REQUEST FOR PAPERS:
Systemic Inequity in New Orleans
Abstracts due: September 9, 2020

BACKGROUND

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. To date, the disease has claimed more than 160,000 American lives. In addition, 1 out of every 4 Louisiana workers has lost their job due to depressed demand from both stay-at-home orders and fears of the virus itself. All told, people of color have been disproportionately impacted by COVID deaths and related job losses. Then, on Memorial Day, George Floyd’s death at the hands of Minneapolis police catalyzed protests across every state and many parts of the world.

At first blush, these events appear to be unrelated, but those who study, work to address, and/or live with racial disparities understand how health, economic, criminal justice systems and others are linked. Recent events have brought heightened urgency to these longstanding problems and have opened the door to new realizations about the anatomy of inequity and the various ways it manifests in America. Books about police brutality, the legacy of white supremacy, and institutional racism and bias are flying off the shelves as the events of 2020 have sparked new interest in not just police violence but racial inequity writ large.

For decades inequality and racism were understood as moral issues often predicated on individual discriminatory acts or behaviors. Furthermore, disparities between racial groups were often thought of as failures of individuals within those populations to perform in a way that would bring about their own success. However, these concepts are now increasingly recognized as conditions born out of system-level laws, policies, practices, norms and behaviors manifesting, in part, as economic consequences that hamper growth and development of entire regions. The damage racial inequity can wreak on individual lives has long been recognized, but there is growing evidence that a region’s ability to compete and its subsequent economic prosperity is dependent upon whether or not society supports all racial and ethnic groups to achieve at their utmost potential—able to fully participate in an economy that provides fertile soil for their growth.

Stark racial disparities are particularly concerning for New Orleans’ future prosperity given the high likelihood that New Orleans will continue to be majority non-white for decades to come. It is not only the case that the effects of structural inequality make marginalized groups less resilient to shocks such as pandemics and economic downturns, but also less able to manage life’s daily stressors. The constant drumbeat of low wages, housing insecurity, reduced economic mobility, educational systems that
inadequately prepare lower income communities for professional careers, business climates that hamper growth of minority-owned businesses, and a criminal justice system that disproportionately impacts people of color represent collections of obstacles that make overcoming disadvantage hard to imagine.

Prior work highlighted by The New Orleans Prosperity Index, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Business Case for Racial Equity points out that generations of racially exclusive practices have greatly contributed to today’s disparities and make clear that there is a regional cost to this lingering inequality. These reports provide compelling data describing the economic and social gain that could be achieved if New Orleans were to close opportunity differentials that limit economic contributions of people of color. Yet more is needed to understand the implications of the festering inequity that created the conditions for a pandemic that kills a disproportionate percentage of people of color and an instance of police brutality that sparked months of national protests on racial injustice. What do these things reveal about the weaknesses woven into the social and economic fabric of the nation? Only in the last 50 years has it even been possible for black New Orleans’ to fully participate in the economy, yet recent events lay bare the consequences of failing to keep this promise.

PAPERS

The Data Center seeks papers that assess specific systems, normative practices, policies, and behaviors and their relationships to historical and contemporary inequities that have created and sustained social and economic vulnerabilities for some and/or advantages for others in New Orleans. Contributors should frame their submissions around answering a research question relevant to their proposed area of study. The Data Center encourages scholars in Economics, Education, Health, Justice, Sociology, History, African American and/or Africana Studies, Public Policy, Urban Planning or Studies, and other social sciences to consider questions about structural inequities related to your field of study.

Though the country has been intensely focused on COVID-19 and protests against injustices, The Data Center intends for these events to simply serve as the motivator for examining how local policies and structures have contributed to creating social and economic vulnerability for specific populations in New Orleans. As a result, this Request for Papers is not seeking research specifically about COVID-19 or the response to COVID-19 nor research about local instances of police brutality. Instead, this Request for Papers seeks research that will facilitate a common understanding of the historical context and contemporary mechanisms undergirding today’s disparities to inform a future vision of a New Orleans that is more resilient and equitably advances prosperity for all of its people.

TOPICS

This collection will focus on the impact of racial inequities and disparities across New Orleans’ history. Accordingly, papers should focus on the New Orleans area rather than the broader South. Similarly, papers should examine structural inequity and resultant disparities, not individual acts or accounts of discrimination. Examples of such should connect to a particular or multiple systems’ effect on a specific population in historical and current context. Though the collection focuses on racial inequity, scholars
are also welcomed to submit abstracts on other axes of inequity such as gender, sexual orientation, etc.

Topics of interest include (but are not limited to):

- Employment, work, and income
- Racial gaps in wealth and land ownership
- Entrepreneurship and business ownership
- Banking, real estate, housing, and housing markets and policies
- Arts and tourism
- Colorism and the legacy of colonialism
- Immigration policies and practices
- Democracy, representation, and participation in decisionmaking
- Urban and community development policies and practices
- Health care and public health
- K-12 education and higher education
- Law and the state
- Criminal justice
- Social and family programs, policies, and services (public and nonprofit)
- Religious institutions
- Transportation
- Technology
- Broadcast media and mainstream communications
- Environment and disaster recovery, response, and mitigation planning

**PUBLICATION**

Papers will be published as a collection on a rolling basis beginning in March of 2021, and are expected to inform current decisions around restructuring the economy, funding priorities, and the functioning of key systems in New Orleans, with the ultimate goal of producing a more competitive region by eliminating gaps in racial disparities.

