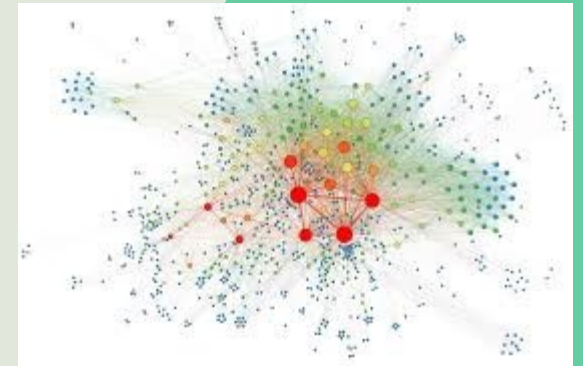


Principles for Structural and Systemic Remediation



DATE

July 9, 2026

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AUTHORIAL SUPPORT

N/A



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQ_8eOaiz8o&t=1s

Types of Racism / Causes of Racial Inequality

1. Interpersonal Racism

- A bigoted or prejudiced actor harms a victim because of their race.

2. Institutional Racism

- Seemingly “neutral” rules operate against background conditions to generate racial disparities. May or may not be intentional or motivated.

3. Systemic Racism

- System elements interact so that inequalities in one domain carry over into another. The outcome is larger inequality.

4. Structural Racism

- The largest view: all of the forces that contribute to racial inequality, including the interaction of multiple systems.

Types of Causes of Racial Inequality

Types of Problems	Examples
Individual	Losing a credit card.
Interpersonal	Having a credit card stolen.
Institutional	Being charged high interest rates on credit card debt by a bank or financial institution because of your zip code.
Systemic	The financial industry establishes rules that charge higher rates of interest on individuals with bad credit histories and target low-income communities of color with predatory financial instruments.
Structural	Credit risk assessment is tied to credit history, which is highly correlated with accumulated intergenerational family wealth, educational attainment, and familiarity with the financial system.

Structural Racial Inequality

- Not all racial inequality is caused by structural dynamics, but much of it is, and much more than is generally appreciated.
- **Structural Racial Inequality** reveals that the forces and arrangements that foster human development, nurture potential, extend opportunity, and facilitate well-being in the United States are *racialized*, meaning that they generate and reinforce group advantages and disadvantages on the basis of race.
- These forces include the healthiest neighborhoods, the best performing schools, the strongest peer and natural environments, and the dynamics of markets and anchor institutions.
 - Example: Children of color are far more likely to attend high-poverty schools or live in high-poverty neighborhoods than white students.

Structural Racial Inequality Explained

- Structural forces, rather than acts of individual discrimination, racist ideas and beliefs about group-based inferiority or presumed cultural differences, which explains **much (although not all)** of the stark and persistent racial disparities in educational attainment, employment, income, wealth, health, and incarceration.
- Simply put, unequal opportunity produces unequal outcomes.
- Nuance: This is not to say that *all* unequal outcomes (all disparities) are caused by unequal opportunities, but unequal opportunity *does* cause, and help explain, unequal outcomes.

Structural Racial Inequality

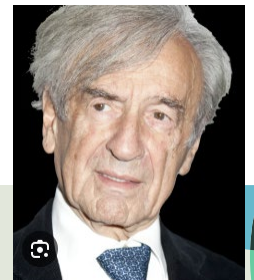
- Many observers assume that these dynamics were initiated or perpetuated by interpersonal or individual racism.
- Much of these structural dynamics are NOT explained by racial prejudice, animus, resentment, aversion, or even anxiety and discomfort.
 - In many cases, they are a product of **self-interest, opportunism, callous indifference/ neglect, and inadequate foresight.**
 - Example:
- The Proof: Even if we curbed acts of racial discrimination and drove out all racist ideas, racial disparities would persist on a massive scale.
- And not just because of path dependency (although that as well). Current policies maintain and undergird these structural dynamics.

What is the source of Structural Racial Inequality?

- Structural racial inequality is the result of a complex set of relationships and interactions between many institutions, policies, and people over many years, *most* of which are either well-intended or not colored by racial animus or based on racist ideas.
- They nonetheless result in significant and persistent racial disparities based upon a structural logic that, once established, requires only indifferent policies preferences and largely self-interested individual and collective action.
- Structural racial inequality is like a **web without a spider**. Some webs were created by spiders, but some aren't, and in many cases the spider is long gone. The task is to dismantle the web, not to locate and judge the spider.

