

RACE COUNTS

RACE COUNTS:

**Advancing Opportunities
For All Californians**

WINTER 2017



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**“WHEN YOU RUN ALONE, YOU RUN FAST.
WHEN YOU RUN TOGETHER, YOU RUN FAR.”**
—ZAMBIAN PROVERB

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INTRODUCTION

California is at a turning point—one that has been 50 years in the making.

In 1968, California officially declared itself the “Golden State.” We gave our state that nickname not just because of our natural resources but also because of the major investments we had made in our K–12 schools, our higher education system, and our overall infrastructure as our state’s population grew by leaps and bounds after the turn of the century.

But this promise, this aspiration of what we could be as a state, rang hollow for many Californians. In particular, low-income communities of color and Indigenous communities were left out of this larger vision of California and saw many of these big investments in the state’s future simply pass them by. Looking back now, it was our state’s unwillingness to resolve this fundamental contradiction of equal access to California’s Promise that over the decades led our public institutions to become engines of widening racial disparities.

Given this contradiction, we eventually saw a wholesale retreat from that dream of the Golden State as investments in our public services grew smaller in relation to the needs of the state’s growing and much more diverse population. This retreat caused the most critical trend lines to shift in the wrong direction. We saw worsening educational outcomes and the rise of the mass-incarceration state. We witnessed the shredding of the social safety net and crumbling infrastructure which hit low-income communities of color and Indigenous groups the hardest.

Through the hate-filled, immigrant-bashing rhetoric and politics of the 1990s and the passage of state propositions like 187, 209, and 227, California continued to fall further away from the earlier dream of the Golden State until we reached the crisis of the Great Recession. Finally, in the late 2000s, California found itself at the precipice of political and financial meltdown—we were 43rd in the nation in per-pupil spending, our jails were woefully overcrowded, and we had a structural budget deficit so wide that you could drive another state’s entire budget through it.

In the end, it was the very people and communities the state had spent decades under-educating, over-criminalizing, and otherwise shutting out from the California Dream who stepped up and saved it from the brink of failure. For within the past few decades, the state has seen a new arrangement of power between elected officials, labor partners, and newly-formed statewide alliances of community organizers working to turn things around for this state. This rising tide of community organizations and organizers not only helped to save the state from financial collapse, not only helped to pass other critical reforms in our education and criminal justice systems, but has also given us another shot at living into our destiny as a state.

But even as we watch this turnaround in California’s fortunes, we find that the ghosts of the past are still very much with us. Antiquated systems and policies continue to produce very disparate out-

comes for communities of color and Indigenous peoples. This report, as a part of the launch of the larger RACE COUNTS initiative, confirms the pervasive nature of racial disparities in every county and across seven issue areas critical to California’s future. This work confirms that while we may have become a solidly “blue state” we are far from being a “blue paradise”—particularly for people of color and Indigenous people. But this work is not just about describing how bad things are—it was also designed to help point a way forward. We aim to help each county in the state to understand its unique challenges, to show where it is starting from, and to point it toward the direction it should be moving to improve both its overall performance and also lower critical racial disparities.

With the launch of the overall RACE COUNTS initiative, we are hoping to open the space for new, more fact-based, constructive conversations around race and racial disparities throughout the state. We hope to spark conversations at the local level, with the communities most impacted by these injustices leading the way.

We are proud that after over 18 months of collaboration and discussion with over 100 social justice organizations throughout the state, we are able to present this report, the companion website—RACECOUNTS.org—and a community-oriented training curriculum to help move those conversations forward.

Now is the time for these conversations and for California to finally address that fundamental contradiction that has plagued our state for the past 50 years. This is not just because our current role in national politics—as the hotbed of the so-called “Resistance”—requires us to address the injustice within our own borders. Rather, it’s because next year, in 2018, it will be 50 years since our decision to assume the mantle of the “Golden State.” On that anniversary, we will be once again faced with the central question of who benefits from the state’s lofty vision—and who is left out. Half a century later, we finally have a shot to reclaim California’s promise, and truly become the Golden State for everyone.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California has long been known as a beacon for progressive politics: a land of hope and promise—dubbed the “Golden State” 50 years ago in 1968. But for many communities of color and Indigenous people, this idealistic vision of California has never been the reality. Acknowledging these facts does not mean giving up on the possibility of a fair and inclusive California, however: we have the responsibility to step up and achieve our state’s promise for all Californians.

Today, it’s clear that race continues to be a major predictor of success and life chances. This is not simply a question of history: race-based injustice is a daily presence in the lives of Californians of color and Indigenous communities. Our initiative—RACE COUNTS—uses race as the primary lens for understanding racial disparities and focuses on systemic racism—the way that racism has been embedded in our public political, economic, and social systems to subordinate people of color and Indigenous peoples. Our key aim is to change the conversation—both inside government and out—through increasing understanding of the toll systemic racism continues to take on our communities and advancing policies to eradicate it. Only by putting race squarely on the table can we rise to the challenge that now confronts us and help California’s next 50 years be ones of equity and justice.

The RACE COUNTS initiative is built around a comprehensive, cutting-edge tool that tracks three dimensions of racial equity: performance, racial disparity, and impact. Performance is assessed by how well or poorly a county’s population scores on a particular indicator. Racial disparity is measured by how far each racial group is from the group with the best performance. Impact is indicated by the size of the county’s population. The tool compares and ranks counties across 44 indicators in seven key issue areas:

DEMOCRACY

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

CRIME AND JUSTICE

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT

EDUCATION

HOUSING

California’s History: Racial Oppression and the Multiracial Movement for Equity

California still struggles with the undigested legacy of a long and unique history of racism. Understanding that history requires, first, acknowledging the very roots of the settler colonialism upon which California was founded—the theft of Native tribes’ land and forced labor that was frequently justified with cultural and racial chauvinism. Since its creation, California’s racial history has in large measure been a push-pull of dominant, elite Whites exploiting immigrant and nonwhite labor and wealth as the engine of economic growth, while simultaneously hemming their communities in with racialized restrictions that prohibit them from obtaining the fair fruits of their labor.

These systems of exploitation were built in an explicitly race-conscious way, but they persist today in new, seemingly race-neutral forms, thanks to a second major trend in our state’s race-relations history: the creation of facially color-blind systems. These systems codify and reinforce the racially unjust status quo while giving them the veneer of legality. However, California has also pioneered new, powerful approaches to fighting back against racial oppression by building multiracial organizing coalitions to challenge the inequities we have inherited.