

DON'T CALL THEM “POST-RACIAL”

MILLENNIALS' ATTITUDES
ON RACE, RACISM AND
KEY SYSTEMS IN OUR SOCIETY



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The “Millennial Generation” (born post-1980, ages 18-30) is the largest, most racially and ethnically diverse generation of individuals the United States has ever known. Unsurprisingly, public opinion surveys provide evidence that young people are more open-minded than their parents’ or grandparents’ generations about inter-racial friendships and relationships. However, too many journalists, political commentators and even researchers read too much into this inter-racial open-mindedness and label young people today as “post-racial,” either explicitly or implicitly. Combined with Barack Obama’s victory in the 2008 presidential election, recognition of the national demographic changes we are currently experiencing through millennials has fed into a common narrative in mainstream media that race and racism are no longer significant barriers to success in our nation.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the racial attitudes of millennials, and the study’s results challenge the labeling of young people as post-racial. The Applied Research Center (ARC) conducted 16 focus group discussions in Los Angeles on the intersections of race and racism with key systems of society: criminal justice, housing, public schools, employment, healthcare and immigration. The participants were 18-25 years old, and each discussion session was divided into four groups: African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Latinos and whites. The evidence from these focus group discussions strongly suggests that **most young people today believe that race still matters.**

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KEY FINDINGS

❶ **A large majority of millennials assert that race continues to matter.** When asked in the abstract if race is still a significant factor, a minority of millennials initially say that they don't believe race still matters—and some young people clearly believe that money or class matter more than race. But when asked to discuss the impact, or lack thereof, that race and racism have within various systems, a large majority assert that race continues to matter. Our focus group sessions concentrated on the criminal justice system, public school system, employment, healthcare system, housing and the immigration system.

❷ **Millennials are not monolithic. There are differences in how young people of different races and ethnicities view the extent and continued significance of racism in various systems of society.** The fact that most millennials believe race still matters should not mask the very real differences of opinion both across and within racial groups about the *extent* to which they believe race and racism impact outcomes, and in which of society's major systems. Our study reveals that issues like employment and criminal justice typically garner cross-racial agreement that racism continues to play a significant role, whereas on the topics of education, housing, health and immigration, different races and/or ethnicities emerge as majorities in the "race still matters" camp. Our study also finds that young people of color are more likely to bring up issues of race, access and resources when discussing these systems, while young white millennials are less likely to make connections across systems.

❸ **Like most Americans, the majority of young people have difficulty defining present-day racism when initially asked and typically fall back upon generic terms of *interpersonal* racism.** After an initial stumped silence or stumbling for words that greets a simple question of how to define present-day racism, the most common responses, both oral and written, are generic terms like "discrimination based upon race or color," "stereotypes," etc. Most white young people think about racism as something intentional and typically as something that occurs between individuals. On the other hand, while many young people of color similarly fall back on generic definitions of *interpersonal* racism when initially asked, most have little problem labeling an entire system as racist, given their personal and community experiences and the racial patterns of resources they see across systems. Moreover, young people with social or racial justice organizing experience and those who have taken courses in race and ethnicity tend to describe racism in *institutional* or systemic terms.

OVERVIEW

This report provides insights into the ways in which young people define present-day racism and the consequences of those different definitions. While the evidence demonstrates that most millennials use readily available language to articulate their views on how race and racism operate in present day, the deeper discussions that focus groups allow reveal that many young people of color and some young whites are able to describe the compounding effects of the connections across society's institutions that continue to impact racial outcomes. Many millennials use more institutional and structural definitions of racism. This study suggests that how a person defines or thinks about racism explains the extent to which they will focus upon institutions and solutions when discussing how racism can be eradicated from our society.

The overwhelmingly white America—in terms of both demographics and culture—of their grandparents’ generation was gone by the time millennials were born. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, people of color made up 39.7 percent of 18- to 24-year old residents in the nation, as well as approximately 85 percent of net population growth in the United States in the last decade (an increase of 24 million people from 285 million to 309 million people).¹ In recent years, the U.S. Census Bureau has estimated that people of color will become the majority of the U.S. population between the years 2040 and 2045.

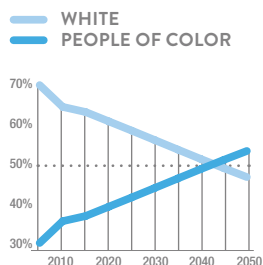
Recent media attention in *The New York Times* and elsewhere explores the racial identities of our nation’s growing number of young people who identify themselves as biracial or multiple-race, subtly suggesting that a gradual and inevitable wave of “colorblindness” is sweeping the nation with these demographic changes. Whereas one early 2011 *Times* article (“Black? White? Asian? More Young Americans Choose All of the Above”)² did not explicitly assert that the population growth of such young people is another indicator of the mythical “post-racial” era, other prominent commentators in the mainstream media have been more upfront with their claims and predictions.

In reference to the Millennial Generation whom he has labeled “First Global Citizens,” pollster John Zogby wrote in a post-2008 election op-ed, “I anticipate the race issue will diminish as the nation gets more comfortable with [President Obama] as its leader, and as the First Globals are followed by the next wave of young adults, who will be even more accustomed to a multi-racial society.”³ In early February 2008, when then-Senator Barack Obama was gaining traction in the Democratic primaries, the *Los Angeles Times* published an op-ed by Tim Rutten, who argued that Obama was the principal beneficiary of a trend among young voters to eschew the polarized “racial identity politics” of the left and the traditional, religious “confessional” politics of the right. According to Rutten, Obama was favored:

...not simply because “change” is a mantra that resonates with the young but because he personifies and articulates the **post-racial** America in which most of our young people now live (especially the ones in multiethnic urban centers such as Los Angeles)... Anyone with children in their 20s or younger knows that they deal with race and ethnicity in ways different from their elders. **Skin color is no longer a physical marker for most of them.** By and large, our sons and daughters describe their friends as tall or short, funny or serious, as good students or poor athletes, but seldom—as earlier generations would have done—as a “black guy” or a “white girl.” They take the sound of Spanish and the sight of Korean shop signs for granted. ...**What the post-racial perspective of this new generation gap may offer us is a chance to see that many of the problems we continue to regard as most intractable are rooted in issues of class rather than race.** Certainly that’s true in Los Angeles, where the vast majority of homicides involve brown-on-brown or black-on-black violence rather than racial antagonisms (emphasis added).⁴

Many other commentators saw election night 2008 as an opportunity to push the post-racial narrative. As the presidential election result was becoming clear, Anderson Cooper asked Bill Bennett, a conservative member of President Ronald Reagan’s Cabinet, what the result meant for race in our country. “Well I’ll tell you one thing [Obama’s victory] means as a former Secretary of Education,” Bennett said. “You don’t take any more excuses anymore from anybody who says, ‘The deck is stacked ... There’s so much inbuilt this and that.’ ... There are always problems in a big society.” And presumably, “big society problems” such as the disproportionate lack of

POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY RACE



Sources for Years 2000 and 2010: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables PL1 and PL2; and Census 2010 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables PL1 and PL2.

Source for Years 2015–2050 projections: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Table 8. Projected Components of Change by Race and Hispanic Origin for the United States: 2010 to 2050 (NP2008-T8) - Release Date: August 14, 2008.

adequate resources for public schools in communities of color could be dismissed because if a Black man could ascend to the presidency, all young Black men could experience similar achievements in a host of fields if they only tried harder. Joining in the self-congratulatory announcement of “post-racial” America was *The Wall St. Journal’s* declaration that “perhaps we can put to rest the myth of racism as a barrier to achievement in this splendid country” and that it is now “harder to justify the claim that a racist country is the major obstacle to black achievement.”

The limited and shallow coverage of race and racism in most national polls that receive significant press coverage also contributes to the problematic perception that our country is already, or on the verge of becoming, a “post-racial” society where the general population (led by millennials) believes race no longer matters. A large part of the problem is that pollsters aren’t asking the right questions to make such wide, sweeping conclusions about the continued significance or insignificance of race and racism in our lives. Often, researchers are asking narrow questions about race relations and diversity in the workplace and school to gauge attitudes toward race.

Much is made of the fact that millennials are “more racially tolerant” than older generations (see the sidebar, “Pollster John Zogby on the ‘Post-racial’ Young Generation”). The Pew Research Center reports that “more than two decades” of its surveys confirm that fact: “In their views about interracial dating, ... Millennials are the most open to change of any generation...”⁵ Pollsters have been asking similar or identical questions about interracial dating continuously for about five decades, providing comparative and baseline data to demonstrate very real generational changes in attitudes over time on a historically painful issue (interpersonal racial prejudice in matters of love and lust). On one level, progress has clearly been made compared to the pre-Loving v. Virginia Supreme Court case era when states were permitted to outlaw interracial marriage. However, it is a great—and unjustified—leap from the fact that members of the racially and ethnically diverse Millennial Generation are “post-racial” simply because they date each other, or don’t object when others do.

POST-ELECTION (“POST-RACIAL”) NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

A man of mixed race has now reached the pinnacle of U.S. power only two generations since the end of Jim Crow. This is a tribute to American opportunity, and it is something that has never happened in another Western democracy—notwithstanding European condescension about “racist” America. ... We have had in recent years two black Secretaries of State, black CEOs of our largest corporations, black Governors and Generals—and now we will have a President. **One promise of his victory is that perhaps we can put to rest the myth of racism as a barrier to achievement in this splendid country. Mr. Obama has a special obligation to help do so.**

—From *The Wall St. Journal* editorial, “President-elect Obama,” 4 November 2008

How else [to] explain his decisive victory in the face of a USA Today poll published just before the election wherein 48 percent of the electorate found him unqualified to be president? How else [to] explain his strong performance practically across the board—from new voters and the young and the old, to African-Americans and Hispanics and whites, to women and self-styled moderates or independents? **Obama may well have carried the electorate across the threshold to a new post-racial paradigm.**

—Ross MacKenzie, “Choice of Obama could make nation stronger” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 9 November 2008

Tuesday was a bad day for America’s racial grievance industry. ... The existence of racism in America has long been used by some civil rights leaders and the political left as an all-purpose explanation for racial disparities. According to the likes of Al Sharpton and Julian Bond, bigotry is at the root of higher rates of black teen pregnancy or lower rates of black homeownership. **The election of a black President doesn’t mean that racism no longer exists. But it does make it harder to justify the claim that a racist country is the major obstacle to black advancement.**

—*The Wall St. Journal*, “Obama and Preferences: It’s time to move past racial quotas,” 6 November 2008

(emphases added)

POLLSTER JOHN ZOGBY ON THE 'POST-RACIAL' YOUNG GENERATION

He may be 47, but in outlook Obama has much more in common with America's 18- to 29-year-olds, a group I call the First Global Citizens. Zogby International polling has consistently found that young adults have more outward-looking and accepting attitudes. ... **Obama has been described by some as post-racial. That description to a large degree fits many in the 18 to 29 set.** One of our Zogby writers was watching the inauguration with his son Matthew, age 20. After hearing one too many times that Obama's election was the fulfillment of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "dream," Matthew snarled at the screen that "King's dream won't be realized until you all stop talking about the fact that Obama is black." The message was clear: Race shouldn't matter. (emphasis added) (From "Barack Obama: America's First Global President" in *Campaigns and Elections*, 1 March 2009.)

The "post-race" archetype is popular on the left of the political spectrum, as well. For example, in the book *How Millennial Youth Are Taking Over America and Changing Our World Forever*, authors Eric Greenberg and Karl Weber don't explicitly label Millennials "post-racial"; however, they do make the argument that race doesn't matter:

On race, too, there's a strong trend among Generation We toward seeing race as fundamentally a nonissue. In 2003, almost all (89 percent) of white 18- to 25-year-old Millennials said they agreed that "it's all right for Blacks and Whites to date each other," including 64 percent who "completely" agreed. Back in 1987–1988, when the same question was posed to white 18- to 25-year-old Gen Xers, just 56 percent agreed with this statement.

Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais argue in their 2008 New York Times Book of the Year nominee *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube & the Future of American Politics* that "paced by the political beliefs of the Millennial Generation, Americans increasingly want and expect the federal government to both deal with and resolve a range of societal and economic concerns." This includes increased support among millennials for affirmative action programs to help "blacks, women, and other minorities" get better jobs and education in comparison to previous generations. Yet, the authors also report that there was no statistical difference between millennials and other generations about the relative importance of "racial and ethnic relations" to their 2008 presidential election decision. The issue was last on the list of 12 options given to them by polling firm Frank N. Magid Associates. Also, this poll asked about race in isolation from other issues, which blurs the role of race in measuring attitudes on its continued relevance in our society.

