

**POLICY BRIEF**

**RACIAL**

**EQUITY**

**&**

**INCLUSION**

**FROM WORDS TO ACTION**

*"If there is no struggle, there is no progress."*

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THE  
ANDREW W.  
**MELLON**  
FOUNDATION

**FIU**

Jorge M. Pérez  
Metropolitan Center

*"If there is no struggle, there is no progress."  
Frederick Douglass*

## **Policy Brief**

### **Racial Equity and Inclusion: From Words to Action**

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Addressing systemic racism remains the foremost public policy and morality struggle in the United States. Despite much talk of a post-racial society in recent decades culminating with the election of Barack Obama as the nation's 44<sup>th</sup> president, systemic racism has never gone away. While the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s set in place an organized effort by Black Americans and White allies to combat institutionalized racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and racial segregation, the struggle continues today as it will tomorrow.

Fundamentally, overcoming systemic racism will require a dismantling of embedded policies, practices, and attitudes. Systemic racism is embedded in our workplaces, our schools, and our healthcare, lending, and criminal justice systems. In the U.S., we have an economy that leaves millions without access to a living wage, an education system that fails Black Americans, and substandard health care that makes a vastly disproportionate share of our Black population more vulnerable to death and disease as we have seen play out during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Black Lives Movement (BLM) has rekindled the fire of Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, John Lewis and so many other Black American leaders. The BLM circles us back 400 years reminding us all of the struggle fighting injustices that have long included voting rights, racial violence, and discrimination in education, employment, and housing. But perhaps the BLM's greatest achievement to date is turning a maturing racial consciousness in the U.S. into a weapon that can be used to promote institutional change. The BLM has been effective in portraying the full complexity of Black identity and systemic racism. It has also forged a dynamic movement that is inclusive, democratic, and just, thus providing continuity to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.

Whether the BLM and allies can create impactful and lasting change depends on the degree to which it disrupts the apparatus of racial inequalities and sustain the transformative changes that are necessary. In his 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. succinctly summarized what he hoped the Birmingham campaign needed to accomplish in order to force "durable structural change" stating "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor, it must be demanded by the oppressed." The BLM knows the struggle for racial justice is on-going and how the 2020 election has underscored the urgent need for transformational reform.

Sadly, we were reminded, once again, of the on-going struggle for racial justice with the Georgia Legislature's passage last week of new Jim Crow era legislation that will dramatically roll back access to the ballot box and allow for unlimited challenges to a voter's registration using racial profiling tactics. Two weeks earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court took up arguments in the case, *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* where Democrats argued the State of Arizona's election rules adversely and disparately affect Hispanic, African American, and Native American voters in violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Of course, none of these recent election bills would have seen the light of day had the U.S. Supreme Court not dismantled the heart of the Voting Rights Act in the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* Case. The Shelby decision made it easier for states to pass voter restriction laws after the high court removed the "preclearance" provision from the Voting Rights Act. Under preclearance, a state with a history of racial discrimination in elections had to get permission from the federal government for instituting any changes to how they run elections.

The Shelby decision coupled with the results of the 2020 election have ignited a wave of GOP state legislature election bills. At last count, 361 bills have been filed in 47 states that would limit mail, early in-person, and Election Day voting with such constraints as stricter ID requirements, limited hours, and narrower eligibility to vote absentee. In Florida, H.B. 7041 limits the use of drop boxes and includes additional ID requirements for mail voting. Not to be outdone by Georgia GOP Legislators, the bill would also ban giving out food and drinks to voters near a polling place.

While we await the outcomes of the GOP sponsored election bills, the voting rights struggle is being led by Congressional Legislation. H.R. 4, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, alongside the H.R. 1, the For the People Act and H.R. 51, the D.C. statehood bill, are viewed as the cornerstones of the necessary reforms to defend democracy and make it work for all. H.R. 4 has received vocal and vigorous support from the civil rights community because it responds to the urgent need to stop the abuses by state and local governments in the aftermath of the Shelby decision.