Structural *Racism*

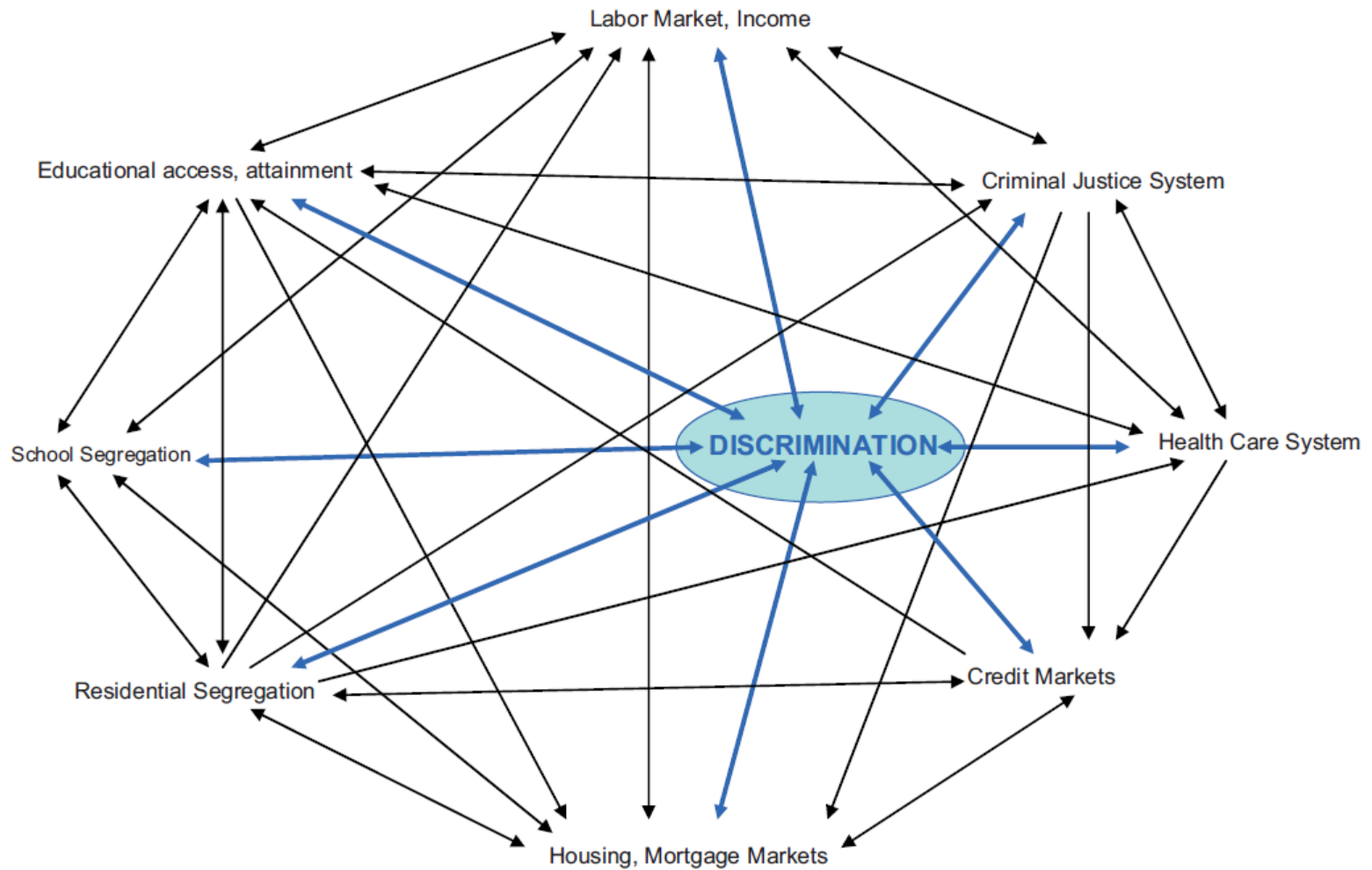
- Structural inequality is like the federal tax code: the accretion of generations and product of countless decision makers that has resulted in a sprawling, byzantine complex of practices, rules, institutions, and interactions that were, in at least some cases, designed for the common good but have been exploited or manipulated by the well-heeled, special interests, and well-connected.
- Structural *racism* is the persistent neglect and callous *indifference* and lack of regard to the conditions of structural racial inequality.
- “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.” – Elie Weisel