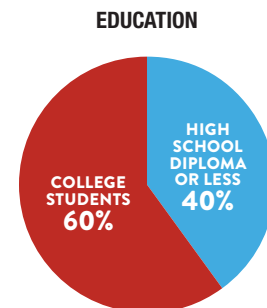
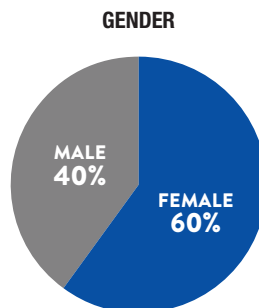
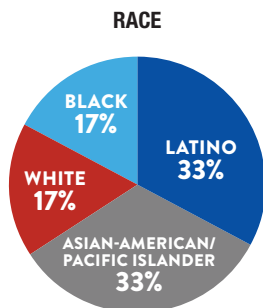
In the first phase of the millennials project, ARC conducted 16 focus groups with young people ages 18 to 25. These focus groups were held in the Los Angeles area between October 2010 and February 2011. (The second phase will expand the study to five or six more cities nationwide.) Each of these 16 focus groups consisted of four 75-100 minute discussion sessions--one session each with African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Latinos and Caucasians. The participants were paired with a same-race facilitator, who used a set of questions from an "interpersonal" script for half of the session and a modified set of questions from an "institutional/systemic script for the other half."

One half of the sessions were conducted on college campuses, primarily with current students, and the other half were conducted in nonprofit community spaces with a mix of college graduates, community college students, high school graduates and individuals with a high school diploma. Discussions were audio-recorded, but participants were informed that all names would be changed in the report and in any other resulting publications. Session locations included Westwood, downtown L.A. with young adults from the Pasadena area, Long Beach, and two locations in South L.A. (including Inglewood).

Participants were recruited through various methods, including fliers posted in South L.A., Pasadena and Long Beach; college campus listservs; non-profit organization membership and community outreach; informational handouts at area community colleges; and targeted recruitment of at-risk youth. Prospective participants were asked to complete an online or in-person demographic and ideological survey, and upon completion of this survey and an exit survey, were given compensation of two free movie passes and/or \$25 gift card(s). The ideological values within each racial group varied, but each group included a range of perspectives and levels of belief in the American Dream (see the sidebar, "Pre-Focus Group Dream Scores"). Whites had the lowest average score (i.e., with the fewest number of "True believers"), with most participants scoring in the "Leaned toward belief" and "Leaned toward skepticism" range. Latinos had a slightly wider central range, just shy of "True skeptics". Asians had the tightest central range, from "Neutral" to "True skeptics," and African Americans had a central range that also skewed toward "True skeptics."³

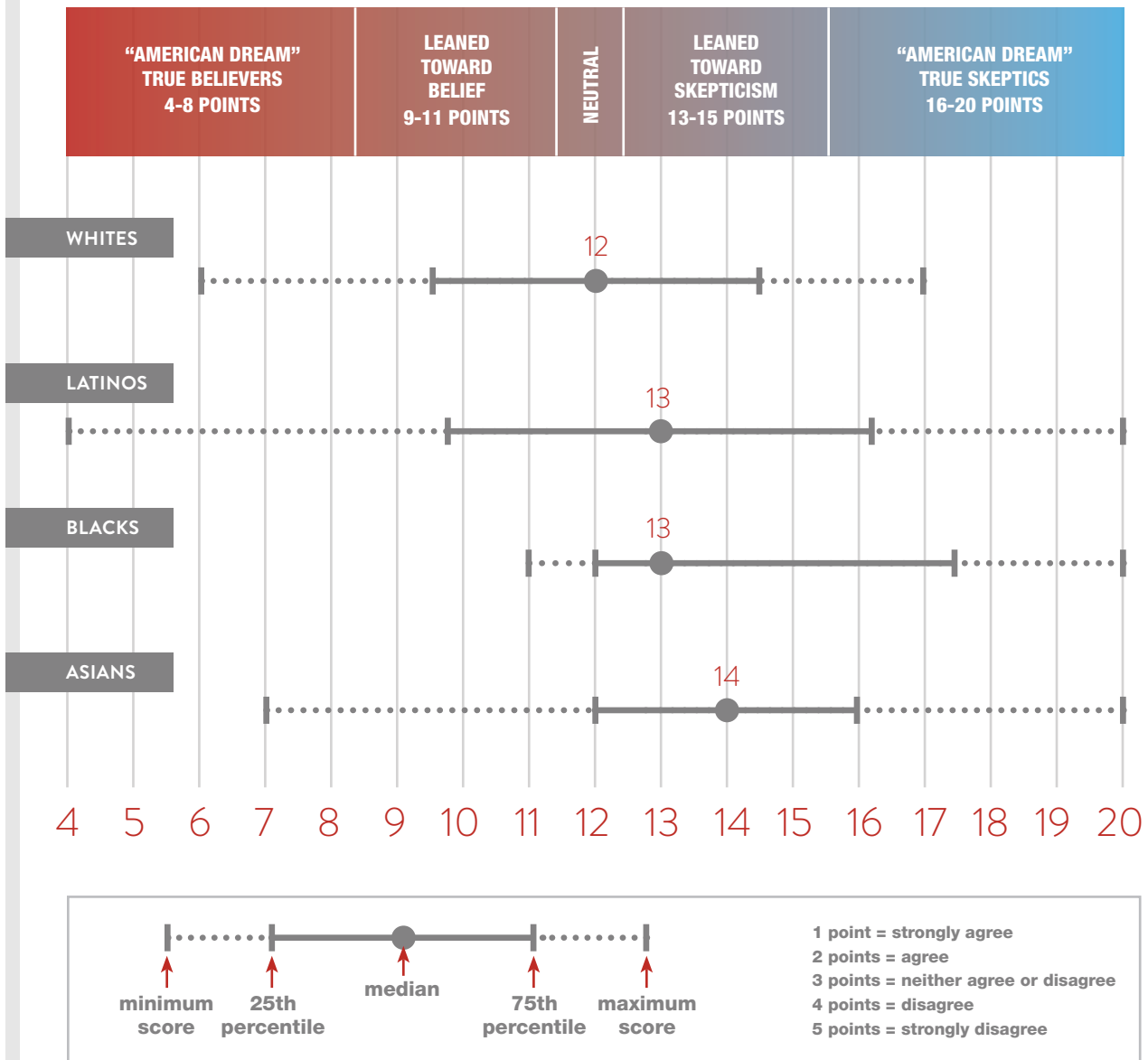
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS IN LOS ANGELES AREA

- 16 focus groups, four sessions each with African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Latinos and Caucasians
- 80 participants (average of 5 participants per session)
- AGE: 18 to 25 years (average age of 20.2 years)



PRE-FOCUS GROUP DREAM SCORES

Before the start of each discussion, ARC measured participants' "Dream Scores" to assess ideological diversity in each racial group. The score measures the participant's level of belief in the American Dream by asking how strongly they agreed or disagreed with four statements (see Appendix A, Select Pre-screening and Post-session Questions). Participants received one or two points for each pro-American Dream statement with which they "strongly agreed" or "agreed," respectively. They received three points for each "neither agree nor disagree" answer, and four or five points for each "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" response. Possible scores ranged from 4 points (True believers) to 20 points (True skeptics).



PART I

RACE STILL MATTERS TO MILLENNIALS

Among the 80 racially and ethnically diverse young people who participated in our 16 focus group sessions between October 2010 and February 2011, a large majority believes that race still matters in society, regardless of the narrative that President Obama's 2008 election was the start of a "post-racial" era. While there are certainly differences of opinion about whether young people believe that race still matters and the extent to which they think key sectors and systems in society are affected by race, essentially all focus group participants expressed a belief that race continues to play a role in the United States.



FOCUS GROUP QUESTION: A LOT OF COMMENTATORS GIVE PRESIDENT OBAMA CREDIT FOR ATTRACTING SO MANY NEW YOUNG VOTERS TO THE VOTING BOOTH FOR HIS ELECTION, AND THEY SAY HIS ELECTION BROUGHT IN AN ERA WHERE RACE DOESN'T MATTER OR THAT RACE/RACISM CAN NO LONGER BE USED AS AN EXCUSE FOR LACK OF SUCCESS IN THIS SOCIETY. DO YOU AGREE WITH PEOPLE WHO SAY THAT RACE AND RACISM DON'T MATTER ANYMORE?

Unlike the long pauses that often greet direct questions about how they define "racism" today, participants didn't hesitate when responding to the question asked about the meaning of Obama's electoral victory to the continued relevance of race and racism. In fact, the idea that Obama's 2008 election signaled an era where race no longer matters was patently absurd to many of our participants.

"I think that's a big, fat lie," responded Jose, 20, a Mexican American who works multiple part-time jobs, including painting cars, being a security guard and working construction. "It's been a thousand years that racism has been going on, up 'til this date. Martin Luther King tried to stop racism ...[And there's] still a whole bunch of things going on."

Similarly, in one of our four sessions with white millennials, Andy, a 19-year-old community college student immediately responded to the suggestion that Obama's election signaled the end of the significance of race and racism in this way: "I don't agree with that. ... That's a load of crap. There are still racists everywhere. Just because the president's Black doesn't mean there aren't any more racists. [It] can still hold you down and make you less successful. And impact your life."

Typically, young people did acknowledge that the 2008 presidential election signaled racial progress, given our nation's history of slavery and other forms of overt racism. Alice, a 23-year-old college student of Taiwanese descent, said, "I *do* think Obama being elected is showing a step forward... 10 to 20 years ago people would never imagine us to have a Black president. So I think it's moving in a good direction. But racism is definitely still around."

Harold, a 22-year-old African-American youth organizer, elaborated on the same point when agreeing with a Black high school student who also participated in his session. "I feel like it's a big stride, because...it took a lot of white people to get [Obama] elected, but [racism]'s definitely not over...He's kinda like Oprah." Continuing, Harold contrasted Obama's individual success with more general indicators of African-American male success in contemporary society, saying, "There are very few [Black] men in four-year universities. And there are so *many* in prisons."

Harold was not the only participant to consider the president an exception—as opposed to the rule—for what outcomes can be expected more broadly for African-American men or other people of color. There were young people of all races who viewed Obama and/or his election as a special case (see the sidebar, "Millennials on Exceptionalism of President Obama").⁴ For example, a female participant from a focus group of Asian-American college students argued, "We can't really

MILLENNIALS ON EXCEPTIONALISM OF PRESIDENT OBAMA

He played by the rules...As a Black man, he passed very well as a white man...If he was an African-American man with dreadlocks, do you think he would've been a president? Like, let's be real about that. So he played by the rules, and I don't think there's anything about like a "post-racial" Obama society.

—Pilar, 23, Latina graduate student

Well, I think this could be just an edge-case situation where...one time somebody from a minority group is elected. But if you look at Congress, it's still like 99-percent old white men. I think that once we see more... minorities in all types of government, we can say that race doesn't have that big of an effect anymore. Because right now we elected one half-black guy. That doesn't necessarily mean anything in the long scheme of things.

—Courtney, 19, white college student

I mean there is still plenty of ethnic minorities who are doing very poorly in this country. Because one of them rose in the ranks does not necessarily say that they all can, or they are all provided the opportunity. It says that one made it. That is all it says.

—Edward, 23, unemployed Chinese-American college graduate

point to the success, albeit a very big success, of one particular individual to say that [race no longer matters]. His experience is completely separate from other African Americans, let alone other minority groups.”

In contrast to many commentators on election night, young people like Vicente, a 19-year-old unemployed Latino, recognize that the way race does or doesn't operate in a presidential election can be very different from how it operates in more common life arenas. “...about the presidential part, [race] don't matter. But there are other parts. Like criminal justice.” Involved in a local program that seeks to provide creative and productive opportunities for current and former gang members, Vicente's life experience has been oriented more around the criminal justice system than perhaps any other system discussed in our focus groups.

When asked why he thought some commentators would argue that Obama's election ushered in a post-racial era, Jose responded, “They're trying to tell people that just to brainwash them.” However, participants in an African-American college-student focus group expressed a different opinion.” They felt that white people were trying to get them to “stop whining” about racism. “I feel like since Obama has become president, Caucasians want to put it in your face,” said one participant. “We hear it in class, from professors with a P...H ...D. That's the scariest thing,” said Stacie.

