

Historical Harms to the Black Community of Oak Park, Illinois and Suggested Repairs

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Oak Park, Illinois and Suggested Repairs**

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Introduction

In the summer of 2020 the community group Walk the Walk launched initiatives around anti-gentrification, housing, community bridging and reparations. Their work began with the Oak Park Public Library's Anti-Racist Book Club, Austin-Oak Park's historical bike drive, housing education discussions, Village Board policy presentations and the launch of the Oak Park Reparations Task Force in the fall of 2021. In the fall of 2021 The Task Force launched with nine residents of the Oak Park area Christian Harris, founder/director, Jameel Abdul-Rafia, Nancy Alexander, George Bailey, Christina Dyson, Camile Grant, A. Michelle Perkins and Marsha Spight. The members are from a variety of backgrounds and ages spanning 17-75 at the onset. The Task Force met with the goal of publishing a report of historical harms to the Black community and suggested repairs. This report will be sent to the six taxing bodies of Oak Park, Oak Park residents, for-profits, non-profits, and religious institutions. This report outlines how each of these groups historically benefitted or contributed to harms against the Black community of Oak Park and how they could enact real repair. To complete this report, the Task Force received small stipends from the Euclid Avenue Church Reparations work group, researched the history of reparations throughout the world, researched the history of Black residents in Oak Park, conducted a survey of Black Oak Parkers with Dominican University, and held informational partnership sessions at the Oak Park Public Library. In October, 2022 this work resulted in an historical plaque dedicating the site of Mt. Carmel Baptist church, Oak Park's first Black congregation.

In each section of this report we will give specific examples of how Oak Park institutions benefitted from and/or contributed to harms done to the Black community in Oak Park and the limiting of Black wealth in Oak Park and give recommendations for how they can participate in repair. All our recommendations are made with the goal of growing the Black community and growing Black wealth in Oak Park. This report does not attempt to outline every single historical harm experienced by the Black community for a few reasons. For one, researching, learning and realizing the enormity of the still unhealed harms ancestors experienced has taken quite a toll on members of the task force. We want to note that a tremendous amount of emotional labor was expended in the creation of this report and as a result many of us were re-traumatized in

the process of making this report, making it hard to continue to produce this report while remaining members of the community. Secondly, other cities' harms reports, such as the City of Evanston's Harm Report, was developed by the Shorefront Legacy Center over the course of 20 years. As a virtually unpaid group of volunteers we were not able to create a comprehensive report to match this. Perhaps if the Village had desired to move forward on reparations when we first presented to them in 2021 or anytime following, funding could have been given to create a more comprehensive report. However, in light of these realities we want to acknowledge that this report is not an exhaustive list of all harms and instead we have chosen to focus on a few specific harms to illustrate the reasons why repair is needed. Also, we want to state that paid commissioners of a reparations task force should be paid to create a full history of harms.

Why Reparations? Why Now?

With all the different approaches to combat racial inequities for Black descendants of emancipated Americans, one may ask why we have specifically chosen reparations as a remedy. Below we will outline a number of reasons for why reparations are a crucial step to creating a more just society and Oak Park:

1. Racial Equity Initiatives Fall Short - In recent years there has been an amazing push to think about our society more equitably. This push has called on all of us to stop thinking solely in terms of equality or giving everyone the same opportunities, and instead give individuals and communities what they uniquely need to be successful. This push for equity has created a fundamental shift for many and changed the way organizations and people approach the work that they do. The Reparations Task Force believes that the shift towards equity has been very beneficial. However, the reality is that equity calls us to make changes looking forward. It calls us to look at why a situation is the way it is, then figure out how we address that in the future. While this is great, it does nothing to actively repair the harms of the past. Equity accepts the assumption that the past is the past, and we can't go back and make things right. The Task Force holds that the present rests on the past, and *it is futile for us to try to look forward and make things equitable without looking back and actively repairing the harms of the past*. In

other words, it would be impossible for us to build a just future without acknowledging and repairing the harms in the past. For instance, how can we truly build economic equality for Black people when many of the laws, systems and people that have historically extracted wealth from the Black community still exist with no signs of changing? As William Faulkner famously said, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

2. America Believes in Reparations - The overall sentiment around reparations is often “that will never happen”. However, our nation's history tells a different tale. Some Indigenous Americans have received reparations in the form of land and resources. We stand with these communities and acknowledge that what has been given is not enough, nor has it truly repaired the tremendous harm done. We hope our efforts can reinvigorate conversations for other oppressed communities. In addition, Japanese Americans received \$1.6 billion in reparations after the U.S. government's use of concentration camps during WWII. More recently, the Biden administration approved millions in reparations for Guam.

3. This nation needs a Reparative approach - There are **5 pillars of reparative justice**: Cessation and Assurance of Non-Repetition, Rehabilitation, Satisfaction, Restitution and Compensation.

Each is needed for any program or policy to be truly reparative. Our working definitions are:

Cessation and Assurance of Non- Repetition In order to truly repair a harm, we must ensure that that harm does not continue, that it ceases.

Satisfaction- The accuser or the one that was harmed must feel as though the harm was acknowledged to their satisfaction, this often included an apology.

Rehabilitation- Once the other four pillars of reparative justice are in place or attempted, ongoing support will be needed to ensure further harm is mitigated and people can heal from past harms

Restitution- Restoring the peace/situation/environment/status/land disrupted by the harmful act to its original status

Compensation-Monetary payment for past harms

We argue that a process of repair is exactly what this nation needs. We've never addressed the true history of this country, never acknowledged it publicly, never apologized, ensured the harms don't repeat, nor have we tried to compensate or rehabilitate the harm done. In many cases we don't even acknowledge the harm that happened in the first place. The recent pushback against Critical Race Theory (a graduate level legal theory), or more accurately put, the teaching of real American history, has taken place at the same time the reparations movement has gained momentum over the past few years. This is not coincidental. Projects like the 1619 Project and the explosion of racial equity work in the last decade and especially post-2020 all highlight the enduring legacy of slavery and how it still affects us all today. Upon learning of this legacy many people began to ask how we repair the harm done. This began the national campaign against teaching real, racial American history in schools, (and the pushback against that information).

4. Nothing else has worked - America has been selective and inconsistent in trying to increase the health, social capital and wealth of Black descendants of emancipated Americans since 1865. Nothing has worked. A staggering wealth gap still exists between white and Black Americans; home values in Black communities do not rise as fast as other communities. It is still rare to see a Black CEO in corporate America, and many more socio-economic disparities exist with no data points showing positive trends. Despite all best efforts of equality and equitable policy, nothing has worked sustainably for Black Americans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, that impacted the Black community the most, the old saying "When America catches the cold, Black folks catch the flu" was heard often. The mentality that "a rising tide raises all ships", with a few exceptions, has not included most Black people; it's time for a new approach.

<https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/report/key-data-on-health-and-health-care-by-race-and-ethnicity/#:~:text=Provisional%20data%20from%202021%20show,77.7%20years%20for%20Hispanic%20people.>

Before You Begin a Reparative Journey

While we hope that the residents and institutions of Oak Park (past and present) embrace this report and embark on a Reparative Justice journey, we want to acknowledge that there are some key steps to take before beginning a reparative journey:

1. Talk with the Oak Park Reparations Task Force. Invite members of our task force to talk about the report creation and ask specific questions.
2. Do your research. Hire a Black owned consulting firm or historical society to complete a comprehensive report of harms to Black people that have interacted with your organization- Our Task force, the Shorefront Legacy Center (Evanston, IL) or longtime former Oak Park resident and author of *Suburban Promised Land* Stan West are all qualified to assist with this.
3. Study restorative and reparative justice practices.

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A Brief History of Reparations

In the United States:

In 1783, Belinda Royall, (also known as Belinda Sutton) a Ghanaian-born woman emancipated in Medford, MA, sued for a pension from her enslaver's estate to compensate her for 50 years of enslavement. She won £15 and 12 shillings/year, and the payment was approved by John Hancock himself. This first reparations case establishes a precedent for reparations in American society. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belinda_Sutton)

But especially for white Southerners, Blacks were inherently alien and could never be a part of American society. In 1862, Lincoln provided financial reparations to roughly 3,185 (white) slaveholders in the District of Columbia for their loss of "human property" as a result of emancipation, but not to enslaved Africans who suffered brutal exploitation, violence, and cruelty during enslavement. (<https://werehistory.org/the-compensated-emancipation-act-of-1862/>) The first U.S. government proposal to repair the damage of American slavery was Special Field Order No. 15 from Civil War general William T. Sherman. The wartime order from the Union general allotted 40 acres of land to some newly freed Black families in Georgia and

South Carolina in 1865, but the order was soon reversed by President Abraham Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson: (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Field_Orders_No._15).

This was far from the only American effort at reparations for Black Americans. From 1890-1916, Callie House in Nashville, TN co-founded and ran the national ex-slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association (MRBP) which sought ex-slaves to sign onto a petition and lobby for a government pension, as well as provide disability and burial insurance. She led a lawsuit in 1915 claiming the Federal government owed her members \$68 million (based on value of Confederate cotton confiscated at the end of the Civil War), which was denied. In 1916, the U.S. Postmaster General, in retaliation, sought indictments against her and the association, and she went to prison for ten months. Their argument was that Callie House had defrauded people by saying they may get reparations when in reality that would never happen. (Darity, William and A. Kirsten Mullen. From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-first Century. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hil, NC. 2020, ch1).

Between 1957 and 1959, Audley Moore, of the Committee for Reparations for Descendants of U.S. Slaves, formally appealed to the United Nations for African American reparations. In 1968 she was a founding member of the Republic of New Afrika, which issued a claim on the southeastern U.S. to form a separate Black majority nation. (*ibid.*)

In 1963, Malcolm X called for Black reparations in a lecture at Michigan State University, demanding the U.S. government grant land to establish a separate territory under Black control. (*ibid.*)

In 1969, militant activist James Forman issued a "Black Manifesto" during Sunday service at Riverside Church in New York City, calling for \$500 million of reparations paid by white churches and synagogues for their crimes and support of slavery institutions. The Manifesto resulted in \$500,000 in donations, which then established a Black bank, Black Star publications, four TV networks, and the Black Economic Research Center. When corporate monetary support dried up in 1980, operations ended. (*ibid.*)

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan officially apologized for the 1942-1943 incarceration of at least 125,284 people of Japanese American descent in 75 sites in the western U.S after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Two-thirds were legal American citizens. The U.S. government authorized a payment of \$20,000 to each former detainee who was still alive when the act was passed. The legislation admitted that government actions were based on "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership." By 1992, the U.S. government eventually

disbursed more than \$1.6 billion in reparations to 82,219 Japanese Americans who had been incarcerated. These are the only reparations ever paid out by the U.S. government.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internment_of_Japanese_Americans)

In 1989, N'COBRA (the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America) was founded "for the sole purpose of obtaining reparations for African descendants in America." They assisted Rep. John Conyers when he researched and introduced H.R. 40 into the House of Representatives. Every year for the last 34 years, it has been reintroduced and never taken up for a vote. Current sponsors are Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) and Sen. Cory Brooks (D-NJ). (Darity, et al. 2020)

Between 1993 and 2005 some form of acknowledgement and repair was granted to Blacks by states for limited circumstances and harms. In 1994, Florida investigated the atrocities of the 1923 Rosewood riots, and the state legislature granted \$2.1 million given in \$150,000 awards to direct victims, and it established a Florida public college scholarship fund for the families and direct descendants. This is the only incident of Florida racial violence that was ever compensated, and Florida is the only state to ever pay any victims of racial violence. (*ibid.*) In 1999, a Black North Carolina farmer, Timothy Pigford, sued the Department of Agriculture in a class action lawsuit on behalf of 400 Black farmers in *Pigford v. Glickman* and won \$1.25 billion, but was never awarded. A second class-action lawsuit was filed with more claimants, and from that lawsuit, *Gilckman II*, farmers finally began to receive monetary awards for the FDA's discrimination in disbursing federal crop loans in 2013, long after their farms had been lost. (*ibid.*)

In 2000, Tulsa, OK issued a report from its OK Commission to Study the Tulsa Riot of 1921, recommending the 125 survivors, mostly in their 80s and 90s, receive reparations such as a scholarship for families affected, an economic development zone established in Greenwood, and resources for reburial of victim remains. The Oklahoma legislature issued no payments of any kind. A group of litigators and activists sued the Oklahoma state legislature in a class-action suit on behalf of the victims that went nowhere. (*ibid.*) At this writing in 2023, there are two survivors left.

In 2006 in Wilmington, NC, the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission recommended that reparations be paid to the descendants of the victims of a 1898 riot sparked when a legal election went ugly, but to this day the state legislature has refused to take it up. (*ibid.*)

In 2005 in Prince Edward County, VA the state finally began to atone for having closed public schools in 1959 for five years when *Brown v. Board of Education* forced integration. At the time, rather than integrating schools, the state and the county closed public schools for 5 years. During that time, they provided vouchers and tax credits to white students, who then went to all-white private academies, while nothing was done for Black students. Forty-six years later, scholarships were offered to victims of shuttered schools, but it was way too late for them to meaningfully take advantage as they were now in their 50s and 60s. No compensation was paid for lost years. None was paid for lesser wages due to their lack of education. (*ibid.*)

Between 2007 and 2008 at least six state legislatures apologized for slavery and Jim Crow, an encouraging first step towards reparations. VA, MD, NC and AL apologized in 2007, and NJ and FL apologized in 2008. And in 2009 the U.S. Congress **unanimously** passed an apology for slavery. Most of these apologies were worded in such a way to preempt actual compensation to the descendants of the enslaved. (*ibid.*)

In 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates published a now-foundational article in *The Atlantic* magazine titled “ The Case For Reparations”. It dives deeply into how red-lining and contract buying devastated and ghettoized the North Lawndale neighborhood (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>).

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Outside the United States:

Meanwhile, other parts of the world acknowledged harms, and in some cases paid out reparations. In 1861, Alexander II of Russia freed his serfs almost two years before Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. As early as 1839, the Tsar’s secret police recommended abolition of serfdom out of fear of revolution. The nobles—one percent of the population—put up little resistance after the Tsar’s 1857 announcement of the coming emancipation. (Not that they had much power to do so in an authoritarian state.) Serfs tied to private lands gained their freedom, the right to buy land, to open businesses, and to marry freely. The fact that serfs were already Russian citizens went a long way in helping to break this system; they were seen as members of society, albeit at the lowest level. (<https://daily.jstor.org/how-american-slavery-echoed-russian-serfdom/>).

Besides the Russian serfs of the 1860s, at the conclusion of WWI in 1918, the Central Powers gave reparations to the Allied Powers. Each of the defeated powers was required to make payments in either cash or kind. Because of the financial situation in Austria, Hungary,

and Turkey after the war, few-to-no reparations were paid, and the requirements for reparations were canceled. Bulgaria, having paid only a fraction of what was required, saw its reparation figure reduced and then canceled. Historians recognized Germany's requirement to shoulder the reparations burden alone as the "chief battleground of the post-war era" and the focus of the power struggle between France and Germany over enforcement of the Versailles Treaty, contributed directly to the rise of facism in Germany.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I_reparations)

After WWII in 1946 both West and East Germany were obliged to pay war reparations to the Allied governments. Italy and Japan were also obliged to pay war reparations. Austria was not included in any of these treaties. No reparations to Allied countries were paid in money as per the Yalta agreements (though that rule was not followed in later agreements). Instead, the Germans paid reparations in the following forms: dismantling German industry; transferring all manufacturing equipment, machinery and machine tools to the Allies; transferring all railroad cars, locomotives and ships to the Allies; confiscation of all German investments abroad; confiscation of all foreign currencies, including gold, silver and platinum in bullion or coin form held by any person/institution in Germany; confiscation of all patents and research data relevant to military application and processes; requisition of current German industrial production and resource extraction; and forced labor provided by the German population.

Additionally, Germany ceded land back to the Soviet Union and Poland. Lands ceded to the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France were eventually returned to Germany after compensation payments in the 1960s. Great Britain, the United States, Greece, Yugoslavia and Israel also received German reparations in the form of industrial property and money.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_reparations)

By far, the most extensive and successful reparations action was post-WWII Germany to Israel. West Germany paid reparations to Israel for confiscated Jewish property, for Jewish forced labor in the camps, and social persecution. Payments to Israel between 1953-1987 amounted to about \$14 billion in technology, infrastructure and direct payments. Israelis from both right and left of the political spectrum objected, arguing that accepting reparation payments was the equivalent of forgiving the Nazis for their crimes. The money was invested in the country's infrastructure and played an important role in establishing the economy of the new state. Israel until then had depended on donations by foreign Jews, and the German reparations, along with these donations, turned Israel into an economically viable country. A

great part of the reparations money purchased equipment and raw materials for nationalized Israeli companies, or went to the Jewish Agency (a national non-profit), and the national labor union.

From 1953 to 1963, the German reparations money funded around one-third of investment in Israel's electrical system, tripling its capacity and nearly half the total investment in the national railway, which obtained German-made rolling stock, tracks, and signaling equipment with reparations money. The reparations also purchased German-made machinery for developing the water supply, oil drilling, mining equipment for use in extracting copper from mines, and heavy equipment for agriculture and construction such as combines, tractors, and trucks. About 30% of the reparations money bought fuel; while 17% purchased ships for the Israeli merchant fleet, and by 1961 these vessels constituted two-thirds of the Israeli merchant marine. Funds from German reparations developed ports and bought cranes for cargo.

