committed to creating an equitable city for all residents.

The City has prioritized combatting racial inequity because of the damaging role that government has played in creating and sustaining racial disparities. The City also centers intersectionality\* in its work, which is a helpful framework for understanding how individuals are impacted by the oppression and privilege of all the identities they hold. Racial equity and intersectionality are important guiding principles because:

- The principles acknowledge that racial equity without explicit focus on disability, gender, sexual orientation, poverty, and other social identities is not fully equitable.
- The principles recognize that individuals with multiple marginalized identities experience compounding oppression. People with multiple identities should be central to creating policy solutions to dismantle systems of oppression.

1630s

The original people of the Philadelphia region were the Lenape people. In the 1630s, European settlers colonized the area, which began a process that stripped the Lenape people of their land and led to the death and migration of the remaining Lenape from the area.

1780

Pennsylvania lawmakers adopted a gradual emancipation law that set a timeline for future emancipation of enslaved Black people. Well after the importation of enslaved Black people was made illegal, many white Pennsylvanians continued to sell and purchase enslaved Black people in neighboring states.

1937

The federal Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) created a color-coded map system, which we now refer to as redlining. The HOLC classified large areas of Philadelphia as “hazardous” and colored those areas in red on maps. The redlined areas were often home to Black Philadelphians, which the HOLC characterized as “undesirable populations.”

1960s

City leaders and the West Philadelphia Corporation seized land in the former “Black Bottom” neighborhood using eminent domain. The predominantly-Black, working-class neighborhood was razed for urban renewal to make way for the Science Center and other university buildings.

1985

The Philadelphia Police Department dropped a satchel bomb on a West Philadelphia rowhome housing the MOVE organization, a Black liberation group. Eleven people were killed, including five children, 61 homes were destroyed, and more than 250 citizens were left homeless.

\***Intersectionality** refers to the interconnected nature of different social identities, such as race, class, disability, sexual orientation, and gender as they apply to an individual or a group. The theory of intersectionality was created by [Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989](#).