Earl, another African-American college participant in the same session, agreed. “I had a prof say that because we had a Black president, he felt racism was ending, and that we don't really have a racist country [incredulous look]. I brought up the comment that also there's the idea that [white voters] felt *guilty*.” Earl also expressed a sentiment that distinguished him and other young people of color from whites: concern about the tone of the political climate as reflected by white conservatives and the Tea Party (see the sidebar, “Comments from People of Color on the Current Political Climate”). In our focus groups, the majority of comments expressing concern about the racial undertones of the current political climate came from young people of color.

COMMENTS FROM PEOPLE OF COLOR ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE

[It] kinda scares me when I watch TV, and there are people saying the country should go back to the way it used to be.

—Harold, 22, African-American youth organizer

People are already making an uproar about it today. Like complaining about how Latinos are, like, making such a majority of the population...People of color are changing what they think American culture is...I don't have a problem with it. [Wasn't] everyone, like, an immigrant when they came here?

—Mary-Anne, 20, Filipina college student

Ever since Obama came into office, I've noticed that the political climate has become really racist and racial too. First, it was kind of towards Blacks, and now we are having issues with the borders and "Let's hate the Mexicans."

And 9/11 — "Oh, we still hate the Muslims." And white people...there are groups of white people that are, like, "yeah, let's embrace this racist attitude we have," and now it's becoming okay to say some of these things in a political nature in media. And ,wow, this is insane.

—Theresa, 24, biracial (Filipina and white) college graduate

My greatest example is like the Tea Party. Everything that comes out of their mouth is this underlying thing over President Obama. "He's destroying our way of life" and "We need to return it back to the way it was." ... That's the constant message that comes up. That things need to return. And I think that part of that is, is the Tea Party a really conservative movement? ... I can't really recollect Clinton, but it didn't seem like people were pushing and telling him that he was destroying their

way of life, and they needed to return stuff back. But I feel that with President Obama, it is that. And that is a clear blatant form of racism. And people are just masking it under a lot of other things.

—Earl, 23, African-American college student

In my political science class, I'm hearing whites go off. They seem very angry. They kinda feel threatened. ... The tension is there, you can feel it. It's just interesting. They say stuff about immigration, where their money for taxes is going. They feel they should go to their schools, not schools in L.A. or Long Beach. They feel like their money should stay in their community. They don't feel the need to help others. They feel like...why should they be penalized for our sufferings, basically.

—Ed, 24, Filipino-American, part-time student, part-time product developer

THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE MAJORITY

During the focus group discussions, we asked young people directly about their thoughts on the demographic projections that will see the United States become a majority people of color nation in their lifetime.



FOCUS GROUP QUESTION: AS YOU MAY KNOW, PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE EXPECTED TO MAKE UP A MAJORITY OF THE U.S. POPULATION IN THE NEXT 30 OR 40 YEARS. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?

The white participants in the focus groups generally did not respond in depth to this question and gave comparatively dispassionate responses. That is not to say, however, that there was no variation among or within the white groups. The responses of a non-college group of white millennials ranged from "[It] will be good [to have] more diversity" to "[It] will lead to more tolerance" to "There will be more conflict, but eventually things will cool down." But as a whole, this group expressed a vague sense of optimism that the nation's projected demographic shift will work itself out well in terms of race relations. "I don't know anybody who's angry or worried about it," said Andy, a 19-year-old white male. "Maybe some crazy Christians."

A Latino session held in South L.A. included this exchange between a young woman who had not graduated from high school and a young man who had: Solomon: Probably [there will be] more issues coming through. More problems. Maria: Or the opposite. [We could] [laughs]...become doctors. There's more possibility that people of color will succeed. It could go either way."

Daniel, a part-time junior college student in a Latino focus group held in South L.A., argued that increases in the population of people of color won't necessarily bring about a post-racial society. "It's pointless if we're not moving forward. If we're not getting the higher education. We could keep on having immigrants coming over, but it's pointless if we're stuck in the same place...kind of [like] people fighting for [pocket] change." Stacie, an African-American college student who grew up in a lower-income household in South L.A., made a similar point:

I guess [people of color] *physically* make up the majority, but [not] in terms of who holds power more politically, economically...as far as, like, land, homeowners. Things of economic value? And that really make the economy turn, and that kinda thing? We are not on the radar for that as much as we should be.

Sofia, a 21-year-old college student whose parents are from Costa Rica, similarly remarked that a demographic shift toward majority status for people of color is "not necessarily a great thing. The rich are getting richer. And the poor are getting poorer. It could just be a little bit of white people who are very wealthy, and we could have a lot more poor people, too." Carmen, another young Latina in Sofia's focus group questioned the desirability of a growth in the population of people of color, because she feared that a disproportionate number of gang members in the expanding Latino community would spread "chaos." She and a Taiwanese American college student named Jean, who expressed discomfort with the expected impact of demographic changes on the traditional American identity as a "white person," were challenged by their peers in our discussions (see sidebar, "Intragroup Exchanges on Demographic Trends and American Identity")

INTRAGROUP EXCHANGES ON DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

From a Latino focus group in South Los Angeles:

I don't think [increased Latino population growth] is a good idea. Cuz [of] how overpopulated we are. I mean no offense, but... I feel like there's a lot more gang members. If we keep growing at that rate, there's just gonna be chaos all over the world.

—Carmen, 19, Mexican-American part-time student

Y'know what? I don't think we're messing it up. ... we don't feel like doing it like everyone else ... we chose this [gang] life. We didn't have your life. We were not in your shoes. You probably had more access to things we didn't have when we were little. ... me, I didn't have a dad. ... this is my family and that's what it is. ... we're not saying it's good or that it's bad. ... [but] our past affects us.

—Vicente, 19, unemployed Latino

From an Asian-American/Pacific Islander focus group on a college campus:

So, I might be the only one here that thinks that, but I actually *do* feel that I would *not* want it to be, I guess, mostly immigrants. Um, not in that sense, but like mostly "non-white." It's just, I guess, not because I don't like them or anything like that. But, um, in the sense that when you think of the United States—I don't know how you guys perceive it—but when you are, like, let's just say from outside, when you are somewhere else and you say, "Oh, I have an 'American' friend coming over." Your image won't be someone who's Asian or someone who's Latino. ...sometimes, not even African-American. But the image you have in mind is a *white person*. And the fact that that would be *changing*, I feel like that's just too much for me. [soft laugh]...It wouldn't feel right for me. I feel like that's just how I perceive it.

—Jean, 18, college student from Taiwan

Well that's just the whole thing. That's *your* image. I mean, whether that's wrong or right, that's not for me to decide. But... as far as I'm concerned, what it means to be an American is you value a certain set of beliefs, a certain set of things that are, say, found in the Constitution that made up the country. So, being an American means more than being just Black or white. It's what you *believe* in. So the fact that it's changing, um, racially...I don't think it matters. What is more important to me is whether those minorities take an active part, become active participants in government. Because right now, as we can see, a lot of people that are dominating the federal government *are* white, Anglo-Saxon males...and you're not hearing the voices from this minority which is gonna be a huge part of the population. [Can they] find it in themselves to organize themselves and have their voices represented in government?

—Grace, 19, Chinese-American college student

PART II

SYSTEMS AND RACIAL PERCEPTIONS: RACE AND...

While most millennials believe that race still matters in our society, that is not to suggest that the racial attitudes of all millennials are the same. Clearly, they are not. Our focus group discussion about the intersections of race and several key systems in our society--public schools, criminal justice, employment, and immigration--confirm that young people of different races and ethnicities tend to have different ideas about how much or how little race matters in those societal systems.

As far as common tendencies between the races, a supermajority of all races and ethnicities believes that racism continues to be a significant problem in the criminal justice system. All but 10 percent of participants circled it when asked in a post-focus group survey, "In which of the following areas of society, if any, do you think racism is still a significant problem? Options: Educational system; Employment; Housing; Criminal Justice system; Health system; Other___."

A majority of the racial and ethnic groups in our post-session surveys also chose Employment as a system where racism continues to be a significant problem. In addition, a majority of young people of color chose the Educational system as being racially problematic, but only a minority of white millennials chose this option. A majority of whites and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders believed that racism is still a significant problem in housing, while less than a third of Latinos and African Americans circled this sector in the post-session survey.

Results from the discussions themselves provide further evidence of the varied character of racial and ethnic perspectives on the continued role of racism within these various systems, as opposed to the more typical discussions about racism in isolation. The subsections that follow briefly describe findings from these discussions of the intersection of "race and" the previously discussed systems, as well as the immigration system. These discussions stemmed primarily from the series of questions in Sections I and II of the institutional/systemic script, and question 3 in Section 11 of the interpersonal script (see Appendix B).

Also included are boxed quotes selected from our 16 focus groups to represent the flavor of the various discussions.

IN WHICH SYSTEMS DID A MAJORITY OF MILLENNIAL GROUPS THINK RACISM STILL REMAINS A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM?

	CRIMINAL JUSTICE	EMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION	HOUSING	HEALTHCARE
White	✓	✓		✓	
Latino	✓	✓	✓		
Asian/PI	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black	✓	✓	✓		

Source: Written responses to post-session survey of 16 focus groups, Los Angeles, CA (Oct 2010–Feb 2011). 79 responses.

A BRIEF NOTE ON CLASS

Typically, our focus groups with young people had at least one participant who believed firmly that class is a more important factor than race in predicting individual and/or group outcomes in society. This was true of all racial groups who participated in our focus group sessions, which averaged about five participants per session. Though they never explicitly described it as such, these individuals viewed the racial demographics of the socioeconomic classes in our society as coincidental. From their point of view, it is essentially a historical accident and/or irrelevant that the upper class overwhelmingly consists of white people and that people of color are overrepresented in the ranks of the poor. (see the sidebar, “It’s More About Class Than Race”).

“IT’S MORE ABOUT CLASS THAN RACE”

I think it’s more about your social class, more than race. Yes, race [matters], but more with poverty. Most of poverty here [in the Los Angeles area] is Black and Latino.

—Kaila, 19, white junior college student

I feel like it has more to do with money than race. I feel like all these tie more into how much money you make. Cuz if you have more money, you can go to better schools. You can avoid going to jail. Have a better job. Get better healthcare. Live in a nice home...The immigrant one, that’s the one I think... has more to do with race than money.

—Makeda, age 20, Black college student (daughter of Ethiopian immigrants)

I’d actually argue that class probably plays a stronger role in a lot of these things. Especially looking at that

educational system. When applying for colleges, USC was among them, and the very first interview question is “How are you going to pay for tuition?”... Whatever class you come from tells the degree to which you can pay for things. I mean in this country, money does, in fact, talk. Health system? If you can pay for it, you get it...same with criminal justice. If you can pay for good representation, then you get good representation. A lot of this stuff traces back to class, I’d argue, more directly and more overtly than race.

—Edward, 23, unemployed Chinese-American college graduate

I think there’s a lot of focus on different racial groups. But I disagree. I think it’s a more socioeconomic issue. It’s always about money. Everything is about money. That’s why it is the way

it is. If your family has been in the U.S. for so many generations, [it’s likely] that you have moved your way out of these systems and maybe private schools, or can afford the best healthcare. Housing’s never even a question. Immigration’s way in the past. Y’know employment status...you don’t think twice about it. [The] criminal justice system... [it] always works in your favor. Y’know, I think it’s more a “how long have you been here? How long have you been established?” That’s why it’s easier to get through it. But it doesn’t necessarily say that if you’re of this ethnic background or this ethnic background, you’re gonna succeed more. I think it’s started to become more blurred, and it’s starting to be more of a socioeconomic issue.

—Martha, 23, second-generation Latina college student

SOME YOUNG PEOPLE OF COLOR FEEL THAT RACE AND CLASS IMPACT OUTCOMES SIMULTANEOUSLY IN SOCIETY.

There’s no way to say, “A + B = C”... It’s, like, super-nasty complicated. And that’s why we keep coming back to this “Is it race, is it class? What is it?” It’s both.

—Pilar, 23, Latina graduate student

I think that race still matters. We need to acknowledge economic differences too. There are poor people that aren’t getting the same opportunities as maybe a rich Black person isn’t getting.

—Theresa, 24, Filipina-American college graduate

A person of color and a white person might be able to achieve the same things, but how much harder does that person of color have to work to

get there?...If you compare Bush to Obama, you can’t say Bush accomplished much, because he was born into privilege. Obama had to work hard to get there. Racism doesn’t act on its own in a vacuum. There are other systems going on, like class, which intersects where people can and cannot go in their lives.

