

America's Truth



MAY WE SEE THE TRUTH AND RECONCILE
TO HEAL OUR COMMUNITIES.



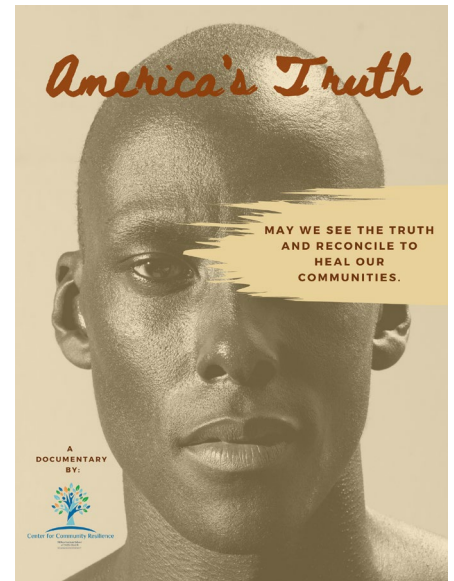
Center for Community Resilience

Milken Institute School
of Public Health
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

America's Truth: A Discussion Guide

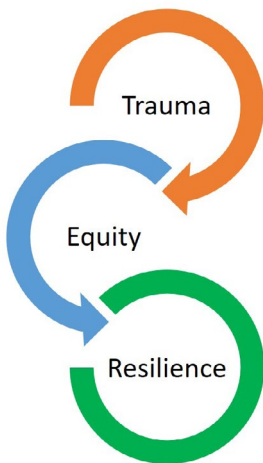
The Center for Community Resilience (CCR) directed and produced this film to tell the Truth about structural racism. We recognize the need in our country to correct narratives that place blame on communities of color for the outcomes of racialized inequity rather than on the systems and policies created to produce inequity. The film is informed by the historical record from official city documents, museum archives and primary data from across multiple sectors including housing, education, criminal justice, and public health. Most importantly, the narrative of the community is drawn from the voices of residents who lived through the trauma or have made it their life's work to ensure the trauma endured by ancestors be told.

America's Truth: Cincinnati explores how structural racism produced inequitable outcomes in four Black neighborhoods. The stories within recount the long history of unjust policies intentionally designed to drive inequitable outcomes by race and place. Using the science of public health married with riveting storytelling, *America's Truth* helps the viewer understand how structural racism has intentionally and reliably produced racial inequities in health, wealth, and wellbeing. Covering nearly 200 years of housing, education, and public safety policy, the film traces how these decisions [continue to produce adversity for Black Cincinnatians today](#).



America's Truth: Creating Shared Understanding

Rooted in understanding the past to inform a more equitable and just future, the film presents Truth – both historical fact and lived experience. As a tool the film suggests a roadmap of policy opportunities that can help to foster racial healing and spur efforts aimed at long-term systems change. This film and guide are meant to help bring community together to face our difficult past by acknowledging the harm that has been done.



