



United Way
of Buffalo & Erie County

the western new york
21-DAY RACIAL EQUITY CHALLENGE

[Pre-Challenge: What to Expect](#)

[DAY 1: Race and Equity](#)

[DAY 2: Exploring Bias](#)

[DAY 3: The Meaning of Privilege](#)

[DAY 4: Talking About Race](#)

[DAY 5: Levels of Racism](#)

[DAY 6: Trauma to Healing](#)

[DAY 7: White Fragility](#)

[DAY 8: Opportunity and Segregation in Western New York](#)

[DAY 9: Housing Inequity](#)

[DAY 10: The Racial Wealth Gap and Financial Stability](#)

[Day 11: How Your Race Affects Your Health](#)

[DAY 12: Racial Disparities in Birth Outcomes](#)

[DAY 13: Early Childhood](#)

[Day 14: Education and School-Aged Children](#)

[Day 15: Immigrants and Refugees](#)

[DAY 16: Equity and The LGBTQI+ Community](#)

[DAY 17: Building a Race Equity Culture](#)

[DAY 18: Being an Ally](#)

[DAY 19: Tools for the Racial Equity Change Process](#)

[DAY 20: Final Reflections](#)

[DAY 21: Take Action in WNY](#)

Pre-Challenge: What to Expect

GETTING STARTED

Welcome to the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge. Thank you for making the time to connect, reflect, and participate in this Challenge to develop a deeper understanding of how inequity and racism affect our lives and our community.

WHY A RACIAL EQUITY CHALLENGE?

This challenge is an opportunity to increase our understanding and education around racial equity. The Challenge will provide demonstrated tools and resources to learn and take action to support a more racially just workplace and community. When change starts within enough of us, together, we can make progress toward becoming an equitable community - for all.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Below you will find 21 links to the different “days” of this challenge to help you explore, develop deeper interpersonal understandings, build a stronger awareness of current systems, and be offered opportunities to take action. The Challenge is free to participate in and open to anyone. How you navigate the challenge is up to you. Feel free to take a look at a different page each day for 21 days, go through the content all at once, or go through a couple modules and come back when you have time.

There are many ways to embrace and interact with the challenge, including:

- **LEARN** – Read, watch, or listen to the content that is on each page
- **REFLECT** – Think about the questions that are offered for self-reflection.
- **CONNECT** – Talk with your colleagues, family, and friends about what you are experiencing.
- **TAKE ACTION** – Join the many events and opportunities to contribute to equity and racial justice in our community.
- **SHARE** – Share the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge badge on your social media to invite others to join

We recognize information shared during the Challenge may be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with, especially for people who have experienced racism and oppression. We understand and encourage you to take a break from the Challenge, whenever you may need and return when you are ready.

CHALLENGE PRE-SURVEY

We would appreciate your input so we can build a 21 Day Racial Equity Challenge experience that is supportive and beneficial for the entire community. We ask that you take two to three minutes to complete [a brief survey](#) before beginning the challenge. Your answers will remain anonymous and confidential.

DAY 1: Race and Equity

Welcome to Day 1 of the Western New York 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge! Together, thousands of local people are working to develop a deeper understanding of race, equity, and our collective role in improving our community. Before you get started, if you haven't done so already, [please fill out this pre-challenge survey](#) to help ensure this experience is supportive and beneficial for the entire community.

To help set the stage, let's look at a few common terms and develop a mutual understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equity:

- *Equity* – A commitment to fair and impartial opportunities for all, often through actively challenging and responding to bias, harassment, and discrimination.
- *Diversity* – Welcoming differences of race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language, culture, national origin, religious commitment, age, (dis)ability status, and political perspective.
- *Inclusion* – A commitment to ensuring that differences are welcomed, every person feels a sense of belonging, and everyone's voice is valued and heard.

RACIAL EQUITY

This Challenge is focused on racial equity. The Center for Social Inclusion defines racial equity as an **outcome** and a **process**. We are striving toward the outcome of everyone having what they need to thrive, regardless of their race or where they live. The process of equity requires breaking down beliefs, systems, policies, and practices that support systemic racism and racial inequity.