—Margarita, 22, Filipina-American, part-time program coordinator

RACE AND... THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Of the six major systems that were discussed in our 16 focus groups, the criminal justice system attracted the broadest agreement that it is the system in which race matters the most. Even a handful of white participants—who typically were hesitant to label an entire system “racist,” as opposed to just certain individuals within a system—felt comfortable labeling criminal justice as such. Andy, a 19-year-old white junior college student, asserted that the criminal justice is the “most racist system...on every level.” His friend Jon, who initially was one of the very few participants who said they did not believe race still mattered much anymore in the post-Obama election era, said there was “definitely more prejudice” and “white cops are usually more mean.” Nevertheless, a small number of our participants continued to believe that class or money has a stronger impact than race in this system. It’s “still not so much race,” argued Kaila, a white participant from the same session.

REFLECTIONS ON RACE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

It can be the same crime, but different race [and] their sentence won’t be the same. And then also, the racial profiling when they’re driving. My dad is a doctor. He doesn’t look young. He does not look like he’s gonna do anything. You can obviously tell that’s not a stolen car. My younger brother... they made him sit on the curb.
—Alexis, 22, African-American student, part-time playground supervisor

I’ve never seen anything correct about the criminal justice system, so I really don’t know what [it] is. I got pulled over two days ago for no reason. *Right* on the corner [in South L.A.] where I lived for over 20 years. And that’s *not* the first time, and I know it won’t be the last. I’ve encountered a peace officer...stopping a man in front of my house telling him to get in front of the fence and turn his back. Handcuffin’ him and then butting him with his gun. I’ve seen a peace officer do several things...none of it’s good, none of it’s about peace.
—Donnell, 24, African-American, part-time sales rep

I’m not really sure *what* their purpose is...Sometimes they just stop us because of the color of our skin—Latino, Black...I hardly ever

saw them stop a white guy. I believe their purpose is to stop people who are committing crimes...They stop me because I’m Hispanic, and they’ll assume I don’t have a license.

—Alina, 19, unemployed Latina high school graduate

[I] recently learned about the L.A. riot; forgot the year. I learned that the LAPD didn’t protect the store owners in K-town. They didn’t even come to the area when everything was happening. Instead they went to Beverly Hills and Japantown to protect *them*...I don’t think it’s fulfilling its purpose, not only for that incident.

—Mi-Young, 24, South Korean college graduate

I work in the Marina del Rey, and, yes, they [whites] get pulled over too, but they don’t get approached the same. Not at *all*. I hear more people cussing out cops than anything that a cop has to say about the individual. “What the fuck did you pull me over for?!” And they *know*...they just did something stupid [with their car]!

—Donnell, 24, African-American, part-time sales rep

Why is it that over 90 percent of prison inmates are people of color? Rates of Black men in prison versus rates

of Black men in college—obviously, there’s something going on that’s wrong. The whole war on drugs is a war on Black and brown folks. So what happens to a white person with a drug problem, right? Rich celebrities in rehab on television vs. people I know who face jail time for marijuana charges.

—Margarita, 22, Filipina-American, part-time program coordinator

The U.S. is, like, the jail mecca of the world. We have more African-American males in the prison system than in high school matriculating into higher education. And another reason is if the recidivism rate is so high, then obviously the system isn’t doing something right.

—Leata, 20, Samoan-American college student

I think the criminal justice system is racist cuz it’s mostly white people. I only ran into one person who was Mexican, a public defender.

—Vicente, 19, unemployed Latino

Criminal justice [is] definitely [racist]. I mean, just in Arizona they passed that law [SB1070]. How’re they gonna do that? They’re gonna stop you because you *look* like you don’t belong?

—Sofia, 21, Costa Rican American college student

THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATED IN OUR SESSIONS GENERALLY FELT THAT TOO MUCH MONEY IS BEING SPENT ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, THOUGH PEOPLE OF COLOR TYPICALLY EXPRESSED SUCH SENTIMENTS IN MORE STARKLY RACIAL TERMS THAN WHITES.

WASTING MONEY ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

I personally like when [prisoners] do community work, instead of just letting them sit in a cell. It just makes more sense to me. You do something against society, you should do something to help society to make up for it. You shouldn't be just sitting somewhere. The only thing we ever hear on campus about the criminal justice system is that they're spending more money on jails than on higher education, and I don't like that. But besides that, I don't know much.

—Jody, 19, white college student

I think it does well in protecting people from criminals to a certain extent, but personally I feel like it fails everywhere else. I'm feeling cynical right now...I think it focuses more on punishment instead of rehabilitation...It doesn't teach criminals anything...We spend too much on it...It's an unnecessary expense, and it doesn't even help the system fulfill its purpose.

—Courtney, 19, white college student

We're spending our money in the criminal justice system not very effectively... Increasing police presence *can* decrease crime levels. It's not always like they're discriminating against Black people or minorities and stuff.

—Duc, 19, Vietnamese-American college student



White young adults who believed that race continues to matter most in the criminal justice system tended to focus their comments on racial profiling that they'd heard about. On the other hand, people of color, particularly African Americans, often spoke about racial profiling from their own or family or community experiences.

Participants in a Latino focus group in South L.A. were uniformly critical of the criminal justice system. Luis, a 21-year-old Mexican-American who is a full-time student recounted a recent story in the news of how "some [white] guy ran over a lady with a Bentley, and he went out on bail for, like, \$50,000. He was some producer." "A cop would get out on bond. If it was us? Lock you away for life!" And Angelica, a 19-year-old Latina who did not graduate from high school and is currently unemployed, added "They're always beating Black kids or Mexicans up."

The young people who participated in our sessions generally felt that too much money is being spent on criminal justice, though people of color typically expressed such sentiments in more starkly racial terms than whites.

RACE AND... HOUSING

Perspectives on the housing system tended to differ somewhat, depending on whether the discussion was about homeownership or renting an apartment. When it comes to owning a home, many young people of all races who participated in this study expressed beliefs that money or class matters more than race. Even many African-American participants tended to believe that it's "based on the money you have." But, when discussions about renting came up in our sessions, young people of all races tended to believe that racism continues to play a role:

I don't think [the housing system] is racist. It's just back to the money thing. I guess, maybe, it's kinda more about class. If you have the money for a better house, you will have a better house...I mean, I don't think that happens much anymore, where someone won't sell a house to you because of your skin color.

—Jody, 19, white college student

Even white respondents who believed that class is more of a determining factor than race displayed a willingness to admit that race continues to play a role in housing patterns, even if they didn't come out and explicitly call their neighborhood dynamic "racist."

JON: Aw, heck yes! I mean, like I said earlier, white people don't wanna live where there are a bunch of Black people...It seems like housing is less diverse in some places. Like in ghetto places...you don't see as many white people in the ghetto places.

KAILA: There still is a racial preference, I think. Like my neighborhood—there is a crazy mix...[though] there were hardly any Black people growing up.

A third participant in this white focus group, a 19-year-old junior college student named Andy, expressed a similar sentiment about renting, saying, "There are probably a lot of racist landlords. Like if they take a look at you, based on if you are a different race from them, they probably won't rent to you."

YOUNG PEOPLE OF COLOR ON HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Like, let's be real. There's supposed to be fair housing policies, but housing—whether you can rent something—depends on who you are and if the landlord likes you. And then if you wanna get a loan!

—Pilar, 23, Latina graduate student

And language, too...We're in L.A.... There's a lot of families that only speak Spanish, or Korean, etc. What about those families that don't know their legal rights as tenants?

—Beatriz, 21, Mexican-American college student

Let's say an immigrant family wants to move into, like, the rich neighborhood, so therefore by definition their children would go to that [school] district. These people will not allow the family to move into this district. Or, if immigrant families start moving into this district, they will move out...I mean, come on, we live in Beverly Hills. Do you see very [many] Mexican Americans going out to, say, the high school that's up here, or do you see any colored people going up? No.

—Alicia, 19, Mexican-American college student

I'm taking a class...in a very poor, Black neighborhood. It's been a great learning experience for me. A classmate of mine worked for a mortgage company and said they are less likely to give someone a loan if they had a last name that was different. Or if they did have an American last name, then they felt more comfortable maybe letting them slide if they didn't fit one of the other requirements. There are certain ways they can manipulate rules to treat people differently I guess.

—Ed, 24, Filipino-American, part-time student, part-time product developer

RACE AND... THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

The overarching theme in young people's perspectives about race and the public school system is one of an unfair distribution of resources. While white young adults tend to describe this lack of resources abstractly on class, income or neighborhood terms, young people of color typically speak from their own personal experiences of multiple forms of resource deficiencies and what they see as racially discriminatory treatment—from a lack of textbooks to teachers who “degrade you” to increasingly large class sizes (see the sidebar, “People of Color Views on Educational Resources”).

Some of the more ideologically conservative white participants (“True believers” on the Dream Score) had difficulty looking beyond their own comparatively privileged experiences of well-resourced institutions of learning.

I mean, in my experience in my life, from the schools I have been to, I haven't experienced racism. I haven't seen, you know, my schools deny service to any specific race. It is just predominantly white, predominantly Jewish, because that is where I live, and that is how it is. I have never witnessed, you know, someone's race being a factor in school.

—Justin, 18, white college student

Very few white participants, especially if they were college students, talked about incompetent, uncaring, racist or otherwise deficient teachers. On the other hand, young people of color with personal experience of such individuals recounted stories such as a high school teacher who would come in and tell kids to read a chapter on their own for an entire period while he puts on his headphones and reads the newspaper.

When asked whether or not the public school system generally is fulfilling its purpose, white college student Jody described her satisfaction with her charter high school, which sent the vast majority of its graduates to higher education. “I think it fulfilled its role pretty well...One of its main roles is to get you to college, so that [was] good. I also enjoyed my time, good friends. It did all the things it was supposed to do.”

It's worth noting that Jody was challenged by another young white woman during their focus group session. Courtney grew up in a rural, lower-income area where only 25 percent of the high school students attended college. “My friends that didn't go to college, they still don't know what to do because we didn't have the breadth of classes that are available somewhere like Palo Alto High. We had, like, woodshop and cars...so I think [the public school system] failed a little bit in the career aspect, as well...It did well in the *babysitting* aspect.”

VERY FEW WHITE
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PEOPLE OF COLOR VIEWS ON EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

[Racism] is where black people or people of color live in communities that don't get a lot of resources. ... Nothing says that you can't go on the other side of La Brea, but you could definitely see once you cross La Brea, it's a whole different world. ... Like I drove by Beverly Hills high school, and I found out that they [their basketball] gym actually opened up and there was a pool under it. ... [M]y school that I went to didn't even have books. Or like good teachers.

—Harold, 22, African-American youth organizer

I think when we have propositions like Prop. 13 that control how much money is being funneled into education in the districts through the property tax, places like Compton and Carson are not getting as much money for their education system because the property isn't as expensive.

—Leata, 20, Samoan-American college student

I think that they *could* change around what they do inside the schools...Late '90s, I went to junior high. Early 2000s, I was in high school. I learned the *exact* same math when I got into high school. It pissed me off! But, I wasn't the type of student to stay in school. So I would go off and learn something somewhere else...and I learned how to work my way around it to still graduate. But that is an issue—if a student has to go outside of his school to figure out what he wants to be or how he wants to learn.

—Donnell, 24, African-American part-time customer service rep

"Resources *are* available but are not *made* available. It's kinda like a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." So it's like, if I don't approach you and ask, "Oh, do you guys offer this kind of evaluation for my child?" or y'know just certain things, like if you don't ask these questions, they're not gonna tell you. And there's really nobody paying close enough attention to even tell you that your child needs it.

—Sharonda, 25, African-American mother

My friend from high school was on [the] honor roll. But he had no money for college. And he's an immigrant...He fell into drugs. The system's not giving them a chance to get that education.

—Luis, 21, Latino junior college student (Mexico and El Salvador descent)

A lot of times, too, it is like people forget about you once you get into college, and so [it's] like, really, really difficult for a lot of communities of color and for other communities that are in need of more financial aid and things like that. I have had a lot of friends that have had to drop out of school, and a lot of them have entered the military.

—Margarita, 22, Filipina-American part-time program coordinator

In my high school, the military was always there. Military was just glorified at our school. Our history teacher would give them time to talk. Once a month, an Army or Navy guy would come into class and talk about the benefits. People were drawn into that. A lot of my classmates joined the military. Even after I graduated, I would get calls once

a week, maybe more. I thought about joining the military myself cuz I felt like I didn't have anywhere else to go.