By the 1990s, Jews began making claims for property stolen in Eastern Europe. Various groups also investigated what had happened to the money deposited in Swiss banks by Jews outside of Switzerland and later murdered in the Holocaust. They also investigated what had happened to the funds deposited by various Nazis in Swiss banks. In 2009, the Israeli Finance Minister announced a demand for further €450 million to €1 billion in reparations from Germany on behalf of some 30,000 Israeli forced labor survivors. These demands are pending. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reparations_Agreement_between_Israel_and_the_Federal_Republic_of_Germany).

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Who is Oak Park in 2024?

According to the most recent U.S. Census survey in 2020, Oak Park had a population of 51,102. Oak Park's population has decreased by -5.92% since the 2010 census. The racial composition of Oak Park is:

- White: 64.54%
- Black or African American: 18.61%
- Two or more races: 8.4%

- Asian: 5.47%
- Other race: 2.72%
- Native American: 0.25%
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 0.02%

Oak Park hasn't always been this diverse, and currently the Village continues to lose African American residents:

(<https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/oak-park-promoted-integration-more-100000802.ht>)

and

(<https://www.oakpark.com/2023/08/15/oak-parks-diversity-and-inclusion-success/#:~:text=First%2C%20there%20has%20been%20a%20dramatic%20drop%20in,more%20than%20doubling%20in%20the%20last%2010%20years.>)

.) In fact, the Village and community of Oak Park has a checkered past with people of color, and only began to integrate in the late 1960s after Fair Housing was enacted here in 1968. We tell that continuing history in this report. We discuss repairing real estate harms done to Black Oak Parkers by the Village of Oak Park and Oak Park institutions since its founding in 1902. We will discuss repairing the harms done to Black Oak Parkers in both school District 97 and in District 200 since Black students started attending in the early 1920s. We discuss repairing harms from the Township of Oak Park, from the Park District of Oak Park and finally from the religious institutions of Oak Park.

We invite you to take a deep breath, pull out your notepad and learn as you read this report. Finally, and most importantly, to the ancestors, we have not forgotten you. We are humbled by your sacrifice, emboldened by your resilience and will continue to fight until this nation does right by you and your descendants.

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History of Discrimination by The Village of Oak Park

The Village of Oak Park is the major taxing body that controls and oversees many aspects of residents' lives from parking, zoning, ordinances and more. The Village's Board of Trustees, which governs the Village, is made up of seven elected residents of Oak Park and hires the Village Manager and Police Chief. Oak Park also has five other taxing bodies with independently elected boards: Oak Park Park District, Oak Park Public Library, Oak Park Elementary School District 97, Oak Park River Forest High School District 200 and the Oak Park Township; each of these we discuss individually later in the report. As a result, our recommendations in this section will be specific to the Village Board of Oak Park and what the Village of Oak Park controls.

In this section, we highlight **three areas** where the Village Board has limited the growth of Black community and Black wealth in Oak Park. The first was the rescinding of the permit to build Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in 1905, the second was the decades-long practice by which the Board enacted fair housing in Oak Park from 1968 to the present, and the third was how the Oak Park Development Corporation colluded with the Village Board in 1987-8 to prevent a Black Austin based church from purchasing an available building, an action that prompted a federal civil rights investigation. In each instance, had the Village Government taken different action, the Black community in Oak Park today would look very different. While we are only focusing on three instances, we acknowledge there are many other examples of the Village participating in the limiting of Black wealth and Black community. These include but are not limited to:

inequitable distribution of Village contracts, zoning and parking laws that affect Black residents the most, over policing areas with a higher concentration of Black residents, failure to create equitable financial outcomes for Black residents, and more. All of these instances should be studied further.

I. Rescinding Building Permit for Mt Carmel Baptist Church at Chicago and Cuyler (1905)

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."- (William Faulkner, 1951)

The early Black community in Oak Park and surrounding areas found a temporary church home thanks to Henry W. Austin. They were originally worshiping in “Temperance Hall,” in Central School on Lake Street, and in a Lake Street storefront” (Suburban Promised Land, West, et al., 2009, p17.) Austin, was a wealthy white Oak Park Businessman and founder of the Austin neighborhood of Chicago. After years of meeting in Temperance Hall, the congregation desired to have a church of their own. Although the Black community would soon be centered around Harlem and Lake, early Black residents fought hard to purchase property in a northern part of Oak Park; and after organizing, saving and enduring hardship, they were finally able to acquire a piece of land.

“The Colored people of Oak Park and vicinity and especially members of the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, are very thankful to be able to announce, after a struggle of several years against many obstacles and unfavorable circumstances, and notwithstanding the fact that the working membership has never exceeded fourteen, that they have succeeded in paying off the last dollar on their lot, located on Chicago Avenue just west of Cuyler Avenue. And we can say with joy that Mt. Carmel now holds the deed to a lot in its own name valued at \$1,900... We wish, through the columns of Oak Park papers, to thank our many friends, both white and colored who have so kindly assisted us.” (ibid, 17)

Unfortunately, that “joy” would be short-lived. Upon learning of the purchase, the white residents who lived nearby were in an uproar. *“Even though a Village permit for construction of a church had been issued, pressure from surrounding white property owners forced the Village Board to rescind the permit.” (ibid, 17).* Harry C Weatherspoon, a leader in the Mt Carmel Baptist Church stated:

“Many things were presented as excuses for not wanting the Church in that community. But under all we see a small tinge of race prejudice which ought to be stamped out now; for the beautiful Village of Oak Park cannot afford to have the world think she is prejudiced against a people for something they cannot help, and that is their color and I want to forever wipe out the thought that we bought that lot of speculation, for it was our intention? to erect an edifice in which to worship God, and to improve the moral and spiritual condition of our people. And had the community not objected, we would have to-day been housed in a neat edifice of our own, instead of paying such high rent of a store front” (ibid, 17-18).

The rescindment of the permit for Mt Carmel Baptist church was detrimental to the growth of Black community and Black wealth in Oak Park (It is important to note that while the main

responsibility falls on the Village Board of Oak Park for taking the direct action to rescind the permit, it was under pressure from Oak Park residents). The members of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church wanted to access their piece of the American dream through property ownership. Had they been allowed to build and grow at Cuyler and Chicago and also on Williams St./Westgate, it is probable that a few years later they would have built a school nearby to educate Black students. A few years after that they could have purchased a multi family investment property in another part of Oak Park. A few years later they may have purchased a house for their pastor. As the church grew, Black residents could have purchased homes nearby and opened businesses nearby. The possibilities of what could have been are endless. What we know for certain is properties in Oak Park have increased in value exponentially since the early 1900s, and that wealth could have been in the hands of Black Oak Park residents if the Village Board had allowed its tax-paying Black residents to build on the lots they owned and for which they had a building permit.

The then-26 year-old Village Board granted, then rescinded a permit to build upon land that the church already owned. With that permit, the Village had let Black folk dream that they too, if they worked hard enough, if they were respectable enough, could share in the American Dream of property ownership. By revoking its building permit, the Village Board snatched that dream back, harming the fledgling Black community by constricting Mt. Carmel Baptist to its little sliver of a lot in the Black section of town on Williams Street (what is now Westgate Street). Mt Carmel Baptist Church would remain a staple on Williams street for over 25 years.

Later after years of thriving, the Village Board harmed its Black residents by marking Williams Street and the Black businesses located there for commercial development. The Village allowed developers to run out the Black businesses. Mt. Carmel Baptist anchored Black Williams Street until it was “mysteriously” burned down in 1929 causing significant damage and was eventually sold. Once the church was off Williams Street, it was easy to rename it Westgate Street and claim what had been the Black neighborhood was “little more than an alley” (*American Builders Magazine*, 1929), justifying the commercial redevelopment of previously Black-occupied land. A 1930 plat survey of that block erases where Mt. Carmel’s lot had been on the 1920 plat survey. If the Village Board had ever investigated the cause of the fire, (and we

have found no evidence that they had), no one was ever charged. No inquiry nor cause was ever announced. No police report was made that can be found. Nor does a bill of sale to the developers, nor transfer of deed exist. This land is now some of the most valuable in the Village.

All Black Oak Park has left of its holdings there is an historical plaque testifying to this history.

II. Oak Park Regional Housing Center (1972-present)

In Oak Park, rental housing, homeowner's assistance and commercial real estate development are handled by 4 different entities: The Oak Park Residential Corporation (rentals), The Oak Park Housing Authority (rentals), the Oak Park Regional Housing Center (homeownership and rentals), and the Oak Park Economic Development Corporation (commercial property and new construction multi-unit building rentals). There is some overlap, which sows confusion for those outside the community seeking housing information or assistance. None of these services are well-advertised to target communities around Oak Park, outside Oak Park they are barely known and in fact even inside the Village of Oak Park many people don't understand how these four entities interact.

The Oak Park Regional Housing Center (OPRHC) was founded in 1972 to *"build vibrant and inclusive communities, promote intentional and stable residential integration throughout Oak Park and nearby neighborhoods,"* and *"to counteract steering and to promote pro-integrative choices through affirmative marketing"* (https://oprhc.org/about_us/). Since 1972 the Housing Center has been a big part of integrating Oak Park and preventing white flight, the phenomenon of white people moving out of urban areas, particularly those with significant minority populations, and into suburban areas. From the beginning, the Village of Oak Park has been one of the main funders and vocal supporters of the Housing Center. In effect, the Village has allowed the Housing Center to oversee fair housing and integration in the Village of Oak Park for the past 50 years. Through these efforts, Oak Park has been able to maintain a Black population of 18% or more and rising home values, something very few communities in America have been able to do (The Southside. Natalie Y. Moore. St. Martin's Press, New York, NY. 2016). But, while the Housing Center has created value for Oak Park by ensuring there would never become an almost exclusively Black part of the Village, true integration has yet to

be achieved. Social circles in Oak Park still remain largely segregated, Black residents own homes at much lower rates than white residents, there is a significant wealth gap between white and Black residents, and there are fewer Black businesses and institutions in Oak Park than there were before 1930 (Stan West, 2009, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOZFZ7dpJOo&t=1s>).

The Village of Oak Park has not holistically addressed how to integrate Black people into the community; in fact, the unwritten policy has been to steer Black renters to Austin and Washington Boulevards where the majority of rental apartments exist. Steering is not integration. Instead, the OPRHC opted for a process that created good optics and statistics of diversity to protect white families home values, while failing to truly integrate Black residents into Oak Park life. Holistically addressing integration would have created Black homeownership programs, wealth building programs, business grants and loan opportunities, targeted opportunities to integrate social circles, and more. The home ownership assistance programs offered by the OPRHC are not well-known, not well-advertised, nor are they open to Black people of all income levels.

The harm to Black folk from the OPRHC has been to stifle a Black **community** in Oak Park.

Merriam Webster currently defines “community” as:

- 1) a unified body of individuals;
- 2) the people with common interests living in a particular area;
- 3) a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society;
- 4) a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society;
- 5) a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests;
- 6) a group linked by a common policy;
- 7) an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (such as species) in a common location.

While white Oak Parkers may see a Black Oak Park “community” based on definition #4 (“*a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society*”), Black folk don’t. Black people are scattered **by OPRHC design** throughout the larger, white community, but they are not a monolith, nor necessarily united. Black Oak Parkers are not “*a group linked by a common policy*” (#6). This is evidenced by how few Black businesses in Oak Park are more than 15 years old, the lack of Black-founded and led non profits and the very small number of predominantly Black churches. Notably, the intense segregation in a comparable town like Evanston, Illinois created a tight-knit, Black community with a predominately Black school, NAACP chapter, nonprofits, businesses and Black churches that have stood for over 80 years. This tight nit community was largely because Evanston redlined Black residents into their 5th Ward.

A “diverse” Oak Park allows the white majority to interact on their own terms in common locations such as schools, grocery stores, park facilities, etc., but Black Oak Park is hardly unified. Black Oak Park isn’t “*a unified body of individuals*”, (#1), doesn’t broadly share common interests (“*the people with common interests living in a particular area*”, #3), and are not “*living together*” (#3). Again, by Village design, Black Oak Parkers are scattered throughout the Village and greatly stretched out narrowly along two miles of Austin and Washington Boulevards, and they are not “*a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society*”, #3.

Oak Park realtor Dorothy Reid, whose mother Sherlyn headed the Village’s Community Relations Board over 20 years, was one of a handful of integrating Black students at Beye and OPRFHS, graduating in 1980. She commented in Stan West’s 2009 book, Suburban Promised Land, about the lack of cohesion in the Village’s Black community, saying:

“ There is no central meeting ground for African Americans in Oak Park. After college I lived in Atlanta and on Saturday mornings I would go to a place where people of the community just came to hang out and it’s where you heard stories past and present. That simply does not exist in Oak Park...There may be some networking that goes on in beauty or barber shops, but nothing that could connect the larger Black community...Thus, when Blacks come to Oak Park, there really isn’t opportunity to maintain Black culture because there is more assimilation than integration that happens here at the expense of Black community ties” (137-8).

Dorothy Reid's statement still holds true in 2024.

The third housing/real estate entity to impact Black life in Oak Park was the Oak Park Economic Development Corporation, which at the Village Board's request, acted in a way that invited a federal civil rights violation investigation in 1988.

III. Oak Park Economic Development Corporation 1987-8

In January, 1987, in Oak Park, the First Church of Christ, Scientist at Oak Park Ave and Ontario was listed for sale due to its declining membership. Six months later in July, 1987 Unity Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, still located at 211 N. Cicero in Austin, entered negotiations to purchase the Oak Park building. At the time Unity Fellowship had about 1,500 members, with about 100 living in Oak Park, including their minister at the time. In late December, 1987, Unity Fellowship submitted a bid for \$500,000, the only bid in nearly 12 months of listing. Days after submission of that bid, a realtor member of the First Church told the Village Board about the bid from the Black church.

The Village Board had known that property had been listed for sale, but in 11 months had shown little interest in it. In fact, 3 months earlier, the Board had voted *not* to purchase it. (Wednesday Journal 1/20/88, 31). But when they found out that a Black church had bid on it, they became again interested in the property. They immediately went into executive session where one of the trustees warned that "*too many Black faces*" (Sun Times, 1/19/88) would scare away white shoppers from the Lake/Oak Park Ave district, and adversely affect the "*white demand for services*" (Chicago Defender, Jan, 1988). Local papers reported that the Village Board feared that Unity Fellowship's plans to open a soup kitchen ministry would threaten the safety of the residents at Prairie Court condos, one block south of the church, and that the church's summer revivals, attracting even more Black people to the area, would discourage whites from moving into Prairie Court. The Board then voted to authorize the Oak Park Development Corporation to submit a bid on the property with the idea of turning it into a civic center. And it was just an *idea*; there were never any proposals or concrete plans for what the civic center would do, or what programs it would house, or what events would occur there.

There were no architect drawings or other local groups that signed on to the vision. There were no notes of discussion on how a civic center would enhance the Village. The Board's last-minute suggestion of turning the church into a civic center was a Hail Mary pass intended to block the plans of a Black church relocating in the heart of Oak Park.

The Oak Park Development Corp, today the Oak Park Economic Development Corporation, was then and still is a private non-profit group of civic minded bankers, real estate professionals, developers, businessmen, architects, engineers and more that supports economic development throughout Oak Park by attracting and supporting small businesses, promoting real estate developments, and facilitating connections and collaboration. Currently, the Village President, the Village Manager, and one Village Trustee sit on its board of directors, and one can assume that was the case in 1988. One week after Unity Fellowship Church put in their bid for the building, the Development Corp. with the Village Board's blessing, put in a bid of \$505,000, exactly \$5,000 over Unity's bid. One wonders if the Development Corporation knew what Unity Fellowship's bid was, which should've been private church business, and bid just enough over it to knock the Austin congregation's bid out of contention.

When news of the Board's racist remarks and subsequent purchase offer got out in early January, 1988, Black Oak Park was stunned. The Village Board defended itself with a press conference, but then days later reversed their authorization to the Development Corporation, which eventually dropped its bid. The Village Board's involvement strongly suggests the Development Corporation was working as their agent in the matter. The local NAACP weighed in and alerted both the Illinois State's Attorney and the U.S. Attorney, who eventually started an investigation into whether the Village Board had violated federal law by encouraging the Development Corporation to bid for First Church. Ralph Innis of the Congress for Racial Equality, (CORE), wrote an op ed in the Chicago Defender (January, 1988) entitled "Oak Park Bigotry". Unity Fellowship also held a press conference, reported in the Defender (January, 1988), stating "attempts to halt the sale to Black parishioners violated their civil rights". Nevertheless, Unity Fellowship continued to negotiate for the church even after losing a close vote on approval of the sale in February, 1988. Subsequently, two more bids came in. Unity Fellowship's bid for the

church had inspired more activity on the church in one month than had been seen in the previous twelve.