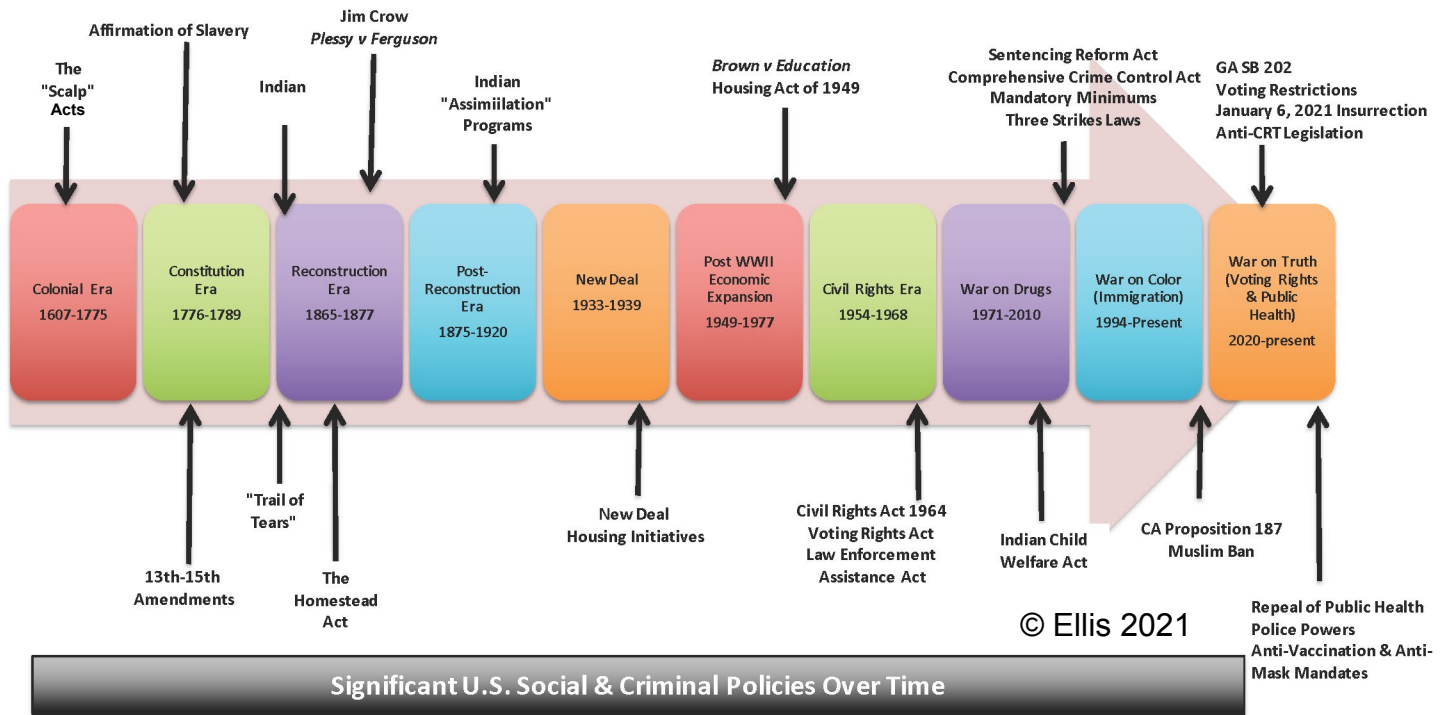
Recognizing the strong connection between trauma and systemic inequity, CCR centers community experience to create equitable access to resources, tools, and the policy supports needed to promote community resilience. We are united with our partners in revealing Truth so that our nation may heal. In healing, we can resolve to do better by working towards building systems in which all our children and families have an equitable opportunity to thrive.

What is Structural Racism?

An examination of legislative and regulatory practices put in place over the course of our nation's history reveals an intent to drive inequity by race, often reinforced by place. Structural racism refers to a system of inequity written into laws and regulations and fortified by practice. Well before our Constitution was written, colonists began to put in place practices to ensure a hierarchy

based on race. As the film points out, the belief in Manifest Destiny—that white people should dominate the land by any means necessary—was used to justify the extermination, subjugation, and oppression of people of color. When white settlers first came ashore in the 1500s, there was an intent to rob Indigenous people of their land using fraud and force. Scalp Acts in the early 1600s was one of the first common laws written in the colonies. Scalp Acts offered settlers cash rewards for the scalps of Native Americans as an incentive to rid the land of tribal nations and make way for more colonists. A few years later the social construct of race was codified into law following a bloody uprising of enslaved people, white and Black indentured servants, and Indigenous peoples that nearly destroyed Jamestown, Virginia. The establishment of rights by a hierarchy of race institutionalized systemic racism in the English colonies in 1676 and served as the blueprint for enumeration of rights a decade later within the new nation’s Constitution.

From the founding of this nation with the Articles of Confederation adopted in 1781, leaving regulation of slavery up to the newly formed states, to the adoption of the Constitution in 1787, our public systems have not been designed to uphold the ideal of ‘freedom and justice for all.’ Throughout our history, adoption of policies and strategies claiming to expand opportunity for upward mobility, equality, and improvement of community environments has, in practice, built upon a history of subjugation by race and class, reinforced by place.



This policy timeline is a snapshot of significant social and economic policies passed since the 1600s. You can use this timeline as a guide to think about the federal and local policies that helped to shape the experience and trajectory of people of color in your community. To learn more detail about each era in the timeline, download [Module I](#) of CCR’s Fostering Equity Guide.

