

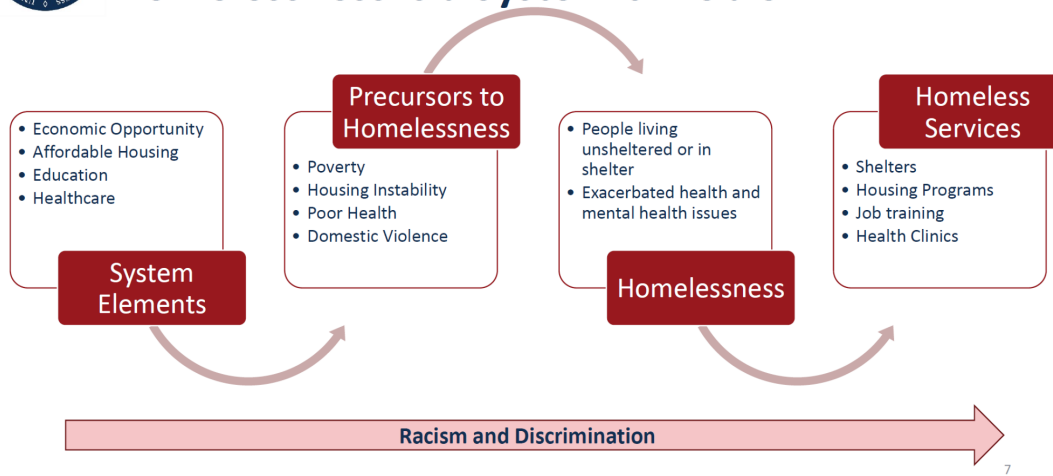
DAY 9: Where Will I live? Housing Affordability and Homelessness

“Housing is a human right. There can be no fairness or justice in a society in which some live in homelessness, or in the shadow of that risk, while others cannot even imagine it.” – Jordan Flaherty, Floodlines: Community and Resistance from Katrina to the Jena Six

You may be wondering what housing has to do with racial equity. The reality is that housing affordability and who experiences being [unhoused](#) is largely influenced by our country’s history of racism. Washtenaw County is no exception.



Key Principle: Homelessness is a Systemic Problem



Source: [U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness](#)

In the 1800s to 1900s, Ypsilanti was home to a free Black population, many of which were enslaved people fleeing the impact of the Fugitive Slave Act. Much of this population was located in the area now known as the Historic South Side of Ypsilanti. After the Civil War, as the Jim Crow era began, with laws permitting discrimination and segregation, separate districts for African American cultural and social organizations and businesses grew in Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor and other local communities.

While there are no “redlining” maps on record for Washtenaw County, oral histories provide stories of housing discrimination and segregation. For example, in response to a surge in employment for the Willow Run Bomber Plant in the 1940s, African American and Black workers were not allowed to live in nearby neighborhoods. The Southside of Ypsilanti (city) was one of

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the few nearby areas where people of color could purchase a home and today is still known as a racially concentrated area.

Deed restrictions and racially restricted covenants were used to enforce racial segregation. Records from the Washtenaw County Register of Deeds provide examples in various parts of the county used in the 1940s. Looking back to census data from 1960, areas with higher concentrations of Black people were the Water Hill/Kerrytown neighborhoods of Ann Arbor, the South Side of Ypsilanti, including historic African American neighborhoods, and portions of Superior and Ypsilanti Township on the east side of the county. [Our county's housing policies resulted in the gentrification of the Water Hill/Kerrytown neighborhoods.](#)

With Washtenaw County being one of the most expensive places in Michigan to live, it is no surprise that we as a community still struggle to keep people from experiencing houselessness. As noted in this MLIVE article, "[Right now in our community, we have close to 400 people experiencing homelessness.](#)" said Aubrey Patino, Avalon's executive director, adding over 2,500 people per year experience homelessness in Washtenaw County and an additional 850-plus units of supportive housing are needed.

Today's Challenge:

Listen:

- Listen to this [Washtenaw United episode with Avalon Housing](#) on progress being made to address affordable housing and the support efforts to address other root causes that land people on the streets.
- Listen to [interviews from the Living Oral History Project, presented in partnership between the African American Cultural & Historical Museum of Washtenaw County and the Ann Arbor District Library](#). These interviews illustrate what local African Americans witnessed, experienced, and contributed to building the Washtenaw County we share today.
- [Listen to the work of local historian Matt Siegfried](#) on the history of Ypsilanti's historic Black community during the 1900s. [His website is here.](#)

Read:

- Review this [presentation on the current state of homelessness and affordable housing in Washtenaw County](#) by the Washtenaw Housing Alliance. Then, explore [potential affordable housing solutions](#) being generated by the Ann Arbor Housing Commission.
- [Read this article to understand the gentrification of Ann Arbor's Water Hill and Kerrytown neighborhoods](#), two historically Black communities in Washtenaw County. Then, [explore the South Adams Street @ 1900 project](#), an online repository documenting the people and history of Ypsilanti's Southside.
- Jones Elementary school, which was the only predominantly African American elementary school in Ann Arbor, is today the location of the whitest and most affluent school in the County, Community High School. [Read about how students are researching and commemorating the building's first 43 years and its role in the lives of Ann Arbor's Black residents.](#)

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Watch:

- Watch this 5-minute [video from the Urban Institute exposing how housing discrimination](#) against racial and ethnic minorities occurs today.
- Watch how [housing discrimination is an example of systematic racism](#) in Detroit.
- [Watch this TikTok on exclusionary and anti-homeless architecture](#), features of buildings and public spaces designed to keep unhoused people away from certain places, disguised as art or conceptual designs.

Act:

- [Visit the African American Cultural and Historical Museum of Washtenaw County](#) located at 1528 Pontiac Trail - Ann Arbor, MI
- Explore "[Hold Me Up](#)", [five narrative accounts of Black histories and experiences in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti](#) from the 1920s through the 1970s
- Today is **National Day of Racial Healing**, a time to contemplate our shared values and create the blueprint together for #HowWeHeal from the effects of racism. Explore and then [take part in an event for National Day of Racial Healing](#).



**Discrimination?
Injustice?
Racial Inequities?**

YES.

**Click here to learn more
and join the
21-Day Equity
Challenge: 2023 Edition**

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