### **Miami's Legacy of Racism**

On August 20, 1619 "20 and odd" Angolans kidnapped by the Portuguese were sent to the British colony in Jamestown, Virginia. The enslaved men and women who arrived in Jamestown would be followed by hundreds of thousands of other Africans who were forcibly removed from their homelands and shipped to colonial America. By the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, 4 million African Americans worth billions of dollars as human property remained enslaved in the United States.

As with the nation, racism in Miami and Florida runs long and deep. Slavery existed in the Spanish colony of La Florida nearly a century before the arrival of the enslaved Angolans in 1619. On the eve of the American Civil War, half of Florida's population were slaves. Florida became the third state to secede from the Union and join the Confederacy in order to preserve slavery. In the aftermath of the Civil War, Jim Crow laws were enacted

to uphold racial segregation and stratification. Jim Crow laws were meant to marginalize Black Americans by denying them the right to vote, hold jobs, and get an education. Segregation divided all public and private entities and spaces based on race. To this day, neighborhoods throughout the country and in Miami are intertwined with racially tied social and economic disparities related to the Jim Crow era.

In his article, *Long Time Coming: Miami's Liberty City Riot of 1968*, author Eric Tscheschlok described Miami in its early years. He notes discrimination, proscription, and segregation had been commonplace in Miami since its incorporation in 1896. Jim Crow ordinances segregated public facilities and consigned blacks to a congested "Colored Town" known today as Overtown. He states "that section was characterized by crowded slum housing. Police brutality was commonplace until the 1940s, and the Ku Klux Klan remained an active enforcer of the color line until the 1950s."



1950s Overtown. Source: Urban Philanthropies

Miami was late to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s. However, racial tensions were growing as racially motivated public policy decisions on zoning, redlining, and public housing further segregated and isolated Miami-Dade County's Black communities. New urban renewal policies ultimately led to the Interstate 95 extension and subsequent evisceration of Overtown. In fact, "slum clearance" plans were well established dating back to 1946 which ultimately forced Black Miamians from downtown areas into new racially segregated areas of Miami-Dade County.

A study by the FIU Metropolitan Center's Institute of Government (IOG) completed in the late 1990's documented that expressway construction and urban renewal during the 1960s had a devastating impact on the Overtown community. In 1950, Overtown had a thriving central commercial area and 45 percent of the African American population in Miami-Dade County. In 1960, Overtown reached its peak in population (close to 33,000) and had a diverse mix of 318 businesses. After around 1970, Overtown bottomed out to a level from which it has never recovered. According to the study, the expressway and urban renewal projects displaced close to 12,000 people and another 4,830 moved out

for other reasons during the 1960s. From 1960 to 1970, the community lost 51.2 percent of its population and 33 percent of its businesses. By 1970, only 15,935 (8.4 percent) of the county's African American population lived in Overtown, and the area's significance and commercial importance had seriously declined.



*Massive interchange clears huge section of Overtown in 1967. Source: Transit Miami.*

In his book *Black Miami, in the Twentieth Century*, Marvin Dunn describes race relations in Miami-Dade in the years leading up to the civil rights movement.

Prior to the civil rights movement (1940-1970) in Dade County, black people were truly second-class citizens. Relations between black and white people in Dade County were cordial, as long as black people understood they were not the social equals of whites. The “whites only” signs as prevalent in Miami as they were in other southern cities, stood as reminders in case someone forgot. Blacks could not use public parks and other facilities. They could not vote in the Democratic primary. Public schools were segregated. Blacks could not attend the University of Miami or any of Florida’s state-supported colleges except Florida A&M in

Tallahassee. Blacks were excluded from living in certain neighborhoods. Certain jobs were not available to Black people and Blacks were excluded from most labor unions.”

Racial tension in Miami came to a head in a 1968 uprising in Liberty City during the Republican Nation Convention. According to Tscheschlok, “it was a long time in coming.” He further notes White Miamians had ignored the problems afflicting Miami’s Black communities and simply attributed the chaos to the work of outside provocateurs. However, the Liberty City uprising was home grown and an attempt by Black Miamians to improve their quality of life by forcing Whites to recognize Black demands for community control and empowerment.

