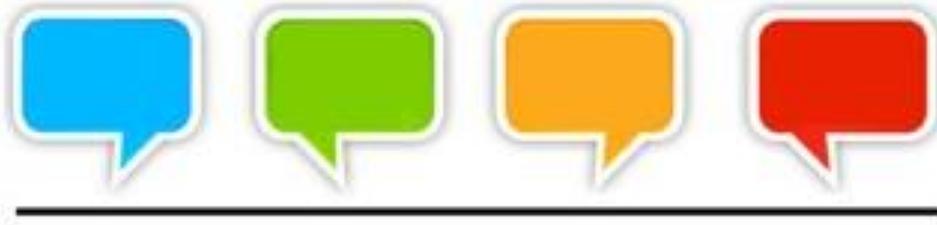


A Colorado Conversation on Race



Racial inequality is an enduring problem of American society. By many standards, minorities are better off than they were 40 years ago, when the civil rights movement won its most enduring victories. High school and college graduation rates, life expectancy, home ownership, and political participation all have risen substantially for African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans. Prior to the economic recession, the black poverty rate had hit its lowest level ever.

And yet blacks are still three times more likely than whites to be poor, and twice as likely to be unemployed. African-American and Hispanic men with college degrees earn less than their white counterparts. Roughly 13 percent of black men are ineligible to vote because of a felony conviction, and one study contends the U.S. has more blacks behind bars than South Africa did under apartheid. Other recent studies have found that whites receive better medical treatment than blacks even when they have the same insurance coverage, and that African-Americans face higher mortgage rates regardless of their credit histories. Fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, most black children and many Hispanic ones still attend schools that are mostly minority.

Changing Demographics: Historically, the discussion of race relations in America has focused on blacks and whites, but demographic trends and immigration are changing that. Hispanics are now the largest minority group in the U.S., according to the Census Bureau. Interracial dating and marriage have become more common, meaning there is a small but growing number of mixed-race Americans. By 2050 census estimates predict that non-Hispanic whites, who are now 74 percent of Americans, will be only 54 percent of the population.

In some respects, Hispanics lag even further behind than blacks—substantially fewer Hispanics graduate from high school, and substantially more go without health insurance. But Hispanics also have a lower unemployment rate than blacks, and as a group get somewhat higher SAT scores. Asian-Americans are ahead of blacks and Hispanics and comparable to whites in many statistical areas, particularly in education.

Polls Apart: Surveys find majorities of both minorities and whites say there is still racial discrimination in society, but also say that things have improved. But when it comes to perceptions of racial equality—and the intensity of those perceptions—the views of blacks and whites are a world apart. Six in 10 blacks and four in 10 Hispanics say racism in the workplace is a major problem, for example, but only two in 10 whites believe that.

That pattern is also significant with respect to affirmative action. Strong majorities of all races say that hiring, promotions, and college admissions should be "strictly on merit." Yet surveys also show that minorities, especially blacks, are much more likely than whites to favor "extra efforts" to recruit minorities. More than half of Americans say employers should be required by law to maintain diversity in the workplace, but strongly disagree with giving jobs to minorities over equally qualified whites.

Personal experience may play a key role in these perceptions. Far more blacks (44 percent) say they've been treated like potential shoplifters than whites (30 percent). And 57 percent of blacks say they believe they've been pulled over by police because of their race, compared to 11 percent of the general public.

By the Numbers: Race in Colorado

Colorado's demographics are somewhat different than the nation overall, as shown in this table from the U.S. Census Bureau:

Group	% in Colorado	% Nationally
White, not Hispanic	69.7	63.4
Hispanic	20.9	16.7
Black	4.3	13.1
Asian	2.9	5.0
Two or more races	2.7	2.3
Native American, Alaskan, and Hawaiian	1.8	1.4

A 2009 "Legislative Report Card on Racial Equity" from the Progressive Coalition, identified the following problems related to race in Colorado:

- There is a documented achievement gap between students of color and white students in Colorado. One of the most alarming issues related to educational equity is the dropout rate. In 2007, more Latinos dropped out of school than whites, even though Latinos were only 18% of the population at that time.
- People of color represent 55 percent of the prison population. People of color are more likely to be stopped, to be subjected to greater scrutiny while stopped, and to be arrested.
- While almost 75% of whites own their own homes, only about half of blacks and Latinos do. Homeowners of color represent less than 20 percent of homeowners in the state. Income is lower—by an average of \$20,000 per family—and unemployment rates higher for blacks and Latinos than for whites.
- Nearly 30% of blacks and Latinos live in poverty in Colorado, compared to 8% of whites.

Three Points of View on Dealing with Race

These points of view are drawn both from what experts say and from what the public thinks, based on surveys and focus groups:

The civil rights strategy, emphasizing aggressive enforcement of laws against discrimination. The only fair and effective way to achieve racial equality is by scrupulously adhering to the principle of equality under the law. Racial justice requires a comprehensive public effort to break down discriminatory barriers, redress individual grievances, and ensure equal treatment in education, in the workplace, and elsewhere. The government's obligation is to ensure that the rules of the game are the same for everyone.

The affirmative action strategy, which uses preferences and incentives to redress longstanding discrimination. It is not enough for government to be concerned with individual acts of discrimination. A nation dedicated to the principle of equal treatment has to recognize the enduring legacy of racial discrimination and compensate for it. Groups that have traditionally experienced discrimination, and continue to experience discrimination, must be given preferential treatment to facilitate progress toward racial equality. Racial justice is achieved when there is evidence of roughly equal results.

The equal opportunity strategy, which tries to aid minorities by addressing poverty and its related ills. The major barrier to racial equality today is not racial bias or discrimination but poverty-related conditions that keep many members of minority groups from becoming literate and employable, and prevent them from moving into the American mainstream. Only when government provides the material prerequisites for a decent life – including quality early education for everyone—does equality of opportunity exist.

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<http://www.publicagenda.org/citizen/issueguides/race/overview>.



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