—Ed, 24, Filipino-American full-time student, part-time product developer

In South Central, y'know how they've been cutting teachers, and they've been cutting, like, classes...cuz we don't have enough money to, I guess, pay them...That's where, like, the classes get crowded. That's when, like, the students don't get, like, they don't get one-on-one time with the teachers. And that's where [the teachers are] just, like... "Well, they're not gonna finish anyways cuz they're, like, Latinos, or they're, like, Black. They're ghetto."

—Angelica, 19, Latina, unemployed

Definitely, class sizes are astronomical. I was, like, "You serious?" Just going into a p.s. elementary school, I swear I remember, like, maybe 20 students. And every class had a teacher's assistant. *Every* class had a TA. Every single class. And it's like now, no TA, 12 more students. So they're 32:1, y'know?

—Sharonda, 25, African-American mother



ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS' EXCHANGE ON EDUCATION

Public schools are failing in that there are a certain quota of students who will do well, but there's a large majority who will take classes for them to be able to do the workforce [jobs]...like McDonald's or things like that. So, I think those students don't have the same opportunities. And they're grouped into classes where that's their purpose. To be able to work after high school, not have higher education.

—Mary-Anne, 20, Filipina college student

[Disagreeing with Mary-Anne] It is fulfilling. [The purpose is] to provide education to the public. [They] don't have to guarantee you become the richest person in the world. The fact that it's accessible to everyone. The fact that everyone has an opportunity to get an education, I feel like that's fulfilling its purpose...Not all countries have [free] public school systems.

—Jean, 18, Taiwanese college student

I think students don't have the same opportunity. If you look at segregated high schools—those schools are predominantly Black. There's, like, probably, like, 1 percent white. And these are not equal opportunities. These schools do not have the same resources, same neighborhood support, and stuff.

—Duc, 19, Vietnamese-American college student

INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE, WORK ETHIC AND FAMILY IN EDUCATION

I think that everybody with [an] education has similar opportunities. It also depends on connections...I think, regardless of race, if you get an education, [you've] got an opportunity to become wealthy and become rich.

—Tim, 21, white, pre-law college student

I mean, the rules are simple. The only real rules are as long as you try, then you'll succeed. That is how I have always looked at it. Cuz if you don't try at all, you are not gonna go anywhere, for any reason, even if you have money or you don't. There [are] always roads to go by, no matter how big or small they are, depending on the rules of the school and stuff. Just, it depends on the person.

—Bobby, 18, Asian-American male

[Change] starts at home with someone telling you "You can be whatever you want." Then education. I feel like those parents who are involved with their child's education—I can see the difference [compared to] the parents who don't care so long as the kid goes to school no matter *where* it is...I look at my boyfriend, his mom had him very young. But education was just going to school. As long as you get up out the house and go. Then you can act crazy. When you don't change things at a young age...then the child takes the mentality that they can disrespect people...Parents [are] so stressed because they have to work three jobs because they don't have an education...They don't have energy to look at homework.

—Alexis, 22, African-American playground supervisor

You know, in public schools we are told to believe that if we work hard enough, no matter what the odds are, we can overcome the adversity? And it is always, like, implicitly that racism is there. Because a lot of people don't understand how difficult it is to come from a low-income background. And when they tell us, like, "Oh, but you are an American, you can do it", it is, like, "Screw you! What did you have to do growing up? This is hard, this isn't, like, easy." And, we are made to believe that if we don't succeed, we are failures.

—Leo, 20, Latino

RACE AND... EMPLOYMENT

Similar to our focus group discussions on housing, there was some admission among white millennials of continued discrimination in the employment sector. However, as discussed in Part IV, whites don't typically possess a corresponding sense of urgency to do something to combat the discrimination they acknowledge exists. So, for example, 18-year-old college freshman Justin said "I think it is definitely still a little bit racist. I mean, I am sure if you have two people with the exact same résumés, the exact same schools, the exact same credentials, you know, it is gonna be better than a coin toss that the white guy gets the job over the Black guy." But later, in the focus group session, Justin and a white male senior student named Tim expressed their disapproval of affirmative action policies (which they explicitly label as "racist") without offering other solutions to overcome the continued impact of race in employment.

Generally, white millennials believed the employment system is fulfilling its purpose in society, which, according to one white focus group, is to "match an individual's skills to the job" and create a "fair process" for obtaining employment. However, as college student Anna mentioned, "There is, though, the illegal hiring of the immigrants from Mexico who are undocumented that we've been learning about. Employers pay them under the table so they don't have to pay minimum wage. So I guess there are flaws in that." Other young white participants shared those sentiments about this perceived flaw in the employment system that rewarded undocumented workers in their view. But generally, the white focus groups in L.A. did not express any radically anti-immigrant views.

An African-American male participant, who works part-time as a customer service representative, spoke from personal experience about feeling unaccepted in many work environments because of his hairstyles and appearance. "It has its crazy twists. Especially me, having the [dread]locks, or me having a fro...And in the workforce...they want you to look 'conformed,' 'professional.'"

Other African Americans shared their experiences of employer discrimination, including Sharonda, who said, "[Job interviewers] are always taken aback that I'm from Watts, and that I went to college. No one believes me. I gotta start naming streets and people that I know [as proof!]" Donnell talked about a similar experience: "I've lived in South Central all my life...When [prospective employers] see a numbered block in Los Angeles, they're like, 'Where do you stay?' cuz most of the numbers, if you're not on the Westside...you're on the 'bad' side. You're in the 'hood.'"

Angelica, a 19-year-old Latina who did not finish high school, believes that employers hire whites and Asians because they view those groups as "smart." She added that they "try to be diverse, but that's for, like, lower-ranking jobs." Solomon, a Latino part-time fast-food worker is more blunt: "[The employment system is] just fucking people up. Their goals. Their purpose of working. Even though they're trying to go for a better situation. They try to take one step [forward] and then take 10 steps back."

Yet Pilar, a graduate student, prompted nods from the other participants in an all-Latina focus group held at an L.A.-area university when she remarked that race seems to be less of a factor in employment during the current recession.

I think right now employment is one of the more unique sectors...These other areas are really disadvantaging people of color, low-income people...but right now, with the employment system, [it] is not only disadvantaging those but also even, like, the haves. People with Masters, people who've gone to college...Now, they're also feeling it. So employment is bad for everybody to some extent.

Broadly speaking, a majority of each racial group that participated in our discussions responded in our post-session survey that racism is still a significant problem in the employment system. Only the criminal justice system can boast the same ignominious record. However, unlike the criminal justice system, in which a large majority believed racism continues to play a role, whites and Asian Americans were somewhat more likely than Blacks and Latinos to circle the employment system as an area where race continues to be a significant problem.

WHITE COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS' DISCUSSION ON RACE AND EMPLOYMENT

Facilitator: Does race still matter in the employment system?

JON: Yeah, I think so ... It's like [employers] see a Black person's name [and go] "Oh pass!"

ANDY: Panda Express only hires Asians in the front—it's like if you're Asian you're in.

KAILA: [But those are] not the jobs that count...I don't think it's race...It depends on whether you are ghetto or not.

JON: Corporations just want token people [of color].

RACE AND... THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Few millennials were satisfied that the healthcare system is doing well and/or fulfilling its purpose, which a majority saw as providing free or affordable, quality care to all citizens. Latino respondents were more likely to specify that citizenship should play no role in receiving healthcare. Most of those who were satisfied with the healthcare system were white. Such participants, like first-year college student Justin, tended to view the deficiencies in this system as minor. “There are definitely some administrative and logistic problems, but overall, I mean, I think that we are a pretty healthy population.” Some variations can be correlated with participants’ Dream Scores. In the exchange below, Jody scored within the “True believer” range, while Anna was well within the “True skeptic” range. Courtney leaned toward “True believer” and hailed from a low-income background.

LOWER-INCOME LATINOS ON HEALTH CARE ACCESS

VICTOR: I think they should be able to help out anybody without race or color or whatever. “You don’t got papers? So what.” ... There should be a plan that would cover them, you know? But they don’t got nothing. Basically you gotta be born here.

SOLOMON: You pay for the [health care insurance] or whatever. And then you gotta pay for the medicine. Even just to go to see doctor even though you pay for the membership. So, it’s just getting money out of you.

ANGELICA: But there are programs, though, they give you like, free dental care. I go there for the dentist and all of that. And, well, they only don’t cover braces. ... I don’t know I disagree with them.

XENIA: [Okay,] it’s not like [white people] wanna see us suffer. But it’s like when someone is sick, and they don’t have money to pay for it? That’s what I mean. Like they’re suffering.

JODY: [The system works well] for the most part. Our rates are pretty good in America. We don’t have too many dying people wandering around without any help at all.

ANNA: From what I understand, millions are uninsured, and a lot of them can’t get the surgeries they need.

JODY: I was thinking about AIDS and stuff. We don’t have diseases just rampant, y’know, like big diseases spread over huge areas. (Anna agrees.)

COURTNEY: I think it’s because of education [AIDS rates compared to Zimbabwe or Botswana]—They don’t understand and don’t have the same access to things like condoms, resources... We have just as many healthcare problems as other people do. But a lot of us are rich because we live in a very developed country, and those of us who are poor don’t have the access and are left to fend for ourselves.

There was little to no disagreement among whites on the question of the quality of care received. Generally, whites were also skeptical that people of color receive a different quality of service. As unemployed Pasadena resident Andy explained, “I don’t think so at all. I think it’s based on money, and if you have insurance or not.”

On the other hand, an Asian-American male participant spoke from his job experience about an example of the different healthcare treatment received by Latinas.

I used to work in a hospital as an ultrasound tech. Most of our clients were Latina, and our techs were white. They’d complain that they’re always scanning Latinas, who were having babies all the time, taking advantage of everything. That was constant. I would hear that every day. They would always complain. I was just an intern at the time, and they wouldn’t even wanna scan. They’d say, “you do it.”

—Ed, 24, Filipino-American full-time student, part-time product developer

Generally, people of color, particularly Latinos, were more likely to lament the lack of access to affordable healthcare for both themselves and their family and/or community members. Pilar, a 23-year-old Latina studying in a healthcare-related field stated, “How you are perceived is gonna impact the care that you receive... Race explains some... factors. If you look at infant mortality... why [do white] women who don’t have a high school diploma have better infant mortality [rates] than African-American women with their PhD?”

A larger proportion of African-American young people expressed a belief that class is more important than race in determining access to good, affordable healthcare. As 25-year-old, college-educated mother Sharonda exclaimed when asked what purpose the healthcare system should serve: “Oooh child! How *much you make* should not determine how well you’re treated. Period. Point-blank.” Donnell, another African-American participant also felt that money was the determining factor, not race: “Because no matter what your race is, if you can afford the good doctors, you can afford the good doctors... For the healthcare system, it’s all about class.”

RACE AND... THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

I could tell you immigration is not working. ... The people who are living here illegally are not necessarily having the best life. I think that immigrants of the 1900s, their life might've been just as bad but nobody knows what it's like to live in fear of getting caught by some sort of police. So I feel like immigration, there needs to be some sort of comprehensive reform that will allow, or give life back to these people.

—Alicia, a 19-year old college student who emigrated to the United States from Mexico as a child

Our focus groups demonstrated that there was general recognition among our sample of young adults that Latinos in general, and Mexicans in particular, receive unfair treatment from the immigration system. Discussions focused less upon arbitrary detention than on the difficulty Mexican nationals have in coming to the United States with papers in comparison to “other countries.” As one African-American college student expressed, “As far as Mexico, it's a lot harder for them to become legal citizens, compared to Europe. It can take years, decades...so the rules can be biased.”

Some of the Black focus groups included African immigrants. Makeda, a 20-year-old student from Ethiopia, explained the painstaking legal process for her family: “You have to be here a set number of years. Learn language. Also, you have to take a test. I didn't have to take it, but my parents did. Literally hundreds of questions. Financially, you have to pay a lot of money. There are formal rules.”

Some white and some Black millennials expressed apprehension or unease with undocumented immigration. A white male college student expressed the common misconception that immigrants are “dragging down” schools, roads, and “everything else” because “they are not paying taxes.” Some African-American participants also believed that Mexican immigrants put a strain on government systems, while others were supportive of more open borders (see the sidebar, “Diverging Views Among Black College Students on Immigration”).

DIVERGING VIEWS AMONG BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS ON IMMIGRATION

FACILITATOR: What do you think is the purpose of the immigration system?

MAKEDA: Well I'm an immigrant. So... to allow immigrants to come to this country...and in turn they would provide for this country.

DARA: I agree with Makeda...but in some senses it's kinda delicate. We had the whole Dream Act. I believe you should be able to get an education, but it's kinda taking money away from what I could get.