In March, 1988 the Oak Leaves reported that the church had been sold in a cash sale to Chatka Ruggiero, a River Forest real estate investor. She paid \$525,000 cash for the building, saying, *"I don't have any intention of demolishing this building or turning it over to another party."* When asked about the civic center, she said that option was *"one of many things I'm considering."* Reverend Williams of Unity Baptist, who had negotiated for eight months on the property, wondered why he *"was courted [by First Church's leaders] and led to believe that everything was A-OK...I feel I was deliberately misled."*

Today in 2024, Unity Fellowship is still in their building on Cicero and very active in the Austin community. One wonders what they could've accomplished in the First Church building, or how much equity they would've had by now had they been allowed to purchase it 34 years ago. The civic center never materialized, no surprise, since there was no real plan for one. Ms. Ruggiero said later in a 2020 interview (Wed. Journal 11/11/20) that she bought the church because *"I just wanted to save that building."* Save it from what, exactly? She used the building as an art center, which hosted concerts, recitals, and art exhibitions. Ms. Ruggiero also rented out the basement to the Hemingway Foundation for a museum until 2017. According to the Wednesday Journal (*ibid.*) in November, 2020, she sold the building for an undisclosed amount to The Free Church, an integrated, non-denominational church that since 2012 had been meeting at the Lake Theater and Mann school. The Free Church had begun leasing the building in 2017 just after the Hemingway Foundation left, and in November, 2020 completed its purchase. Ms. Ruggiero called the church *"a perfect fit"* for her building. By the way, Pastor Chuck Colegrove of The Free Church is white as is the majority of the congregation.

What can we conclude from these 3 examples of harms done to the Black community? When the Village of Oak Park revoked Mt. Carmel Baptist's building permit and failed to investigate the fire that ended its life, it established a racist pattern of treatment toward its Black folk that included housing segregation, racial steering, economic discouragement, blurring and erasure of history that has continued to this day. We emphasize that the land where Mt. Carmel Baptist Church sat on Westgate is now some of the most valuable commercial property

in Oak Park. One can only imagine what Mt Carmel Baptist could've accomplished had they been allowed to keep their land and build equity. Black Oak Park needs reparations for that loss. And even though Unity Fellowship Missionary Baptist was not an Oak Park church, it is clear that the Village Board and the Development Corporation kept its Black congregation from moving into Oak Park, in spite of the fact that nearly 100 of its members were already taxpaying Oak Park residents. The U.S. Attorney's office found no violation of civil rights laws by the Village Board when it blocked the sale of the church to a Black congregation by encouraging the non-profit Economic Development Corporation to bid against them. It found no violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, and no pattern of race discrimination. In this report, we are publicly disagreeing with this finding. The Village Board and the Development Corporation ***did*** discriminate against and harm the 100 or so Unity Fellowship MB Church congregants who resided in Oak Park at the time and wanted their church a little closer to home. The Village Board and the Development Corporation stifled Black Oak Park's wealth and advocacy in the process, and relegated the congregation to the red-lined Austin community in Chicago where they would have more trouble borrowing against the equity they had built up in their Austin church home.

For decades, Oak Park has rested on its laurels as a place of racial integration and harmony, but in truth, what it has been doing is carefully and deliberately crafting and minimizing a Black presence in its midst. Black churches anchor Black communities, and if there's doubt about that, just look at the census numbers before and after Mt. Carmel's expulsion from the Village: The 1920 US Census shows 169 Negro Oak Parkers. Mt. Carmel was sold in 1930, and that census shows 143 Negroes, a loss of 26. But by 1940, there were only 98 Negroes counted, a loss of 71 Black inhabitants at a time when the white population was growing. By 1950, the number of Blacks was down to 75, and by 1960, 57. Once the church was gone, many Black families felt unwelcome and left. The loss of the church disintegrated the Black community here.

HARMS CAUSED

- Uncompensated loss of land occupied by Mt Carmel, which was the collective wealth of the member families and the basis of generational wealth for the Black community.
- Destruction of a cultural and community center, religious school, meeting space, concert hall, recreation center and perhaps most importantly the loss of what could have been had they been allowed to grow and thrive.
- Destruction of Black businesses on William Street.
- No municipal investigation of the arson, so no one to sue.
- Destruction and diaspora of 143 Black residents and their families.
- Rescinding the building permit, forcing the sale of land the church could not build on.
- Devaluing of the land on Williams Street so it could be bought and developed cheaply.
- Forming the commercial district which has generously fed Oak Park's tax revenues over 90 years, enabling Oak Park to provide municipal services and become a destination community for wealthy residents. This came at the direct expense of Black residents, who were not compensated by the Village for the loss of their land in this district.
- Stifling of the growth of Black community in Oak Park by limiting our re-integration through specific housing policies.
- Interfering with the sale of First Church of Christ Scientist (now New Church) to a Black congregation, the majority of which already lived in Oak Park.

Recommended Repairs for the Village of Oak Park

Recommended repairs to be enacted by the Village of Oak Park for limiting the growth of Black community and Black wealth in Oak Park by rescinding the permit to build Mt. Carmel Baptist church, creating the Oak Park Regional Housing center, colluding to deny access to real estate, and other harms done to the Black community.

Cessation and Assurance of Non Repetition

-Hire a reparative justice consultant to do a complete review of Village policies, practices and procedures that cause negative outcomes for Black residents.

-Yearly assessment completed by an anti-racism consultant to review policies practices and procedures that harm Black residents.

-A yearly budget plan submitted by the Village manager to address harms discovered by the anti-racism consultants yearly review (see above).

-Create a Oak Park Reparations Commission with paid stipends for commissioners. The commission should have a yearly budget of at least 1 million dollars for stipends, community engagement sessions, events, speakers, refreshments and more. The commissioners will make recommendations to the Village Board twice per year on how to contribute to reparations for Black residents.

Restitution

- Instruct the Oak Park Regional Housing Center to give the descendants of Black families denied mortgages in Oak Park first access to new home buying programs and downpayment assistance. -Create a program to facilitate the transfer of real estate back to the descendants of Black families who lost their properties due to discriminatory practices, compensating the current owners if necessary.

Rehabilitation

-Refine inclusionary zoning ordinance to require a minimum of 30% Black subcontractors on any new project.

-Refine inclusionary zoning ordinance to earmark 50% of funds generated to go into a reparative justice fund that will be governed by the newly formed Oak Park Reparations Commission and its members.

-Prioritize, provide discounts to and intentionally seek out local Black farmers to be a part of the farmers market.

Compensation

-Provide funding to launch the Oak Park Reparative Justice institute, a private non profit, which will raise funds to allow Faith Jefferson to stay in her home and eventually turn her home into a cultural center for Black Oak Park residents, create reparative justice programs that benefit the

Black community and assist the Village in dispersing funds in instances where the Village may be limited legally.

-Partner with banks to create a low interest loan and downpayment assistance program for Black residents.

-Provide financial compensation to the descendants of residents whose homes were firebombed. Compensation amount should be determined by the Oak Park Reparations commission. **Satisfaction**

-Village Board issues an official apology to Black residents past and present for policies, practices and procedures that harmed the Black community.

-Make Black lives more visible by creating more monuments and plaques of ordinary Black residents and historical Black figures.

• • •

History of Discrimination in Elementary School District 97

Oak Park, Illinois has become synonymous with buzz words such as diversity, anti-racism, inclusion, social justice and cultural competence. What if anything do the words mean to the actual residents, families and communities of Oak Park, Illinois? Like many areas reacting to the murder of George Floyd in 2021, Oak Park School District 97 adopted an Inclusive and Anti-Racist Curriculum publicizing the district's stance against all forms of racism and prejudice in their educational system. District 97 often leads in societal issues of race and education. Nevertheless, for all their efforts, there remains a gap between white and Black students' test scores, higher suspension levels for students of color, and a lack of teachers of color.

Racial Development in African American Children

Children learn to recognize racial differences as early as three years of age (Bigler, 1999). Results from the "Doll Experiment" conducted by African American psychologists Drs. Mamie and Kenneth Clark in the 1940s, bolstering the Brown v. Board of Education case, showed African American children preferred "white skinned dolls," over the darker skinned dolls. Black children still prefer dolls with lighter hues over dolls of darker hues. African Americans are still negatively portrayed in most forms of media, and the omission of positive images and role models contributes to the poor self-image of African American children. The results of this study hold true in Oak Park.

While many in the Oak Park community have made substantial efforts to combat racism and build an inclusive environment, Oak Park's Black history has never really been taught. NOT teaching Oak Park's Black history has led to ignorance for all. White students who fail to learn this history, *their* history, continue to fear and misunderstand the Black community, they gain no insight into why the Black community in Oak Park looks the way it does, and keep repeating the mistakes of the past, without even knowing they are repeating them. Black people who don't learn their own history don't know who they are, or how they fit into a community that historically does not value them equitably. They never learn that their ancestors were integral parts of Oak Park from the beginning. All these realities harm our children.

A History of Racial Policies in Oak Park Elementary District 97

Having the foresight to prepare for incoming and/or increasing racial tension in the Oak Park elementary District 97, in 1972 Superintendent of Schools Kenton E. Stephens developed the proposal Crisis Prevention In Oak Park Elementary School District 97: A Plan For Staff Development In Relation To School Desegregation. In the request for Title IV federal funding, Superintendent Stephens proposed policies addressing the intentional hiring of African American teachers and curricular revision. In the early stages of desegregation, the Board of Education recognized the positive development of African American children must include curricular recognition of efforts and accomplishments of African Americans. This initiative, directed at educational staff, did not significantly move standardized test scores, which continue to this day to show marked differences between White and Black students. Let us also point out that standardized testing is just one convenient measure of student progress; it was then and is still now inherently flawed with biases from the white middle and upper classes on which the tests then and now are normed. And while there has been a “widening” of the populations on which the standardized tests are normed, test questions are still predominantly written by white people and still reflect race and class biases.

(<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2023/01/should-college-admissions-use-standardized-test-scores/672816/> and <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/racist-beginnings-standardized-testin>).

In December, 1974, two years after the publication of the report mentioned above, the District 97 school board was presented with the Final Report of the Committee for Tomorrow’s Schools...Concerning Recommendations for Maintaining Racial Balance in Oak Park Elementary Schools. This document established a curriculum committee to examine the cultural biases of classroom materials.

In 1984, the *Oak Park Task Force on Racial Diversity*, an Education Subcommittee to the Village of Oak Park, presented a report to the Village Board of Trustees. This report discussed revisions of policy in Human Dignity, Cultural Pluralism and Racial Balance in Oak Park’s public

schools. Acknowledging **lack of minority representation among district educators**, Section II of the revised policy immediately addresses hiring and retention directives. Section IV discusses the need for curriculum revision stating “special efforts should be made to **revise or replace curricular materials which ignore [their] impact and contributions**. It is not sufficient to devote short periods of time (a day or a week) to dealing with accomplishments of isolated prominent figures who were or are members of minority groups,” (Task Force, 1984). Unfortunately, there were no specific recommendations about *how* to make these changes beyond textbook revisions, which we know today is superficial compared to the ideal of teachers that reflect the cultures of the students, cooperative and integrated classrooms, and academic supports for students performing below grade level. No plans were discussed to increase the hiring of minority teachers in District 97.

The District’s 2016 Vision process produced a vision statement that challenges the District to provide an equitable education for all of our students. In 2017, they added the cabinet level position of Senior Director of Equity. That said, even with the integration of our schools, the community’s stated desire for equity, and a senior district leader focused on equity, the District’s efforts to eliminate inequities have been unsuccessful.

In 2020, Oak Park middle schoolers, facilitated by D97 Equity Coach Gina Harris and sponsored by the Oak Park Public Library, read and discussed over 3 months *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi. Additionally, the Board made equity training for staff available. The sessions, both for middle schoolers and later for the communities of Austin and Oak Park, were well attended, and for that reason considered “successful”. Unfortunately, once again, no meaningful change in outcomes for Black students has been noticed.

In 2023, District 97 hopes to begin painting the “Portrait of a Graduate,” a well-rounded, high-achieving student that represents the district’s vision for the skills, character traits, as well as social-emotional abilities students would need to success in their future. According to Superintendent Ushma Shah, the portrait is still in the early development stages. Additionally, District 97 has filled three new senior administrative positions for the 2023-2024 school year as

it lays the groundwork for its community-driven vision of an ideal graduate. In May, 2023, the district announced new hires: Dr. Luis Fernando De Leon (formerly of Unit District 46 - Elgin) as the assistant superintendent of middle schools, Luis Rodriguez as the new chief legal and equity officer, and Patrick Robinson (formerly Whittier School principal) as the new assistant superintendent of elementary schools beginning with the new school year. We have yet to see if the 2023 initiatives for the “vision of an ideal graduate” renders any significant changes in the success of Black and Brown students.

Inequity in Standardized Test Scores

Standardized test data over five decades consistently reveal that race is the most persistent predictor of student performance in District 97. This has resulted in the underrepresentation of students of color identified as advanced learners and racial disproportionality in discipline. In addition, the data demonstrate that learning differences, disabilities, IEP status, and socioeconomic status are also negative predictors of student performance. Students who are not white and middle class experience our District differently than white, middle class students, depending on their ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, foster status, involvement with the juvenile justice system, immigration status, or language. Racial disparities are often intersected with disparities of other factors. While race is a significant factor in most disparities, it may not always be the most salient factor. *Thus, District 97 needs an inclusive equity analysis of all relevant factors not limited to race in its policy considerations.*

Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) standardized test: English Language Arts (ELA) Data

Students take this test every year, which measures reading, writing, and grammar, starting at 3rd grade. In 2020 there were no data from District 97 regarding ELA scores, due to COVID. Here we report total Reading, Language Arts and Grammar achievement in grades 3-8 for District 97’s students who took the test in 2021. There was **a 35% gap** between Black (16%) and White (51%) student achievement in District 97 in ELA. In 2022, there was again **a 35% gap** between Black (15%) and White (51%) students in English Language Arts.

Illinois Assessment of Readiness: Math Achievement Data

Students take this test every year, starting at 3rd grade. In 2020 there was no data from District 97 regarding Math achievement, due to COVID. Here we report total Math achievement in grades 3-8 for District 97's students who took the test. In 2021, there was a **39% gap** between Black (10%) and White (49%) students in Math achievement. In 2022, there was a **40% gap** between Black (12%) and White (51%) students in Math achievement. In spite of evolving District 97 Board policies since 1974, students of color not only continue to underperform on state-required achievement tests, but the gap is growing.

Illinois Science Assessment (ISA): Science Data

Students in Illinois take this test in 5th and in 8th grades, and the achievement data here for both 5th and 8th grades combined and reported in 4 levels. Notice that in 2021, **75% of Black students** in 5th and 8th grades are Emerging and Developing in Science achievement, **the bottom two levels**, and **69% of White students** in 5th and 8th grades are achieving at Proficient and Exemplary levels in Science, **the top two levels**:

Science Assessment 2021:	Black	White
Emerging	38.6%	7.1%
Developing	37.6%	23.8%
Proficient	18.8%	44%
Exemplary	5%	25.2%

In 2022, **66% of Black students** remained in **the bottom two levels** of Science achievement, while **78% of White students** achieved at **the two top levels**:

Science Assessment 2022:	Black	White
Emerging	29.4%	5.7%
Developing	36.4%	16.2%
Proficient	27.6%	41.2%
Exemplary	6.6%	36.9%

Inequitable Access to Gifted and Talented Education

Representation of the district's true efforts of equity should show an increasing rate of African American students tested and enrolled into Advanced Learning Programs. Reports submitted to ISBE by District 97 have significant portions of missing and/or unreported data as it relates to "enrolled in accelerated placements, advanced academics, assessed for giftedness and students identified as gifted." There is no data from District 97 for students "Enrolled in Accelerated Placements" for 2022, likely due to COVID. In 2019, the district reported 8.2% for White students and 2.8% for Black students "Enrolled in Accelerated Placements." There is no data from District 97 for students "Assessed for Giftedness" for 2022 or 2021. There is no data from District 97 for "Students Identified as Gifted" for 2022 or 2021.

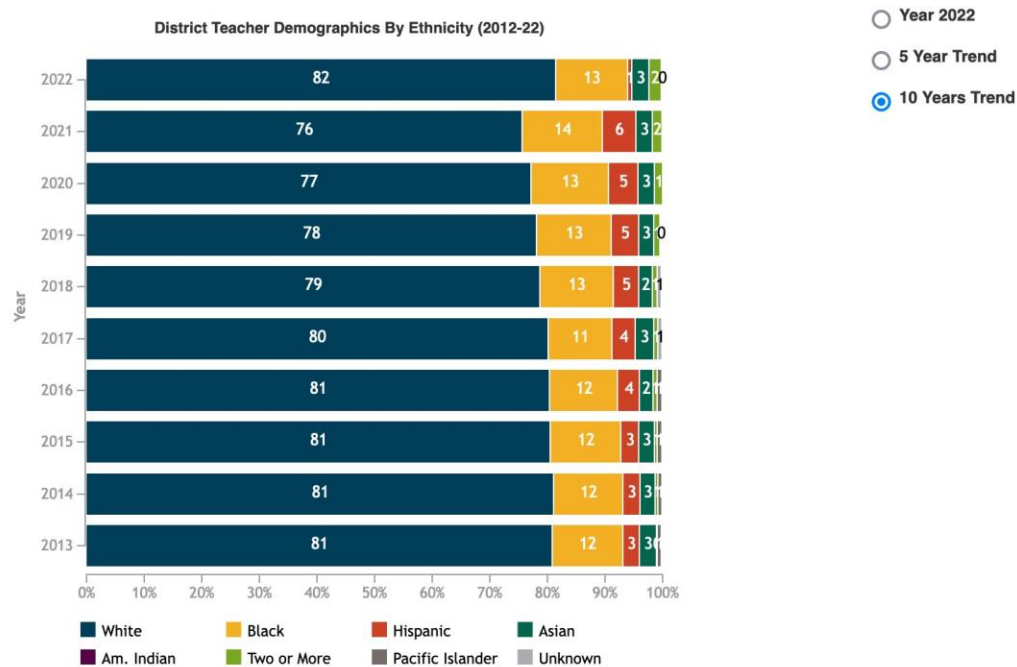
Lack of Teachers of Color

The absence of teachers of color, specifically Black teachers has occurred for decades in District 97. The most recent Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) D97 Report Card shows 12-14% Black teachers over the last 10 years in a district that is nearly 30% Black and mixed race, 14% Hispanic, and 3% Asian ([OAK PARK ESD 97 | Racial/Ethnic Diversity](#)) .

