

Persistent socioeconomic gaps for Black Californians would take more than 248 years to close unless more is done: Report

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Almost two decades ago, the inaugural State of Black California report was the first to provide a comprehensive look at how the material

conditions and socioeconomic outcomes for Black Californians fared compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

[The latest report](#), published by the Black Policy Project, an initiative of the UCLA Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, builds upon its predecessor by providing a [comparative analysis](#) with a sobering message: Despite improvements in the quality of life for Black communities in California since 2000, [racial inequality](#) stubbornly persists and may continue to do so for centuries to come unless more is done.

Utilizing the "Equality Index," which was modeled after one developed by international consulting group Global Insight Inc., the researchers found that Black Californians' overall socioeconomic outcomes improved by an average of 21.7% in the state based on [census data](#) from 2000 to 2020.

The analysis was informed by an extensive set of outcome data in economics, housing, health, education, [criminal justice](#) and civic engagement, with the largest improvements occurring in education.

Yet in 2020, compared to white Californians, who serve as the baseline for the Equality Index at a score of 1.00, researchers also found that Black Californians had the lowest score (0.69) of all racial minority groups. This means that the outcomes of Black residents scored 30% lower than white Californians across all analyzed socioeconomic measures. Other racial and ethnic groups' scores were 0.72 for Latinos, 0.74 for Indigenous Californians and 1.14 for Asian Pacific Islanders.

Additionally, Black Californians were only able to close the overall racial gap in social and economic outcomes with whites by a mere 4%, or three index points (0.66 to 0.69), since 2000.

"According to that rate of change, closing the racial gap between Black and white Californians would take over 248 years," said Michael Stoll, faculty director of the Black Policy Project and author of the report.

Stoll, a professor of public policy, co-authored the original report, which looked at Black Californians in 2000 and was commissioned by the California Legislative Black Caucus under the leadership of former California State Assembly Majority Leader and current Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass.

Since then, the state's Black population declined for the first time in decades, dropping from 2.2 million to 2.1 million. The Black population represented 5.6% of the state's population in 2020, compared to 6.6% in 2000. Once home to the second-largest metro Black population, Oakland saw a significant decline (46%) in Black residents. Only two regions saw growth in their Black population: the Inland Empire, which had the highest regional Equality Index score for Black Californians, and Sacramento.

The findings of the report demonstrate the impact of gentrification and high housing costs, which limited the economic progress of Black Californians and led to the shrinkage of Black communities in the state's major metropolitan areas; nearly a quarter (24%) of the state's Black residents (up from 17% in 2000) now live outside the urban centers of San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Los Angeles and Oakland, likely because of housing affordability issues.

The decline in Black homeownership between 2000 and 2020 was nearly 6%, while other ethnic groups did not experience the same decrease over the same period. For Black renters, the median monthly rent increased by over \$400, as the report also shows a 12% increase of Black Californians being rent-burdened, spending 30% or more of their income on rent. The median income for Black households also remained

largely the same, while other ethnic groups saw increased earnings of over \$10,000 in that same period.

In addition, despite aggregate improvement on the overall Equality Index, communities in Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco and San Jose experienced a widening of the gap in outcomes, with drops in homeownership and income gains.

As California looks to advance racial equity and continues to examine reparations proposals, Bunche Center Director Lorrie Frasure hopes the state's leaders take a deeper look at the report findings.

"The Equality Index's measures can help our leaders and lawmakers to better understand the lasting impacts of racial inequality on Black Californians' social and economic opportunities," said Frasure, who holds the Ralph J. Bunche Endowed Chair and is a professor of political science and African American Studies.

The researchers also encourage California leaders to use this study as a metric for the pandemic's absolute impact on Black life, establishing a baseline for the conditions and disparities experienced by Black communities before the pandemic. Moving beyond census data, Frasure states that the Bunche Center will launch consistent and ongoing data collection efforts around socioeconomics, health, education, housing and [civic engagement](#), to better understand the patterns found in the report and move toward policy solutions to close the gap for Black Californians.

The report emphasizes at least one path to help narrow the racial inequality gap: Black Californians made progress in issue areas where public policy action took place. Steps like improving access to more required courses for the University of California and California State University systems and implementing criminal justice reforms, such as

Proposition 47 and 57, had a marked positive impact on educational and criminal justice outcomes.

"These findings are meant to guide the development of new solutions and to build upon successful programs," Stoll said. "Although there is a long way to go, the data shows that with investment and action, the lives and socioeconomic outcomes of Black Californians can significantly improve."

More information: Report: [bunchecenter.ucla.edu/wp-conte ...
-SOBC-Report_red.pdf](https://bunchecenter.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/SOBC-Report_red.pdf)

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