



What Is Structural Racism?

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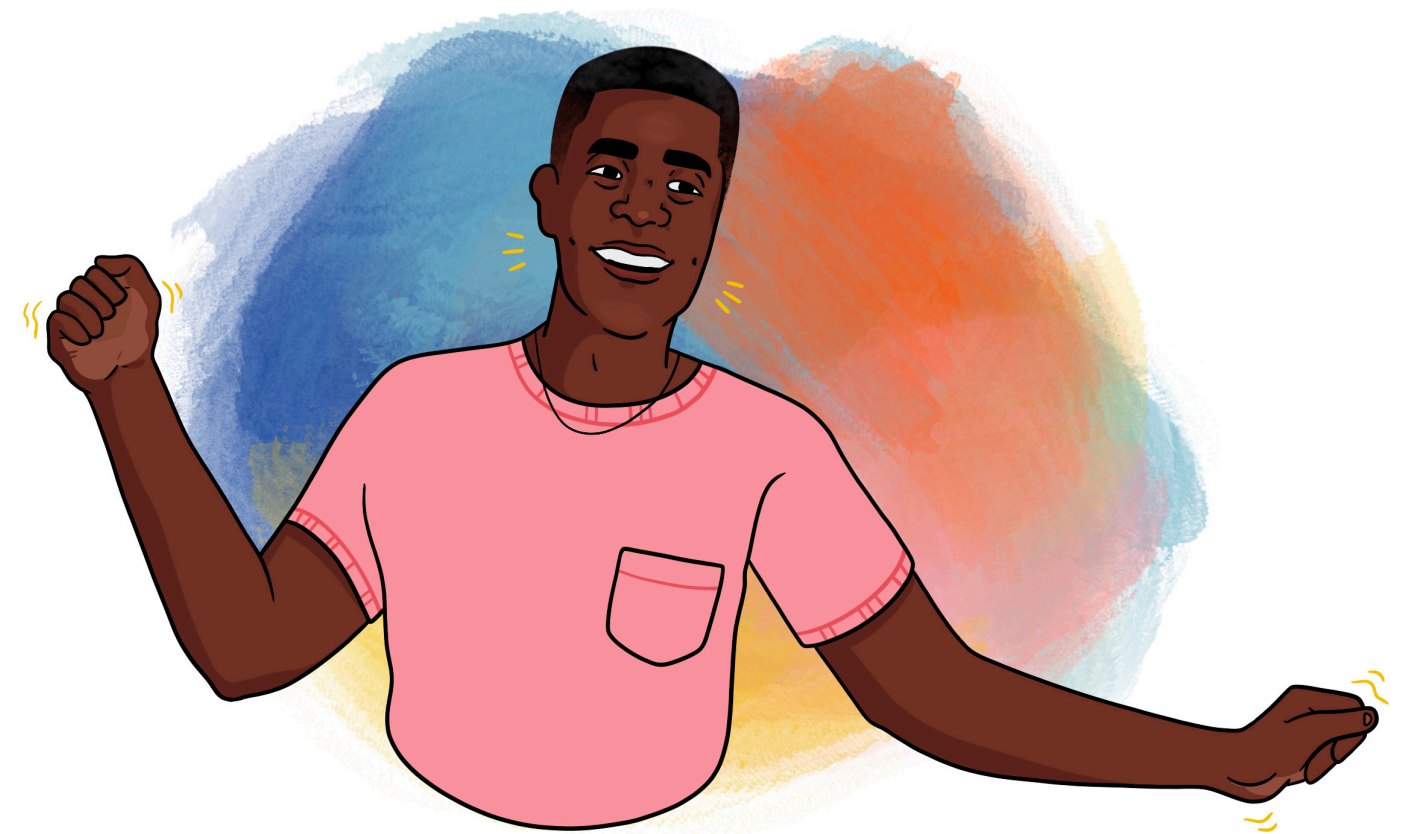
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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is about racism. Racism is one type of **discrimination**. Discrimination is treating someone unfairly because of who they are.

There are other kinds of discrimination. One example of discrimination is ableism. Ableism is discrimination against people with disabilities. See our toolkit [Fighting for Fairness](#) for more information about discrimination.

Talking about racism can be stressful. It can be especially stressful for people of color, who have faced racism. This toolkit talks about racism in a lot of detail. Please take care of yourself while reading this toolkit. It is okay if you need to take breaks. It is okay to put the toolkit down and go do something else for a while. It is okay if you can't read the whole thing all at once.



What is race?

A society is a big group of communities. A society usually has rules and people in charge. The United States is one society. We all live in societies.

Society makes different ways to group people. One way to group people is by **race**.

