

COVID-19 and Racial Privilege

It is not news that America holds a long-standing struggle with racial inequalities and disparities. In the midst of this Coronavirus pandemic, structural inequalities have been more prominent than usual. COVID has hit communities of color harder than others, all as a result of this country's immense gap of privilege between whites and people of color. Disparities in healthcare, housing, socioeconomic status, and prejudice have allowed Coronavirus to take a toll on people of color. With COVID exposing the effects of white privilege and racial inequalities, we have been given an opportunity to work against this system and eradicate white privilege and its inherent oppression of people of color.

Currently, as documented by the CDC, "[New York City identified death rates among Black/African American persons \(92.3 deaths per 100,000 population\) and Hispanic/Latino persons \(74.3\) that were substantially higher than that of white \(45.2\) or Asian \(34.5\) persons.](#)" Calling the disparity "racial capitalism," [Pirtle argues](#) that multiple risk factors which combine with capitalism lead to an over-representation especially of blacks among fatal COVID cases. People of color are dying at rates far beyond white people, and it all is linked to systemic oppression. Housing, finances, and healthcare accessibility all put racial minorities at a disadvantage that is ultimately life or death.

People of color experience housing discrimination stemming from segregation, as well as immigrant heavy areas. They also tend to live in lower income neighborhoods, where it is more crowded and neglected. Poor living situations may lead to higher risks of exposure. Similarly, as [Daniels and Morial point out](#), people of color make up the majority of service work deemed essential, thus putting them at high risk of being exposed to the virus. When they are working these service jobs like transportation, cashiers, food industry workers etc., it may be vital for them to attend work as much as possible in order to provide for themselves. If they get sick or need to care for children, they may not have the ability to take time off. Low income also means they may not be able to get tested for the virus or receive treatment. The lack of access to affordable healthcare is a major issue in this country, but it targets racial minorities heavily. [A report for the Kaiser Family Foundation](#) estimated that 22% of American Indians/Alaskan Natives, 19% Hispanics, and 11% of Blacks lack healthcare coverage on average compared to 8% of Whites in America. Due to lack of healthcare, people of color cannot afford to be treated when contracting COVID and unfortunately, they are dying at remarkable rates as a result.

The intersectionality of social class and race is often used as an excuse or way to debunk white privilege. For example the statement, "I'm white but I grew up in poverty," implies that if white privilege were real, one should have had a different experience. However, [Jennifer Heller, in the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*](#), explains that while being of lower socioeconomic standing may exclude some from certain aspects of white privilege, this should not overshadow the fact that white privilege still grants them at the very *least* psychological advantages. However, when looking at the intersections of identities in white people, it is clear that their whiteness is *never* a point of contribution towards any oppression or disadvantages. White privilege is not a guarantee to a good life on account of your whiteness; it is a guarantee that a bad life is never a direct result of your race or skin color.

A perfect example of privilege amongst the pandemic, outside of the previously mentioned ones, is the issue of lockdown protests in America. With footage flooding social media of groups composed mostly of white conservatives breaking quarantine, it is easy to see the privilege held by these people. Protesters gathered in large groups, without protection (lack of gloves or face masks), open carrying firearms, and displaying aggressive behavior. Yet, law enforcement met them with peace and low interference. However, when protests such as Black Lives Matter occur, protesters are met with hostility, arrests and even violence. This is a perfect example of the blatant bias in place in our country. This system sets people of color up to fail, that is something that simply cannot be denied.

Since our founding, we have strived off of a system that was built in favor of white people. A system that benefited those with light skin, but at the expense of people of color. This country has a duty to dismantle its biased system. If things do not change, lives will continue to be lost. As [Neeta Kantamneni wrote](#) regarding marginalized populations in the United States, "Although the COVID-19 pandemic has been described as a 'great equalizer,' the individual, community, and structural impacts it has on workers in the United States is not equal in any capacity." Coronavirus has exposed the severity of racial inequalities and white privilege. To continue to overlook them is to decide that the lives of people of color are expendable.