You may have heard of the idea that race is a “social construct.” What does this mean? As a society we define race based upon values, perceptions and power, as it is a product of culture and not a biological product. Race is not defined by genetics or DNA, instead society plays a major role in shaping our views of race and racial identity. With this comes social, economic, and political implications that have contributed to racial inequity in the United States for hundreds of years.

How do you think about your racial identity and its relevance to your work/volunteerism/studies? Identity matters. Who we think we are and who others think we are can have an influence on all aspects of our lives. Think about the first time you became aware of your racial identity. What comes up for you?

DID YOU KNOW...

[The latest U.S. Census figures](#) put Buffalo's population at just over 261,000. About 47% identify themselves as white, 37% as black, 12% as Hispanic or Latino, and 4% as more than one race.

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Read ["What is Racial Equity"](#) from the Center for Social Inclusion. (3 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Watch ["The Myth of Race: Debunked in 3 Minutes"](#) from Jenée Desmond Harris at Vox. (3 minutes)

ACTIVITY 3: Journal about your own racial identity. You might consider:

- When did you first become aware of your racial identity?
- What messages did you learn about race from your school and family?
- Did they align with what you've seen in your life?
- Think of a time when the way others perceived your racial identity affected how they treated you?

DAY 2: Exploring Bias

Today we're starting by looking inside, because we know that is where change starts. Knowing more about ourselves makes it possible to learn, grow, explore, and act.

What does race mean to you? More specifically, what does YOUR race mean to you? While many people are intimately aware of their racial identity, others may still be learning about what racial identity means for themselves and their perceived place in society.

When we know more about ourselves, we can be more aware of others and open to their experiences. Learning about our own implicit biases—the positive and negative attitudes, stereotypes, and feelings we have about people and groups that are different than ourselves—is an important part of this Challenge.

Often the biases that we hold, even those that are unconscious, may cause us to act in ways that are offensive and discriminatory to others. Exploring our own implicit bias is key to moving toward equity.

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Read "[Race and Racial Identity Are Social Constructs](#)" by Angela Onwuachi-Willig. (3 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Watch "[We All Have Bias](#)" with John A. Powell. (1 minute)

ACTIVITY 3: Take the [Project Implicit Bias Test](#) from Harvard University [select Race IAT after agreeing to terms]. (10 minutes)

DAY 3: The Meaning of Privilege

It's time to talk about privilege. Privilege is the unearned social, political, economic, and psychological benefits of membership in a group that has institutional and structural power ([source](#)). There are many types of privilege that different groups have in the US and most people can identify at least one privilege that they hold. We commonly hear about privilege because of race or gender, but privilege also exists for different groups based on religion, sexuality, ability, class, education level. Read more about [5 common types of privilege](#).

The idea of privilege can be divisive, but at the core it means a built-in advantage, immunity, or benefit that a person or group enjoys beyond what others have access to or experience. Having privilege can give you advantages in life, but having privilege is not a guarantee of success.

Consider today's challenge activities to identify ways that you could use your privilege to promote racial equity and justice in our community.

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Watch this ["What is Privilege"](#) video. (2 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Watch ["Privilege/Class/Social Inequalities Explained in a \\$100 Race"](#) (4 minutes)

ACTIVITY 3: [Listen to this Stateside episode with Eddie Moore, Jr., executive director of The Privilege Institute](#), about the how the White Privilege Conference in Grand Rapids created a space for people to have "tough conversations. (8 minutes)

DAY 4: Talking About Race

How often have you been in social settings where the majority of individuals have been of a different race or ethnicity? How often does a conversation about race turn a room silent, or create divisions among friends, family, and colleagues? Why does this happen? Many people think that talking about race is “taboo” or have been taught to avoid the topic all together. Others may shy away due to lack of experience or ability to articulate their feelings on the topic. Whatever the reason, taking this Challenge may help to build the skills to participate in conversations about race to help move our community forward.