Demographics: Demographics

1 of 2

The chart displays the demographics for teachers in this district. The numeral within the circle is the total number of teachers (FTE). [Learn More](#)



Summary of HARMS

The persistent **test score gap** between Black and White in these major academic areas harms Oak Park’s Black students. It’s demoralizing for students who come to believe they will never catch up and so, give up. It feeds the myth that Whites are superior in intelligence because they score better on culturally biased standardized tests. By focusing on student deficits rather than systemic and social factors that have stymied progress, District 97 has few clues as to how to construct real support systems, even where there is a genuine wish to do so. The test score gap disadvantages Black students in a world where the best paying jobs are increasingly dependent upon technology; not only can students not easily demonstrate having the skills, it fosters a stigmatizing view of Black students by branding them as “at risk”, “underachieving”, and low performing students who “do not value education”.

We are aware that opportunity gaps exist, even in Oak Park. Not attending a quality preschool program, for example, puts Black students behind their peers as early as kindergarten. And the opportunity gaps continue throughout elementary and secondary education in Oak Park in the forms of access to various art, music, sports, travel, cultural experiences that some can have and others, not.

All of these harm students in their classrooms by lowering expectations and restraining efforts on the teacher's part. **Not having access to gifted and talented education** limits enriching cultural exposures to Black students, contributing to opportunity gaps and misunderstandings on students' parts who have been excluded from certain educational experiences. Not having access to tutoring services suppresses academic mastery and keeps Black students either behind their peers or having to work twice as hard to master the same material. **Not having access to extracurricular enrichment activities** like travel, sports and arts classes affects the learning schema and experiences of Black students; these develop innate talents of students, create background knowledge for students and underpin skills like reading comprehension and problem solving.

Higher suspension rates for children of color come from non-Black teachers, social workers and administrators failing to understand and empathize with students that have backgrounds different from the standard white, middle class, nuclear family American public schools are built to serve. This difference between teacher expectations and the Black students and families they serve causes cultural clashes that school leaders may read as "disruptive", "lacking" or "not valuing education".

Not having teachers that reflect the race of their Black and Brown students makes it difficult for those students of color. School curricula are Eurocentric. Their white teachers come to believe through implicit biases that their students of color cannot achieve, which reinforces poor performance on standardized tests. By focusing on student deficits rather than social factors that have stymied progress, teachers/administrators have few clues as to how to construct real support systems, even where there is a genuine wish to do so. But not having

teachers of color adversely affects white students, too:

(<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/08/teachers-of-color-white-students/400553/>) For white students, having a teacher of color expands their experience with other races, increasing their tolerance and anti-racism. A teacher of color shows those teachers in leadership roles, expanding their students' world view, increasing their racial socialization. It chips away at stereotypes and prejudices. Being white with a Black teacher offers white students a safe space to examine and reflect on racial privilege they enjoy without being made to feel morally deficient for having white skin. Black teachers of white students offer racial relationship-building opportunities.

In spite of fifty years of Board policies, Black children in this District have not yet experienced equity in education.

Recommended Repairs for District 97

CESSATION and ASSURANCE of NON-REPETITION -

Test Score gaps

- Use data and research to dispel the myth that lack of hard work or low ability is the reason Black students do not test well. Attributing failure to inadequate effort implies that if you work harder, you will learn more. Attributing it to ability serves as an excuse for doing nothing. Neither view acknowledges racism and racist tests as the reason for the gap. Grit and character education will not change the racial achievement gap.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-Black-white-test-score-gap-why-it-persists-and-what-can-be-done/>

Higher suspension rates for children of color:

- Restorative practices to include but not limited to:

-community-building circles within the classroom

-classroom norm setting

- community circles for classroom content
- restorative chats amongst faculty
- active listening training
- affective communication training (I-messages)
- curiosity questions training
- sentence starters for conflict resolution training
- training white teachers to recognize cultural differences and how they impact behaviors in the classroom, specifically from boys of color
- moving away from order and compliance, and toward mutual respect and observance

of co-generated classroom rules **Test Score Gap:**

- Reduce class sizes
- Offer free test prep classes
- Set minimum standards of academic competency for teachers
- Adjust teachers' expectations for low-performing students (Teacher Expectations Student Achievement, i.e., **TESA** protocols). All these changes would benefit both Blacks and whites, but all appear to be especially beneficial for Blacks.
- Find new ways to assess students' ability and achievement validly, prioritizing lived experience. Assessment instruments and procedures must be valid for the population being assessed. (Tests that are not sensitive to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds will often merely indicate what the students don't know (about the mainstream culture and language) and very little about what they do know.)
- Finally, stop focusing solely on fixing test scores and refocus on teaching/learning.

Limited access to gifted and talented education

- Stop using standardized test scores for referral into these programs, and consider other demonstrable traits: unusual promise in art, music, math, science and lived experience. The majority of gifted/talented ed programs focus on English language arts and reading over STEM/STEAM. (Note: As of 2023, OPRFHS D200 has de-tracked all freshmen into honors level.)

- Determine what student needs are to be addressed in such a program. Consider these recommendations from Education Week: <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/gifted-education-comes-up-short-for-low-income-and-Black-students/2021/04>
- Increase enriching cultural experiences for ALL students. Opportunities to participate in travel, camps, sports teams, art, drama and music education should be available to all students through scholarships and grants.
- Prioritize placing high achieving academic students and low academic achieving students in the same classroom. (Studies show low academic achieving students benefit greatly from observing and learning from high achieving academic students)

COMPENSATION-

- Reimburse taxes to Black families who did not receive an equal education as compared to their white counterparts **REHABILITATION**
- Provide free tutoring services to Black students
- Teach an accurate history of Black Oak Park to all students at all grade levels (see satisfaction for more details)
- Invest in recruitment of Black teachers
- Pay Black teachers higher salaries in order to offset the discriminatory environment they have to navigate and also to retain top talent
- Create a Black teacher affinity group with funding to allow Black teachers to connect and build community **SATISFACTION -**
- Local residents and District 97 need to publicly recognize that the history of Oak Park includes the presence of African Americans in its early settlement and contemporary history because it is not currently part of the District's social studies curricula, and it should be. District 97 has administrative authority to revise their Social Science/Individuals and Societies Curriculum. The book, Suburban Promised Land: The Emerging Black Community in Oak Park, Illinois, 1880-1980 has been thoroughly researched by Oak Parkers and the Oak Park Historical Society, and it documents the presence of African Americans in Oak Park from its early settlement until 1980. The

book Suburban Promised Land is a great resource that could add value to District 97's 2021 commitment to an Inclusive and Anti-Racist Curriculum and should be added to the District's social sciences curricula.

■ ■ ■

History of Discrimination in High School District 200

One of the most enabling sensibilities to come out of this work is a certain satisfaction knowing that real, flesh and blood, Black people lived in Oak Park at the turn of the century. How did they negotiate the long trending virtues of *belonging* as they struggled to build lives in and around William Street (now Westgate)? But the Black people who lived in the Williams Street section of Oak Park pushed past obstacles erected against them to expect equal shares of everything under the law, including education, even if they themselves didn't directly benefit.

For at least 40 years now, for complicated reasons, many African American students attending Oak Park River Forest High School have been unable to realize acceptable levels of academic and communal success. This claim is not new, nor is it intended to portray D200 as failing all students. On the contrary, many students, including Black students, attending D200 are doing exceptionally well –but far too many African American students continue to underperform. Many people will assert that our claims should best be taken up as *equity* issues, i.e., where individual students' needs are addressed proactively. This may be true, but racism affects the collective, and our claims are collective reparative demands (where the harm done to a group of students is repaired after the fact) as well. Reparations and equity are not the same, though they overlap; both strive to accomplish common goals.

This report presents persistent collective issues in Oak Park River Forest High School District 200 (OPRFHS) that require repair after presenting a brief history of how Black families in Oak Park endured the racism found in District 200 between 1910s and 2020s. After the history of discriminatory behaviors from D200, we will present **5 issues that demonstrate critical disparities in educational infrastructures in D200**: 1) standardized testing gaps, 2) under-representation in Honors and Advanced Placement classes, 3) over-representation in Special Education, 4) high suspension/expulsion rates for African American students, and 5) lack of educators of color. We will also discuss how our Black children have been harmed by these persistent issues.

Oak Park River Forest High School 1910 - 1980

African American students attended OPRFHS long before the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. When Dorothy Brown attended OPRFHS in the 1910s, she was the only Black student, and her Latin teacher kept her from graduating. She had to transfer to Englewood High School in Chicago to graduate. Faith Jefferson and Archie Webster, both class of 1923, were the first African American graduates of OPRFHS. Faith Jefferson's house at 622 S. Cuyler was firebombed twice before she finished high school, and when she expressed desire to become a social worker, her OPRFHS teachers discouraged her. Their principal at the time wrote in the 1923 yearbook about a generalized "Sambo" and why he wanted a high school education, answering, *"Sure boss, so I won't have to work no mo.'...By work Sambo meant that for which his racial history had best prepared him and that to which his racial history had sentenced him, -manual labor."* (West, et al., 34)

LeRoy Brodie, class of 1933, and Lewis Pope, class of 1938, both played football for the high school. But in 1937 as a halfback on the undefeated varsity team, Lewis Pope could not play the invitational Orange Bowl in Miami, FL because of Jim Crow. Neither his coach nor his principal (the same man who'd written the Sambo remarks in 1923), stood up for him or pulled the team from the game. Following precedent set by northern colleges when playing in the Jim Crow south, OPRFHS left behind Lewis Pope to broadcast the game's play-by-play in the high school's auditorium to a crowd of 1,500. The game ended tied 7-7. While both Faith Jefferson and Lewis Pope were honored many decades later (Jefferson-Jones, posthumously in 1985, and Pope in 1999) with portraits in the school's *Tradition of Excellence* gallery, it could never erase the damage done to them. By 1970, there were still only NINE Black students enrolled, which grew to 388 students in 1980.

In the 1980s and 1990s, OPRFHS underwent significant tumultuous cultural upheavals. Tensions between students, teachers and staff were strained. Passing periods in the corridors became warzones with fights and disrespectful language until

“In March, 1998 [Black parents], Mary Jane Hollis and George Bailey, began facilitating group dialogue sessions at Oak Park and River Forest High School. The sessions...addressed three concern[s]: climate, belonging, and achievement.

A.P.P.L.E Focus Groups and Report, 1998

As early as the 1980s(the first influx of Black residents following open housing) African American parents in Oak Park School District 97 and District 200 saw the need to advocate for their children’s quality education. Their concern and actions established the *African American Parents for Purposeful Leadership in Education (A.P.P.L.E.)*. This organization spread to several schools in both districts and was a positive agent in educating Black students at that time. We cite A.P.P.L.E. here because it illustrated how African Americans, along with large segments of the white community, saw the discrepancies in achievement and tried to do something about it.

There had been racial tensions at the high school since the mid 1970s and through the 1980s, but during the late 1990s Oak Park River Forest High School [Teachers’] Cabinet, the District 200 Board of Education, and the Oak Park River Forest High School Human Relations Committee [which were] identified as issues requiring resolution in order to maintain, and improve the high school’s mission of providing quality education for students living Oak Park River Forest communities.” (Bailey, 1998)

Those issues were identified in dialogue sessions consisting of three, two-hour sessions in which over 400 participants representing every area of the high school met over the course of three consecutive weeks. Each person was required to meet 6 hours total. There were 26 individual groups of 15-20 people in 78 group sessions that dialogued. The year-long dialogue process was divided into Spring and Fall and focused upon three central issues:

1. How do we create **a more hospitable climate** for the entire Oak Park and River Forest High School teaching and learning community?
2. How do we create an environment within Oak Park and River Forest High School wherein everyone feels **a sense of belonging** to this high school community?
3. How do we create **a teaching and learning environment where all** students, and especially African American students, **can achieve?** (*ibid*)

In spite of several recommendations that came from these focus groups, very little change in behavior came from the dialogue process. An extensive qualitative report summarized each session, and Dr. Donald Offerman, Superintendent of District 200 at that time, viewed it as “a yeoman’s effort.”

AAAST Study, 2003

Five years later in May of 2003, the African American Achievement Study Team (AAAST), in cooperation with District 200 published an impressive study entitled: ***The Learning Community Performance Gap: An Analysis of African American Achievement Oak Park and River Forest High School***. This study is an important document that only recently, twenty years later, has found resonance in detracking and restructuring the Freshman curriculum at OPRFHS. Recommendations coming out of the team’s work, in retrospect, were ahead of its time. Dr. Carl Spight, who co-wrote the document and served as a statistician at OPRFHS, helped to resurrect it in the late 2010s and advocated for critical elements of it to the District 200 Board. The study presents a highly dynamic and complex set of teaching and learning issues and questions now underway at OPRF. While it is not possible here to present the voluminous quantitative/qualitative data sets or lengthy, detailed analytical summaries of this work, here are two passages from the document that may serve as a compass to what the team wanted to community to understand about the performance gap and how to address it :

“Because the mean academic performance of African American students is so consistently below (ie., one grade point) that of White students regardless of their enrollment in accelerated/honors, college preparatory/regular, transition/basic, or special education courses at OPRFHS, a catalyst for change becomes imperative.” (AAAST, Executive Summary, 2003)

This second passage, excerpted from the 2003 *Major Qualitative Findings* section of the team’s study, describes social qualities needed by African American students to attain higher academic performance at OPRFHS and is entitled, “The Triple Quandary”:

“The academic achievement of Black students is enhanced by those students who’ve successfully negotiated the triple quandary. This triple quandary consists of the following theoretical constructs:

- *The Mainstream (White Culture)*
- *The Minority Experience (being non-white)*
- *The Black Cultural Experience (being specifically African American)*

Both qualitative and quantitative results show that African American students in the AAST sample who endorsed internalization of The Black Racial Identity And Attitude Scale (BRIAS), have higher weighted GPAs. African American students in the AAST sample do not have attitudes that identify with either African American or White Culture experiences. They do not reject White cultural norms; instead, they negotiate mainstream, minority and African American cultural experiences within the social ecology.” (AAAST Executive Summary, 2003)

In plain language, because of racism, Black students at OPRFHS have to navigate socially and culturally at three separate levels of awareness: within the white mainstream expectations, behaviors and language; the general minority expectations, behaviors and language; and then within specific Black cultural expectations, behaviors and language, *all at the same time*. Inevitably, there is conflict. Black students may not feel “authentically Black” if they take Honors or AP courses which have few Black people, or if they get good grades or other academic honors. Whites often treat them as “good negroes”(an old American trope to describe Black people that are docile and assimilate well into American society), irritating other Black people. But being a “good negro” is no gift to Black people either. Being a good negro means “white people are watching” and judging every move Black students make, creating a fishbowl-effect paranoia. Other Black students might be critical of “selling out to whitey” or “talking white”. It is very stressful to walk the lines between white school culture expectations and one’s own cultural authenticity, while white students navigating within expectations, behaviors and language of the majority white middle-class culture have no such conflicts because the high school’s culture is normed to them.

Blueprint Educational Group Needs Assessment, 2011

Another study that focused generally on the standardized test score gap (as measured by state-mandated annual standardized testing), school climate, and overall quality of education for all comes from the *Blueprint Educational Group* (May, 2011). Entitled *Oak Park and River Forest High School Organizational Needs Assessment*, the study emphasized the need

to respond to parent and student needs. However, the Blueprint Group's *Assessment* "identified themes that revealed inconsistencies in quality, focus, expectation and accountability" of the professional, administrative and teaching cultures at OPRFHS. The study also stated "a need [for OPRFHS] to align resources, vision and commitments with rhetoric... related to disparate academic outcomes linked to student race." In plain language, District 200's Board, staff and administration needed to commit to improvement of low academic achievement caused by racial inequities to their vision statements, policies and prodigious resources. In 2012, the Board and faculty tried to remedy Black students' perennially unacceptably low academic performances by assuming they resulted from **deficits** related to racism (putting the onus to improve on the victims of their failed policies), rather than addressing racist attitudes, expectations, and culture of the school (putting the onus for change on those who control the attitudes, expectations and school culture, i.e. administration and faculty).