MAKEDA: [But] if you're an immigrant, you actually don't get money. You don't qualify.

LAURA: Are you talking legal or illegal? Cuz I grew up in southern San Diego. And it's a day-to-day issue there, so you look at it differently. If you are paying into the system, why not? But in terms of illegal immigration, it's not necessarily about equal opportunity.

SESSION 1

DIVERGING VIEWS AMONG BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS ON IMMIGRATION

FACILITATOR: What do you think is the purpose of the immigration system?

FEMI: Obviously, with Mexico being so looked down upon, with Mexicans migrating to America, it plays a big part in it. I just look at the European union, and I just see how freely people from countries within the union are able to move from one country to another. And we have North America. I don't see why we can't have the same policies. Ok, I understand that Mexico is vastly under-developed, and Canada is close to our level, but at the end of the day, they were here first if anything. Like, how can you tell them they can't come into America when they partially owned most of the land? So it's just bizarre to me.

EARL: Racism definitely plays into immigration...I did summer abroad, and I was in Madrid. And they have, like, you

can move freely from countries within Europe. But then there's a strong hatred toward anyone that's from Asia or from Africa...and I think it extends over here to the United States. I think that some countries find it easier to get into here than other countries.

STACIE: You can't put that huge a restriction on citizenship amongst the people who, don't they make up, now, with the Census, a majority of California? Hispanics or Latinos. Like, that is the workforce. They're doing, y'know, the blue collar jobs that keep it running. So for you to sit there and put some cuffs on them for someone who's gone to school here their whole lives. They are American yet you wanna send them back....I don't understand the logic of that. But then again, I'm sure it's politics.

SESSION 2

While she was by no means in the majority of whites, Courtney articulated an argument for open borders similar to the idea expressed above by Femi, who immigrated from Nigeria. Courtney stated: "I think there shouldn't even be an immigration system...Why should I discriminate because you were born in Mexico and I was born in the United States? That's not very fair. I think there should be a more globalized system." Courtney's fellow focus group participants did not agree with her—for example, one participant argued that one of the immigration system's purposes should be "to protect us from anyone who would do us harm, to protect the country." Regardless, a majority of white female college students expressed the belief that there is a anti-Latino bias in the immigration system.

The topic of immigration came up in all four of the Latino focus groups in each of the five other topic areas, as indicated in the quotations throughout this report. Additionally, one Latina college student also brought up immigration in a discussion of how to define contemporary racism. "Anti-immigrant activists in Arizona are being portrayed as 'border activists,'" she argued about media coverage of the issue. "Whereas before if you ... walked into the home of some random civilian's home and you killed them and their kids, you'd be a 'murderer' and a 'terrorist.' But if you are working under the state agenda, and the national rhetoric, then you're a 'border activist.' So I think that is racist."

PART III

DEFINING RACISM AND TALKING ABOUT RACE

- Most millennials in our focus groups stumbled, paused and/or provided a generic, interpersonal-level definition of racism when asked directly to define it.
- Most participants of color had little trouble labeling entire systems “racist,” while white participants were uncomfortable with that.
- Most whites defined racism as requiring intent.

As discussed in Part I, our focus groups clearly revealed that millennials do not subscribe to the idea that Obama’s 2008 election was some magic bullet or end-of-the-line stop for racism in the United States. And, as will be discussed in Part III, there is a perception gap both among and within races about exactly how issues of race and of class play out in several key systems of our society. Some participants believed that racism appears significantly throughout society’s institutions, while others believed that nothing is wrong with the rules and practices within the various institutions—it’s just that certain individuals within some institutions behave in a racially biased fashion.

Across the four racial groups in our study, the most common responses to the question of what constitutes racism in today’s society were either a long, silent pause as the participants struggled for the right words to describe their thoughts or something on the order of “Oooh, man, that’s hard.” This isn’t surprising considering most young people, like most people in the United States in general, don’t have a well-developed definition of the term racism (see the sidebar, “The Four Levels of Racism as Defined by ARC”).

Typically, the long silent pauses or “Oooh, that’s hard” were followed by a simple, Interpersonal-level definition of racism. For example, Jenny, a 21-year-old Asian-American college student responded, “This is a hard one. Racism today would be... um... I don’t know why this is so hard! I guess discriminating based on the color of someone’s skin. Or a perceived bias or thought that you’ve already had about them. Stereotype of a race or something.” Similar generic expressions included:

Judging someone based on their ethnic background. Applying assumptions on them without knowing them, I guess. So, like, stereotypes, other things. Pre-judgments.
—Patrick, 21, Korean-American college student

When you’re judged by the color of your skin. By your ethnic background.
—Carmen, 19, Mexican-American part-time junior college student, unemployed

Judging someone not on their character or merits, but how they look.
—Sofia, 21, Costa Rican American college student

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THE FOUR LEVELS OF RACISM AS DEFINED BY ARC

At ARC, we differentiate between four levels of racism in seeking to change the way society talks about and understands racial inequity. The most common understanding of racism in our country is limited to the “interpersonal” level of racism—the personal prejudice and intentional bias in our individual interactions across different races. A different and emerging explanation of racism contends that interpersonal racism is actually a *symptom* of a more fundamental *system* of racism—an array of cultural norms and institutional policies and practices that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes, often without individual intent or malice.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL



INTERNALIZED RACISM lies *within individuals*.

- This type of racism comprises our private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture. This can take many different forms including: prejudice towards others of a different race; internalized oppression—the negative beliefs about oneself by people of color; or internalized privilege—beliefs about superiority or entitlement by white people.
- An example is a belief that you or others are more or less intelligent, based on race.



INTERPERSONAL RACISM occurs *between individuals*.

- This is the bias that occurs when individuals interact with others and their personal racial beliefs affect their public interactions.
- Examples are racial slurs, bigotry, hate crimes and racial violence.

SYSTEMIC LEVEL



INSTITUTIONAL RACISM occurs *within institutions and systems of power*.

- This refers to the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.) that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they reinforce racial inequities.
- An example is a school system that concentrates people of color in the most overcrowded schools, in the least challenging classes and with the least qualified teachers, resulting in higher dropout rates and disciplinary rates compared to white students.



STRUCTURAL RACISM is racial bias *among institutions and across society*.

- This involves the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors, including the history, culture, ideology and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.
- An example is the cultural depictions of people of color as criminals in mainstream media, which can influence how various institutions and individuals treat people of color with suspicion when they are shopping, traveling, or seeking housing and employment—all of which can result in discriminatory treatment and unequal outcomes.

RACISM IS ABOUT HATERS

DANIEL: [Racism is] a little bit of everything. Jealousy. But mostly it's built up when that other race knows you're moving up.

LUIS: Grudge, envy [because] they are getting left behind. People of a different color try to go against you.

XENIA: [White people] don't want us to move forward. If [immigrants] had papers they would move forward...and they don't want us to get there. Hating. Jealousy.

MARIA: I think if they ain't gonna like you they ain't gonna like you. If I ain't gonna like her, I ain't gonna like her. Sometimes, because you're Mexican. Salvadoran.

Andy: Hate. Disgust because of others' background.

Generally, when asked to provide examples, participants of color reflected upon their personal, family, and/or group experiences within institutions or systems. For example, Alexis, a 23-year-old African-American junior college student reported, "I had an economics teacher who didn't teach us absolutely nothing...because obviously he didn't care. So that's racism."

Some young people of color—particularly those with community organizing experience or other social/racial justice volunteer work, go a step further and articulate definitions of the institutional level of racism previously described. Leata, a 20-year-old college student whose family is from Samoa, said, "I don't think racism today is like racism was in the '60s—like very overt 'You're Black, drink from that fountain.'...I think it's more institutional and hidden in the laws that we create." Harold, an African-American youth organizer, described how his aunt helped him understand present-day racism. She's told him, "Race is a system. And so white folks don't have to, like, call you an n-word to your face now. They just make sure that you live, y'know, close to the 110 freeway. Or they just make sure you go to schools like Manual Arts, or Dorsey, or Crenshaw." Another African-American participant, Stacie, said, "Racism plays out a lot within policy and things that are institutionalized. It can be within school, within prisons, the county. Within public entities in general."

Some white college students who have taken race/ethnicity courses in sociology or other related fields also show signs of being able to articulate definitions of racism at the institutional and structural levels. One female college student contributed: "I think today structural racism is kind of more prevalent than just like one-on-one interaction racism. So, like, today racism is the fact that there is severe residential segregation that leads to economic stratification. And just...the fact that the system puts minorities at a disadvantage, whether that it is on purpose or not, but just the fact that the way that the system is disadvantages minorities is like the main racism today."

A WHOLE SYSTEM? RACIST?

QUESTION TO FOCUS GROUP OF WHITE MILLENNIALS: Can any of these systems that we've been talking about—public schools, criminal justice, employment, healthcare, housing, immigration—be described as racist?

ANNA: [Pausing] ... Well, what do you mean by "racist"?

JODY: Calling a whole system racist is, like ... [trails off skeptically].

ANNA: [Agreeing] Yeah.

JODY: Besides immigration....I guess the public schools system is more "classist". if you will, than racist. But it comes to the same thing sometimes in some areas. Criminal justice? Probably. It depends on the judge or jury, I guess. Employment? Also, technically not supposed to be, but maybe [it] is, depending upon the employer.

ANNA: I mean, there's definitely *aspects* of racism in everything. Defining racism as creating a hierarchy between different groups and valuing some above others? Then yeah.

COURTNEY: I think none of them, at least today, *intend* to..., but because of corruption ... because unfortunately, a lot of, like, lower-class areas are filled with minorities, you know, unfortunately they have the effect of being racist, but I don't think that any of them *really* intend to be racist. Some of them have in the past...housing system... immigration for the Chinese...At least now, none of them *overtly* strive to be racist.

IF IT'S NOT OVERT, IT MUST NOT HURT?

Contrast college student Margarita's view with those of three white students who attend the same university.

I think that's why it's easier for more people to say "oh racism doesn't exist anymore today"—because we don't have the overt racism of, like, segregation where it is spelled out, like, "You can't come here because of your color."

—Margarita, 22, Filipina-American part-time program coordinator

I guess you could go back to segregation if you really want to see racism. There wouldn't be any Black kids or Asian kids going to the same school together...Now, obviously,

we're all pretty much in the same places. Like at my public school, there were a bunch of races. In the jails, there's a bunch of races.

—Jody, 19, white college student

After the reconstruction in the South, you had all these laws being re-enacted that prevented African Americans from voting. Inherently racist right there, the grandfather clause, the literacy test, that kind of stuff, and you know you can clearly see that a certain group is being discriminated against. If you are in L.A. and you had one school that just outright denied African Americans from going there, like, then that is, like, racist.

—Justin, 18, white college student

You'd have to have like a blatant. I don't know that is hard cause you'd have to have someone saying that "They refused to sell me this because I'm, you know Asian as opposed to Black" or whatever. I don't know, but then the real estate agent could just be like, no they didn't fit the [profile]... like their money situation just wasn't... I mean it is hard to say.

—Mirna, 20, white female college student

Few whites used institutional or structural language when defining racism. This was the case compared to people of color in both their oral and written definitions (see the "Defining Racism Word Clouds" sidebar). As mentioned, they tended to focus upon intention—for example, Courtney argued that some individuals are racist, but since our systems don't intend to be racist, we cannot justifiably label them as such. Certainly, some young people of color are also uncomfortable with labeling an entire system as racist.

I don't know if that's me personally, that I'm pretty idealistic, so I think when I look at most of the systems...I don't know if I'm being objective, or I *want* to believe that they're not...overtly racist. But I do think there are *people* in the system, like individuals in the system, that do have discrimination against certain types of people...[Individuals] in more powerful positions who have that point of view and that could influence others. But I don't think the system as a whole is racist.

—Alice, 22, Taiwanese-American college student

When a participant in a focus group of Latina college students argued that the written and unwritten rules of the various systems worked to effectively maintain the status quo of racial hierarchy, Martha, a 23-year-old daughter of low-income immigrants, had this to say:

I think it's more of the overarching system. Not necessarily a "this group wants to keep that group down." I think it's more of an "ok, if these rich people are gonna live in this community, then their taxes are gonna go to that community." And it's not necessarily that they're, like, "I don't care about that community, I *want* them to be poor." It's not that. It's just, they don't wanna give up their money.