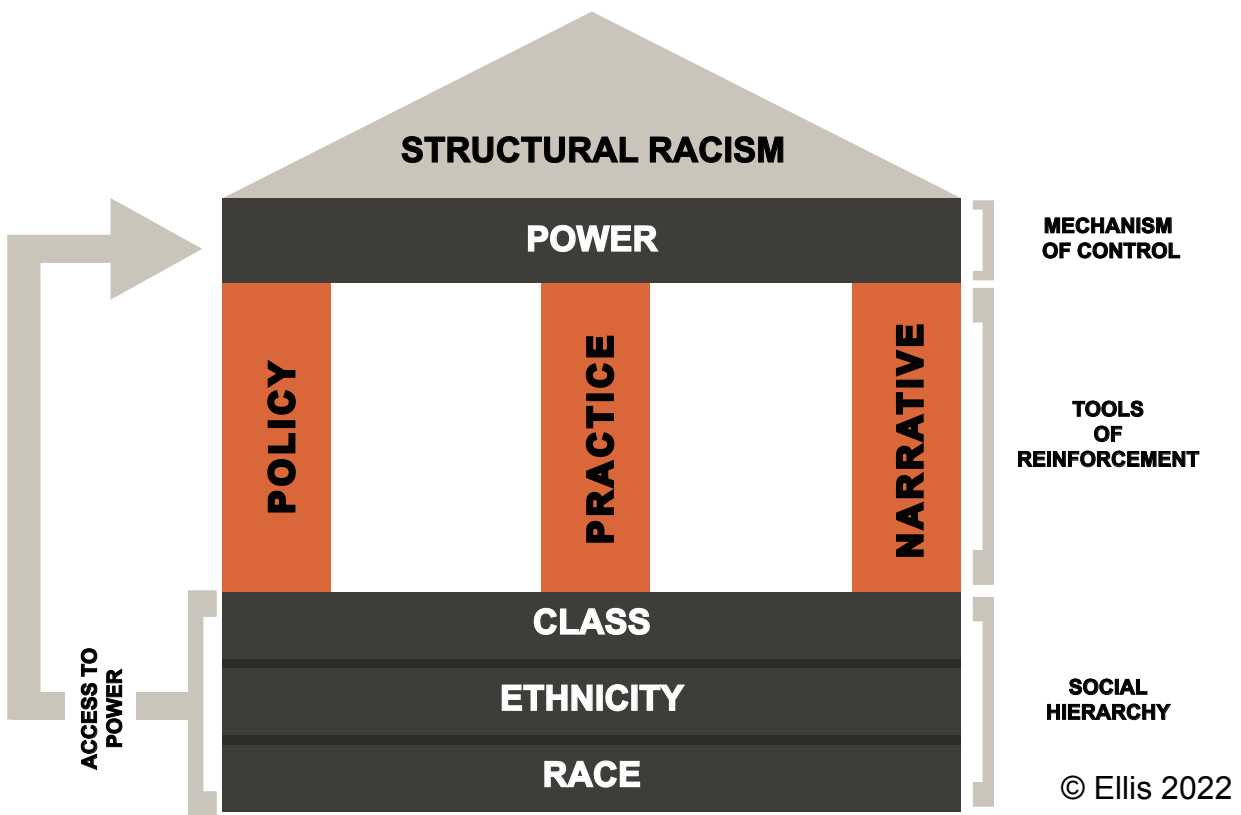
Using this Guide

Understanding structural racism and confronting our history is both a personal and communal journey. In October 2020, in partnership with the Association of Children’s Museums, CCR convened a cross-sector coalition of eight community partners in Cincinnati—led by Joining Forces for Children, All-In Cincinnati, and the University of Cincinnati’s Center for Truth, Racial Healing

and Transformation (UC-TRHT)—to lead a process of Truth & Equity. The effort sought to deepen understanding of the measurable impacts of structural racism; facilitate racial healing and cross-sector collaboration to advance practice, program, and policy change; and build political will to promote racial justice and equity throughout the region.

The film shares the multiple layers of structural racism embedded in policy upon Ohio’s statehood and into present day. Each chapter of the film provides the viewer with an understanding of how place and policy can influence outcomes for a population over generations. The courage of the Cincinnati partners provides an example of how community members of all races can hold space to discuss these painful truths, examine the brutal reality of systemic inequity, and develop a collective will for change.

This guide provides the opportunity to explore your community’s history and how you might develop a community platform for racial healing through storytelling. We used stories to demonstrate that despite reforms to repeal some of our nation’s most harmful racist policies—racial inequity persists. The stories help you understand that these inequities persist by design. Reform is more than a pen stroke; repair and equity require intention to undo the cycles put in place with a durable infrastructure of structural racism.



When exploring the guiding questions, refer to this graphic of structural racism to explore the pillars that uphold a system of power that produces inequitable outcomes intentionally and reliably by race and place.

Examine the social hierarchy (the foundation of structural racism) and the pillars of Policy, Practice and Narratives that reinforce and sometimes justify this structure. What are the stories we tell ourselves—and those that have been passed down—to justify inequity or blame communities of color for creating vicious cycles of adversity? Who and what are the sources of Power in your community that most benefit from this structure?