Regrettably, the uprisings in 1968 were largely unsuccessful in turning the tide of racial injustice and inequality in Miami-Dade. Liberty City and Overtown would erupt once again following the acquittal of four Metro-Miami police officers for the brutal killing of Arthur McDuffie, a 33-year-old insurance agent and former Marine on December 17, 1979. The McDuffie uprisings would result in 18 people being killed, 400 injured, and more than \$100 million in property damages. Following the McDuffie uprisings, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1982 issued a report stating, “despite the gains of the civil rights era, blacks have been excluded from the economic mainstream in Miami.”

### **Black Miami Today**

By the late 1990s, anger and frustration in Miami-Dade’s Black communities over economic disparities and inequities came to a head once again. In the communities of Overtown and Liberty City, Black leaders expressed growing levels of economic and political isolation, disconnectedness, and a sense of disenfranchisement. Then Mayor Alex Pinellas and the Miami-Dade County Commission responded by soliciting the Florida International University (FIU) Metropolitan Center to study the “impediments” to economic development in Miami-Dade’s Black communities. The initial focus of the 2001 *Economic Development Implementation Plan for Miami-Dade County* (EDIP) was on likely impediments to economic opportunity, i.e., educational attainment, job skills, structural unemployment, but by degrees researchers found greater systemic problems throughout the County’s economic and community development delivery systems. The EDIP’s research found Black leaders had a sense of isolation and alienation from the larger economy of Miami-Dade, noting insufficient access to private capital resources, a fragmented County planning process with an economic development disconnect, and no coherent and unifying economic development vision and policy within the County.

The 2006 disparity study, *Thirty-Year Retrospective: The Status of the Black Community in Miami-Dade County*, prepared by the FIU Metropolitan Center, found that while some progress had been made since the 1983 inaugural study establishing the Metro Miami Action Plan (MMAP) in the wake of the McDuffie uprisings, Blacks in Miami-Dade County “were still plagued by poverty and disparity.” The study found modest progress in some areas but significant disparities remaining in the areas of criminal justice, poverty, housing affordability, and healthcare. Since the 1983 MMAP study, Blacks in Miami-Dade County continued to hold the highest rates of infant mortality and health problems related to hypertension, adult diabetes, obesity, and HIV. Significantly, the Metropolitan Center’s

disparity study also found a Black “Brain Drain” occurring with a survey that showed many young Black professionals leaving Miami-Dade County after receiving their college degrees.

More recent studies on racial disparity and equity show little progress has been made to address the major economic and social challenges in Miami-Dade’s Black communities. The 2016 *Miami-Dade County Prosperity Initiatives Feasibility Study*, prepared by the FIU Metropolitan Center, identified a clear spatial pattern of economic inequality in the County. A “spine of distress” was identified in the study extending through all Black and Hispanic communities from Miami Gardens south to Florida City. The study’s key findings showed two clear patterns of disparity and inequity in these communities: 1) a fixed concentration of the highest poverty levels, unemployment, and lowest incomes in the same communities over time, and 2) rather than shrinking, the number of census tracts with high levels of distress were increasing five years into the post-Great Recession Economic Recovery. This concerning trend was amplified once again in the 2018 Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust’s *Annual Report Card and Scorecard*. The report found disproportionately higher poverty rates in Black Targeted Urban Areas (TUAs) including Opa Locka (27.2 percent), North Miami (24.1 percent), Liberty City (23.6 percent), Model City (22.6 percent) and Perrine (22.0 percent). Significantly, most TUAs lost minority-owned businesses with the largest year-over-year decreases occurring in Little Haiti (91 businesses), Northwest 183rd Street (50 businesses), and Opa Locka (47 businesses).

