



TOWARD A GREAT CLEVELAND:

Eliminating Inequity,
Disparity and Racism

Mayor Frank G. Jackson



CITY OF CLEVELAND
Mayor Frank G. Jackson

INTRODUCTION

Inequity, Disparity and Racism in the City of Cleveland

In the midst and aftermath of the coronavirus and the recent civil unrest, we have demonstrated proof of institutionalized inequities, disparities, and racism. These inequities, disparities and racism are evident in all aspects of our society – our criminal justice system, healthcare delivery, who gets to accumulate wealth, who gets a good education, where political power resides, and so much more. In terms of criminal justice systems, African-Americans are more likely to be arrested, face more aggressive charging and more severe sentencing.

The disparities in health outcomes are equally stark – evident by the disproportionate number of infections and death from the coronavirus and chronic illness including asthma, diabetes, and hypertension, and lower life expectancy. Similarly, at the other end of the life cycle, African-American babies are disproportionately impacted by low birth weight and premature delivery placing them at higher risk to die. African-Americans face disparity and inequity in terms of income and wealth as can be seen in lower household incomes and an inability to tap into the growth, prosperity and wealth others have experienced.



African-Americans have lower levels of educational attainment – not because of ability – but rather due to a host of factors including access and affordability. And, the long established suppression of African-Americans voters and the institutionalized practice of gerrymandering has diluted African-American political power and has left many feeling that there is little government is able, or willing, to do to change things. All of this is a recipe for economic, social and political disaster, and we are seeing this play out in front of us right now.

If we fail to take action – and use all of the tools available to us to eliminate institutional inequity, disparity and racism – this will only get worse. We can no longer be satisfied with just words, the identification of the problem, or the promise of something better.

Instead, there has to be substantive and sustainable change in order to create communities where all people can thrive and share in quality of life and prosperity. Government, however, cannot do this alone.

“Inequities, disparities and racism are evident in all aspects of our society.”

Everything we have done that has been successful, we have done as a whole community. Transformative change that is substantive and sustainable has to be based on concrete and focused steps to eliminate institutionalized inequities, disparities and racism. The social unrest, protest and demonstrations are indicators of an underlying sense of injustice. It represents a reality for many people that this system doesn't work to their benefit, and so they have no stake in it. It is the outcry of people for justice and that we take immediate action to eliminate institutional inequity, disparity and racism. Here are just some of the things that need to be done:

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

The reform of the entire criminal justice system is key to the elimination of institutionalized inequity, disparity and racism. The initial contact people have with our criminal justice system is the police. Incremental police reform does not work – instead there must be systemic and institutional reform. The Consent Decree helps us and provides a blueprint to create a new culture and behaviors.

Real reform will include:

- **Recruitment** so that we have a police force that is reflective of the community;
- **Training** that includes use of force, crisis intervention, proper search and seizure, and bias free policing; and
- **Accountability.**

This will enable us to get the right people into the police force, provide them with the training necessary to change the culture of the organization, and hold them accountable when they fail to follow the new procedures and practices that are aligned with the new organizational culture. In preparing these financial statements, the Directors are required to work these reports.

The **second contact** with the criminal justice system is when someone is charged. This reform involves changes in the way Prosecutors charge people. There has to be equality in charging people who are arrested based on the facts of the case NOT on who they are, where they live, or their ethnic and racial background.

The **third contact** is with the Courts. Just as we must eliminate inequities, disparities and racism in how people are charged, our Court systems must also eliminate them from how people are sentenced.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

The color of your skin and/or economic status should not determine your guilt or innocence and whether you receive a harsher sentence. Ensuring a jury of peers is an essential step. Juries have to be representative of the community at large – and need to understand the people that appear before them. This has critical implications for how people are sentenced.

Crime is just a symptom of the larger underlying problem of a lack of social and economic justice. It is the symptom manifested by the institutionalized inequity, disparity and racism that we see across all aspects of our society. In order to truly solve the criminal justice problems, we must also identify solutions to eliminate inequity, disparity and racism through:

- Wealth creation; and
- Job and career opportunities.

Creating an economic system that builds wealth and eliminates inequities, disparities and racism will have a significant impact on crime reduction. One key to doing this is to keep more of our spending in our local economy. A Self-Help Procurement initiative will have a significant impact on building wealth locally. By taking a portion of the billions of dollars that the public and private sector spends and redirecting them into our local economy, we can

- Expand business opportunities;
- Create and sustain jobs; and
- Create wealth among those who have been traditionally left out.

In addition, we must ensure all residents are prepared to capitalize on this expanded investment through enhanced workforce development opportunities to all people, including former felons, and opening up career and business opportunities that has an equitable outcome.

EDUCATION

For many, a quality education is the key to changing their social and economic condition. The traditional way we educate children doesn't work – in fact it bores them. We have to reorient our education system to allow all of our children to compete by giving them the tools that:

- They learn by;
- That is the way they retain what they learn; and
- Demonstrate their comprehension

Education is becoming increasingly technology driven. And the way in which young people learn, retain information and demonstrate comprehension is through the tools of technology. Interactive learning, virtual reality, and new ways of measuring performance are needed. But, substantial portions of our population do not have high-speed internet access.

Those without access tend to be concentrated in poorer communities of color, which puts children at a disadvantage, creating and reinforcing inequity, disparity and racism. This can be solved in several ways – such as working with service providers to expand access, making the internet a public utility, or building our own high-speed internet utility.

