

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/we-will-not-settle-in-our-pursuit-of-racial-equity>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Something is better than nothing.

This is what we say to ourselves when we know the remedy provided is not enough.

For many black people, myself included, the celebration of Black History Month falls squarely in this unsatisfying space. I am overwhelmed with pride when we celebrate the accomplishments of black historical figures, living trailblazers, and important moments of advancement for the black community; but I am disappointed when the month ends with [so much of our story going untold](#), so many of our experiences and contributions discounted and disregarded, and so few formal commitments made to advance racial equity.

At the Vera Institute of Justice, we will not settle for something in our pursuit of racial equity. We are marching, urgently, toward our goal and we are taking the steps necessary to become an [Antiracist, Multicultural Institution](#). This means we are committed to dismantling racism both within our institution and the wider community, and to transforming our professional relationships and activities to align with this vision.

I am proud to say that we didn't wait until February to get started. Several months ago, we embarked on an [extensive, multi-year initiative](#) to more deeply understand and address race and ethnicity in our research and programmatic work, as well as our internal culture and operations so that we can more effectively combat institutional and structural racism in justice systems and our own workplace. With the partnership and support of our capacity-building partner [Race Forward](#) and our internal steering committees and affinity groups, we have been nurturing our staff and board to develop a shared understanding of foundational concepts surrounding racial equity and introducing effective practices to operationalize and advance it. Several training and discussion forums have been created in response to the results of our comprehensive racial equity assessment process, including town hall conversations and skill-building sessions on topics such as transformative leadership and racial equity innovation.

We have also implemented strategies to help our board members, staff, and key partners better understand the link between the American criminal justice system and America's history of white supremacy, including cohort visits to the Equal Justice Initiative's [National Memorial to Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum](#) in Montgomery, AL and relevant conferences and convenings such as [Facing Race](#). We have also hosted colleagues such as Rashad Robinson, the president of [Color of Change](#), a leading online racial justice organization, and Jeffrey Robinson, ACLU Deputy Legal Director and Director of the Trone Center for Justice and Equality, to discuss with us their vision and plans for action on this front.

In our communications and programmatic work, last year we released [Reimagining Prison](#), a report that narrates how racial oppression and the dehumanization of black people lie at the foundation of the American prison system, as well as our current era of mass incarceration and calls for a commitment to human dignity as a response. We are expanding a program that radically transforms the conditions of confinement for incarcerated young adults for whom racial disproportionality is even more pronounced and that centers racial equity in its theory of change. And, we are reviewing our other work to find additional ways to center racial equity moving forward.

In the coming months, we will begin to leverage a specific tool, a racial equity toolkit, to identify areas within our policies, practices, and products where racial inequity is perpetuated and to change them. We will also begin drafting a racial equity action plan that will spell out some of our key plans and commitments.

This work is difficult, uncomfortable, continuous, and completely necessary. As explained by our president Nicholas Turner in a [recent blog post](#), these efforts are integral to our theory of change as advancing racial equity is a commitment that must go hand in hand with all criminal justice reform. At Vera, we won't settle for something we want more.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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