Hosting a Screening

Follow these steps to maximize the viewers' response to America's Truth:

1. View America's Truth at least one time before hosting a viewing to learn the names and perspectives of each of the featured community members and featured professionals, as well as the neighborhoods and landmarks highlighted in the film.
2. Read this discussion guide in its entirety. The guide can be valuable for different audiences at different times. While *America's Truth* tells the story of four neighborhoods in Cincinnati, the policies and practices that are highlighted in the film can be found in almost any city in America. Customize your opening remarks to draw comparisons to neighborhoods in your community.
3. Learn as much as you can about your audience and choose the discussion points that are most relevant to them but be flexible if the conversation moves to other areas. If you are speaking to a specialized audience—such as lawmakers or business leaders—consider using a perspective from their profession or sector. For example, since lawmakers may be seeking legislative or funding opportunities to address inequity, you may want to highlight some of the solutions discussed in Chapter 4 of the film. Business leaders may want to understand how to target investments in economic development to close the racial wealth gap; you would want them to listen closely to the stories of Chapter 3 in the film to avoid unintended consequences as well as build off current opportunity in communities of color.
4. Learn about equity initiatives in your area or state and contact them for resource materials. Using local references will help to provide a context for action as well as identify potential partners.
5. Decide if you want to ask viewers to complete a post-film survey via cellphone or email. This may help you to build a database of contacts but also understand the readiness of your community to build your own Truth & Equity coalition.



Film Discussion: Let's Talk About Truth & Equity

The questions below are meant to explore the range of reactions to the film, while also setting the stage to build a coalition committed to a Truth & Equity journey. We recommend you begin your discussion with the acknowledgement of the pain endured by communities depicted in the film as well as the trauma endured in your own community. It may also be useful to set some discussion ground rules to ensure viewers can process and share in a group setting that is non-judgmental.

Below are some questions to ask your audience following the screening:

- **Level Set: What is your emotional reaction to the film?**
 - Were any of the stories surprising to you?
 - Do you have similar experiences to share?
- What are your thoughts about how the filmmakers connected the facts, policy and history to present day experiences of the Cincinnatians?
- What connections can you draw between the experience of structural racism and community trauma in Cincinnati to your own town, city or region?
- How can you use the knowledge gained in this film about structural racism and community trauma?
- How can you influence people in your social or professional circle to learn about systemic inequity?
- What additional information or support would you need to feel comfortable talking about structural racism and the need to foster equity with your family, co-workers, or other community members?
- List three things that you can do in response to seeing America's Truth:
 - Short-term (NOW)
 - Near-term (in the next 30 days)
 - Long-term (within a year)
- How might we build a coalition to explore our community's history of structural racism and advocate for equity?
- Where can we start and who else cares about these issues?

Creating a Brave Space: Setting Shared Agreements

- **Use "I" Statements.** Speak from your own experience and don't make generalizations.
- **Step Up, Step Back.** Use your voice but leave space for others to use theirs.
- **Listen to Understand, Not to Respond.** Stay present when others are sharing; don't get distracted thinking about your response.
- **Take Risks, Ask Questions.** Don't be afraid to ask questions, but do be respectful and accountable for what and how you ask.
- **Address Harm by Calling In vs. Calling Out.** If someone says or does something that causes harm, resist the urge to publicly shame. Instead, communicate the impact it had on you and use it as an opportunity to open dialogue that can educate and restore trust.
- **Honor Confidentiality.** What happens in a discussion space, stays in a discussion space. Take the insights with you, but don't speak on behalf of anyone else without explicit consent.
- **Expect and Accept a Lack of Closure.** Disagreement and conflict are normal in courageous conversations. Anticipate encountering different perspectives, embrace the reality that resolution may take time, and accept that some things may be left unsaid.