Here's How You Get Started

First, ask yourself if you are comfortable engaging in a conversation about race with those who are the same race as you. Now, how about a conversation about race with someone who is a different race? Either situation may feel uncomfortable, especially if you haven't been exposed to this type of dialogue or are not sure how to start. Maybe you're worried about “saying the wrong thing”, causing harm, or creating a rift in a relationship. If this is you, you're not alone. Today's challenge offers helpful tips and supportive examples to improve conversations about race.

DID YOU KNOW...

64% of Black adults said that their family talked to them about challenges related to race while they were growing up (32% said that this conversation happened often). 90% of white adults said that their families rarely had these types of conversations.

[Source: Pew Research Center](#)

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Watch [“Intergroup Anxiety: Can You Try Too Hard to Be Fair?”](#) (5 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Read [“Beyond the training: How to host meaningful DE&I conversations at your company”](#) (6 minutes)

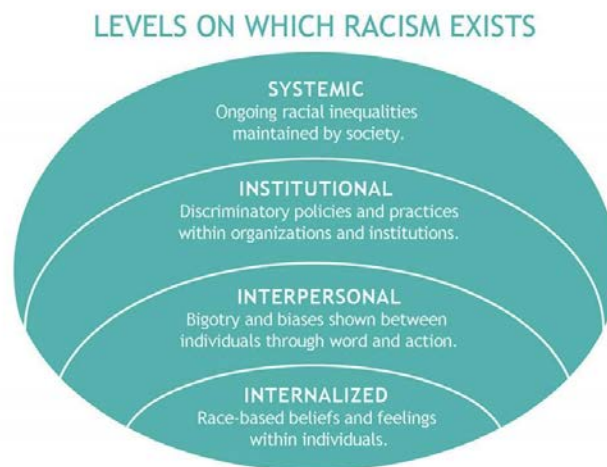
ACTIVITY 3: Watch Ted Talk [“Is My Skin Brown Because I Drank Chocolate Milk”](#) by Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum (13 minutes)

DAY 5: Levels of Racism

A common misconception about racism in our country is that racism is limited to personal prejudice and intentional bias in our individual interactions across different races. Another misconception is that being racist is a binary, either-or status: either someone is 100% racist (and therefore “bad”), or 100% not-racist (and therefore “good”). For people who mistakenly think that being racist is a binary status, it can be upsetting to hear that they have said or done something racist.

More accurately, racism exists on multiple levels, and includes any policies, actions (including inactions), words, and thoughts which result in racially inequitable outcomes, whether malicious intent is present or not. Also, racism is so pervasive within American society that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for anyone who grew up in the United States, including BIPOC, to be 100% free of internalized racism. And intentional interpersonal racism between individuals is actually a symptom of a larger 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.

Change requires an awareness of the levels of racism, a commitment to self-reflection, and a collective will to address people, organizations, and systems to break down barriers that have been built over hundreds of years.



Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Read more about the [Four Levels of Racism](#) from Race Forward. (2 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Watch [“Systemic Racism Explained”](#) from Act.TV. (4 minutes)

ACTIVITY 3: Check out this [short video from Race Forward](#) about the levels and the importance of looking at systemic, not simply individual, racism. (4 minutes)

DAY 6: Trauma to Healing

As we move into the second week of the Challenge, we hope you have taken the opportunity to look inside yourself and expand your mind through the different activities offered. Now we will look to shift the focus from personal reflection to a broader view of racial equity and social justice.

We hear a lot about trauma related to combat veterans, those who've been in significant accidents, and those who've been the victim of violence. **Racism is also trauma**, and many Americans are subject to racism in both overt and covert ways every day, including the youngest among us. Racism is painful, violent, harmful, and deeply felt by those on the receiving end. The lasting effects and trauma of experiencing racism can show up in emotions, behaviors, and in many other ways.

Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy suggests that rather than asking, "What is wrong", a trauma-informed approach would be to question, "What happened to you?" Numerous studies show that racism and discrimination are forms of trauma, and the lasting psychological effects can be similar to those of veterans who have experienced combat. Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is becoming more commonly diagnosed in marginalized communities as racism and discrimination continue to create psychological, emotional, and physical harm. It is important to understand this trauma to be able to move forward.