There are different races people can belong to. Each person can be part of one race or multiple races. Some examples are:

- Black
- White
- Asian
- Latinx

Race is one way to group people. Society made up the idea of race to group people. They wanted ways to talk about where people came from. They wanted ways to talk about how some people were different from others. For example, people have different skin colors. They called these differences **racial traits**.

Traits are different things about a person. For example, someone could be shy or have long hair. These are traits.

Racial traits are differences in how people look and how their birth family looks. Everyone looks different. When people made up the idea of race, they used traits to group people into races. For example:

- Skin color
- Eye shape
- Hair texture
- Where you were born
- Where your birth parents were born

Society put people in different groups based on these things. Sometimes these were differences in how people looked. Sometimes these were differences in how people's parents and grandparents looked. Sometimes these were differences in where people were from. Or, where their parents and grandparents were from.

Society used these things to make up racial groups. A **racial group** is a group of people that society has decided are the same race as each other. Society decided what traits made someone part of a racial group. People do look different and come from different places. But society chose what differences put someone in a racial group.

For example:

Dana's family comes from England. George's family comes from France. In the US, Dana and George are part of the same racial group. Society decided that they were both white. The difference between them does not mean they are in different racial groups.

Here is another example:

Theo has very light skin. Xavier has very dark skin. In the US, Theo and Xavier are part of different racial groups. Society decided that they are not in the same group. Society decided this based on their skin color.

Society uses many traits to decide what race someone is. For example:

Anna might have light skin, but one of her parents is Black. In the US, Anna is considered Black or multiracial. This is true even if when people see Anna, they might think she is white.

White people decided the racial groups that are used in the US. White people in power decided who would be in what group. They decided what racial traits were important. Then, white people discriminated against other racial groups. This is racism.

For example, the US set limits on who could come to the US. These limits were based on racial groups. White people in power decided which countries were white. They wanted only white people to move to the US. They banned people from certain countries from coming to the US. These countries had people from different races. We will talk more about this later in this toolkit.

Society made up race. Sometimes the way society defines racial groups changes over time. They decide different traits make someone part of a racial group. For example, a hundred years ago, people from Italy were not considered white in the US. Now, Italian people are considered white.

Sometimes different places use different racial groups or traits. The same person might be put in one racial group in the US, but a different one in Brazil or Singapore.

A lot of people who are put in the same racial groups are very different from each other. For example:

One race is Asian. Not everyone from Asia is considered part of the Asian racial group. People who are considered Asian are also very different from each other. They can come from very different places. They can look very different from each other. They also have different cultures and history.

Racial groups are not based on science. People made them up.

It is true that people look different. It is true that people are from different places. But racial groups are made up.

Some people think that racial groups are based on science. They think that racial groups tell us a lot about different groups of people. They sometimes think that people of different races are stronger or weaker. They sometimes think people of different races are more or less smart. This is not true!



What is a social construct?

Race is a **social construct**. Social constructs are ideas that people make up together. Then, these ideas get accepted by society.

People thought certain ideas were important. They made rules for these ideas. They said other people had to follow those rules too. When the people making these rules have enough power, they can make other people follow these rules. When there are enough people following these rules, they can make other people follow the rules too. They can make people follow these rules even when other people don't want to follow them. These ideas are social constructs.

Race is a social construct. White people decided that race was important. White people created racial groups. White people had a lot of power. They used that power to make everyone else accept racial groups.

Making racial groups gave white people more power. White people decided who counted as "white." They said that white people were better than other races. Then, they made laws and decisions that only helped white people. This gave white people even more power. They kept using that power to only help white people. This is a part of white supremacy.

People make up social constructs. But social constructs still matter. Social constructs still have real effects, because enough people with power say they matter.

For example:

Money is a social construct. People make dollar bills and coins. They are real. You can touch and feel them. But they are just paper and metal. We agree that dollar bills and coins are worth more than just paper and metal. We say that they are money. A lot of people agree that money can be used to buy

things. If we didn't agree, money wouldn't work.

For example, some countries in Europe use euros instead of dollars. In the US, we don't use euros. You can't buy a soda with euro coins in the US. In Europe, you can buy a soda with euros.

Money also has real effects. You can buy food with money. You can buy a house with money. Money is made up, but the things you can buy with money are real. It is very hard to get food or a place to live without money. People have to use money.

Race is like money. It is made up, but it is still very important in our society. It has real effects. It impacts people's lives every day.

Another example of a social construct is traffic lights. Traffic lights tell us when we can drive and when we can't. They work that way because we all agree that's what the lights mean. Traffic lights are like other lights. But we decided that the traffic lights have meaning. Green means go. Red means stop. Other lights don't tell us when to drive.

We obey traffic lights so that no one gets hurt. But we also do it because of laws. There are laws that say what traffic lights mean. These laws are rules people made up. But if we break the rules, we can be punished. If you drive when the light is red, that is illegal. You can get in trouble.