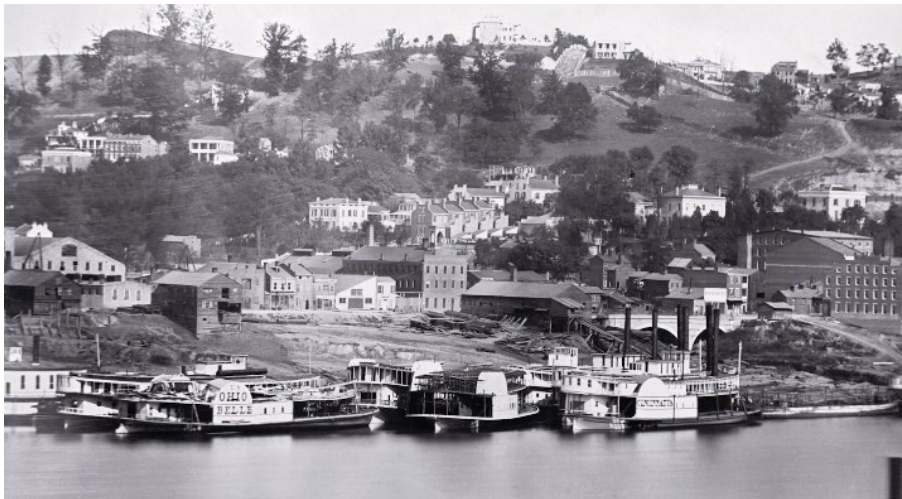
To learn more about fostering community conversations on race and building equity-centered coalitions download [Module II](#) and [Module III](#) of CCR's Fostering Equity Guide. You can also learn more about the Cincinnati Truth & Equity Initiative and the community-driven policy agenda developed by partners by downloading the [case study](#) from our website.

Community Conversations Grounded in Truth

These questions are intended to help your discussion group take a deeper dive into the ways the film might have parallels in your community – and how you can organize and plan for change. As Wendy Ellis says in the film, a process of Truth and Equity “isn't just about telling the truth, bleeding the truth, and crying over the truth, it is helping us understand that which must be repaired and how we move forward. And we all have a role in that.”

Your job as a facilitator is to inspire your audience to explore the hidden histories and uncomfortable truths of your community. Your role is key in generating curiosity that could lead to formation of a coalition aimed at healing racial trauma and fostering equity through larger systemic change.

- **In the film's open we learn that Cincinnati's politics are very much informed by its geography as the 'southernmost city of the North and the northernmost city of the Midwest.'**
 - How does your city's geography influence its politics?
 - How might this geography inform early and current policies?
 - How might this history influence today's disparities in health, housing, education, policing, etc.?



Credit: Cincinnati Museum Center

- **The film outlines several policies from as early as the state's founding that limited rights, economic freedom, education, and movement by race in the Black Codes.**
 - Does your community have a history of similar policies (such as Jim Crow laws, Sundown Towns, Redlining, etc.)?
 - If so, are there remnants of those policies that influence behaviors and population patterns today?
- **The Cincinnati coalition used arts and museum partners to help tell the story of structural racism. Story quilts were used in exhibits and central to many of the community conversations to foster cross-racial dialogue. The city's Museum Center examined how narrative played a part in perpetuating harmful stereotypes or excluding the contributions of people of color**

to the city's history. In addition to creating more inclusive exhibits and removing harmful narratives, the Museum opened their archives to the filmmakers to help share many of the city's hidden stories on racism.

- How might the arts and culture community be used in your community to spark conversation and create a deeper understanding of the experience of structural racism?
- How can the arts be used to help visualize and communicate a racially equitable future?



Cracked Justice, Carolyn Crump (Houston, TX)

- **The multi-sector coalition that led the Truth & Equity work in Cincinnati focused on identifying specific policies of the systems and sectors that are at the root cause of racial inequity.**
 - Can you identify the public systems and policies that perpetuated racial inequity in Cincinnati?
 - What are the systems and sectors that may contribute to racial inequity in your community?
 - What are the policies of those systems that historically have contributed to inequity in your community?
- **In Cincinnati, the Truth & Equity initiative took place amid an election that would install a new City Council and Mayor. The coalition used this change in leadership to advocate for policy change to foster equity in economic mobility, public education, housing, justice, and health.**
 - What opportunities are on the horizon in your community to influence systems change?
 - What dilemmas or events have occurred in your community that highlight the long-standing need to address systemic inequity?
 - How can you use the framing presented in this film to mobilize your community to action?

About the Center for Community Resilience

The Center for Community Resilience (CCR) partners across business, community, philanthropic, advocacy, public education, health, and social sectors to support communities in adopting and adapting policies, programs and practices that address adverse childhood experiences in the context of adverse community environments—the [Pair of ACEs](#).

Known for its rigorous academic and social research, diverse network of partners, and explicit focus on equity and prevention, CCR works to influence systems and policy change focused on addressing long-standing economic, social and health disparities by lifting community voices, integrating service delivery, and building political will for change. Recognizing the strong connection between inequity and systemic trauma, CCR focuses on helping communities access the resources, tools and policy direction needed to increase equity.

Housed within the Milken Institute School of Public Health at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., CCR is widely known as a trusted thought partner and public health innovator among major foundations, national public health organizations, and federal health leaders.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS


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