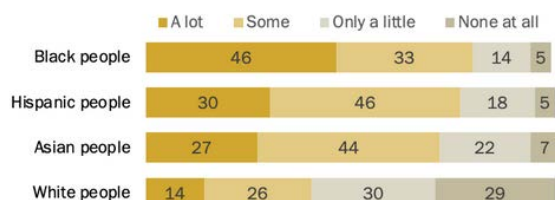
DID YOU KNOW...

81% of Black people reported experiencing discrimination. 1 in 10 developed symptoms of PTSD due to racism and discrimination. [American Psychological Association](#)

4 in 10 Latinos say they have experienced discrimination in the past year, such as being criticized for speaking Spanish or being told to go back to their home country. - [Pew Research Center](#)

Nearly half of Americans say Black people face 'a lot' of discrimination in society today

% who say there is ____ of discrimination against each group in our society



Note: No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 1-7, 2021.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/18/majorities-of-americans-see-at-least-some-discrimination-against-black-hispanic-and-asian-people-in-the-u-s/>

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Read ["Healing the Hidden Wounds of Racial Trauma"](#) (7 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Read ["The Link Between Racism and PTSD"](#) (5 minutes)

ACTIVITY 3: Read [this list of 8 ways to practice self-care](#) to support you and your loved ones when you are personally affected by racism. (4 minutes)

DAY 7: White Fragility

Have you heard of the term “**White Fragility**?” For white people, “White Fragility” refers to their discomfort and avoidance of racially charged stress, which perpetuates racial inequity.

[Dr. Robin DiAngelo](#) describes white fragility as a state of being for white people in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves can include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors shut down conversations, and inhibit actions which, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.

Today’s Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Take a [quick quiz](#) from the publisher of “White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism,” Robin DiAngelo, PhD, to see if you exhibit “White Fragility” traits. (3 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Read a [short article by Dr. DiAngelo](#) that unpacks how we continue to reproduce racist outcomes and live segregated lives. (5 minutes)

TIP: [We highly recommend reading Dr. DiAngelo’s entire book.](#) You can also utilize [this free reader’s guide](#) to discuss the book in a group.

ACTIVITY 3: Review [this list of 28 common racist attitudes](#) and behaviors that indicate a detour or wrong turn into white guilt, denial or defensiveness. Do you identify with any of these attitudes? Reflect on which ones, and how you think you came to hold these attitudes.

DAY 8: Opportunity and Segregation in Western New York

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 27% of Erie County households were already one emergency away from a financial crisis, setting the stage for the unprecedented economic impact of the pandemic. This is according to the latest [ALICE Report](#), from United Way of Buffalo & Erie County. In 2018, over 103,000 of Erie County's 390,000 households were **ALICE** or **Asset Limited, Income Constrained & Employed**. ALICE households have an income above the federal poverty level, but are still struggling to afford basic household necessities like housing, child care, food, transportation, and technology. This is in addition to the 52,000 households living in poverty in Erie County. The report also demonstrates disparities between race and ethnicity and the likelihood of being classified as ALICE. The report reveals that the majority of households of color in WNY are ALICE compared to only 36% of white households.

When you hear the word segregation, what do you think of? Many of us think back to the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, American cities continue to be highly segregated even today. According to [a report developed by Partnership for the Public Good](#), "The [Buffalo metro area] itself is ranked sixth most segregated in the nation on the white-black index, and twenty-first most segregated on the white-Hispanic index. White people are overrepresented in the suburbs, while people of color are overrepresented within the city of Buffalo."

Present-day racism was built on a long history of racially distributed resources and ideas that shape our view of ourselves and others. It is a hierarchical system that comes with a broad range of policies and institutions that keep it in place. Policies shaped by institutional racism that enforce segregation include redlining, predatory lending, the exclusion of black veterans from the G.I. bill, and the forced segregation of neighborhoods by the Federal Housing Authority. To learn more about how federal, state and local governments segregated every major metropolitan area in America through law and policy, watch this short video ["Segregated By Design"](#).