These social constructs have laws that say how they work. The laws punish people who don't follow them.

Sometimes, there are laws about race. Today, many people do not think there are laws about race. But in the past, there were laws that told people how race worked. There were laws that defined racial groups. These laws made different rules for different racial groups. These laws punished people if they did not follow

the rules. Today, some laws have changed. Some laws still exist. Sometimes, people kept following the rules after laws changed.

For example, there were different laws for white people and people of color. These laws said that white people and people of color should go to different schools. These laws are called **segregation**.

Segregation is when laws or rules keep different groups of people apart. Segregation laws gave advantages to white people and kept people of color from getting the same advantages. For example, white schools got more money than schools for people of color. Segregation laws were racist.

Some forms of segregation are illegal now. But people kept following some of the rules of segregation after laws changed. We will talk more about segregation in a later section.

What is racism?

Racism is when people **discriminate** against others because of their race. When someone discriminates, they treat someone unfairly because of who they are. In the US, racism affects **people of color**. People of color are people who are not white, or who belong to more than one race. For example, someone can be Black and white. This person can experience racism. They are a person of color.

Some white people believe that they are better than people of color. A lot of the people who made rules and laws for the US throughout history believed this.

The idea that white people are better than people of color is called **white supremacy**. Saying that racial groups are based on science is part of white supremacy. It is not true. White supremacy is wrong! White supremacy is racist. White supremacy is a big problem in the US! White supremacy is also a big problem in other countries. This toolkit is about racism in the US.

There are different kinds of racism. Sometimes individual people do racist things. People treat others unfairly because of their race. They might do this because they believe lies about people from certain races. People can be racist without knowing they are being racist.

For example:

Bob is renting out an apartment. Harold wants to rent the apartment. Harold is Latinx.

When Bob meets Harold, Bob thinks that he doesn't want to rent the apartment to Harold. Bob doesn't think that this is because Harold is Latinx. Bob just thinks he "has a bad feeling" about Harold. But the bad feeling is only because of racism. Bob is being racist without knowing it.



What is structural racism?

Sometimes people or groups working together can do racist things. Sometimes organizations or systems are racist. Sometimes governments are racist. This type of racism is harder to see. In this toolkit, we are talking about this type of racism. We are talking about when racism affects systems.

A **system** is a big group of people working together. One example of a system is the government. Another example is a company. Systems are big and affect a lot of people. For example, there are over 300 million people in the US. The decisions and laws of the US affect all of those people! If the US government does something racist, it affects many people.

When systems that people made cause a problem, we call that a structural problem. A structural problem is a problem caused by a system.

For example, the US government has rules that give tax benefits to people who own their own homes. White people are more likely than people of color to own their homes. (We will talk about how this happened later in this toolkit.) So this rule about taxes mostly helps white people. This makes homes cost more for people of color. This is a structural problem.

When a system causes problems, the problems don't go away on their own. Even if people don't make problems worse on purpose, the problems stay around. The system can even make the problem worse on its own.

For example:

John is racist. John thinks that people of color are lazy. This is racist! He talks about this with his friends. Maria hears him. Maria is a person of color. Maria is hurt by John. This is racism.

The next day John goes to work. John is the boss of a company. John is hiring people to work at his company. John thinks that people of color are lazy. The company doesn't hire any people of color. The company is racist.

Then, John leaves. But the company still doesn't have any people of color working there. The company doesn't have any people of color as leaders. The company keeps hiring the same groups of people it did before. Even though John is gone, the company is still racist. This is **structural racism**.

Structural racism is racism that is built into systems. Some examples of systems are:

- Government.
- Schools.
- Societies.
- Companies.

People in power set up systems. People in power make choices about how systems work. Sometimes a system is set up in a racist way. Sometimes the people setting up the system are being racist on purpose. They decide to discriminate against people of color. Sometimes they don't think about people of color at all. But their choices still discriminate against people of color.

Structural racism means that systems that are built racist, stay racist. Racism will keep happening and won't stop unless the system changes.

For example:

John created the company we talked about earlier. He is racist. Racism is built into the company. The rules and culture might be racist. People of color are not leaders of the company. These are all examples of structural racism.

Even the way systems get made is affected by structural racism. Structural racism

sometimes means that people of color get ignored when making new systems. This means the new systems that get made are structurally racist too. People of color weren't listened to, so the new systems didn't help people of color. Often, these new systems even harmed them.

For example:

Janine owns a company that sells makeup. She and her coworkers are all white and they don't talk to people of color about makeup. So they only make makeup for people with light skin. They ignore what people with darker skin need.

The US is structurally racist. The people who created the US were racist. They thought that people of color didn't deserve rights.

The Constitution is the document that made the US government. Almost half of the people who wrote the Constitution enslaved Black people. No Black people were part of writing the Constitution.