### Tri-County Poverty Levels by Race, 2019

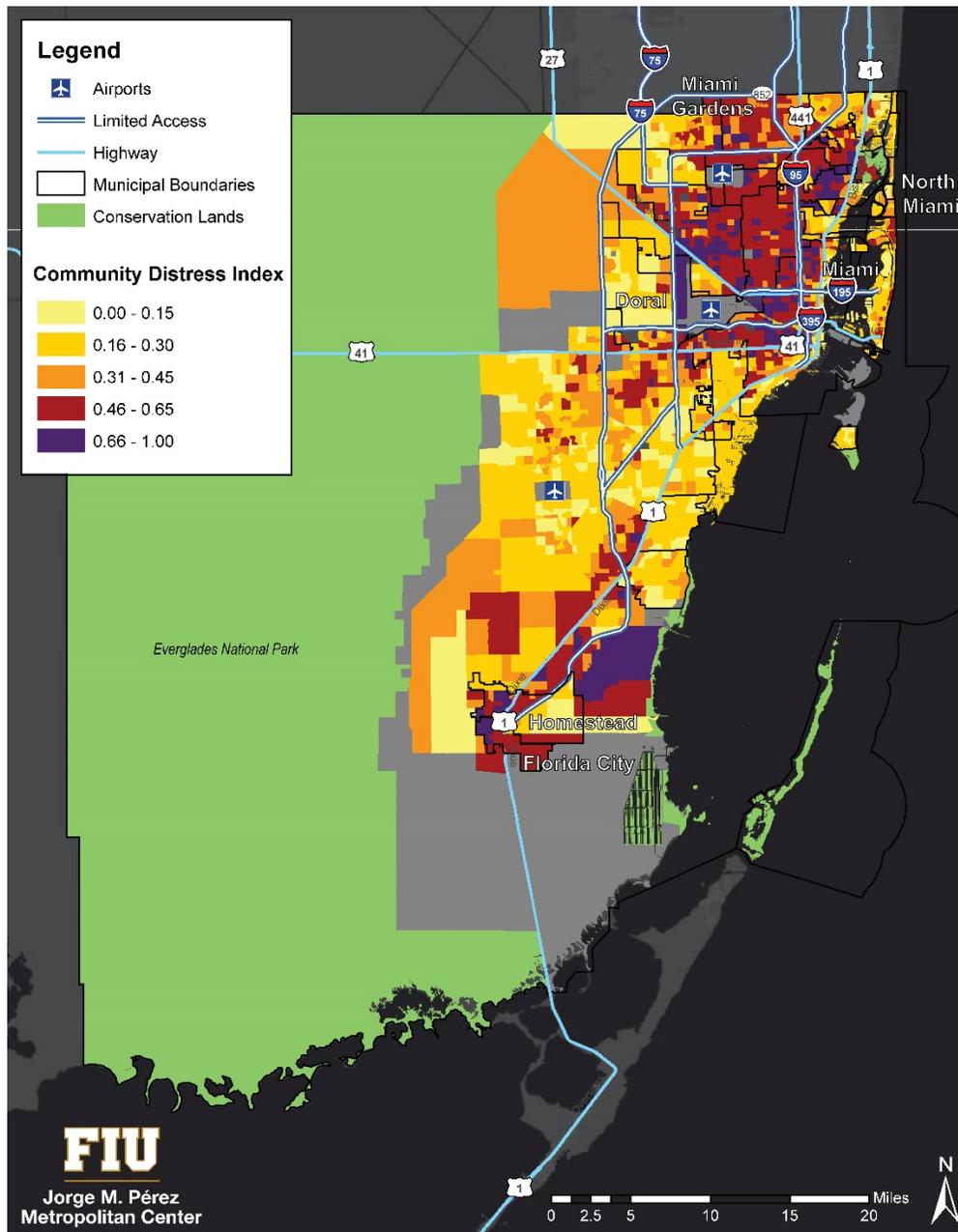
County	White alone (not Hispanic or Latino)			Black or African American alone			Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)		
	Total Population	Below Poverty Level	%	Total Population	Below Poverty Level	%	Total Population	Below Poverty Level	%
Broward County	692,563	63,213	9.1%	544,547	98,660	18.1%	570,626	74,109	13.0%
Miami-Dade County	346,805	33,109	9.5%	456,116	113,540	24.9%	1,833,868	308,904	16.8%
Palm Beach County	790,119	60,615	7.7%	266,609	51,608	19.4%	324,251	57,022	17.6%

Source: US Census 5-year Estimates, 2019

Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted for all to see the racial disparities and inequities that continue to exist in Miami-Dade County and South Florida. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused deep and far reaching economic and community impacts. Evidence shows the health, economic, and community impacts of the virus have been borne disproportionately by minority populations, individuals and families living in poverty, undocumented immigrants, and persons with disabilities. The economic burden of the pandemic has also fallen more heavily on Black workers and Black business owners. It is anticipated that without carefully crafted responses the health and economic crisis created by the pandemic may increase inequality, exclusion, and unemployment in both the short- and long-term.