"America to Me" Starz docuseries, 2018

In 2015-16, the 10-episode documentary series on Starz, "America to Me" was filmed at OPRFHS, depicting daily life over a school year for twelve students. The students and families who agreed to be filmed spanned different races, social classes, and academic tracks within the school community. The documentary highlights the Oak Park way of dealing with race and changing the cultural system that works for some, but not all. Steve James, filmmaker of *Hoop Dreams* (1994), sent his 3 kids through OPRFHS and said the film is about "how individuals can persevere within a broken system, and how much harder that system makes it for some of them" ("[Steve James on How Oak Park Has Reacted to America to Me](#)". 2018-10-30. *Slate Magazine*.) In this documentary series, biracial teacher Jess Stoval struggled to establish a research-based, data driven, method of changing that system, using cohorts of 3 teachers and 1 teacher observer called WOVEN (**W**ith an **O**bjective **V**iew, the **E**ducation-debt **N**arrows). In New Zealand,

"it dramatically improved the multiracial learning environment, resulting in students wanting to be in school and taking it more seriously; disruptive behaviors declined, and students went from

24% meeting national standards to 75% meeting the standards in just one year—and the only change was utilizing the teacher feedback program to change teacher mindsets about the types of learning conversations going on in their classrooms.” (Phil Prale, OPRFHS asst. superintendent, 4/2016, in a recommendation memo to the Board).

Stoval had high hopes that Curriculum and Instruction would embrace the protocol, but we see in the documentary that her efforts were not well-supported. She left OPRFHS shortly after, as did Chala Holland, another talented Black educator that OPRFHS let slip away because the systemic change they advocated threatened the implicit power structure. Loss of Black educators in the system deprives our kids of role models, advocates, and people they can trust.

This ongoing OPRFHS history weeps persistent **harms** to Black folk that require repair. These **harms** stem from critical disparities in educational infrastructures in D200:

- 1) Race-based standardized testing: African American under-performance scores over decades
- 2) Under-representation in Honors and Advanced Placement classes
- 3) Over-representation in Special Education
- 4) High suspension/expulsion rates for African American students
- 5) Lack of educators of color

Harm #1) Standardized Testing and African American underperformance: Narratives in the Numbers

This 2007-2019 OPRFHS Report Card from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) illustrates Tier 2 - Below Academic Standards, second of four levels of performance on the annual standardized tests. The report card shows ten years of African American Juniors' academic performance on state-mandated achievements tests in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics and Science. There are two achievement tests reported here; the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE), which also tested Science, was replaced in 2015 with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test, which dropped the Science test. We could show thirty years of similar performance but such a large amount of

data would take up much space with the same conclusions. The numbers show percentages of Black students that fell into the BELOW STANDARDS category between 2007 and 2019:

Metric Tiers for Ability Grouping OPRFHS Illinois State Report Card

PRAIRIE STATE ACHIEVEMENT EXAMINATION (PSAE) The following tables show the percentages of student scores in each of four performance levels. These levels were established with the help of Illinois educators who teach the grade levels and learning areas tested. Due to rounding, the sum of the percentages in the four performance levels may not always equal 100.

Level 1 -- Academic Warning - Student work demonstrates limited knowledge and skills in the subject. Because of major gaps in learning, students apply knowledge and skills ineffectively.

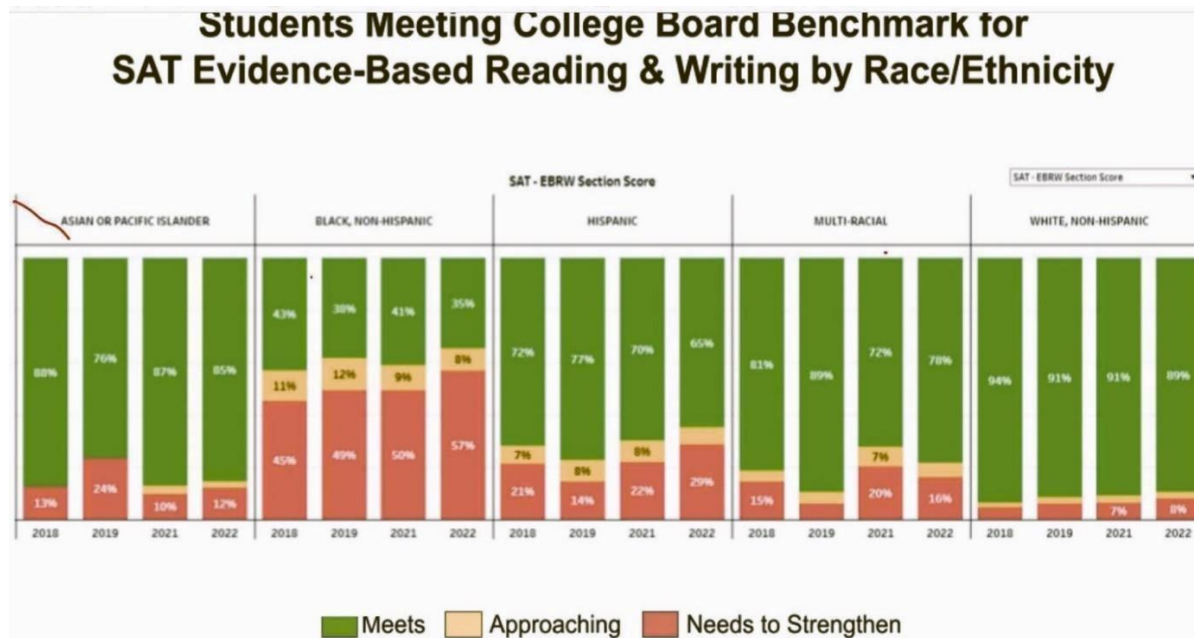
Science	48.2	50.2	48.4	55.1	58.4	55.2	00.0	00.0				
Math	52.4	50.0	47.9	54.1	41.4	52.5	43.4	41.2	31.7	33.6	44.8	
Eng./ELA.	56.0	35.0	37.5	45.4	48.8	49.0	41.1	45.7	50.0	35.6	44.4	
	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2014	2015	2017	2018	2019		

*Level 2 -- Below Standards - Student work demonstrates basic knowledge and skills in the subject. However, because of gaps in learning, students apply knowledge and skills in limited ways.

Level 3 -- Meets Standards - Student work demonstrates proficient knowledge and skills in the subject. Students effectively apply knowledge and skills to solve problems.

Level 4 -- Exceeds Standards - Student work demonstrates advanced knowledge and skills in the subject. Students creatively apply knowledge and skills. (All performance scores are taken from level 2)

The cumulative twelve-year averages in the three disciplines: English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics and Science, are shocking. 45-50% of Black OPRFHS students testing in Math and ELA Over 12 years remain BELOW STANDARDS in achievement compared to all other students. In Science achievement, more than 50% of Black OPRFHS students were BELOW STANDARDS. And the numbers barely change from year to year, illuminating troubling issues about what were, and are, “the demonstrated knowledge and skills” that Tier 2 students possess, and what approaches might serve to launch them forward--beyond Tier 2?



Data from the report card questions the Board's lack of urgency regarding the high percentages of African American students who remain stuck in the lower quartiles of academic performance at Oak Park River Forest High School. This report summarizes decades of District 200's ineffective efforts to address the Black student test-score gap in its mission statement and educational practices. Feeding these chronically low standardized-test scores are a history of:

- 1) tracking of Black students into College Prep and Basic classes which effectively closes their access to Honors and Advanced Placement classes,
- 2) over-referral of Black students into Special Education which again, lowers teacher expectations, demoralizes students, deprives students of enriching learning opportunities,
- 3) higher-than-average discipline issues and suspension rates driven by white teachers and administrators who do not understand the culture of their minority students and often hold unconscious racial stereotypes that lead to inequitable application of discipline, and

4), a lack of teachers who reflect the culture of the students they educate. Black teachers are more successful at supporting the achievement and well-being of Black children. There are fewer discipline issues and fewer dean referrals (interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline). Students of color believe Black teachers are more successful at supporting their achievement and their well-being (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0013189X16671718>).

5) Additionally, we must recognize that these tests are standardized on primarily white, middle class students' educational and life experiences which are different from Black middle class educational and life experiences. Even when Black and white students come from the same community, church, preschool, elementary school, in other words, controlling for every variable imaginable, white students will almost always outscore Black students. This indicates intrinsic cultural biases built into the tests that remain in spite of broadening the norming population. Standardized tests have always been and continue to be biased against the Black American experience

(<https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/racist-beginnings-standardized-testing>).

These five inter - connected issues and the harms they cause historically relegate Black students to lower quartiles of academic performance in majority white high schools in the United States.

Harm #2) Under-representation in Honors and Advanced Placement classes

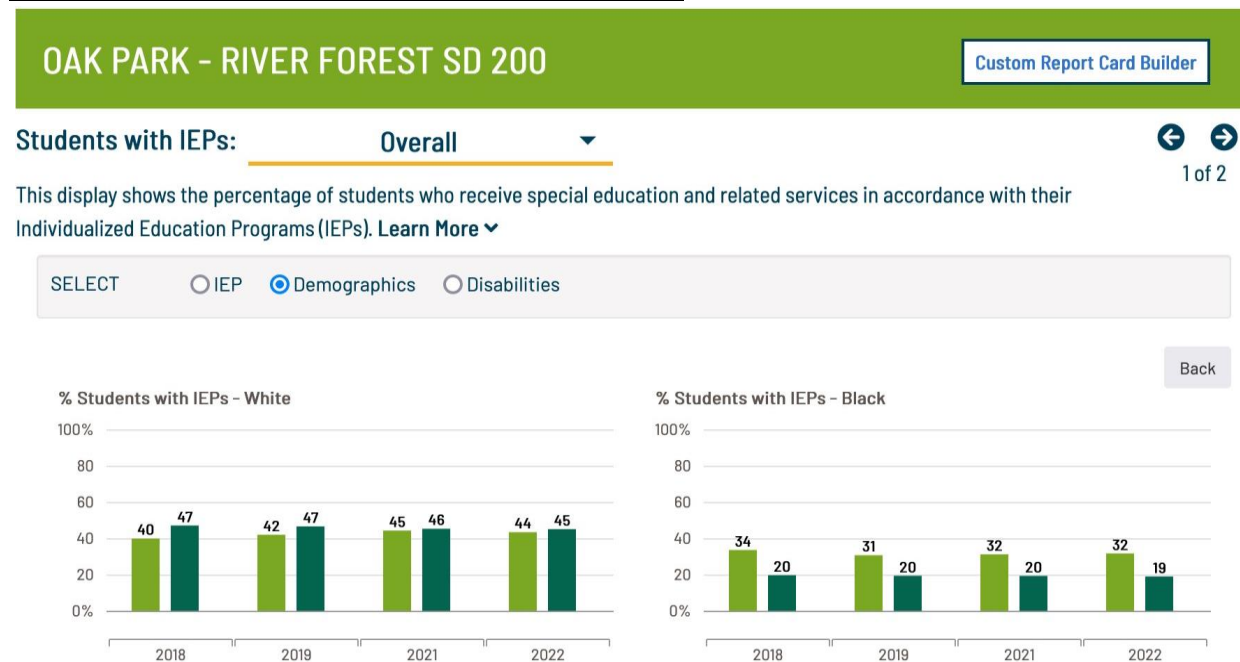
Ability grouping and its sibling, tracking, have been the main delivery system of curricula at OPRFHS since the beginning. But because Black students preponderate in the lower tracks, the harm is that teachers tend to have reduced expectations for Black students. Other harms of the lower tracks include: missing out on vital learning opportunities that can set students up for success in college and careers, missing out on the most skilled teachers, less demanding curricula, and demoralized students. Teachers' union leadership and other dominant voices in the community and on the board have questioned ability tracking based on test scores because it creates a "separate but not equal" educational system. The **2011 Blueprint Assessment**

findings, based on lengthy qualitative interviews with a representative group of 60 administrators, teachers, and community members, concluded that OPRF was two schools, separate and racially inequitable — an assertion made by APPLE and community activists for a generation. Especially disheartening was the finding that the faculty also experienced an educational divide between the honors/AP faculty and those who taught the college prep and transitions tracks.

The **2011 Blueprint Assessment** was rejected by influential board members and essentially hidden from ongoing discourse around racial equity. The pattern, sadly, was familiar at OPRFHS — sponsor focused research on how race and education intersected — then either delay action, provide more remediation, or simply reject the unsettling findings the study revealed. (Duffy, *Wednesday Journal*, June, 2021

<https://www.oakpark.com/2021/06/01/racial-justice-tipping-point-at-oprf/>). Only when the Committee for Equity and Excellence in Education called on equity advocates and new board members in 2015-16 to examine the report did the study begin to play a role in the emerging commitment to address structural racism in D200, including the report's recommendation to develop a unitary freshman curriculum grounded in equity. In 2022-2023, to increase access to rigorous coursework for all students, the high school launched a restructured curriculum for freshman core classes. The college prep level has been eliminated for all freshmen, and they will take honors level classes for English, science, and history. 2022-23 has been the first school year to institute this change with the freshman class, and so the data are yet to be analyzed.

Harm #3) Over-representation in Special Education



Referrals into Special Education services usually come from teachers, and sometimes by parental request. Light green is District 200 data; dark green is the State data for comparison. The data come from the 2021-22 D200 State Report Card. Although the white students are 55% of the total school population, 44% of them have an IEP. Meanwhile, Black students are 18% of total enrollment but represent 32% of all the IEPs at OPRFHS.

Harm #4) High suspension/expulsion rates for African American students

4/27/2015 1:43 pm

Note: To protect student privacy, cell sizes of less than 10 are suppressed; cell sizes of 10 or more are suppressed when disclosure would allow indirect disclosure of cell sizes of less than 10.

2014 Number of Students Suspended More Than Once by Gender, Grade Cluster, and Race/Ethnicity

Suspension: SIS Discipline Code 03 In School Suspension			
White	Male:	Female:	Total:
Two or More Races	Male:	Female:	Total:
	Total:	Total:	Grand Total:
District: Oak Park - River Forest SD 200 (200013)			
Students Suspended More Than Once - Grade 9-12			
Hispanic or Latino	Male:	Female:	Total: 18
American Indian or Alaska Native	Male:	Female:	Total:
Asian	Male:	Female:	Total:
Black or African American	Male: 68	Female: 42	Total: 110
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Male:	Female:	Total:
White	Male:	Female:	Total: 24
Two or More Races	Male:	Female:	Total:
	Total: 106	Total: 57	Grand Total: 163
District: Proviso Area Exceptional Child (803060)			

This table from ISBE shows that 110/163 Black students, male and female, were suspended more than once in 2014. This means 67% of all students who were suspended more than once

were Black. Meanwhile, 24/163 white students had repeat suspensions; almost 15% of all students suspended more than once in the same year were white.

Suspensions harm students; they lose instructional time and fall behind. Suspended students are branded as “troublemakers”, and so, lower their teachers’ expectations. Suspensions do not deter or reduce misbehavior; suspensions poison school climate for students vulnerable to this type of discipline ([An Empirical Examination of the Effects of Suspension and Suspension Severity on Behavioral and Academic Outcomes](#), 2021).

Suspensions harm students because they fail to teach students anything about resolving conflicts or changing behaviors, and they remove students from the classroom where they can learn such behaviors. Suspensions are a punitive loss of academic time and contribute to students falling behind academically. Notably, Black families who pay the same taxes as white families receive less academic class time.

District Name	School Name	Action Description	Total Incidents	Total	Alcohol	Violence With Physical Inj	Violence Without Physic	Drug Of	Dangerous Weapon: Fire	Dangerous Weapon: O	Other Reason	Tobacco	
3200	Oak Park - River Forest SD 200	Oak Park & River Forest High Sch	In-School Suspension	309	206	15	0	65	28	0	4	128	69
3201	Oak Park - River Forest SD 200	Oak Park & River Forest High Sch	Out-of-School Suspension	37	29	0	1	15	10	1	3	6	1
3202	Oak Park ESD 97	Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School	In-School Suspension	54	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	54	0
3203	Oak Park ESD 97	Percy Julian Middle School	In-School Suspension	36	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	36	0
3204	Oak Park ESD 97	William Beye Elem School	In-School Suspension	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
3205	Oak Park ESD 97	William Hatch Elem School	In-School Suspension	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
3206	Oak Park ESD 97	Oliver W Holmes Elem School	In-School Suspension	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
3207	Oak Park ESD 97	Irving Elem School	In-School Suspension	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
3208	Oak Park ESD 97	Abraham Lincoln Elem School	In-School Suspension	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
3209	Oak Park ESD 97	Longfellow Elem School	In-School Suspension	12	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0
3210	Oak Park ESD 97	Horace Mann Elem School	In-School Suspension	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
3211	Oak Park ESD 97	Whittier Elem School	In-School Suspension	11	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0
3212	Oak Park ESD 97	Whittier Elem School	Out-of-School Suspension	18	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0
3213	Oak Park ESD 97	Horace Mann Elem School	Out-of-School Suspension	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
3214	Oak Park ESD 97	Longfellow Elem School	Out-of-School Suspension	15	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0
3215	Oak Park ESD 97	Abraham Lincoln Elem School	Out-of-School Suspension	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0
3216	Oak Park ESD 97	Oliver W Holmes Elem School	Out-of-School Suspension	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
3217	Oak Park ESD 97	William Beye Elem School	Out-of-School Suspension	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
3218	Oak Park ESD 97	Percy Julian Middle School	Out-of-School Suspension	16	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0
3219	Oak Park ESD 97	Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School	Out-of-School Suspension	20	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	0

The post-covid data on suspensions does not break down suspension by race. ISBE again provides these data, which show more suspensions in middle school than in elementary, and more suspensions in high school than in middle school.