Other young people of color, particularly those with organizing experience, reflected explicitly upon the racial power dynamics that help maintain systems of racial hierarchy. Harold, a 22-year old African-American youth organizer, grew up in South Los Angeles and interacted with “other Black folks, Latinos, Koreans, and white folks.” But when he interacted with those different groups, “They were all on different levels. Blacks on the street. In school. Similar with Latinos. White folks here in South L.A.? They’re usually in a position of power. Firemen. Most common is police, teachers, doctors. Koreans, too—go to the liquor store.”

It was relatively rare, on the other hand, for white participants to position themselves as beneficiaries of any sort of privilege based on their race. And without a perspective about their own racial privilege and with a strictly interpersonal definition of racism, it’s easier for whites to believe people of color are, in fact, the “most racist” members of our society. “Honestly to me, it’s more like ethnic, it’s like groups that aren’t white that...have the crazier prejudice,” claimed Kaila, a white community college student. “Y’know, those excuses like why they are the way they are? And blaming the white man and stuff. It seems like there’s more [of] *them* being racist than white people.”

DEFINING RACISM WORD CLOUDS

Most frequently used language when defining racism in post-session survey

WHITE PARTICIPANTS



PEOPLE OF COLOR PARTICIPANTS



Note: Font sizes are proportional to the percentage of respondents who used the word in written responses to the post-survey question, “How do you define racism?” For example, the word “someone” was used twice as often (42.8%) by white participants as the word “group” (21.4%), so the font size is twice as large. A total of 14 white respondents and 58 people of color respondents.

PART IV

WHAT NEXT? HOW DOES CHANGE HAPPEN?

As discussed previously, this report provides three key findings from ARC's first series of 16 focus groups with millennials—people ages 18-25—in the Los Angeles area:

- **First**, millennials do believe race and racism still matter.
- **Second**, while millennials believe race matters, they do not think monolithically about race and racism. We found differences in how young people of different races and ethnicities view the extent and continued significance of racism in different systems of society.
- **Third**, like most Americans, the majority of young people have difficulty defining present-day racism and typically fall back upon generic terms of *interpersonal* racism, even though young people of color, in particular, generally have little trouble labeling entire systems as racist.

We conclude this report with some initial results on how millennials believe change happens in our society and what changes they believe should occur to narrow society's racial disparities in the six systems discussed in the focus groups: criminal justice, education, employment, housing, healthcare, and immigration. We also reflect upon their relative sense of urgency on how soon such change can and should occur.

INDIVIDUAL EXPLANATIONS

Given the prevalence of the American Dream narrative (what some have called the “myth of meritocracy”)—the idea that ability and hard work will lead to material success for every individual, and the related implication that lack of success is almost exclusively a failure on the part of the individual—it is not surprising that many participants in our focus groups emphasized the importance of individual effort and of education in changing the racial disparities that continue to plague our society.

This was particularly true of the white participants and those young people of color who believed issues of class are more important than issues of race in the 21st-century United States. Both of these groups also tended to remark that society is “not perfect,” and individuals of color have the choice and even “special” opportunities or “advantages” to overcome most challenges they face in society.

Even when acknowledging the persistence of racism in some systems, white participants nevertheless expressed general satisfaction with the performance of various systems in “fulfilling their purposes.” Anna, a college student who was taking an “inter-racial dynamics” course where she was learning about “the corruption” of the criminal justice system and how “there’s a lot of innocent people in jail because their race was a factor,” nevertheless expressed satisfaction with the system’s performance. “It’s definitely far from perfect, like any institution, but I think overall it’s a good system...in terms of protection and all that.”

“I think that this is the best it is gonna get,” reflected Courtney, another participant in Anna’s focus group. “I think that somebody can probably think of something better than I can somewhere down the line. But as of right now, this is doing pretty well, even though it is sometimes racist because of the individual aspect of it, but how are we really gonna fix that?” Future ARC focus groups may help determine if others who have similar beliefs about racism as Courtney (largely limited to an interpersonal level realm, as opposed to an institutional or structural level) also share her view that racism is intractable.

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Martha, a Latina college student, stressed several times during her focus group discussion that class is more important than race, and held a similar viewpoint reflecting her emphasis on interpersonal rather than institutional racism:

I'd have to add that maybe it's not the systems, necessarily, that play on these identity roles, but more so the people *in* the systems...[It] depends on the individuals *running* the public school systems, individuals *running* the healthcare systems. And then, furthermore, I think it depends on human nature. People are generally greedy. It's just, like, the instinct to look out for yourself. So I think it's, um, almost inevitable that those sort of things will happen. Because we don't live in a perfect society. People are not perfect.

One college student—Makeda, an Ethiopian immigrant—similarly believed that “money” was more important than race, and saw increased government resources to improve education in underprivileged communities as the key to changing racial disparities. Later, however, Makeda stated that a lack of individual initiative of students of color students in “rough neighborhoods” would undermine the positive impact of those increased resources.

Like for the public school system, in order for that to be equal, I feel like the government has to take more responsibility to help those who are in really low-income areas to make those on an equal playing field. And I feel like once education is equal, everything else will even out...Y'know, immigration doesn't really play into that well, but everything else, once education is equal, everything will equal out...But then the only thing is... the dedication that a student puts into their education *isn't* the same. Especially when you're in, for example, a rough neighborhood. And you're tempted by gang violence and all those other things, you're less inclined to focus on education than someone who has no worries except school. So I feel like setbacks like that are gonna prevent it from ever really being equal...there's only so much you can do. I feel like at some point it has to be more an individual thing.

Like with the other racial groups, there was a segment of Asian-American millennials who suggested that individual initiative was the key factor to success in our society and used themselves or other young people of color they knew who had successfully navigated the college application system as proof that it could be done. Some students expressed disagreement with their focus group peers who decried racially disproportionate educational resources. For example, Rajni argued:

It's kind of unfair to blame the school system. Y'know, maybe the way of allocating money isn't fair, but I think that coming from a school that is, y'know, kinda low-income... if people wanted to succeed, we had resources to succeed. My roommate's from Inglewood, and she got [to college]. My other roommate [is from] the bad district of Long Beach, and she [received an academic scholarship]...So, I feel like the resources are there, it's just changing the motivation in the kids who are there. You have to inspire them to want to do better and use the resources they have.

Another Asian-American college student named Jean agreed, arguing that “there are students here from all different parts of the state, and they still made it” [to college].. Each individual's own approach, their “surroundings...their family background and other factors...” have more impact than race. College student Mi-Young, a South Korean immigrant, also agreed with Jean and Rajni. At her high school, “there were a lot of immigrant children” who didn't have documented status. “But they still were able to go to school and, y'know, get their educations.”

Some white college students also implied that young people of color have a better chance than whites at achieving if they just take advantage of the opportunities before them. Kaila, a white female junior college student said, “If they really want it, though, they'll do it. People with a diverse background, if they do better in school, have a much better [chance].” College student Anna similarly remarked, “If you show any sort of interest or effort, you will get attention, but those who don't get pushed to the sidelines because they didn't even put in the effort.”

Finally, some white participants explain racial disparities as a function of not only individual initiative, but also “cultural” factors.

Some of that might even be cultural...I was talking to my friend the other day, and she is Mexican, and she was saying, basically, she wants to move in with her boyfriend, and her mom is going crazy... she is saying, “You are doing the typical Mexican thing where you are gonna move in and get married, and your husband is gonna have to pay, and you are, like, just gonna pop out a bunch of kids,”... and she was telling me that this is kind of like...Mexican ethic. So if you are gonna have, like, people who do that, they are not gonna make as much money, they are just gonna keep, you know, the income inequality is just gonna keep going. —Mirna, 20, white college student

A different perspective came from Duc, a 19-year-old Vietnamese-American college student. “I don’t know if you guys have heard ‘the model minority’ of how, like, Asian Americans are hard-working and stuff? And oh, ‘If they can achieve it, so can other minorities.’ I think this is used to kind of discredit, like, Black and Latino communities...The model minority is not true.”

MORE THAN EDUCATION (COMPOUNDING EFFECTS AND ACTION/POLITICAL EXPERIENCE)

We all agree that education is important. But education, like the public school that you go to, is determined by the *housing*...where you live at. And the housing...is determined by *employment*. Where can you afford to live. So...I can see that education is our only way out, but it doesn’t *start* in education. —Alicia, 19, Latina college student

As indicated in Alicia’s quote above, some young people of color and a handful of white millennials believed that there are deep connections across the major systems discussed in our focus groups, and therefore that solutions that focus solely on education will be insufficient. They see the compounding effects of one system upon another:

I think that even though they’re supposed to be organized and keep things flowing, for some groups of people they are inherently dysfunctional. So like we look at low-income communities or racial minority communities. And they’re underprivileged within these systems. Healthcare, housing, immigration. ... Ingrained in these systems are certain rules that certain people are privileged and certain people aren’t. And, you know, across the board it’s not a coincidence that across all these systems like racial minorities are under-privileged, women are under-privileged. Immigrants are under-privileged across these systems. ... They’re supposed to be organized to provide resources, but then the inequality in distribution of resources across the system is also similar. So it’s like an *organized* inequality I feel like sometimes. —Pilar, 23, Latina graduate student

Pilar and other young people of color were also more likely to mention the challenges that parents working multiple low-wage jobs (and sometimes with undocumented status) face in supporting their children and becoming more involved in advocacy. As expressed by Belinda, a Latina participant in one of our South L.A. focus groups, “For public schools, if you’re low-income, your parents don’t get as involved with your school because they’re out trying to provide for you. ... You’ll have to take care of your school on your own. ...like going to college.” And then she added health and housing on top of education and income. “You struggle.”

Despite the persistence of racial disparities in multiple sectors, in our white focus groups, the most common response to the question of how change happens was that “time” or generational change would improve conditions in the discussed sectors. This sentiment was also reflected in people of color focus groups, but there was typically a greater range of perspectives offered. As previously discussed, white participants also tended to define racism on an interpersonal level, focusing on the personal prejudice of individuals. This may partially explain why white focus groups were less

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likely to bring up policy changes as sources of positive change going forward in our society, but additional research is necessary on this question.

In the one of four white groups that broke from the norm, when a young white woman suggested that additional laws would be needed to ensure equality of the races, another woman expressed skepticism that such remedies would have a positive impact: “If you go around implementing these laws like you said, then that also gives people reason to discriminate more. ‘Oh, this race has a certain law, I don’t like them cuz they have their own law, what about my race.’ ... So I don’t know, it has to start on the individual level somehow.”

Young people with community organizing or political experience also tended to note that the creation of a more inclusive society is unlikely to come automatically with the passage of time. Beatriz, a Latina college student who interned in a nonprofit for housing rights, argued that advocacy does work by helping to empower those who may not know their rights, for example, as a tenant. The message she helped convey in her work was “Just cause you’re an immigrant, just cuz you’re a single mother, just because you’re on some other social economic need, doesn’t mean that you don’t have rights as a person, as an individual.” They also were more likely to argue that change comes from the “bottom up” and the “grassroots,” as opposed to top-down from the presidency.

Grace, a Chinese-American college student, felt that educated individuals become aware of different issues, ask the government for change and, crucially, “then mobilize people to support it.” Another student with organizing experience from the same session agreed largely with Grace and added her own observation about how change can happen in racial outcomes across the multiple issues discussed in the focus group:

I think grassroots, definitely. But, um, it has to do a lot with people’s experiences. Like a lot of the times, the people who *are* creating change are the people who actually feel the negative impact of whatever negative system is imposing on them. So I think experience brings a lot of change. And people are making better demands, so definitely I think education as well. —Leata, 20, Samoan American college student

Harold, a 22-year-old African-American high school youth organizer, believed that change must come in all these systems “by changing laws, policies, [and] distribution of resources...It was masses of people that got Barack Obama elected...You need to organize, like, masses of people. Any major movement or change involved masses of people.” However, another African-American participant in Harold’s group added a dose of skepticism about the African-American community. Merlissa, an 18-year-old high school student, argued: “I dunno. I think it *does* have to be done with masses of people. But you have to care. A lot of people don’t care,” said Merlissa, an 18-year-old high school student. “A lot of people talk but don’t do anything. You have to have a desire to want to change.” Harold countered that Black communities need “more organizations,” stressing that he did not mean “charity,” but instead “ones that build leaders.”

A similar dynamic occurred in another African-American focus group—this one with college students. Earl, who was born in the San Francisco Bay Area, believed change definitely starts with one person who then pushes “the change to others...and continues the action.” Stacie, who was born in the L.A. area, felt that “amongst the different types of Black people...we always wait until it gets *really, really bad* for us to get together to work collectively. Things are gonna have to get worse.”