Presidents in the US are almost always white. There has been one president who is a person of color. Every other president has been white.

People who make laws in the US are mostly white. There have been almost 2000 white Senators in history and 11 Black Senators in history.

White people make most of the US laws. They may be racist. They may be racist on purpose or without realizing it.

For example:

The Great Depression was a time in US history when many people were poor. Many people did not have a job, a place to live, or enough money to buy food. The US passed laws to help people that were written by the President

and Congress. Almost all of the people making the laws were white.

The laws helped mostly white people and didn't think about the needs of people of color. Some people making the laws were racist on purpose because they would only pass laws that didn't help people of color. Other lawmakers might not have been racist on purpose, but they agreed to pass these laws too. There were almost no people of color making laws, so white lawmakers ignored people of color.

People of color weren't helped as much. They were less likely to get jobs or help to buy food. This was structural racism.

There are other forms of structural discrimination. One example is **structural ableism**. **Ableism** is discrimination against people with disabilities. Structural ableism is ableism that is built into systems.

One example of structural ableism is **institutions**. Institutions are places where a lot of disabled people live. People living in institutions did not decide to live there. They usually can't leave when they want to.

Some people with disabilities need supports to live on their own. For a long time, the government would only pay for institutions. People who did not want to live in institutions were forced to live in institutions anyway. People with disabilities should decide where we want to live. We should not be forced to live in institutions.

This is structural ableism. The government said they would only pay for institutions, but this rule is unfair and ableist. The government made this rule without listening to people with disabilities.

Learn more about institutions in our toolkit [Institutions: The Old, The New, and What We Should Do](#).

Structural racism can hurt white people, too. And structural ableism can hurt people without disabilities, too. For example:

The US gives some people government benefits, like help with buying food. The US doesn't spend enough money on government benefits to help people with low incomes. One reason for this is that many white voters think of government benefits as being for people of color. So they won't vote for people who will spend more money on benefits. But spending more money on benefits would help people of all races.

Different kinds of structural discrimination interact. For example:

People of color with disabilities are more likely to be in institutions. States with a lot of people of color have more institutions. This is both structural racism and structural ableism. People of color with disabilities have to deal with both ableism and racism.

We talk more about this example in the chapter on supports in our toolkit [Crisis in Our Communities](#).



Structural Racism in the US today

Structural racism affects a lot of laws and rules in the US. Here are some examples:

Housing

In history, there were laws that said people could only live with people of the same race. This is segregation and racism. One system that supported segregation was the government. The **federal** government made rules and laws about housing. Federal means the laws made by the US government for the whole country. The federal government made programs to make it easier to afford new houses. They made these programs from the 1930s until the 1960s. People could get help from banks to buy a home.

The government also told banks to follow rules about who to help. White people could get help from banks and people of color could not.

The federal government and banks told neighborhoods to make certain rules. These rules said that nobody could sell a house to people of color. White people had to buy homes in white neighborhoods and weren't allowed to sell their home to people of color. Because of these rules, white communities stayed white. Sometimes white people and people of color already lived in the same communities, so these rules forced these communities to become segregated instead.

Communities became more segregated. Also because of these rules, people of color could not get help to buy homes. Many people of color could not afford to buy a home and the homes they could buy were not as good. People of color could only live in certain communities, and this meant that communities where people of color live had much less money.

Eventually, the government changed the law, but even after the law was changed,

the damage was already done. Communities of color had fewer homes and less money. Having less money made it harder for people to move. The federal government stopped making banks use these rules, but a lot of banks and communities kept using the old rules anyway. Even when new laws and rules were made to stop segregation, the government didn't make sure banks and communities followed the new rules.

Communities are segregated because of structural racism. Some people think communities became segregated by accident, some think segregation was because of individual choices, not racism, and some blamed people of color for why their communities had less money. These people are wrong. The reason was structural racism.

Learn more about housing and discrimination in our toolkit: [Racial Disparities in Community Living](#).

Environmental Racism

Structural racism forced people of color to live in places that were less safe and less healthy. Often, white people wanted to live in the healthiest and safest places. Sometimes the government wanted to take the land where people of color lived. Then, people of color were forced to leave.

Sometimes people of color would have to sell their homes and often they wouldn't get as much money as the homes were worth. They would only get unfair deals. Sometimes white communities forced people of color out of their communities with violence. And sometimes both happened at the same time. People of color sometimes accepted unfair deals because of the violence. They were forced to move to stay safe.

Then, people of color often needed to move to more crowded places. These places had less money for new homes, because of racist housing policies. Which

meant they weren't very good places to live. They didn't get as much money for parks and trees so this made these places less healthy to live in. A lot of times the government or businesses would pollute the environment in these places because the people living there didn't have as much money. Without a lot of money it was harder to say no.