Harm #5) Lack of educators of color

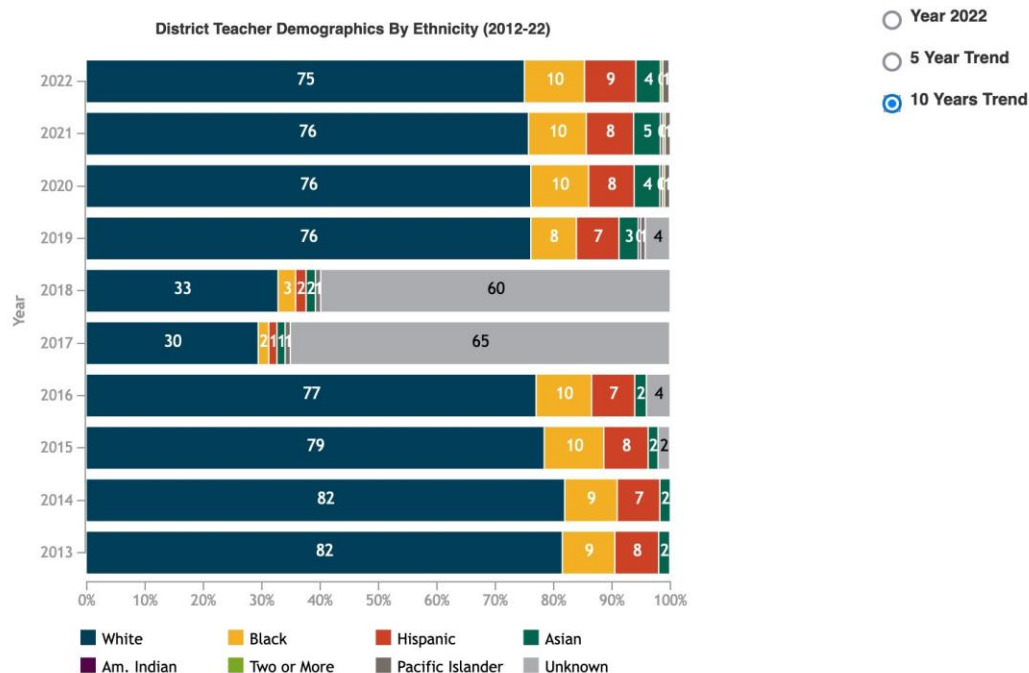
OAK PARK - RIVER FOREST SD 200 Custom Report Card Builder

Demographics: Demographics



1 of 2

The chart displays the demographics for teachers in this district. The numeral within the circle is the total number of teachers (FTE). [Learn More](#)



There has historically been a lack of teachers of color at the high school. One can see in the chart above that “lack” over just the last 10 years. Illinois State Rep. Camille Lily, an alumna of OPRFHS, presented on this topic at a 2018 school board meeting:

<https://www.oakpark.com/2018/03/06/demands-for-more-minority-teachers-at-fever-pitch/>

The lack of minority teachers harms Black District 200 students because it creates a lack of cultural empathy and understanding in many classrooms. That lack of representation heightens a sense of student alienation and, at times, contributes to an outright hostile environment for minority students.

And the dearth of minority teachers in mainstream classes adversely affects white students, too:

(<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/08/teachers-of-color-white-students/400553/>)

For white students, having a teacher of color expands their experience with other races, increasing their tolerance and anti-racism. Having a teacher of color shows those teachers in leadership roles, expanding white students' world view, increasing their racial socialization. Having teachers of color chips away at stereotypes and prejudices. Black teachers of white students offer racial relationship-building opportunities.

OPRF must remain focused on eradicating these disparities. Those harmed by the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and aggressive policing must control the process of reparatory justice and dictate its terms. Institutions responsible for harm should be asked to listen first—and act second. Finally, we end this section on District 200 history of discrimination with respectful invocations to teaching and teachers. Like many of us whose children negotiated District 97, and District 200, we consider the number of children adrift in the 40th quartile and wonder who will come for them? What and who will they become? They are our children, too.

Recommended Repairs

CESSATION and ASSURANCE of NON-REPETITION/ Rehabilitation

Standardized testing- African American under-performance scores over decades

-Stop focusing on fixing test scores and refocus on teaching/learning. Assess students' ability and achievement validly. Assessment instruments and procedures must be valid for the population being assessed. Tests that are not sensitive to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds will often merely indicate what the students don't know (about the mainstream culture and language) and very little about what they do know. Top-tier colleges are moving away from ACT and SAT scores for acceptance.

-Fully institute W.O.V.E.N. (With an Objective View, the Education Gap Narrows) protocols, approved by Asst. Superintendent for Curriculum, Phil Prale in 2016. [Oak Park and River Forest High School District 200](#)

-WOVEN includes trained teacher equity coaches, Restorative Practices and Peace Circles and teacher cohorts for peer observations with substantive feedback.

-Fully re-institute TESA (Teacher Expectations Student Achievement) protocols.

Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement

-TESA includes 14 teaching protocols in three strands, including providing equal opportunity for responding or performing, giving equal feedback to students, allowing students enough time to think over questions before assisting or ending the opportunity to respond, stopping a student's misbehavior in a calm and courteous manner, using higher-level questioning in ALL levels of instruction from Special Education to Advanced Placement.

Under-representation in Honors and Advanced Placement classes

- -Pre identify, recruit and retain with support students to take Pre-AP and AP classes.
- -Open pre-AP and AP classes to any student willing to take on the challenge.
- -Offer free 6 week preview AP classes during summer.
- -3-5 day free AP summer camp with focus on study skills
- -Mandatory study groups and free tutoring
- -AP Informational Night for parents and students
- -Practice AP tests in classroom with feedback and testing strategies taught

Over-representation in Special Education

- -Investigate District97 policies and investigate why over-referral occurs at the elementary level.
- -Once an IEP has been written, include IEP students in regular classes as much as possible. Require supervised tutoring, as opposed to study halls. **High suspension/expulsion rates for African American students**
- Restorative practices

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-ways-to-implement-restorative-practices-in-the-classroom/2020/01> enable students to learn from unacceptable choices, understand

their impact, make better decisions and resolve problems, take ownership of their behavior,

and engage in acts of empathy and forgiveness. Restorative practices include: community-building circles, classroom norm setting , community circles for content, restorative chats, active listening, affective communication (I-messages), curiosity questions, how to apologize, sentence starters for conflict resolution.

Lack of educators of color

- Recruit and train people of color inside the District to become teachers. Candidates might be non-licensed staff members like paraprofessionals or teacher’s assistants, education technicians, students, or simply community members affiliated with the district.
- Establish affinity and support groups for teachers of color, and focus on their well-being.
- Assign mentors of color to new teachers of color.
- Develop pipeline relationships with student teacher programs at HBCUs.
- Increase time, resources and effort to recruiting and retaining teachers of color.

COMPENSATION

Standardized testing- African American under-performance scores over decades -

Provide SAT and ACT prep courses without cost to Black students.

-Pay back taxes to Black families that did not receive an equal education as compared to their white counterparts.

Lack of Black Educators

-Pay certification costs of Black teachers with a requirement to stay in District 200 for 3 years. Consider paying off part of their student loan debt as well. Investing in preparing teachers of color to teach will go a long way to showing their value to the districts and improve the chance of their retention. **SATISFACTION**

-Acknowledge and apologize to past and current OPRF students for not providing an education that fit their needs as evidenced by large differences in standardized testing scores.

-Hold truth telling sessions by Inviting former Black OPRF students back to share their stories and experiences of navigating OPRF and compensate them for their time.

Restitution

N/A

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History of Racial Discrimination in the Township of Oak Park

The Oak Park Township is one of the six taxing bodies in Oak Park. The township has a Board made of of seven residents elected by the community at large. The Township primarily focuses on Youth and Senior services within the Village. Historically, the Township has often flown under the radar given its narrow focus area and relatively small budget when compared to other taxing bodies. That being said, the Township has a tremendous impact in their areas of focus. One of the Township's flagship programs has been the **Youth Engagement Program**. The Youth Engagement Program is a unique display of intergovernmental cooperation and could be used as funding model for a comprehensive reparations program in Oak Park. Until 2019, the Youth Engagement Program received funds from the other 6 Oak Park taxing bodies and continues to receive funds from 5 Oak Park taxing bodies.

The Township's relationship with the Black community has been fairly positive, with many of the program offerings benefiting Black residents directly with support and counseling services. Under the surface, however, there has been a largely charitable and reactionary approach to youth engagement, resulting in the root causes of issues (racism and inequitable opportunities) continuing to plague the community. In the following paragraphs we will discuss how the township has benefited from and contributed to discrimination of Black residents, and where they fell short in wholistically changing the environments of Black youth in Oak Park.

One of the key ways the township has benefited from discrimination is through the **collection of taxes**. All Oak Park taxing bodies have benefited from tax dollars that were generated from the removal of Black residents from around Harlem and Lake. As we have stated previously in the report, Black residents were pushed out of Oak Park to make way for a commercial district. This commercial district has generously fed Oak Park's tax revenues over 90 years, enabling Oak Park to provide municipal services and become a destination community for wealthy residents. This came at the direct expense of Black residents, who were not compensated by the Village for the loss of their land in this district.

In addition to this, the Township, through its Youth Engagement Program (formerly the Youth Interventionist Program), has taken a largely charitable, white-savior approach to youth

intervention which has failed to acknowledge or address the racist root causes of the issues the program was trying to alleviate. The Youth Engagement Program was created to combat gangs, violence, drug use and to prevent youth from engaging in other illicit activities when not in school. In order to be referred to the program youth had to have been involved in gangs, violent activity or drugs. For many reasons, including how discipline is handled in American public schools, most of the youth referred into this program were Black. Once referred, youth interventionists worked directly with the youth to provide accountability, support and counseling services. One of the the first issues we identified with the program is that the referrals came from teachers and administrators who were not using an equity lens. This likely resulted in over-referring Black students because the traditional school model does not engage Black students the way it does white students (see D97 and D200 sections for more details). Another identified issue with the program has been the lack of Black leadership and Black interventionists. In the program's history there have been two leaders, both of whom identify as white. While their race should not instantly disqualify them from leading this program, this report acknowledges how impactful it is for Black youth to see people like them in positions of power. Also, white people doing this work inevitably have inherited blindspots and biases that can negatively impact youth and program design. Particularly in a program like this, those blindspots and biases can be detrimental to youths' trust of institutions, people and systems. Moreover, because youth services did not have a dedicated building or office, many students received services in the Township offices. A former Board member of the organization noted that the Township's structure was a very white corporate environment that alienated many Black volunteers and staff. Needless to say, Black students who were referred to this program may not have felt the most comfortable talking with their interventionists in a predominantly white corporate office environment.

Finally, from our research, there seems to be a lack of focus on the racist root causes that create many of the issues the program sought to address, and more of a focus on alleviating the community of the symptoms of those issues. Some of these root causes are, but not limited to, income inequality, a lack of belonging, school curriculum being targeted towards white students, historical traumas, and more. While it is likely the township did not see some of

this as their purview (perhaps because of the aforementioned blindspots?), there was a huge missed opportunity to use this unique intergovernmental collaboration to create equity, repair harms, and proactively address the issues that caused youth to engage in gangs, drugs and violence. The program treats the symptoms and not the causes, and as a result, the root causes still exist; although some symptoms have been alleviated, the problems persist. Lastly, removing the symptoms from view has allowed people in Oak Park the comfort of not seeing the results of inequities in the community.

HARMS Summary:

- Taking a largely charitable, white-savior approach to youth intervention which has failed to acknowledge or address the racist root causes of the issues the program was trying to alleviate.
- Focusing only on alleviating the community of the symptoms of those issues, rather than their root causes in racist actions.
- Utilizing a very white corporate environment that alienated many Black volunteers and staff.
- Over-referring Black students for services and lack of Black leadership for Black clients.

Recommended Repairs

CESSATION and ASSURANCE of NON-REPETITION -

- Find safe spaces outside of township offices to have conversations with youth and families.
- Prioritize Black leadership of township youth services program.
- Hire an anti-racism consultant yearly to do a review of the Townships policies and practices. - Hire a DEI consultant to do a root cause analysis to identify why youth become involved in gangs, drugs and violence and dedicate resources to address the root causes.
- Engage a reparative justice consultant to implement ongoing reparative justice initiatives. - Address income inequities, opportunity gaps, jobs for youth, and lack of mentors of color.

COMPENSATION

- Provide monetary stipends to participants or the families of the youth in the youth services program

SATISFACTION

- Apologize and acknowledge publicly places where the Youth Services Program has fallen short and publish a plan to correct those harms.
- Interview past participants in the youth services program from 10 years ago to get their feedback on the program and how it can be improved.

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History of Discrimination by the Oak Park Park District 1912-present

(research taken from the *OakLeaves* 1912-1967, and OPRF History Museum folder entitled:

“Oak Park Parks’ History - Includes RECREATION history 1916-1967”)

The **Park District of Oak Park** began in 1912 with voters’ approval of a PARK DISTRICT, PARK COMMISSIONERS, and a BOND ISSUE to fund it all. In 1913, famed landscape architect, Jens Jensen designed Scoville Park, the layout of which today remains very similar to its original plan. In 1915, the **Park District of Oak Park** came into being with only the power to purchase and maintain parkland. The **Park District of Oak Park** had neither authority nor funds to establish programming; in 1921, the **Village of Oak Park Recreation Department** was established to purchase property, contract services, operate recreational programs, and hire a recreational director.

The State of Illinois then and now imposed debt limits on its special taxing bodies, like park districts and library districts. This was to protect them from taking on too much debt, but at the same time, it limited their abilities to fund their services with taxes. One way to get around this limit was to form new taxing bodies inside existing geographic areas, which increased the amount of debt to what both bodies could carry together. Without these multiple special taxing bodies, the Village could not have met costs of building infrastructure. Both special taxing bodies (The **Park District of OP** and the **VOP Recreation Department**) had power to levy taxes to support themselves, which they did. But it resulted in Oak Park having authority over its parks and recreational programming split into two different entities.

This split endured until 1970 when the **Recreation Department** could no longer levy enough to support itself, and the Village Board began supplementing their budget. By 1972, equal amounts were raised by both levy and Village Transfer taxes to fund both parks and recreation, and the Village of Oak Park began monitoring the **Recreation Department’s** budget more closely. By 1974, the Village eliminated the budget line for Recreation, and the Village’s General fund began to fund park services completely. By 1979, the **Park District of Oak Park**, in competition for services and personnel with the **Recreation Department**, could no longer hire leadership. First proposed in 1977, a merger between the two bodies was finalized by an

election in 1980, and the **Recreation Department** was subsumed into the **Park District of Oak Park**. Consolidation improved funding to all Park District properties and programs, as well as eliminating costly redundancies between the two taxing bodies.

In May, 1968, the Fair Housing Act was passed by Village trustees; meanwhile Oak Park began integrating throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Sometime during the 1970s and/or 80s, the Park District of Oak Park quietly took down basketball hoops at all the Village's outdoor basketball courts (as did D97 at its elementary school playgrounds), putting them up two to three hours a day. This was originally done in response to resident concerns about the kind of crowd the basketball courts attracted after hours. The Beverly neighborhood on Chicago's far-Southside did a similar thing for similar reasons:

<https://blockclubchicago.org/2023/10/16/basketball-hoops-were-ripped-out-of-beverly-decades-ago-now-a-push-to-bring-them-back/>.

But in 2009 a Wednesday Journal editorial reported,

“neighbors of the Longfellow Park at Ridgeland and Jackson were worried about their park and sensed that it was being taken from them by punks and knuckleheads. As part of the park district's master planning process, Longfellow neighbors took part in planning their refurbished park. To their everlasting credit, neighbors and the park district chose to emphasize a nearly full-sized basketball court and placed it prominently at Ridgeland and Adams. Basketball hoops attract young Black men by the bushel. And as we know, young Black men make many white people wary. That's what makes this effort counterintuitive and, yet, instinctively right. We're inspired to watch these intense and excellent basketball players crowd the court while, 90 feet away, a fabulous new playground is swarmed by toddlers, preschoolers and the people who love them. This friends, is Oak Park.”