ELIMINATING HEALTH DISPARITIES

Institutionalized inequities, disparities and racism are also reflected in our healthcare system and eliminating them is essential to creating communities where all people can thrive. Just as we cannot truly reform our criminal justice system without also addressing the underlying causes of crime, we have to approach health from a perspective that recognizes the importance of social determinants of health.

ELIMINATING HEALTH DISPARITIES

This means not just treating the immediate ailment. But, accepting that:

- Racism is a public health issue;
- Violence is a public health issue;
- Health delivery models should be based on mission – not a corporate model;
- Quality health is based not only on treatment, but also prevention and access to quality treatment;
- The commercialization of bad eating habits is a public health issue; and
- A public health model that focuses on reducing the prevalence of chronic disease which disproportionately impacts African-Americans.

People’s mental, physical and emotional health are a result of how society functions as a whole. Again, this will involve a coordinated and intentional approach that addresses the underlying inequities, disparities and racism that have led to the increased prevalence of any number of chronic illnesses.

“Racism is a public health issue; Violence is a public health issue.”

All of this is not possible unless we make a deliberate effort to create a healthcare system and workforce that is responsive to and representative of the community and increase the number of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers who serve and reflect their communities. This will require both medical providers and educational institutions to develop models that support the success of students from early in their academic career into their professional career. In addition to improving health outcomes, this will have the added benefit of creating job and career opportunities.

POLITICAL POWER

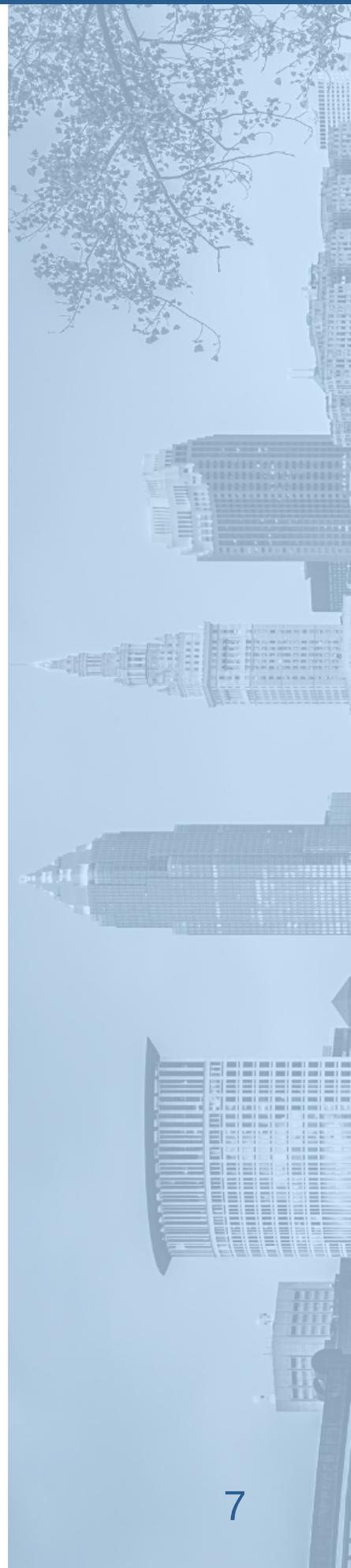
From the founding of the country when African-Americans were considered only 3/5ths of a person with no rights, political power has been suppressed through institutionalized inequity, disparity and racism. From that point until today, attempts to suppress the African-American vote and dilute political power are still very real.

As a result, we have elected bodies and individuals that are not always representative of those burdened with institutionalized inequity, disparity and racism. And, the institutionalized practice of gerrymandering dilutes their voice, resulting in less input on policy and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

I've often said that Cleveland is a successful city, as measured by traditional means, but Cleveland is not a great city. A great city is measured by what we, as a society, do for the least of us – not through welfare, charity, or social programs, but by ensuring that everyone can participate in the prosperity and quality of life our society produces.

The coronavirus and the recent civil unrest have demonstrated that the greatest impediment to that greatness is institutionalized inequities, disparities and racism.



CONCLUSION

The social unrest, protest and demonstrations are indicators of an underlying sense of injustice. Injustice based on the reality that our social, economic and political systems maintain power and wealth through the exploitation of individuals, resources and opportunities, and places enormous burden on those who suffer from inequity, disparity and racism.

If we don't provide:

- Criminal justice systems that are fair and equitable;
- Economic systems that provide opportunity and create wealth for all people;
- Education systems that meet
- student's needs and prepare them to succeed in the future;
- Healthcare systems that recognize and remedy the social determinants that drive quality health outcomes; and
- Political systems that provide a voice and access to power for all people...

Things will not get better – In fact, things will get worse. If we are going to eliminate inequity, disparity and racism – and the injustices that produce them – then we must as a community take action.

So the question is, who are we as individuals? Who are we as a community? As a city? What is our character and personality? When we see injustice will we stand against it? When we see justice, will we stand up for it?

We have the opportunity to make Cleveland a great city. The only question that remains, is do we have the will? I ask people to resist the temptation of believing that this is just a function of government. That only if we pass legislation; Or, if only we start initiatives and programs; Or if only we say the right thing. Everything that we have done and we have been successful at, we have done as a community. One city. One people. Operating in the way that changes our culture that dictates our behavior; that dictates an outcome. An outcome that will produce justice and will eliminate inequities and disparities, and where racism will just be a thing of the past.