Living near a lot of pollution hurts people. It was harder for people of color to get the government to help them. This is because of structural racism.

One example is building highways. The government made a lot of highways in the 1950's and 60's. They made these highways so people could go to the cities for work. A lot of the communities that highways were made to help were white communities. They were communities that were segregated by federal housing policy.

The government would build a highway through a community of color on purpose. They would avoid white communities. Many people were forced to move away from their communities. Some people stayed, but now they had a highway in the middle of their community. Living next to a highway is hard, and it's unhealthy because highways make a lot of pollution and noise. It is harder to walk around in a community when there is a highway. Highways made a lot of communities of color worse places to live.

Another example of environmental racism is reservations. Before European settlers came to the US, other people lived here. The people that lived here before Europeans are indigenous. **Indigenous** means the people who have lived in an area for the longest time. Indigenous people in the US are also called Native Americans or American Indians. White people wanted the land indigenous people lived on. They stole the land and killed many indigenous people.

The US government forced indigenous people to leave their homes. They forced indigenous people to move to reservations. **Reservations** are areas that are set

aside for indigenous people to live, and are lands that white people didn't want to live in. This land is difficult to live on. Many reservations are in deserts. It is hard to grow food in deserts.

The US government also uses nearby land for other things that hurt the environment. They build oil pipelines and they do tests that pollute the area. This is dangerous! White people don't want these things happening near where they live, so this happens near reservations. It hurts indigenous people and it pollutes their land.

Learn more about environmental racism in our toolkit: [Racial Disparities in Community Living](#).

Mass incarceration

Mass incarceration is putting lots and lots of people in jail or prison. The US puts many more people in jail than any other country. A lot of people who made our laws wanted to control people of color. This was based on white supremacy. White people in power designed police and prisons to control people of color and to take away their rights. They made laws to keep people of color from having the same freedom as white people, made sure police watched and arrested people of color, and made sure police kept people of color out of white communities.

Around two million people are in jail or prison in the US. Police are more likely to arrest and hurt people of color. Courts are more likely to send people of color to prison. For many crimes, white people and people of color commit crimes at the same rates, but people of color get arrested more. People of color go to prison more, get sent to prison for longer, and experience more police violence. Some of this is because of individual racism, but a lot of it is also because of structural racism.

Learn more about mass incarceration in our toolkit: [Crisis in our Communities](#).

Learn more about police violence in our plain language explainer: [What is police violence?](#)

Immigration

Immigration is when people move from one country to another country to live there. **Immigration policy** is rules the government makes about:

- Who can come into the country
- What rules they have to follow to come into the country
- How long they are allowed to stay in the country
- What rights they have while they live in the country. This includes the right to become a **citizen**

A citizen is someone who has certain rights in the country they live in. Citizens usually have more rights than non-citizens. For example, the right to vote. In the US, you can get to be a citizen by being born here, or you can apply to become a citizen.

Immigration policy in the United States is another example of structural racism. For the first 100 years of the US, there were not a lot of rules or laws about immigration policy. The earliest rules were about who could become a citizen and what rights non-citizens had. These laws only let white immigrants become citizens, not people of color. Laws during this time usually didn't limit who could come to the US. But they did say only white people could become citizens. There were also laws that made it easier to arrest non-citizens. People used these laws to make non-citizens leave the US.

Starting in the 1850s, the US started making a lot more rules about immigration. During this time a lot of immigrants from China came to the US for work. American businesses discovered gold in California. Businesses needed a lot of people to do work in mines and build railroads. These businesses hired a lot of Chinese

immigrants for this work. This work was very hard and very dangerous. Many white people did not want to do it, so many Chinese people died doing this work.

But after a while gold became harder to find. When this happened a lot of mining and building jobs went away. Then, there were not enough jobs left for all the people in California who wanted to work. The people who wanted to work were competing for fewer jobs.

White workers were angry at Chinese workers. They blamed Chinese workers for “taking their jobs.” Politicians started passing laws that hurt Chinese immigrants. They passed laws that controlled:

- where Chinese immigrants could live.
- where Chinese immigrants could work.
- how Chinese immigrants were allowed to dress and cut their hair.
- They also forced Chinese people to leave the US.

The federal government started passing laws that kept Chinese immigrants from coming to America. In 1875 the government passed a law called the Page Act. This law made it mostly illegal for Chinese women to come to the US. It was the first law about who could come into the country.

In 1882, the federal government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. This law made it illegal for any Chinese workers to come to the US.

These laws banned people from coming to the US because of their race. Both laws were based on racist ideas about Chinese immigrants. These two laws were racist.

California also took away a lot of Chinese immigrants’ rights. White people attacked Chinese communities and destroyed the homes of Chinese Americans, and forced them to flee. Many Chinese Americans were killed during these attacks.