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Increase your understanding of how racism is reinforced by policies and systems by [reading this article by Anne Branigin published in The Root. "Black Communities Are on the 'Frontline' of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Here's Why."](#) (14 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Why are cities still so segregated? Watch this [video where NPR's Code Switch](#) looks at the factors contributing to modern-day segregation. (7 minutes)

ACTIVITY 3: Watch this WIVB Channel 4 story ["A legacy of racism: How past practices affect segregation in Buffalo today"](#)

DAY 9: Housing Inequity

In Western New York, and in many parts of our country, there is extreme housing segregation that is a direct result of a practice called "**redlining**," a form of lending discrimination that has disproportionately affected Black, Latinx, and other people of color for hundreds of years.

Beginning in the 1930s, this nationwide practice allowed banks to deny mortgage and loan applications, and prevented people from buying homes based on race or which community they lived in. The term "redlining" comes from the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) using red ink to outline maps of undesirable neighborhoods— predominantly consisting of Black and Latinx families—to unfairly mark them as high-risk for loan default and thus give banks a "reason" to deny a loan. Housing segregation continued further as the FHA and VA denied subsidized mortgages to Black, Latinx and families of color in the growing suburbs after World War II. The first federal law prohibiting home lending discrimination was put in place with the 1969 Fair Housing Act, yet much damage had been done and lending discrimination still occurs today in different forms.

Home ownership plays a significant role in family wealth, enabling families to build equity that is passed down to future generations. People who did not have the opportunity to build wealth through home ownership because of redlining, housing discrimination and predatory loans are hundreds of thousands of dollars behind in wealth compared to their white counterparts, and continue to face these and other discriminatory practices today. It is important to reflect on the ways that housing inequities are advanced through policies and practices, and what we can do to address these inequities.

DID YOU KNOW...

In February 2021 the New York State Department of Financial Services released [a report on redlining in the Buffalo metropolitan area](#). According to the report, Buffalo remains **one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States** decades after the practice of redlining and other forms of housing discrimination were banned by law.

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Read "[A 'Forgotten History' Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America](#)" from NPR. **TIP:** We also suggest listening to the 35 minute "Fresh Air" podcast. (7 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Connect with the resources provided by [Housing Opportunities Made Equal \(HOME\)](#) and learn about fair housing laws.

ACTIVITY 3: See how your own neighborhood has been affected by redlining by checking out [The Mapping Inequality website](#).

DAY 10: The Racial Wealth Gap and Financial Stability

Wealth is more than just jobs. It includes annual median income, homeownership, access to a college education, access to workplace or self-employment retirement plans, and more. The racial wealth gap in the United States is staggering. According to the U.S. Federal Reserve, white families have an average net worth of more than \$934,000, compared to Black families with an average net worth of \$138,000, and Hispanic families with an average net worth of \$191,000. These figures consider assets like homes, vehicles, income, retirement accounts, and other wealth-related items.

Contributing to the wealth gap are factors like income inequality, earnings gaps, homeownership rates, retirement savings, student loan debt, and inequitable asset building opportunities. This inequity in financial resources exists in our community, holding many back for decades, simply because of the color of their skin.

DID YOU KNOW...

60% of POC (POC = Asian, Black, Hawaiian, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and/or two or more races) households in WNY have incomes below the ALICE threshold - they earn above the Federal Poverty Level, but struggle to afford basic household necessities. In comparison only 36% of white households in WNY have incomes which put them below the ALICE threshold. [Source: ALICE Report: 2018](#)

Today's Challenge:

Activity 1: Watch ["Explained | Racial Wealth Gap."](#) (17 minutes)

Activity 2: Explore [these data graphs](#) by the Urban Institute about wealth inequality in America. Looking at all of the data together, what story is this telling you? (10 minutes)

Activity 3: Check out [Vox Media's visual explanation](#) of the wealth gap and how cuts to tax rates for the rich have led to drastic inequality in the last 50 years. (10 minutes)

Day 11: How Your Race Affects Your Health

In April 2020, when The Buffalo News [took a comprehensive look](#) at the county mortality data, 30% of those who died from COVID-19 were Black even though they account for only [14% of the county's population](#).