Systems Theory

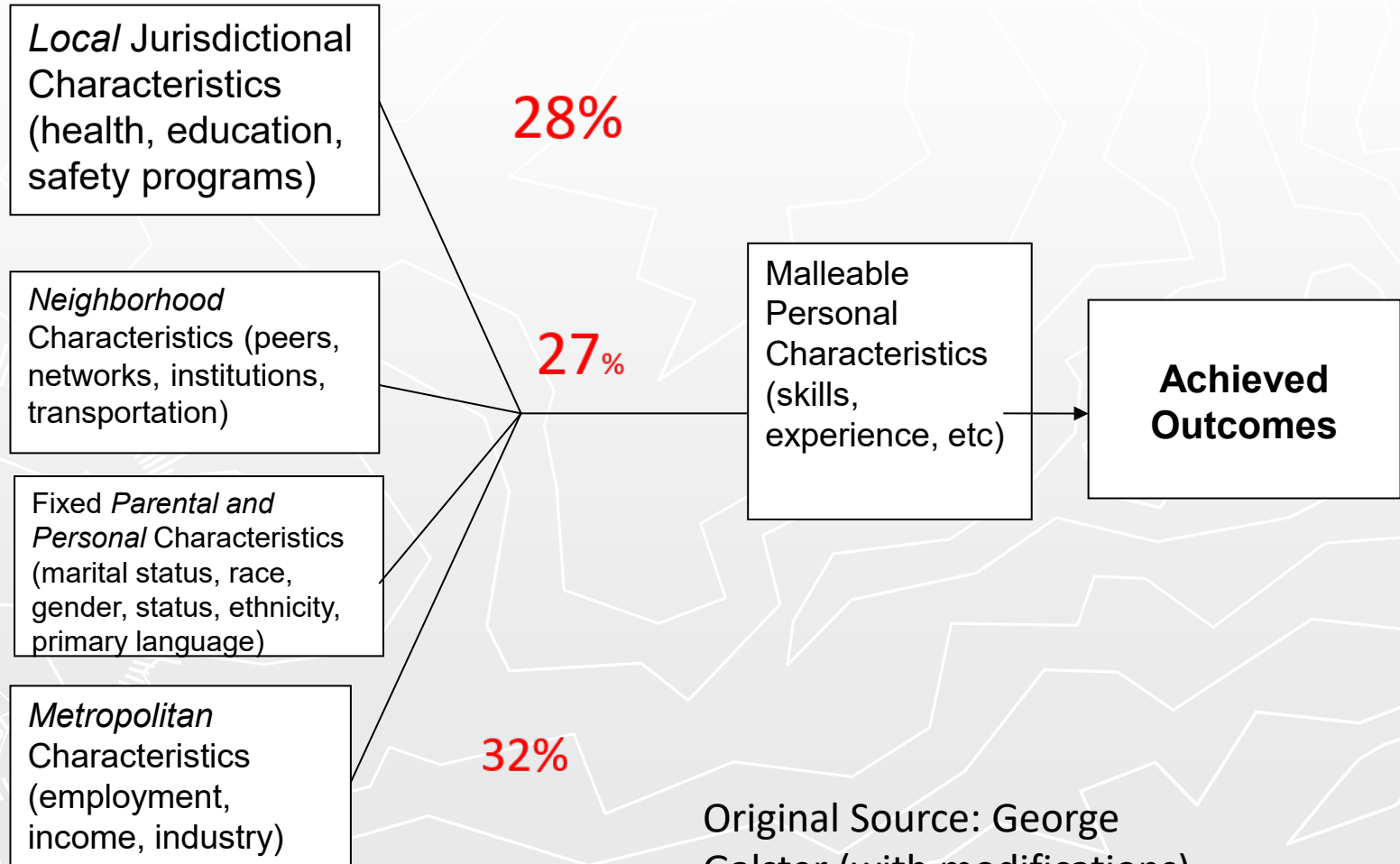
- Complex systems theory, also known as systems theory, or complex system dynamics, is set of principles arising out of various academic fields, such as cybernetics, ecology, and mathematics, that make the dynamics and characteristics of system behavior intelligible.
- A system is defined as “an interdependent group of agents working together as a whole.”
- Examples: the solar system, the cardiovascular system, a school system, or the criminal justice system.
- If there are multiple parts, and they interact to shape overall outcomes and behavior of elements, they constitute a system.