These were the first laws that stopped people from coming to the United States.

The government passed more laws to ban people from different countries. Many of these laws banned people from other countries in Asia. They usually didn’t stop people immigrating from Europe.

In 1924 the federal government passed a new law called the Immigration Act of 1924. This law is also called the Johnson-Reed Act. It was named after the two Members of Congress who wrote the law. One of the Members of Congress was Albert Johnson. Albert Johnson believed in white supremacy. He thought that white people were better and smarter than other races and that people of different races shouldn’t be allowed to get married or have children together. He thought that people with disabilities shouldn’t be allowed to get married or have children at all.

These ideas are part of **eugenics**. Eugenics is the idea that some people have “good traits” and some people have “bad traits.” People who support eugenics think that people with “good traits” should have large families. They want to reduce or get rid of groups of people that they think have “bad traits” by making sure those groups don’t have children. People who believe in eugenics think that people with disabilities and people of color are worth less. Eugenics is always wrong.

Albert Johnson believed in eugenics. He believed that people of color had bad traits. He created the Johnson-Reed Act that banned all immigrants from Asia as well as a lot of people from the rest of the world. It said people from some parts of Europe couldn’t come to America. Albert Johnson thought some people from different parts of Europe had bad traits too. He believed in white supremacy so he wanted to make sure white people stayed in charge of America. The Johnson-Reed Act said only small numbers of people could come from different countries. It let in more white people and fewer people of color. The law was written to make the US more white, which is racist.

The Johnson-Reed Act made rules for everyone coming into the US. The US used

these rules until 1965. It made it easier for white people to come to the US and made it harder for people of color to come to the US. This is racist, but the US kept using those rules for a long time. Even when more people agreed that racism was wrong, they kept the law. A lot of people didn't know why Albert Johnson wrote the law this way, and they didn't know the reason was racism. Sometimes they thought there were different reasons for the law, so they left the law alone until 1965.

Some people in America still believe in white supremacy. They still think that America should be controlled by white people and that people of color should not come to the US. In 2017, President Trump signed an order called the Muslim ban that said that people from a list of countries could not come to the US. The list of countries were all countries where most people are people of color. President Trump said he signed the order to stop Muslims from coming to the US. Muslims are people who follow the religion of Islam. President Trump also said that Muslim people were dangerous to America. This is a lie and racist.

In the US, everyone is supposed to have freedom of religion. Freedom of religion means that people can follow any religion or no religion. It is unfair to say people from one religion can't come to the US, and it is against the law. This is religious discrimination against Muslims.

Most Muslims are people of color. The people who were banned were mostly people of color. It is racist to say people of color can't come to the US. It is supposed to be against the law.

People sued to stop the Muslim Ban. Courts agreed that the ban was racist and illegal and stopped this ban. Then President Trump signed a new ban. He gave different reasons this time, but it banned the same people. In 2018 the Supreme Court decided this ban was okay because President Trump gave a different reason. It was not okay. It was still racist.

Structural Racism is Still With Us

A lot of the examples we gave happened in the past. A lot of people, mostly people of color, fought against racism in America. People marched, and organized boycotts, and refused to follow racist laws. A lot of people fighting racism were arrested and violently attacked by police, threatened and attacked by people who wanted to keep white supremacy, and even killed. After a long time, people changed the laws. There are new laws now. There are new ways people should do things.

Segregation isn't legal anymore. It's illegal to make rules to keep people of color from buying homes, for jobs to discriminate against people of color, and to ban people of color from coming to the US. The government isn't supposed to leave out people of color when it helps people.

For example:

A new law said banks couldn't use racist rules to help people buy homes. Banks had to help both white people and people of color buy homes.

Another example is the Voting Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act passed in 1965. Before 1965, many people of color could not vote. This is structural racism. The Voting Rights Act made a lot of new rules to make sure people of color could vote. Many people of color fought for these changes. Now, many more people of color can vote.

But these new laws didn't mean everything was equal. Structural racism still exists. There are a few reasons why.

Sometimes, a new law bans discrimination, but then the government makes that law weaker. Sometimes judges and lawmakers think the problem went away. They decide the law doesn't need to be as strong anymore, and might even decide that nobody needs the law anymore.

For example, the Supreme Court decided that people didn't need parts of the Voting Rights Act anymore. They decided that some of the rules of the Voting Rights Act should go away. This meant that places could make it harder for people of color to vote. And that is what happened. A lot of places did this right away. We still need the Voting Rights Act, because racism never went away.

Sometimes, laws ban discrimination, but structural racism continues anyway. Here is how:

Sometimes, people refuse to follow the law. For example, a new law said it was illegal to discriminate in housing, but a lot of white people didn't want to sell or rent homes to people of color. So they broke the law and discriminated anyway. A lot of banks still didn't want to lend to people of color, even though it is illegal, so they kept doing it.