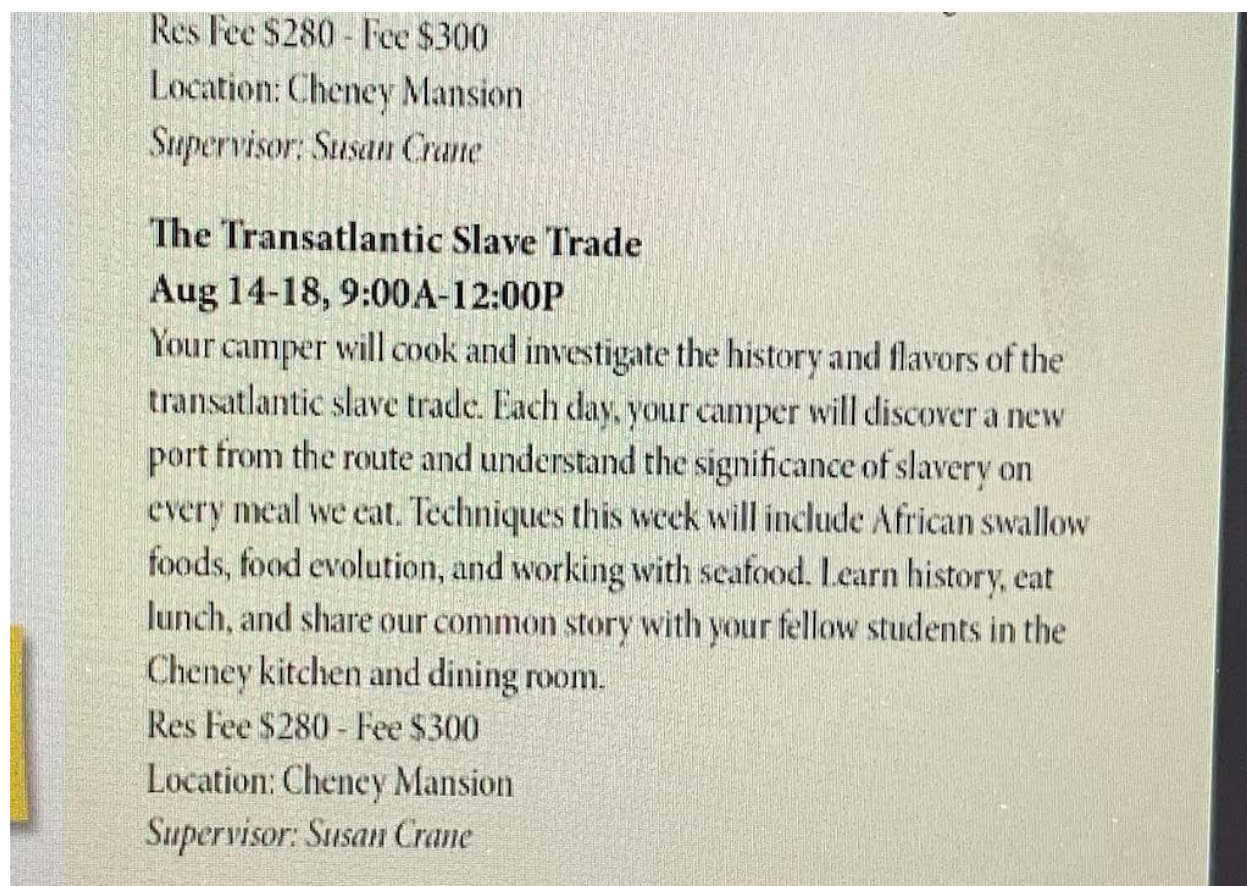
(<https://www.oakpark.com/2009/09/01/hope-grows-as-expulsions-shrink/>)

In 2016 the Park District gathered resident input for a feasibility study, and one of the comments it got was that Oak Parkers wanted the basketball hoops to stay up for longer. After study, the Park District allowed the hoops to stay up between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. while still having the staff take the hoops down at night. According to the 2023 Park District's website, basketball hoops have been installed at three outdoor courts –Barrie, Longfellow and Stevenson Parks. But there are 17 community parks, and 10 schools belonging to elementary

school District 97, and only one of them, Whittier School (in 2022), has restored its outdoor basketball hoops and courts.

The Park District currently in 2023 offers no sport leagues in baseball, basketball, soccer or football; Oak Parkers who wish to pursue these sports must find private for-tuition leagues at the West Cook YMCA, American Youth Soccer Organization, OP Youth Baseball Softball, or OPRF Youth Football. These groups (excepting the YMCA's basketball programs) pay the Park District to use playing fields.

In the Winter 2023 camp catalogue, (a month before Black History Month), the Park District advertised a summer camp entitled, "Cuisine of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade" :



Black Oak Park responded to the insensitivity of the topic and the cultural ignorance of the white instructor with objections, emails and editorials, including from a Village Board member. The Park District's own Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Review Board admitted they had approved the course before pulling it and publicly apologizing. Many Black residents were shocked and

dismayed by the course offering seemingly making light of the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. In addition, many were upset that a white instructor was allowed to profit off of Black American culture in this way.

In spring, 2023, the **Community Recreation Center**, a facility built with public and private funding, opened. The land on which it sits was privately donated to the Park District, and while the Park District of Oak Park funded part of its development and construction, the balance came from grants and private fundraising. Oak Park residents may pay a \$25 monthly membership fee to use the facilities there; for non-member residents, only the walking track (above the gymnasium which non-members cannot use), stretching area and locker rooms, a fraction of the facility, are available for free, public use. Free access is available only for District 97 students after school until 6pm. This Park District facility has essentially become a private club built on donated land with public and private money. The **Park District of Oak Park** owns and maintains the facility with taxpayer money.

This fee for use of a community recreation center is out of reach for “under-resourced and under-represented” residents. \$300/year/person in a family with 3-4 kids comes to \$900-\$1200 just for the children. Concerning low income and under-represented residents of Oak Park, the **Community Recreation Center** says this:

“The Park District will continue community outreach and marketing efforts with School Districts 97 and 200 social workers as well as the Oak Park Township and Public Library to provide continual information about programs and services offered to the community by the Park District, including the District’s Scholarship Program. With a free walking/running track and free open gym and related space, under-resourced Oak Park families can use the Center without financial limitation. The Park District will intentionally seek the input from Black and brown people at all points of planning this project.” (<https://parksfoundationop.org/history/community-recreation-center-faq/>)

“Under-resourced and under-represented residents of Oak Park” means people of color. And these residents, and any who cannot pay a monthly fee of \$25/month, **do not have access to these “community” Park District facilities** other than the walking track above a gymnasium they cannot use. And per their statement, the CRC provides scholarship funding for qualified residents up to 75% of program fees, with funding up to \$300 for each person in need. So under-resourced residents still have to invest money into tax-funded park/gym services. The

Park District also offers a childcare membership discount for school aged kids; They will pay 25% – 55% toward full day, in-house, summer camps and school’s out full day activities. It can also be applied to the afterschool Clubhouse (childcare) program. Children must be Kindergarten through age 14, so there are no scholarships for high school students. This in particular is a problem given that District 200 is about to tear down and rebuild the school’s Physical Education wing, a three year endeavor. The school districts do not provide these scholarships; one must be a resident getting Park District mailings or be in the Park District system from earlier program registrations. In spite of all this, it doesn’t change the lack of access to these quasi-public/private facilities due to user fees.

How is the **Community Recreation Center** a “COMMUNITY” center, if only a portion of the community can afford a gym membership to the quasi-public facility? And the after-school programming is only for K - 8th grade students. There has been no Y-Kids at the West Cook YMCA since Covid-19 took it out. So, poor folk of color, retirees on a fixed income, renters, large families are by design, shut out of the CRC facilities, a **Park District of Oak Park** facility funded operationally by Oak Parker’s tax dollars and fees.

HARMS Summary

-The Park District continues to offer activities/courses on Black topics by white instructors, even as recently as Winter, 2022-3.

-The Park District continues to reinforce fear of Black bodies, a persistent stereotype. By taking down basketball hoops in Village parks/playgrounds after dark when Park District personnel can no longer monitor their use, the Park District sends the message to be wary of young Black men. -The Community Recreation Center is not a community center, and is not accessible for many Black residents. It functions like a private health club or the YMCA, offering memberships to access facilities. It has taken tax-payer money, added a lot of private donations, and restricted the building to those who can further pay. Its basketball gyms are private to members. Its programming has additional costs beyond the membership fee. By using this fee structure and offering/advertising limited scholarship aid, the Park District intentionally

restricts “under-resourced and under-represented” Oak Parkers from this “public” entity. The Community Recreation Center was built to be exclusive, and not inclusive.

REMEDIES

CESSATION and ASSURANCE of NON-REPETITION -

-Improve programming vetting procedures from the Park District’s DEI committee. Add 1-2 Black community members to the course vetting process.

-Hire a anti-racism consultant to evaluate policies and procedures that are harmful to Black residents and make a plan to remedy the findings

RESTITUTION N/A REHABILITATION

-Award full year, CRC scholarships to Black couples or families regardless of income.

Advertise these in the *Wednesday Journal* and *Oak Leaves* or through direct mailings.] -

Allow day passes/rates to any resident.

COMPENSATION

-Offer yearly free programs open to all Black residents this can include classes, programs

SATISFACTION

- Apologize for the Park districts history of discrimination against Black residents

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A History of Racial Discrimination in Oak Park's Religious Institutions

In 1963 Dr. King famously said:

*"We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this. Now, I'm sure that if the church had taken a stronger stand all along, we wouldn't have many of the problems that we have. The first way that the church can repent, the first way that it can move out into the arena of social reform is to **remove the yoke of segregation from its own body**. Now, I'm not saying that society must sit down and wait on a spiritual and moribund church as we've so often seen. I think it should have started in the church, but since it didn't start in the church, our society needed to move on. The church, itself, will stand under the judgment of God. Now that the mistake of the past has been made, I think that the opportunity of the future is to really go out and to transform American society, and **where else is there a better place than in the institution that should serve as the moral guardian of the community, the institution that should preach brotherhood and make it a reality within its own body.**"*

What Dr. King observed nearly 60 years ago is still true in the Village of Oak Park, which has long considered itself a "community of churches". As early as the 1960s, Oak Park's religious organizations have driven social action into municipal public policy. The majority of Oak Park's church buildings are occupied by mainstream sects, with predominantly white congregations headed by white pastors. While some mainstream sects claim a degree of integration with congregants of color in the minority (First United, Euclid Methodist, St. Catherine-St. Lucy-St. Giles, to name a few), relatively few white congregants attend church with people of color in the majority. And while some local congregations of color have white leaders (St. Catherine-St. Lucy-St. Giles, Chicago West Bible Church, 5916 W. Lake St. in Austin), almost no majority white congregations in Oak Park have pastors of color. And while many mainstream sect congregations rent their buildings to congregations of color (Black, Hispanic, Asian congregations all exist within Oak Park's borders), they don't share worship, nor merge their congregations. The extent to which these situations happen suggests it is the result of deliberate choices. The questions we're interested in is: Are those deliberate choices racist? Have congregations benefitted from racial discrimination?

The majority of Oak Park's church buildings are occupied by mainstream sects, with predominantly white congregations headed by white pastors. And while they are located all over the Village, the most-established and best-known tend to be located in the heart of Oak Park, near downtown. Why is that? We know there are non-white congregations within our borders: New Life Ministries on Austin Blvd., Light of Liberty on Washington and Austin Blvd., St. Catherine-St Lucy also on Washington and Austin, New Life Christian Fellowship on North Avenue, Fellowship Christian on Madison between Maple and Wisconsin, Living Sanctuary of Faith on Augusta and Belforte, for some. They tend to be at our borders on or near Austin Boulevard, North Avenue, Harlem Avenue, Roosevelt Road or a block or two inside. Why is that? Even Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, founded in 1905 and Oak Park's first and only Black church until the 1970s (and which was mysteriously burned out of Oak Park in 1929), was located near Harlem on what is now Westgate Street.

In 1987 when First Church of Christ Scientist sought a buyer for its building at Oak Park Ave and Ontario in the center of the village, the Village thwarted its sale to a Black congregation in an action that invited a federal investigation of civil rights law violations. The eventual private buyer of that church said she bought it because she "*just wanted to save that building*" (Wednesday Journal, Nov. 11, 2020). Save it from what, or better, whom? It was not falling apart, and she put little renovation work into it. She held onto it without breaking even for 32 years until a non-denominational, slightly integrated church headed by a white pastor showed interest and bought it. She ironically proclaimed the sale a "*perfect fit*" (*ibid.*), ignoring how she'd blocked its sale to a Black congregation decades earlier.

Was the church's choice racist to sell to her and not the Black congregation that had negotiated six months? She was a better qualified buyer in the end because she was already deeply connected into Oak Park's real estate business and could pay cash. The Black congregation historically had no such connections nor easy access to financing (largely due to real estate practices addressed in the For Profit section). Was the Village's involvement in blocking the sale to the Black congregation racist? One of the Village Board trustees at the time

warned that “*too many Black faces*” (Chicago Sun Times, 1/19/88) would scare away white shoppers from the Lake/Oak Park Ave district, and adversely affect the “*white demand for services*” (Chicago Defender, Jan 19, 1988). Local papers (*ibid.*; Chicago Tribune Jan 17, 1988) reported that the Village Board feared that Unity’s plans to open a soup kitchen ministry would threaten the safety of the residents at Prairie Court condos, one block south of the church, and that the church’s summer revivals, attracting even more Black people to the area, would discourage whites from moving into Prairie Court. The Oak Park NAACP, the Chicago Defender, Chicago Sun Times, and protesting villagers thought it was racist; the US Attorney Anton Valukas who investigated a possible violation of federal civil rights laws did not. Was the buyer's reason for "*sav[ing] that building*" racist? It certainly seems so in light of its sale back to a congregation headed by a white pastor, a transaction she called a "*perfect fit*".

While many mainstream, majority white congregations rent their buildings to congregations of color (Black, Hispanic, Asian congregations all exist within Oak Park's borders), they don't share worship, nor merge their congregations. Black Pastor Michael Wright of True Freedom Ministries, which has been meeting at Cornerstone Anglican Church at 171 N. Cuyler since 2015 explained why they preferred to stay separate from the Anglican congregation that rents them space and not combine forces and form one congregation, saying in some ways it's a matter of taste:

" 'You have to be true to who you are [culturally], ' he explained. 'The main point is that people need a relationship with Christ. If it takes loud music for you to come to Christ, guess what? We're going to amp it up. If it takes meditative music, then we're going to tone it down.'...Wright and Pastor William Beasley of Cornerstone both used the metaphor of harmony to describe their relationship. 'We don't sing in unison,' Wright explained. 'You do your thing and I do mine.' That's why on most Sundays the two faith communities meet separately for worship, but in sharing the same building — and from time to time worshipping together — they feel like they can retain their own cultural identity without the differences becoming a source of irritation. Beasley said, 'We're not trying to make everybody the same. We respect each other's cultures, but we have harmony in the Lord and that makes a beautiful sound.' "
[\(https://www.oakpark.com/2015/12/15/pageant-brings-congregations-and-races-together/\)](https://www.oakpark.com/2015/12/15/pageant-brings-congregations-and-races-together/)).

But Cornerstone True Freedom is the exception in Oak Park. More typical is the experience of Austin Boulevard Christian Church (ABC) who eventually sold its building to New Life Ministries, a Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C), in 2011 after many years of trying to revive itself through integration. The church had been losing membership since Austin's population changed from white to Black in the 1960s. The minister at the time of closing told the Wednesday Journal (Oct 25, 2011) that its ministers at that time were

"real champions of diversity...and intentionally worked to welcome people of color into the church. To a degree, they were successful with ABC diversifying its membership to include Blacks, whites, Hispanics and Filipinos. The diversity, ironically, became an obstacle to growth, because, contrary to what many Christians long for, multicultural congregations rarely grow. Bailey said that his denomination, Disciples of Christ, no longer even tries to start new congregations which are anything but homogeneous."

Was that deliberate choice by the Disciples of Christ governing body racist? It continues to be a policy based on race to benefit and make future DoC congregations financially sound, spiritually successful, and racially homogeneous. Did ABC church benefit from racial discrimination? It seems so, since once the neighborhood's racial make-up changed and the church started to integrate, the church started to die. The more the church integrated and ministered to non-white congregants, the more white folk left the church, taking with them their financial support.

And then, some Oak Park congregations (for example, True Freedom 171 N Cuyler, Free Church 200 N Oak Park, Village Church 911 S. Taylor, Fellowship Christian Church 1106 Madison, Living Sanctuary of Faith 701 Belleforte, Redeemer Church 6740 North Ave in Chicago) are independent "planted" churches, i.e., churches founded by pastors called to ministry who may not be connected to a mainstream sect nor have necessarily graduated from seminary. Their churches tend to be non-denominational, more evangelical, less formal and less dogmatic. They typically begin in a basement, grow to rent out space in a storefront, school, community center, theater, or another established church, and hopefully and eventually buy a building of their own. The seed money to begin the church usually but not always, comes from

the founding pastor, who then has an incentive to grow the church. Many such pastors work 40 hours/week jobs while growing their church until the congregation grows big enough to support itself, which can take years.