The Race Discrimination “System”



Original Source: Barbara Reskin

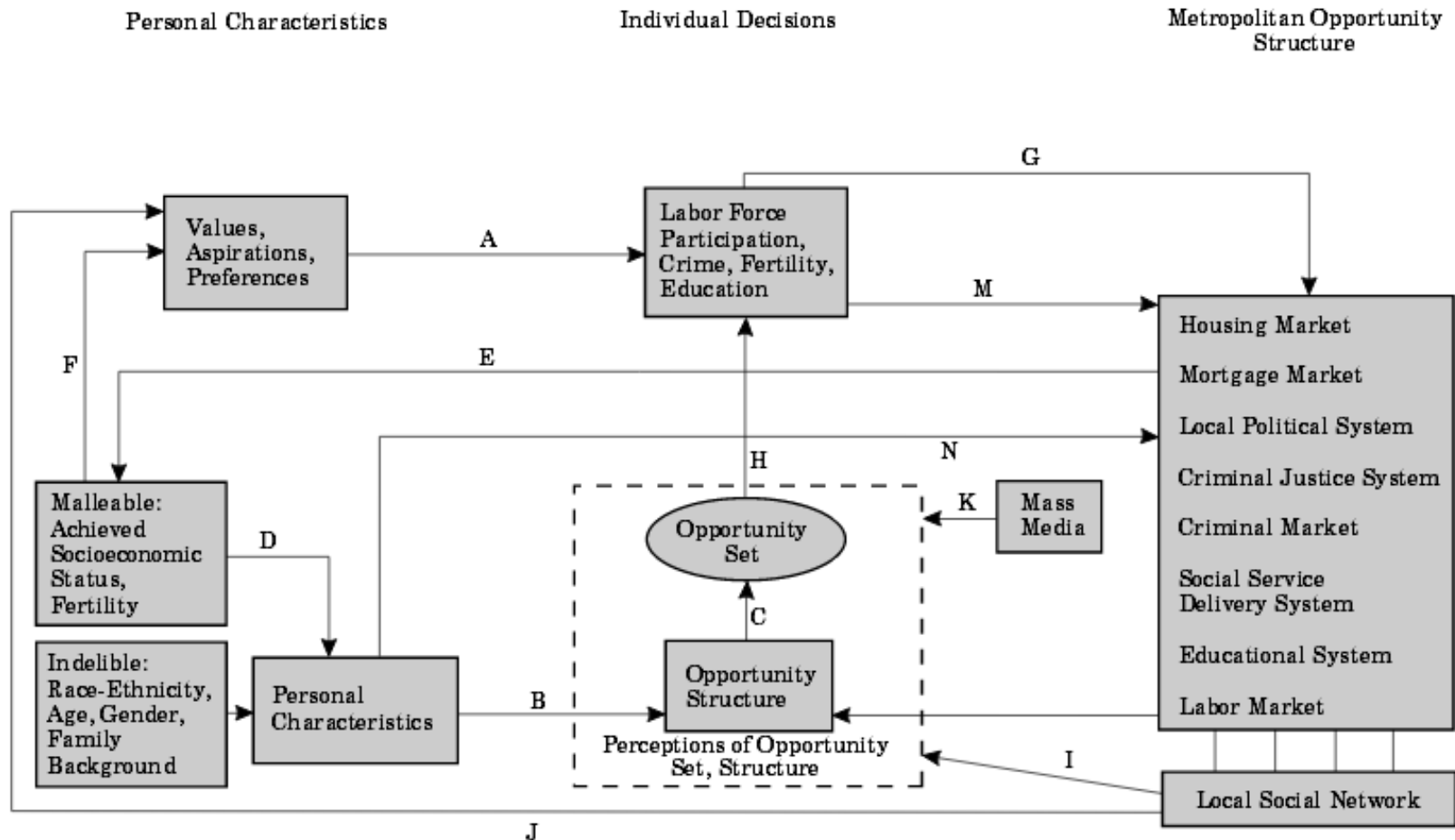
The *opportunity structure* includes the geographically varying set of institutions, systems, and markets of the area in which a person is born.



Original Source: George Galster (with modifications)

Composite Structural & Systems Model

Figure 1. A Model of Life Decisions by Youth



Original Source: Galster and Killen (1995).