[According to Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz](#) in an interview with The Buffalo News, "...we've done a better job by working with many partners, including hospitals, nursing homes, but also with our friends in the African-American Health Disparities Task Force to get resources into the city, to identify cases early so that individuals get the services they need, and they don't wait until it's too late." Even though interventions were made locally to change the trend of COVID-19 deaths in Erie County, there are still systemic problems that need to be addressed to create equity in how healthcare is delivered. Now we are facing an issue of COVID vaccine equity and [large racial disparities in who has received the vaccine](#).

Within many of our nation's healthcare institutions, medical racism against Black, Indigenous and other People of Color is systemic and widespread. Racism manifests itself in countless ways (i.e., higher black infant and mother mortality rates, beliefs that Blacks experience less pain, racial bias introduced in medical school training) and makes equitable access to healthcare more difficult.

Healthcare costs also make up a significant portion of a household's annual budget, placing additional stress on families that may or may not have insurance and access to quality care. The 2018 ALICE Report indicates that ALICE and poverty-level families [are more likely to become ill because their basic needs for health insurance coverage and regular, quality preventative care are not being met](#). As you engage with one or more of today's Activities, ponder one or more strategies you or your organization might consider to prevent health inequity in WNY.

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Read ["Implicit Bias and Racial Disparities in Health Care."](#) (5 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Watch ["How Racism Makes Us Sick."](#) (17 minutes)

ACTIVITY 3: Check out this [Fact Sheet from the American Psychological Association](#) exploring the compounding impact of socioeconomic status and race on health.

DAY 12: Racial Disparities in Birth Outcomes

Racial inequities begin before birth and continue throughout the lifespan, putting children at a disadvantage to meet their full potential right from the very start. In Erie County, children born to black mothers are almost twice as likely to be born prematurely and more than twice as likely to die in the first year of life.

This Challenge has previously touched on how households of color are more likely to not be able to meet basic needs. Pregnant women who do not have their basic needs met and are undereducated on available resources face considerable barriers to accessing prenatal care.

Inadequate prenatal care is a significant risk factor for premature birth. Local analysis on 2013-2015 birth data provided by Jim Shelton, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University at Buffalo showed that [women receiving inadequate prenatal care are 1.5 times as likely to experience premature birth](#), and those receiving no prenatal care are 5.5 times as likely. Women experiencing financial hardship face unique challenges to obtaining appropriate prenatal care.

America is the most dangerous wealthy country in the world to give birth. This is, in part, due to the dramatic racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality. Toxic stress and bias in medical care mean that women of color are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications. Racism is a public health crisis and it is time to treat it as such.

DID YOU KNOW...

During 2015-2017 (average) in Erie County, preterm birth rates were highest for Black infants (13.5%), followed by Hispanics (11.1%), American Indian/Alaska Natives (10.5%), Asian/Pacific Islanders (9.2%) and whites (8.6%). In Niagara County, preterm birth rates were highest for Black infants (16%), followed by Hispanic (9.2%), Asian/Pacific Islanders (5.1%) and whites (8.4%). Other counties in WNY have similar disparities.

- Black infants (13.5%) were about 2 times as likely as white infants (8.6%) to be born preterm during 2015-2017 (average).
- In the United States, prematurity/low birthweight is the second leading cause of all infant deaths (during the first year of life) and the leading cause of infant death among black infants.

Source: [National Center for Health Statistics, period linked birth/infant death data](#)

Today's Challenge:

ACTIVITY 1: Read about how [COVID-19 Deepens Maternal Health Disparities Among Women Of Color](#) (3 minutes)

ACTIVITY 2: Watch this PBS video [“Why are black mothers and infants far more likely to die in U.S. from pregnancy-related causes?”](#) (10 minutes)

ACTIVITY 3: Read about how [amid staggering maternal and infant mortality rates, Native communities are reviving traditional support concepts](#). (10 minutes)

DAY 13: Early Childhood

Early childhood is one of the most critical times for developing healthy minds and bodies. Those who face the challenges of poverty, racism, discrimination, and inequitable access to resources, find themselves “behind the starting line” compared to their peers who do not face these issues.