Participants who exhibited a sense of urgency or passion about the need for change were typically millennials of color, particularly Latinos in college settings. One woman spoke passionately about the need for the criminal justice system to radically shift its course toward providing better opportunities for young kids as opposed to incarceration. When she received push-back from Martha, who saw class as more important than race generally, Pilar said, “And, yes, that is their job, because I as a taxpayer, I as a citizen, would rather have my tax dollars working on prevention rather than incarcerating Black and brown kids.” But they have a “limited budget,” Martha replied. To which Pilar responded, “But budget-wise it makes more sense. It costs us less money to prevent than to incarcerate.”

OUR REPORT
STRONGLY
SUGGESTS
POLLSTERS,
POLITICAL
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THINK TWICE
BEFORE LABELING
MILLENNIALS
“POST-RACIAL.”

 FOR MORE
INFORMATION

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CONCLUSION: IMPORTANCE OF HAVING DEEP CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE

The focus groups conducted by ARC for this “Don’t Call Them Post-racial” study were purposely designed as single-race discussions with a same-race facilitator to provide participants with as safe a space as possible to express their honest opinions. Most Americans are not accustomed to taking part in deep discussions about the role that race and racism may or may not continue to play in our society. And while the very topic causes discomfort in many, ARC believes that discomfort should not be used as an excuse for our society to ignore issues of race, as if they will simply disappear inevitably with the rise of this racially and ethnically diverse generation.

One focus group participant who expressed discomfort with the topic of race was Martha, a Latina college student who believed that issues of class and money are more important than issues of race. She acknowledged that racism is “still present” when asked directly, adding “It’s unfortunate that it is so present.” Then pausing briefly, Martha continued:

I hate the topic of race. I hate it. Because you start seeing ... people who are Latinos, who are Blacks, hating white people. And then you look at their friends. “All of your friends are like you! So, they’re probably judging us, and we’re probably judging them.” But how much interaction is there between the groups?

As Martha implies, some people have “race fatigue” because they feel conversations about racism in the United States so often can be summed up as a blame game.

Others “really don’t want to hear” about race, as college student Tim expressed in one of our white focus groups. Speaking about why he felt the media doesn’t typically cover issues of race, Tim argued, “I mean a lot of news are selection biases [of] what they wanna put in before this or before that. And, I mean, really if it is something that is gonna get them a lot of viewers, they are gonna put it on. And you know a lot of issues about racial issues is not gonna do it.”

“Nobody really wants to watch that,” Tim added. “So again it comes down to the money again, the bottom line and they are not gonna show that kind of stuff.” On a related note, some young people of color also expressed that they detect white society’s impatience with continued discussion of race and racism. For example, one young woman said this:

I feel like if the white privileged communities were to pay attention to all this research they would be like, ‘Oh, well, they are just playing the race card,’ or something, and might not pay attention to it. Or maybe they just don’t understand at all, like what is going on. Like we grew up in these communities so we understand that there is, you know, these serious issues that they are not affected [by]. And maybe people towards the top, they don’t see that and they feel their policies are working. —Julia, 19, Latina college student

Similarly, Ed, a 24-year old Filipino-American student and part-time product developer, said the white students in his political science class “feel like their money should go to their [high] schools and not to schools in L.A. or Long Beach. They just feel like their money should belong to their community, and I don’t [think] they feel the need to help or even care about helping others.” Moreover, Ed spoke about the sense of disconnect between relatively segregated communities. Whites “feel like they have it and they don’t wanna give it up and why should they be penalized for our suffering basically, so that is kind of the feeling I get.”

If such differences of perspective about the need to discuss racial issues continue to fall along largely racial lines—with whites lacking interest in having the discussion—demographic changes may force the issue. While the United States will be a majority people of color nation in three decades, our report suggest pollsters, political commentators, journalists and others should think twice before labeling millennials “post-racial.” ARC believes that as long as the systems, structures and unconscious motivations that shape racism are obscured, racism itself will remain embedded in the fabric of society and transcend even our best individual intentions.

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Footnote on limitations of the data: While our participants did include some whites from a lower-income background, these were typically individuals in a higher-education setting (see, for example, Courtney). The experience and perspective—while different from their college peers from higher-income or higher-wealth backgrounds—are unlikely to mirror their hometown peers who did not make it to college. Additional research in upcoming phases of this project in various locations across the nation will address this challenge.

APPENDIX A

SELECT PRE-SCREENING
AND POST-SESSION
SURVEY QUESTIONS

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the government and American society? (circle one for each)

In the United States, people who work hard generally succeed in life.	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Generally the American legal system treats all groups with fairness.	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
The American economic system creates a fair distribution of good job opportunities for all racial/ethnic groups in our society.	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
In the United States, people who have not succeeded in life, generally failed to work hard enough and/ or failed to take advantage of opportunities to better themselves.	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

How do you define racism?*

In which of the following areas of society, if any, do you think racism still remains a significant problem? (circle)*

Educational system

Employment

Housing

Criminal justice system

Health system

Other: _____

* Asked post-survey only

APPENDIX B

INTERPERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL/ SYSTEMIC SCRIPTS

NOTE: Some questions appear in both scripts (marked with a “***”), but may be found in different sections of the discussion. Race and racism are deliberately not mentioned in the Section I questions of the Institutional/Systemic script.

FACILITATOR GREETING AND INTRODUCTION (5 TO 10 MINUTES)

In all, there will be 16 total sessions similar to this one around the L.A. County area. ...
We are audio-recording this discussion to help us with note-taking.

My job is to make sure you all feel comfortable sharing your perspectives, and to ensure that each of you gets to participate. This isn't a “test.” There are no right or wrong answers to our questions, we just want to learn about the true attitudes of young people today.

It's perfectly okay for you all to disagree with each other. ... But that being said, I just want us all to be respectful of those differences of opinion, to avoid talking over each other. ...

The discussion is for research purposes only, and we won't be using any personally identifying information in our research. For example, we won't use anyone's real name.

INTER-PERSONAL SCRIPT (8 OF 16 FOCUS GROUPS)

SECTION I: PERSONAL/PEER SOCIAL HISTORIES ON RACE (20 TO 30 MINUTES)

- ❶ We'd like to start off talking about your own experiences and those of your friends, family co-workers, etc. Where, if at all, have you interacted *the most* with people of other races and ethnicities, and what have those interactions been like?
- ❷ Do you think your experience has generally been the same as others in your family, or as your friends? If not, what sorts of differences are there and why do you think their experiences have been different?
- ❸ Do you think people of *other* races and ethnicities (i.e., those who aren't in your social network) have had the same experiences as you (positive or negative) with race relations?
- ❹ As you may know, **people of color are expected to make up a majority of the U.S. population in the next 30 or 40 years. How do you feel about that?**

Do you think there's anything we need to do as individuals, groups, or as a whole society to make that transition happen smoothly?

SECTION II: DEFINING RACISM AND EXPLAINING CONTINUED DISPARITIES (30 TO 35 MINUTES)

❶ If someone asked you to **define or describe “racism” in present day**, how would you do that? [Probe for specific examples or hypotheticals.] And how do you think racism is portrayed in the media (news and/or popular)?*

❷ A lot of **commentators give President Obama credit** for attracting so many new young voters to the voting booth for his election, and they say his election brought in an era where “race doesn’t matter,” or that race/racism can no longer be used as an “excuse” for lack of success in this society. **Do you agree with people who say that race and racism don’t matter anymore?** Why or why not?*

❸ In which areas of society do you feel most strongly that race does/does not matter anymore?

[Write on board independently and discuss:]

- Educational system
- Employment system
- Criminal justice system
- Healthcare system
- Housing system

When you **compare these systems to each other, do you think race matters any more or less in one system or the other?***

❹ So, whether or not you think race does or does not matter in these sectors of society, do you think that class, gender and sexual orientation also have an impact on outcomes in these systems?*[Probe participants for specific examples of these characteristics at work in these systems. But don’t explicitly ask them to compare, i.e., “Oppression Olympics.”]

SECTION III: ENGAGEMENT & SOLUTIONS* (20 TO 25 MINUTES)

❶ **How do you think change happens in society?**

[If necessary, remind them of the sectors listed on the board]

❷ What else needs to be done, if anything, to make the United States as fair and just as possible for people of all races, ethnicities and backgrounds? And to change the outcomes in our society so that we don’t see so many differences?*

[If necessary, remind them of sectors listed on the board]

❸ Has anyone here ever worked for or been involved with an organization that tries to create more opportunities for people of color and/or lower-income people in any or all of these areas?

If so, were they single “race” groups, or multi-racial? Did that make a difference to you, or would it make a difference to you if you ever were looking to get involved in a community organization? How effective do you think they can be to produce change?

❹ Finally, I’d like you to **write down your definition of racism, and circle on this piece of paper [distribute handout] which areas of society, if any, where you think racism still remains a significant problem.** You can also write in additional areas in the space provided if you’d like.

INSTITUTIONAL/SYSTEMIC SCRIPT (8 OF 16 FOCUS GROUPS)

SECTION I: GENERAL PERSPECTIVES ON INSTITUTIONS/STRUCTURES (35 TO 40 MINUTES)

We'd like to start off talking about your perspectives on some of the key aspects and systems in our society. By "systems," I mean things like the public school system, the criminal justice system, the healthcare system, etc. Now for each of the systems we talk about tonight, there are three questions I'd like us to cover:

BRIEF QUESTIONS (IN BOLD) TO BE WRITTEN ON THE BOARD (ASK FOR EACH OF THE SYSTEMS BELOW)

A) **What should be the purpose of this system?** [in our country today]

B) **What types of rules does this system have?** [written or unwritten rules; real or imagined]
[i.e., what rules, if any, are people supposed to follow to succeed]

C) **How well is this system fulfilling its purpose?** [i.e., More on *how* the system is working, if not already covered. How do we know it is or is not fulfilling its purpose? Why isn't it fulfilling its purpose? What other purposes is it fulfilling, if any?]

[FACILITATOR NOTES: If necessary, you can let participants know that they'll get a chance to discuss what they feel needs *to be done* to change these systems/outcomes *later*, in Section III. Write the first five systems on the board (these are the ones we covered in the first set of focus groups), and cover each in turn, in whichever order people want to discuss them.]

- Public school system
- The criminal justice system
- Employment system [free to discuss public or private, but don't prompt]
- The healthcare system
- Housing system
- Immigration system

SECTION II: DEFINING RACISM AND EXPLAINING CONTINUED DISPARITIES (35 TO 40 MINUTES)

❶ In your view, **are any of these systems "racist,"** or can we describe any of these systems as "racist"?

If yes, what do you mean by that? How do we know when a system is racist?

If no, how would we know if one or more of these systems was racist?

❷ **How can we explain different racial outcomes in all of these systems?** [Provide examples, if necessary: e.g., incarceration rates, homeownership/wealth, high school dropout and college degrees, etc.]*

❸ **When you compare these systems to each other, do you think race matters any more or less in one system or the other?***

❹ If someone asked you to **define or describe "racism" in present day**, how would you do that? [Probe for specific examples or hypotheticals.] And how do you think racism is portrayed in the media (news and/or popular)?*

⑤ A lot of **commentators give President Obama credit** for attracting so many new young voters to the voting booth for his election, and they say his election brought in an era where “race doesn’t matter,” or that race/racism can no longer be used as an “excuse” for lack of success in this society. **Do you agree with people who say that race and racism don’t matter anymore?** Why or why not?*

⑥ So, whether or not you think race does or does not matter in these sectors of society, do you think that class, gender and sexual orientation also have an impact on outcomes in these systems?*[Probe participants for specific examples of these characteristics at work in any of the systems they find it most easy to discuss. But don’t explicitly ask them to compare “-isms,” i.e., “Oppression Olympics”]

SECTION III: ENGAGEMENT & SOLUTIONS* (15 TO 20 MINUTES)

① **How do you think change happens in society?**

[If necessary, remind them of sectors discussed.]

② As you may know, **people of color are expected to make up a majority of the U.S. population in the next 30 or 40 years. How do you feel about that?**

What else needs to be done, if anything, to change the outcomes in our society so that we don’t see so many differences? [If necessary, remind them of the sectors listed on the board.]

③ Has anyone here ever worked for or been involved with an organization that tries to create more opportunities for people of color and/or lower-income people in any or all of these systems? Why or why not?

④ Finally, I’d like you to **write down your definition of racism, and circle on this piece of paper [distribute handout] the systems, if any, you think racism still remains a significant problem.** You can also write in additional areas in the space provided if you’d like.

* These questions appear in both scripts