<https://www.scribd.com/document/499303684/Galster-Killen-1995-LEER>

System Concept: Feedback Loops

- Complex systems are adaptive and may resist change. This does not mean that one cannot fundamentally alter a system, but instead describes the property of *autopoiesis*; the self-organizing nature of complex systems. One must understand the system and its internal dynamics.
- The mechanism by which systems adapt or resist change is known as a *negative feedback loop*.
 - Example: white families leaving urban school districts in response to desegregation decrees.
- Transformation of a system can be produced by a *positive feedback loop*. This is a catalytic intervention or a snowball effect.
- A negative feedback loop is self-correcting and maintains the status quo. A positive feedback loop is self-reinforcing; the more it works, the more it will continue to work.

Principle 1: Seek Leverage Points

- Interventions that do not adequately account for system dynamics are not only ineffective, but can backfire. Instead, we need to understand the system first.
- Leverage points are specific places within a complex system where a small, well-focused intervention can produce lasting, significant, and often counterintuitive, improvements.
- A small investment targeted at exactly the right spot can have outsized impacts, producing positive feedback loops in the system.

Examples of Possible Leverage Points

1. Getting families into integrative “opportunity bargains,” which is low-cost housing in higher opportunity areas. This is easier than trying to reset the entire trajectory of a low-opportunity community.
2. Policies that increase access to credit.
3. Removing unnecessary or excessive barriers to employment.

Access to Credit!

- Too many individuals, regardless of talent, industriousness or ambition, are unable to start new businesses and pursue economic opportunity because of lack of access to fair credit.
- The National Urban League co-produced a report that surveyed Black entrepreneurs, and found that they were often shut out of traditional financing opportunities and starved of venture capital.
- Many businesses take years to turn a profit, and credit is needed to build and sustain these businesses before they become profitable. Microloans have a proven track record globally, and expanding such programs (with loans up to \$50,000 or \$100,000) for Black and Latino borrowers could provide a significant boost to long-term wealth creation and reducing the racial wealth gap.

Access to Credit!

- This is why banks in places like St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Iowa tried microlending programs for Black borrowers. Such loans allow entrepreneurs and small business owners to invest in equipment, supplies, and facilities. In addition, lower-cost loans could help disadvantaged communities or members of disadvantaged groups, especially if they have been locked out of traditional credit markets.
- The problem is that many of these programs have been shut down by legislatures or successfully challenged in court in recent years. They will need to be redesigned to survive legal challenge.

Employment Barriers

- As a complement to anti-discrimination provisions, policymakers should consider proactive measures that limit, restrict or curb artificial barriers to opportunity.
- Foremost among those that merit greater scrutiny are unfair and unnecessary employment screening barriers, such as criminal back-ground inquiries, non-compete clauses, and credit checks, as well as occupational licensing requirements.
 - California is a leader in banning non-complete clauses in 2024.
- In addition to expanding personal freedom to pursue opportunity, curbing or more carefully limiting these devices may remove pretexts for identity-based discrimination.

Employment Barriers

- Any employment qualification, especially those for entry level positions, should be scrutinized and validated or thrown out.
 - Diplomas too often stand-in for the presence of actual skills and relevant experience, and arbitrary requirements such as "X number of years of experience" should correlate to minimally required performance and not used to filter out weaker candidates.
- Job cards (standardized duty statements that also specify position requisites) for public or government positions should be systematically and periodically reviewed to ensure that job qualifications and requirements are strictly necessary rather than lazy winnowing tools. Instead, critical job skills can be assessed through tests, interviews, work samples, and reference checks rather than through generic certifications, specific credentials, or arbitrary years of experience.

Principle 2: Aim at Systems and Structures Rather than People or Individuals

- As a general principle, policies and remedial interventions derived from a structural analysis tend to target structures and systems rather than people, especially individuals.
- Policies that target people can improve outcomes and even affect structural forces, but they are generally not systemic leverage points, places in a system where the structural trajectory can be reset by isolating and reforming a critical node or entry point that can spur positive feedback loops for greater change.

The Problem with People Specific Interventions

- Most structural inequities affect or harm more than just the most affected group. People-specific interventions tend to be either under- or over-inclusive.
 - They either help people who aren't the most disadvantaged or fail to reach people also affected by the structural arrangement.
- By targeting structures, the policy will have a larger set of beneficiaries and thus stronger support.
- And they will be more likely to effect systems change.

The Curb Cut Effect



- Coined by Angela Glover Blackwell, this is the phenomenon where policies, technologies, or architectural features designed for people with disabilities end up benefiting society as a whole.
- Originating from the installation of sidewalk ramps for wheelchair users, this concept illustrates that designing for equity improves accessibility and convenience for everyone, including parents with strollers, travelers with luggage, and the elderly.
- Structural interventions tend to be positive-sum, serving a broader range of beneficiaries than traditional race-based remedies. If well designed, such policies would improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged but would improve conditions for the benefit of others as well.