When this happens, the government is supposed to stop them. The government is supposed to punish people who break these laws, but sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes the people in charge of the government don't want to stop these things at all. Sometimes the people who are supposed to stop them don't have enough money, or they think it is too hard to prove someone broke the law. If the new law isn't followed, then structural racism keeps happening.

Sometimes people are allowed to discriminate if they don't say they are discriminating. For example:

President Trump banned people from certain countries from coming to the US. These countries were places where mostly Muslim people lived and where mostly people of color lived. The new order does not say that people from these countries are banned because they are Muslim. So President Trump was allowed to discriminate.

Here is another example:

The law says everyone has a right to serve on a jury. A jury is the part of the court that decides if someone broke the law and how much they should be punished. Every citizen can be asked to be part of a jury.

After people are called for jury duty, the lawyers in a case get to pick who will be on the jury for that case. But a lot of times lawyers did not want to let people of color on juries. Some lawyers think that it is easier to have only white juries. White people are more likely to say that people of color broke the law and that white people accused of racism did not break the law. This is one reason why more people of color get sent to prison. This is unfair and racist. The law says lawyers could not do this. It said lawyers could not keep people out of juries because of their race, but lawyers could use any other reason.

So instead, lawyers use things like how people dress, talk, or what neighborhood they are from. Sometimes they even use how people answer questions about whether racism exists or how they feel about it. These are all ways to keep people out of juries because of their race. But they are allowed because the lawyers pretended to have a different reason. This is still racist.

We will talk more in the next section about how systems try to hide discrimination like this.

Structural Racism is Sometimes Hidden

Sometimes it is hard to tell that structural racism exists. Even when people make racist systems, they usually don't say so. Most of the time, they give other reasons for how the system works. This makes a lot of people think that structural racism doesn't exist and might think that it only existed in the past. Or they might think that racism only happens because of individual decisions. None of this is true, but when structural racism is hidden, it is very hard to prove it is happening.

People create racist systems that don't look racist on purpose. They hide racism because of laws against racism. They also hide racism because some people don't like obvious racism.

We gave an example of how racism can get hidden when we talked about juries. Another example happens in voting.

The 14th Amendment said that everyone born in the US is a US citizen. Male citizens had the right to vote. Before the 14th amendment, only white men had the right to vote. After the 14th amendment, men of color also had the right to vote.

White people in many parts of the country did not want people of color to vote because they didn't want people of color to have power over the laws. This is white supremacy. The 14th Amendment and other laws said they couldn't keep people of color from voting, so they came up with new rules that kept people of color from voting. These rules didn't say they were stopping people because of race. But, they only stopped people of color from voting.

For example, states made people pass a test before they could vote. They said they wanted voters to be able to read and write. No one should have to pass a test to vote. They also made the tests very unfair. Sometimes they said if your grandparents voted, you did not have to pass the test. But most people of color didn't have grandparents who were allowed to vote. So only people of color had to take the tests.

Sometimes states made people of color pay extra fines to vote and made it harder for them to prove they were allowed to vote. But these rules almost never mentioned race or people of color. They were made to look like they applied to everyone. Sometimes they gave white people a way to get around the rules, or they only used the rules on people of color.

Sometimes states made laws that said people who broke the law couldn't ever

vote again. Then they made a lot of laws that made sure people of color could be arrested. These laws also didn't say that they were about people of color. But the laws were only used to arrest people of color, so a lot of people of color had their right to vote taken away.

When states made these laws right after the 14th Amendment, it was called Jim Crow. Some people think Jim Crow is in the past, but a lot of these rules stayed around. For example, some places still take away people's right to vote when courts say they broke the law. Sometimes these are the same laws that states passed during Jim Crow and these laws were never changed.

The Voting Rights Act was supposed to stop a lot of these laws. It said states could not make these laws unless the federal government said they could. But that part of the Voting Rights Act got taken away. Now states are passing very similar laws today, but none of these laws mention race. A lot of times the laws make it harder for people of color to vote.

Sometimes they look at the way that people of color vote. Then, they try to make those ways of voting harder. Sometimes there are rules to make people get new paperwork to vote and then they close the offices where people can get that paperwork, but only offices near communities of color. Sometimes they move or close the places to vote in communities of color. This means people of color have to travel further and wait longer to vote.