Planted churches in Oak Park with white pastors, however, seem to have an easier time of it than planted churches with Black pastors do. According to a Dec 11, 2012 [Wednesday Journal](#) article, "Indie churches being 'planted' all around Oak Park", Black Pastor Michael Wright of True Freedom Cornerstone and his wife worked full time jobs while taking seminary coursework and running their church out of Beye School. This was before landing at Cornerstone Anglican. But white pastor Chuck Colegrove of Free Church had financial backing from a church Colegrove had worked for in Houston, Texas. That church paid the Colegrove's salaries an entire year while they resettled their family and began to build a new congregation. The Colgroves also received funding from the Association of Related Churches in Birmingham AL, "a cooperative of independent churches from different denominations, networks, and backgrounds who strategically resource church planters and pastors to help them reach people with the message of Jesus" ([About - ARC | Association of Related Churches |](#)) and from Churches in Covenant in Florida. White pastor Cisco Cotto of Village Church 911 S. Taylor was able to seed his church through fundraising, contributions from "*friends, family, business leaders...other churches...[and] people in the congregation who tithe*" ([Wednesday Journal](#) 12/11/12). He did not have to work a day job while seeding a new church. Yet another example of a white pastor who had financial help seeding his church, Rev. Matt Stuhlmuller, (now campus pastor at Augustana Lutheran in Hyde Park) served as the mission development pastor from a mother church, Redeemer Lutheran in Park Ridge, IL. The parent church paid his salary, the national church provided insurance and a pension, and the building was provided by his denomination.

And then, there is the issue of storefront churches. Storefronts are often the first space a (usually Black or Hispanic) congregation obtains after they have outgrown the pastor's basement or living room. Oak Park, unlike the surrounding communities of Galewood, Austin,

Cicero, has a noticeable lack of any storefront churches. Why is that? Does Oak Park lack cheap storefront space to rent? Are there permitting issues?

Are these deliberate choices racist? We think so. Have congregations with white pastors benefitted from racial discrimination? Yes, they have in terms of fundraising to which they seem to have personal if not denominational access. Did the congregations with white pastors have an easier time in seeding their churches than the Black pastor did? Apparently so. These four examples may not indicate a trend, but they do document what has happened within Oak Park.

And what is clear is that the three white pastors and their congregations 15 years later have their own buildings, and the Black pastor's congregation is still renting space in another church.

In summary, the Village of Oak Park's discrimination against its first congregation of color is its original sin. While Mt. Carmel was burned out, (a fire which was never investigated by the Village) and not allowed to grow and thrive, white churches were allowed to buy property, build schools, and grow, resulting in some of the inequities we see. This Village has continued for over 115 years to stifle and discourage congregations of color obtaining a foothold here, and this needs to be acknowledged as an ongoing harm in need of repair. But additionally, the churches and denominations themselves are not blameless either.

HARMS

-Lack of seed money for startup churches outside the main denominations, -

Lack of access to capital, in general, to congregations of color.

-Blocking non- white, non-mainstream sects from purchasing buildings near Oak Park Ave and Lake Street, and forcing them to the outskirts of town; *cf.* the First Church of Christ Scientist fiasco of 1987-8.

-Discouraging establishment of storefront churches.

-Building thriving congregations while Black faith institutions were systematically denied the ability to grow and thrive

Recommended Repairs

CESSATION and ASSURANCE of NON-REPETITION

-Make a commitment to anti-racism and allyship. Become aware of books, conversations, sermons, online coursework and allyship actions. Explore the examples of the Episcopalians, United Methodist Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church of America:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/more-us-churches-are-committing-to-racism-linked-reparations> and [9 Things Your Church Can Do to Fight Racism | Media Center](#)

-Learn and hold public forums on how Christian patterns of theology over the last several hundred years have created the conditions for social justice situations like segregated communities, pipelines through native lands, etc. , and we are responsible for the realities that we see in front of us. Rethink our theologies to address that. When a theologian teaches that to be human is to be Christian, and to be non-Christian is to be somehow 'other,' and that people of other faith traditions might be lesser Americans, that is Christian supremacy. The ideology of Christian supremacy actually informed legislation that dispossessed native people.

-As a faith community wholistically address the reasons why there are so few predominantly Black churches and why its important that Black people have a safe space to practice their faith.

-Individual congregations hire a reparative justice consultant to identify the harms their congregation has caused and benefitted from and how they can repair said harms. Once identified, make every effort to enact repair.

RESTITUTION

-Led by the community of congregations, create a fund to seed a predominantly Black church in Oak Park.

REHABILITATION

- The community of congregations partners with and follows the lead of the Interfaith Action of Evanston to develop a reparations commitment and action steps. Following this commitment the Community of Congregations should contribute funds to the Oak Park Reparations Task Force on a yearly basis.
- Advocate for all taxing bodies in the Village of Oak Park to pass a comprehensive reparations plan for Black residents. This advocacy should include public comment, meetings with elected officials, informational town halls and if necessary solidarity marches and demonstrations.

COMPENSATION

- Use diocese/presbytery/ organizational, etc. funds to provide funds to predominantly Black churches in Oak Park

SATISFACTION

- Apologize for and acknowledge past harms of redlining and forced removal of Black residents and how it has benefitted religious institutions.
- Host a yearly ceremony to honor Mt. Carmel community that was forcefully removed from the area around Westgate and Marion Streets. This event should amplify the voices of Black theologians.

■ ■ ■

A History of Racial Discrimination by Oak Park For-Profit Businesses

For-profit businesses are a core part of any community. Over the years, Oak Park has been home to many successful small and large for profit businesses. While the sales tax revenue generated from these institutions is a relatively small piece of the Village's revenue, for-profit businesses create a sense of community, desirability and contribute significantly to property tax revenue. Like many institutions in Oak Park, for-profit businesses benefited from and contributed to discrimination against Black people. In this section we will focus on the practice of redlining and how this practice benefited Oak Park's for-profit businesses.

In 1991 Peter and Dolores Green of Chicago, filed a lawsuit against Avenue Bank of Oak Park (now US Bank on Oak Park Avenue). The couple alleged that they were discriminated against when seeking a loan to purchase the remaining shares of a 6 flat building from their relatives in Garfield Park. Upon being denied for the loan the couple was given reasons that they later found out were blatant lies. First, they were told that because it was a 6-flat building it was considered a commercial property, and that the bank could not give loans on commercial properties. The couple found out that this was not true and no such rule existed within the bank. The couple was also told that the bank did not give loans to buildings that far away, but later found out the bank gave loans to white people even further away. The couple realized what was happening and identified that even in the early 90's racial discrimination and redlining were still alive and well. Frustrated from being denied the loan the couple took a stand and sued Avenue Bank of Oak Park. In 1992 a Federal judge sided with the couple and granted them an award of \$250,000.

(<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1992-12-09-9204220125-story.html>)

Redlining is the discriminatory practice in which services are withheld from potential customers who reside in neighborhoods classified as "hazardous" to investment; these neighborhoods almost always have significant numbers of racial and ethnic minorities, and low-income residents. Historically most of Chicago's West Side was redlined by banks, while Oak Park was not. This allowed Oak Park, with its close proximity to Chicago, to receive the funds

necessary to develop properties and build businesses creating the destination community we see today. This dynamic was created directly from investments being denied to predominantly Black neighborhoods. In addition, businesses in Oak Park who received business loans were instantly at an advantage over businesses in nearby Austin and Garfield Park that could not receive loans. In other words, Oak Park businesses were better funded and supported because of how banking institutions chose to dole out funds. Finally, the lack of businesses on the west side of Chicago created and continues to create high demand in Oak Park for grocery stores, gas stations, general stores and more, resulting in increased property values for Oak Park businesses and increased property and sales tax revenue for the Village. In this example it is clear how for-profit businesses in Oak Park benefited from the practice of redlining that harmed so many Black communities. Oak Park became a community Black people “escaped to” largely because of the easy access to capital and well funded businesses with pretty facades and interior design. This was all made possible by the stark contrast between Chicago’s west side and Oak Park, largely caused by redlining to which Oak Park banks contributed.

Moreover, for-profit businesses benefited from the removal of the Black community from the area around Harlem and Lake to create a commercial district. In the mid 1920s the area around Harlem and Lake began to increase in value and investment:

*“The first arrival was the Fair Store, and soon after Marshall Field’s opened an impressive Oak Park store. Pressure grew to expand the downtown into William Street (now Westgate). During this time mysterious fires erupted in the area where Black homes and the African American church were located. Economic, demographic, and racial forces signaled the beginning of the end for the church and for many of the Black residents who lived nearby. On Christmas Day 1928, a suspicious fire caused \$1,000 damage to Mt. Carmel Baptist Church” (West, et al., *Suburban Promised Land*, 2009, p.43).*

“Additionally, many Black families’ homes were firebombed as well (ibid. 32-33)”. Fire was a common tool in the early 1900s to intimidate Black people. Notably the Chicago Race Riots of 1919, where nearly 2,000 Black people lost their homes due to fire, and the Tulsa Riots of 1921 where an entire Black community was burned to the ground in one night, all occurred around this time. After the 1919 Riots in Chicago “some three hundred Chicago Blacks sought temporary refuge with friends and relatives in Oak Park”(ibid. p.30) which prompted E.H.

Mundt a local white realtor to write a letter to the Village Board, saying, "It is impossible for colored people to obtain houses or apartment in Oak Park according to real estate men." (*ibid.* p.30) Imagine for a moment that the congregation had been able to keep their land. Today the area around Harlem and Lake is some of the most valuable in Oak Park. Had that wealth stayed within the Black community, had those homeowners not been firebombed and scared out of their homes, Black Oak Parkers, like their white neighbors, would have built generational wealth. Their property values would have continued to rise, their businesses would have continued to grow, and their wealth would have been passed down to the next generation and the next. All of that wealth that could have been was and is instead in the hands of white Oak Parkers.

HARMS

- Racially discriminatory bank practices continue to limit minority property ownership in and around Oak Park.
- Tax revenues from the Westgate commercial district have never compensated Mt. Carmel parishioners for their burned out property.
- Black Oak Parkers have no department or person to whom to bring racial complaints suffered in Oak Park businesses, other than direct lawsuits.

Recommended repairs to be enacted by for-profit institutions

CESSATION and ASSURANCE of NON-REPETITION

- Downtown Oak Park hires a reparative justice consultant to research the history and recommend repairs specific to the area around marion and westgate where the Black community centered in the early 1900's before being forcefully removed.
- Banks and Real estate agencies create a non profit to specifically identify and eliminate the barriers to homeownership for Black residents in Oak Park.

-Banks and Real estate agencies require all employees to learn the history of Black residents in Oak Park and the banking and real estate industries' active participation in limiting the growth of Black wealth.

RESTITUTION

- Provide free or reduced rent to Black residents in the area around marion and westgate - Find real estate parcels where Black residents were forcefully removed and explore returning them to the descendants or create a profit sharing arrangement.

REHABILITATION

- Downtown Oak Park and the Oak Park Chamber of Commerce work together to create a Black business start up fund that assists Black businesses with start up costs.
- Banks and real estate agencies Oak Park should work together to create a low interest loan program for Black residents and the descendants of those denied mortgages in Oak Park.
- Free monthly financial advising for Black residents.

COMPENSATION

-As Target sits on the land where the Black community and Mt Carmel Baptist once stood, Target should commit 200,000 per year to the Oak Park Reparations Task Force.
-Banks and real estate agencies in Oak Park should contribute 1% of annual revenue to the Oak Park Reparations commission to compensate for redlining and inequitable denying of loans.

SATISFACTION

-Acknowledge and apologize for past harms of redlining and forced removal of Black residents and how it has benefitted for-profit institutions.
-Host a yearly ceremony to honor the Black community that was forcefully removed from the area around Westgate and Marion.

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History of Racial Discrimination by Non-Profit Organizations

A 2016 document produced by Linda Francis (formerly) of the Co-Lab for Early Childhood revealed there were nearly 30 non profit organizations in Oak Park working towards equity for Oak Park residents. As previous parts of this report have illustrated, all of these efforts have had little to no effect in creating a more equitable Oak Park. Part of the reason for this is the way the nonprofit industry is structured. The non-profit industry in America emerged from a desire of wealthy folks to protect their wealth through tax write offs. In the 2020 essay “Have non-profit and philanthropy become the ‘white moderate’ that Dr. King warned us about?”: Vu Le writes:

“Our white-moderate fundraising philosophies and practices are centered entirely on making donors who are mostly white feel good about themselves ... The rest of us are not off the hook either. We continue to intellectualize, spending resources and time on research that demonstrates again and again what we already know, which is that all systems are racist...Moderates though are not just white. The “white moderate” is an archetype of those who defend the status quo, insist on incremental change, and yet claim moral high ground. Plenty of people of color fall into this category. POC moderates, even as they have less relative power, can be even more destructive, as they are often weaponized by white moderates to prevent change.”

Aside from a few individual examples Oak Park’s non profit community raises millions per year under the guise of helping and has never substantially changed statistical life outcomes for Black people. Feeding a few hungry folks or housing a few unhoused people, while noble and needed, does nothing to prevent the next person from being hungry or needing housing. In practice, nonprofits alleviate the visible symptoms of inequity (i.e. an unhoused person sleeping on the street) while not addressing the root cause. This practice creates comfort for people by removing the visibility of inequity and allowing people to feel good about themselves for contributing to causes that are not changing outcomes. An industry that does not challenge norms, diverts funds from efforts to address root causes and

doesn't make people uncomfortable or produce meaningful shifts in life outcomes, is maintaining the status quo and thus harming Black residents.

HARMS:

- White savior complex is perpetuated by local non-profits involved in housing, feeding, educating, disciplining Black residents of Oak Park.
- Staffing may not reflect Oak Parkers. Or include staff who understand the Oak Park community
- Millions of funds raised with no statistical shift in economic, social or life outcomes for Black residents
- Non acknowledgement of the structural racism within the non-profit institution itself.
- Employees of color are often "tokenized" to maintain an anti-racist reputation.
- Management teams and governing boards are typically not integrated.
- Responsibility of anti-racist education is typically put on the people of color. It is the responsibility of white folk to learn about and dismantle a system they put into place.

REPAIRS:

CESSATION and ASSURANCE of NON-REPETITION

- Convene an Oak Park nonprofits group to discuss the future of the nonprofit industry. The goal of the convening is to leave with action items on how to address root causes of inequities for Black residents.
- Hire a reparative justice consultant to do a complete review of your organizations policies, practices and procedures that cause negative outcomes for Black residents.

REHABILITATION

- Use the Evanston Illinois Community Foundation Model to create a Reparative Justice Fund managed by the Oak Park Reparations Task Force.
- Require every person working in nonprofits to learn the history of Black people in Oak Park dating back to 1880.

COMPENSATION

- Use at least 20% Black owned vendors and suppliers for all goods and services purchased. - Dedicate 50% of your organizations resources to addressing root causes of the issues your non profit attempts to address

SATISFACTION

-Issue an apology on behalf of your organization for the nonprofit industry's complicity in maintaining the status quo and failure to improve statistical life outcomes for Black residents.

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History of Racial Discrimination by The Oak Park Public Library

The Oak Park Public Library was established in 1902 after voters approved a tax to fund a public library system. The library was originally located in the Scoville Institute Building at 834 Lake Street which had previously housed a private (likely segregated) library since 1888. Although many things are known about the origins of Oak Park's library system, in our research we were unable to uncover whether the library had ever been segregated or prevented Black residents from having access. This is one of the areas we note as being very important for a future paid commission to research further. While there have been incidents of more recent harm such as Black students feeling unwelcome at the Oak Park Library in 2018, which led to a social media uproar, or a lack of any Black leadership staff until 2017, we do acknowledge the Library is an institution that has embraced anti-racist ideals and set out to make things right. One area where harm persists is in the lack of Black vendors and suppliers that the library uses. We hope this report can encourage the library to think strategically about finding and utilizing more Black owned vendors.

Recommended Repairs to be Enacted by the Library:**CESSATION and ASSURANCE of NON-REPETITION**

-Continue the libraries anti-racism work and hire a reparative justice consultant to research past harms the library has benefitted from and suggest repairs and review library policies.

REHABILITATION

-Host twice-yearly programs highlighting and amplifying the history of Black Oak Parkers.
-Host quarterly programs amplifying Black voices and stories.

-Set a goal of 25% of library vendors to be Black owned businesses by 2030 and create goals and action steps to work towards this.

COMPENSATION

-Create a mentorship and scholarship program for Black youth to learn about careers in library science. The mentorship program would start with youth at the age of 12 and end at 18. During that time students would learn hands-on what it's like to work in a library. Upon successful completion of the program youth would receive a scholarship to go to college and eventually get their masters degree in library science.

-Contribute twenty five thousand dollars per year to the Oak Park Reparations Commission once formed.

SATISFACTION

-Acknowledge publicly places where the Oak Park public Library has fallen short and harmed Black residents and apologize.

-Hold truth telling sessions by inviting Black patrons of the library to tell their stories and experiences of interacting with the Oak Park Library.

Conclusion

Normally this is where a conclusion would go. However, as a gesture and act towards counteracting and disinvesting from the societal norms that have done so much harm to Black people, we will not write one. Instead, we will opt to make an amendment to this report once Oak Park has actively engaged in reparative justice for its Black residents. For now, there is no conclusion because the harms remain unrepaired and continue.

Our Heartfelt Thank Yous to Our Supporters and Friends

Oak Park Reparations Task Force Members
Euclid Avenue Reparations Work Group, Oak Park, IL
Kindred Keynotes and Coaching
Dominican University, River Forest, IL
Oak Park History Museum
First Repair of Evanston, IL
Robin Rue Simmons
Oak Park Area Arts Council
Black Roots Alliance
Your Passion First
Walk the Walk Oak Park
Equity and Transformation Chicago
Illinois Reparations Coalition