Principle 3: Fix the Bottleneck Rather than Create a Work-Around

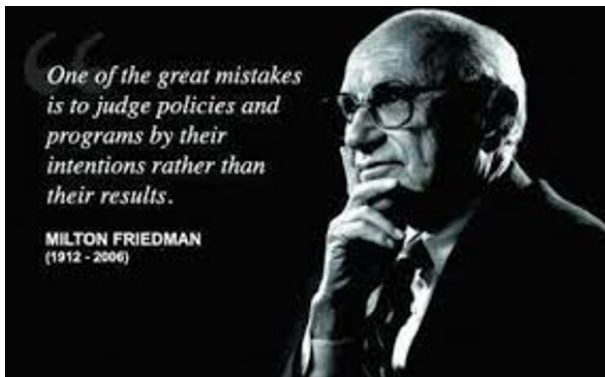
- Although expedient in the short-term, it is preferable to reform a bottleneck than to create a special workaround pathway, like affirmative action to the problems of university admissions.
- Work-arounds only help the target group, but leave the structure or system largely intact.
 - Experience with affirmative action shows that these it tended to reinforce the existing system rather than transform it.
- Structural reform, which loosens or eliminates a bottleneck, can benefit substantial numbers of persons outside of the target group and fix the underlying problem.
- Positive-sum interventions are much more likely to receive broader support as well.

Principle 4: Assess Likely Impacts

- A key structural principal is that outcomes are not always a product of intent or purposeful design. Instead, systems operate based upon their own internal logic, and outcomes are based upon system dynamics.
- In a variety of contexts, policymakers at every level are required to consider the possible impacts of their actions.
 - In the environmental context, law requires environmental impact assessments. In the fiscal context, policymakers must assess fiscal impacts. Even voters are presented with possible budget impacts on referenda.
- Policymakers at every level should consider the possible impacts of their choices on racial inequality.
- Policymakers could still proceed, but conducting Racial Impact Assessments, explicitly, would help overcome the problem of indifference and neglect.

Principle 5: Set Goals & Be Outcome Oriented

- We need clarity around goals and objectives. Use SMART criteria if possible.
- We must be relentlessly outcome oriented. This means more than simply caring. It means creating procedures and systems that will disrupt the status quo and put us on a healthier trajectory.



Provocation: *Ineffective interventions are worse than nefarious ones.* They dash hope and engender cynicism and despair.

Beware leaders with “good hearts” who don’t change systems.

Closing Thoughts

- Dismantling structural racial inequality is not impossible.
- But maintaining and structural and systemic focus is difficult! It is easier to spend energy focusing on the spider or trying to change hearts and minds. It feels more cathartic, even if the ultimate outcomes remain roughly the same.
- Good policy and good process trumps good intentions. Analysis and assessment can help overcome the problem of neglect and indifference.

Released June, 2025

Structural Racism:

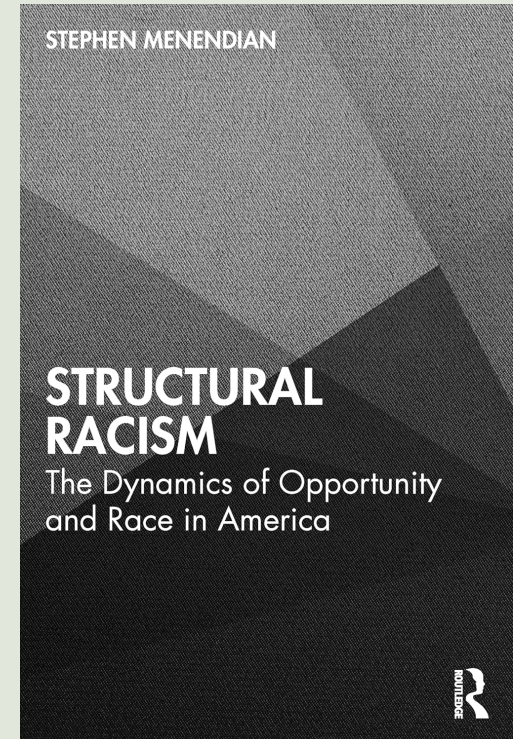
The Dynamics of Opportunity and Race in America

by Stephen Menendian



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Belonging Without Othering

by john a. powell and Stephen Menendian



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