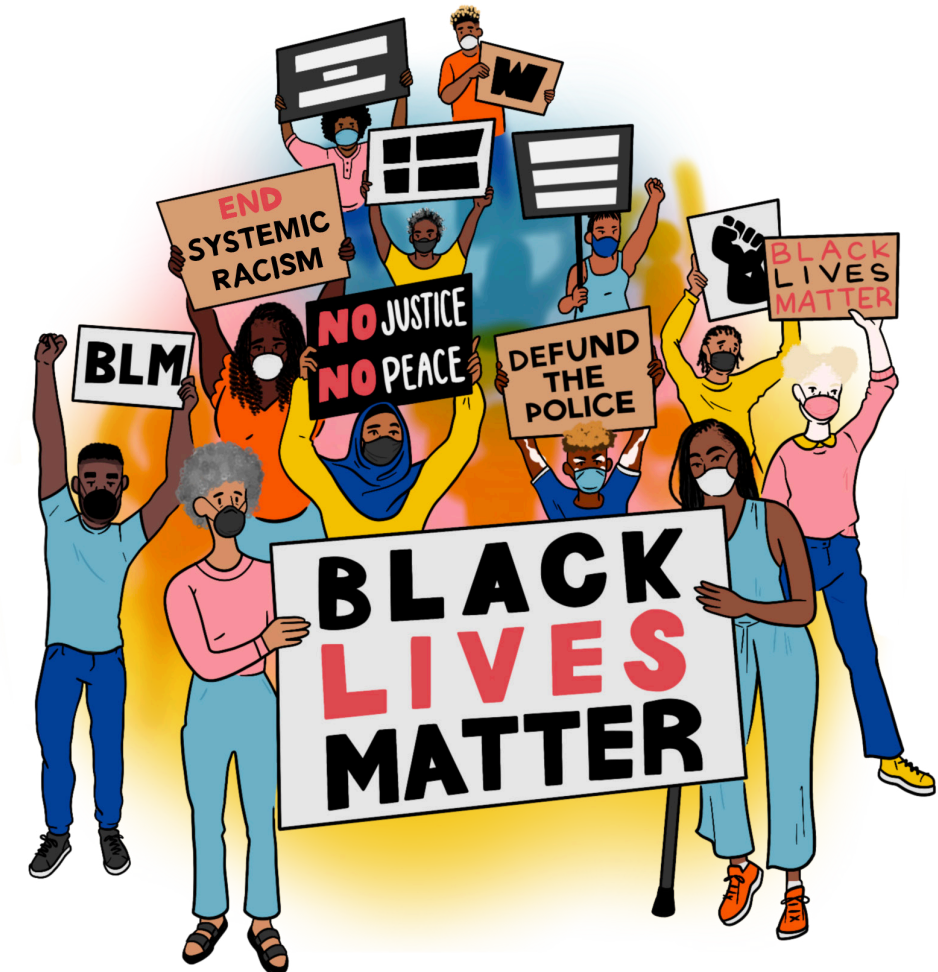
The people making these rules defend these decisions and say they're not discriminating because they don't mention race. They give other reasons for the decisions, but all the decisions make it harder for people of color. And that is on purpose. This is structural racism, even if it's hidden.

Because these rules don't mention race, it is harder for people to notice they cause discrimination. It is easier to defend them.

Sometimes people think the rules and systems aren't the problem. They might think the only problem is individual people's racism. This can make people think that the problem can go away if they don't think about race at all. But not thinking about race doesn't change the rules and systems. They are still there and are still racist. Not thinking about race at all makes it even harder to notice and fix this.

Sometimes people think all the real racism happened a long time in the past. They think that we got rid of racism and don't need to think about it anymore. But a lot of structural racism didn't go away. Some of it was only changed to be more hidden.

People tried to make racism look neutral in the past too. It is always important to look at how systems hurt people. Deciding structural racism doesn't exist doesn't make it go away. It just makes it harder to notice.



Structural Racism Takes Work To Get Rid Of

When systems are set up to be racist, it takes work to fix them. Systems are usually designed to keep working on their own. When systems were designed to discriminate, they keep structural racism in place. This happens even when people in the system might not be individually racist themselves. It's especially true when systems are designed to hide structural racism. It might be hard to realize that a system is racist at all. People might believe there are other reasons to keep a system the way it is. Change can be hard, and it can mean learning to do things differently. It might be hard to think of new ways for systems to work. But this is work we all need to do to stop racism.

A lot of racist systems were created a long time ago and make it hard to notice how they're racist. If we didn't make the system, it's not our fault that these systems are racist. But if we know that these systems are causing racism, it is our responsibility to fix them. Sometimes we might need to make brand new systems.

This work is very important. Many people of color are fighting for change. You can fight for change too! You can work with groups that are working to change the systems.

One example is Black Lives Matter.

You can also vote for people and laws that will change systems to be better. Learn more about voting in our toolkit ["Your Vote Counts."](#)

When you are fighting for change, you should fight for everyone! We are all stronger together. We need to work together to make sure that everyone is treated fairly.

Learn more about how we can change the systems that make racism work in our toolkits:

- [Fighting for Fairness](#)
- [Racial Disparities in Community Living](#)