

DAY 4: Opportunity and Segregation in Washtenaw County

In Michigan alone, over 1.6 million working households – or 43 percent of households – are struggling to afford basic necessities like housing, child care, food, transportation, and technology, according to the [2019 ALICE Report](#) by the Michigan Association of United Ways. These households, also known as ALICE – Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to cover the basic cost of living, called the ALICE threshold, in their counties. A recent [Washington Post article](#) shared that during the pandemic people of color lost their jobs at a higher rate than white men.

In Washtenaw County, these numbers are just as concerning, with 39% of households below the ALICE earnings threshold (12% below poverty line; 27% below ALICE threshold but above poverty line) and deep disparities across communities, ranging from 15% in Webster Township to 56% and 68% in Ypsilanti Charter Township and Ypsilanti City, respectively.

Institutional Racism is defined as “the systematic distribution of resources, power and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are white and the exclusion of people of color.” -- [Solid Ground](#)

When you hear the word segregation, what do you think of? Many of us think back to the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, American cities continue to be highly segregated, and in 2015 Washtenaw County was ranked the [eighth most economically segregated](#) metro area in the United States. Washtenaw County also ranked in the [bottom 8% for upward mobility](#) for children whose parents fall into the bottom 25 percent of earners nationwide.

Present-day racism was built on a long history of racially distributed resources and ideas that shape our view of ourselves and others. It is a hierarchical system that comes with a broad range of policies and institutions that keep it in place. Policies shaped by institutional racism that enforce segregation include redlining, predatory lending, the exclusion of black veterans from the G.I. bill, and the forced segregation of neighborhoods by the Federal Housing Authority. As a result of institutional racism, racial stratification and inequities persist in employment, housing, education, healthcare, government and other sectors. ([Source](#)) These policy decisions are presently influencing who is at highest risk for contracting COVID-19.

Today’s Challenge:

Option 1: Read this [MLive article](#) on how the corona virus has devastated black communities.

Option 2: Listen to Aubrey Patiño, executive director of Avalon Housing in this [Washtenaw United interview](#) share why the coronavirus crisis has proven particularly difficult for people experiencing homelessness and what preparations are underway to serve the moment and the future.

Option 3: Increase your understanding of how racism is reinforced by policies and systems by [reading this article by Anne Branigin published in The Root, “Black Communities Are on the ‘Frontline’ of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Here’s Why.”](#)

Option 4: Read about [Raj Chetty](#), a Harvard economist committed to showing how zip code shapes opportunity. Dive into his research through the [Equality of Opportunity Project](#). Then [explore Washtenaw County's Opportunity Index](#).

Option 5: Explore the [Racial Dot Map](#) created by the University of Virginia, which uses colored dots to visualize how racial segregation appears in our communities. We encourage you to zoom into Michigan and Washtenaw County to see how it plays out in our backyard.

Option 6: Why are cities still so segregated? Watch this [quick video where NPR's Code Switch](#) looks at the factors contributing to modern day segregation.

Share your reflections on today's topic on social media using the hashtag [#unitedforequity](#) and tag [@uwwashtenaw](#).