A “COVID Community Distress Index” (CDI) (see map) created in 2020 by the Jorge M. Pérez FIU Metropolitan Center determined populations at risk at the block group and neighborhood levels in Miami-Dade County. The CDI ranked each sub-geography based on 20 data indicators, grouping them into four related status determinations – socioeconomics, household composition and disabilities, race and language, and housing and transportation. The analysis found the highest levels of community stress in Miami-Dade’s predominantly Black communities. The most highly distressed Black communities have also experienced a disproportionate share of COVID-19 infections and job loss.

### Miami-Dade County COVID-19 Community Distress Index (CDI)



## The Path Forward

A just community will take political action to resolve its inequities. The now commonplace adoption of the words equity and inclusion does not necessarily commit a community or society to take appropriate action to give them true meaning. Like elsewhere in the nation, Miami-Dade and South Florida will need to enact and implement the political actions necessary to effectively fight systemic racism and economic inequality. These actions include reducing racial wealth disparities, improving public education, expanding affordable healthcare, affirmatively addressing fair housing, and making lasting reforms to our local criminal justice systems.

Where can Miami-Dade and South Florida begin? Before his assassination in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was organizing a march on Washington called the Poor People's Campaign that would fight for economic justice and equality for the poor in the United States. The night before his assassination Martin Luther King told a group of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee in his iconic "I've Been to the Mountaintop," address, "Now let me say as I move to my conclusion that we've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through." MLK spoke to the "blind operation of our economic system" in which U.S. economic growth does not eliminate poverty nor create a more equitable economy where the "prevalence of discrimination thrust people into idleness and bind them in constant or frequent unemployment against their will." A just community begins with an equitable economy where the path to prosperity is clear to the eyes of Black Americans.

As noted in the Jorge M. Perez FIU Metropolitan Center's Policy Brief, *When Work Disappears*, returning to "business as usual" in the post-COVID-19 environment would not be good for most struggling workers in the low wage service economy of Miami-Dade and South Florida. Despite healthy job numbers, the pre-COVID economy was marked by wage stagnation, an increasing number of working poor and growing levels of housing distress. With the rapid growth of unstable, low-paying jobs and the failure of even full-time work to pay family-supporting wages, the pre-COVID economy was already at a tipping point.

An equitable and more resilient post-COVID-19 economy would direct new policies in support of industry sectors poised for innovation and human capital investment in the 2020 decade. An equitable and more resilient post-COVID-19 economy would place equal emphasis on the social balance sheet and human capital development. In fact, human capital development would be the distinguishing feature of an equitable and resilient post-COVID-19 economy. Reindustrialization policies focused on human capital development can create economic opportunities through a variety of jobs and occupations paying competitive wages and incomes that increase rapidly with improved skills and experience. These policies can enhance economic mobility so workers and their families can improve their economic conditions, build wealth, and promote economic equity to ensure the benefits of new industrial policies are shared by workers across the income spectrum.

Lastly, Black communities in Miami-Dade and South Florida must be provided the opportunity to build employment and asset wealth by growing the businesses they already have, in addition to the formation of new start-up businesses by Black entrepreneurs. Minority business growth and expansion will require the packaging of incentives, capital, and business support. New capital products would need to be introduced to support microbusinesses and sole proprietors in need of credit and equity. Racial justice begins with wealth building and removing structural impediments embedded in our economic system. Thoughtful and championed local economic development policies can remove this longstanding structural impediment and build the equitable and inclusive communities we preach.