These papers will be published on The Data Center's heavily trafficked website, [datacenterresearch.org](http://datacenterresearch.org). They will be further promoted to 400 local, national, and international media outlets, the 5,000 subscribers to The Data Center’s mailing list, including 1,400 national and state policymakers, and 3,600 civic, business, and nonprofit leaders and community members, and promoted to the thousands of followers in The Data Center’s various social media feeds. Please visit [http://www.datacenterresearch.org/research-and-analysis/](http://www.datacenterresearch.org/research-and-analysis/) for the most recent versions of similar Data Center research. See The Data Center’s [About Us](http://www.datacenterresearch.org/about) page for more information regarding the organization.
HONORARIUM

An honorarium of $1,000 will be paid for each paper selected and published.

ELIGIBILITY

This request for papers is directed at scholars who have a university affiliation, a PhD, or a history of publishing in selective, peer-reviewed journals. Submissions from local scholars are particularly encouraged. Collaboration among scholars studying similar topics in New Orleans is also encouraged. In past Data Center essay collections, some scholars have collaborated with on-the-ground practitioners to produce works that are both well-researched and responsive to pragmatic needs. For national scholars interested in submitting, including those whose scholarship is topically relevant but not centered on New Orleans, The Data Center will facilitate connection to local scholars or on-the-ground practitioners where appropriate.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSIONS

Submissions should contain a title, an abstract of no more than 500 words, the author(s) name and institutional affiliation(s), contact details, as well as a short CV.

Submissions are due Wednesday, September 9, 2020, and should be emailed to Katrina Andry at SystemicInequity@datacenterresearch.org.

SELECTION PROCESS

The Data Center’s staff and members of the Systemic Inequity Advisory Committee will review submitted abstracts and select no more than 10 papers for publication.

TIMELINE

- Advisory committee meeting to discuss viable topics submitted through abstracts will be held in mid-September.
- Papers will be selected, and authors contacted by Friday, September 25, 2020.
- Share selected abstracts with advisory committee and allow members to choose papers they would like to review.
- A Zoom meeting of authors and advisory committee members will be held on Tuesday, September 29, 2020, to discuss content of papers, answer questions, and provide guidance on the process ahead.
- First drafts of papers will be due Monday, November 9, 2020.
- Authors will receive comments from editors, peers, and steering committee members in early December.
- Final papers will be due Monday, January 25, 2021.
CRITERIA FOR PUBLICATION

Final papers must:

- tie to the themes of economic inclusion, equity, and systemic disparities;
- summarize relevant antecedents and current conditions from which progress and future implications can be assessed;
- close with observations/lessons/recommendations for policymakers and community leaders on how to address disparities in New Orleans;
- stick to 5,000 words of text; and
- use endnotes (rather than footnotes) conforming to APA style.

In addition, papers must be based on empirical data and provide empirical evidence of structural inequity and resultant disparity. Assertions based solely on logic, theory, or intuition should be avoided. Authors’ recommendations for improving outcomes from systems must be based on evidence of efficacy in other similar communities.

For examples of final papers, see the essays comprising The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection.

EDITORS

Papers will be edited by The Data Center’s executive director, Lamar Gardere, chief demographer, Allison Plyer, as well as other Data Center staff. Additional review is expected by a community of peers and the Systemic Inequity Advisory Committee.

Lamar Gardere is Executive Director and co-author of The New Orleans Prosperity Index. He leads The Data Center’s community-driven mission of democratizing data. During his tenure as the City of New Orleans’ Chief Information Officer he was nationally recognized for his work developing the extensive data sharing resources now available through the City of New Orleans’ Open Data portal. A New Orleans native, Lamar earned his Masters of Science in Computer Science degree from the Georgia Institute of Technology and his BS in Computer Science from Xavier University of Louisiana.

Allison Plyer is The Data Center’s Chief Demographer and co-author of The New Orleans Prosperity Index. She also co-authored The New Orleans Index series, developed in collaboration with the Brookings Institution to analyze the state of the New Orleans post-Katrina recovery. Allison served as an editor for the Brookings Institution Press volume entitled Resilience and Opportunity: Lessons from the U.S. Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita. Dr. Plyer received her Doctorate in Science from Tulane University’s School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, her MBA in marketing and organizational behavior from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University, and a BA in religious studies and Spanish from Vanderbilt University, magna cum laude, and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Dr. Plyer is on the U.S. Census Bureau’s Scientific Advisory Committee, and she is a Life Fellow of the Louisiana Effective Leadership Program.
Additional Data Center staff who may edit papers:

Dr. Robert Habans, Economist

Donald Asay, Program Manager

Dr. Amy Teller, Sociologist