When a child enters school already behind, it is very difficult to catch up. Resources like universal pre-K, well-child health screenings, and quality childcare are key to ensuring that children enter kindergarten ready to learn and grow with their peers. Low-income Black and Latino families are the most at-risk for inequitable access to these essential resources.

Fortunately, progress has been made in recent years. Since 2010, more than 40 states have instituted state-funded preschool programs and results show that children who attend a high-quality early learning program gain four months of learning, on average. In addition, children see positive gains throughout their lives including improved reading and math scores, better graduation rates, and higher income later in life.

There is still more to be done to provide equitable access to resources that support healthy early childhood development.

Did you know...

Students who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. (Source: [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#))

Today's Challenge:

Activity 1: Read [this U.S. News article](#) on how ‘Education Inequality Starts Early’ for children in households with low incomes. (6 minutes)

Activity 2: Watch [this CBS News report](#) on how systemic racism persists in early childhood education, where black preschool students are disproportionately facing harsh punishments, like suspension. (2 minutes)

Activity 3: View [this info-graphic](#) that explains how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), like racism and community violence, without supportive adults, can cause what’s known as toxic stress. (2 minutes)

Day 14: Education and School-Aged Children

We have already explored how segregation persists in our communities. Our economically and racially divided neighborhoods are leading to inequitable educational environments and adverse academic outcomes for our youth. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* effectively dismantled the legacy of Jim Crow. The Justices ruled unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional. Unfortunately, progress is reversible. Even schools that were successfully desegregated are again racially segregated.

Today, more than half of the nation's school-age children are in racially concentrated districts in which over 75% of students are of the same race, and districts are further segregated by income. Students of color, who are more likely to attend under-resourced schools than their white counterparts, suffer because of teachers working in under-resourced school environments and large class sizes, which when controlling for socioeconomic status, almost entirely explain disparities in academic achievement ([Source](#)).

Today's Challenge:

Activity 1: Read the Partnership for the Public Good's report on [Public Education in Buffalo and the Region](#). (7 minutes)

Activity 2: Watch TED Talk "[How America's Public Schools Keep Kids in Poverty](#)." (13 minutes)

Activity 3: Read New America Weekly article "[How to Bring Equity and Inclusion to the Classroom](#)." (4 minutes)

Day 15: Immigrants and Refugees

Imagine: What would it take for you to grab your family and run from your home? Imagine leaving behind everything for which you have worked so hard, fleeing to a place you have never been, where you don't know a soul. Can you imagine having one hour to pack, choosing items from your home to embark on what may become a long, arduous journey? What would you leave behind? Envision how terrible a situation would be for you to leave everything behind, putting yourself and your family at the mercy of strangers. This is the experience of **refugees**: individuals who have fled their country of origin and who meet the United Nations' criteria of having a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." Unfortunately refugees, as well as other immigrants, face very real racism and discrimination in their new communities.

The reality is that immigrants make our communities better for everyone. 2018 data from New American Economy indicates that immigrants in the Buffalo metropolitan area have **\$1.5 billion** in spending power ([source](#)). Immigrants fill labor shortages in high-tech and manual labor fields and start new businesses which creates job opportunities for immigrants and natural-born citizens alike. Immigrants and refugees also bring culture to our cities, making Western New York a more diverse and lively place. Refugee and immigrant owned businesses are popping up all around the Buffalo-Niagara region, sharing their cultural goods and their delicious cuisines with our community. Despite all of the good they bring, many foreign-born neighbors experience backlash stemming from the misconceptions, racial discrimination, and language access barriers, all of which is detrimental to their quality of life and safety.

We want to call attention to the issues faced by immigrants and refugees and make sure that their voices are accepted and heard in the community.

Did you know...

There are currently 79.5 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide. Source: [USA for UNHCR](#)

Today's Challenge:

Activity 1: Read "[Refugees raise voices to push for racial justice](#)" (7 minutes)

Activity 2: Watch "[The racist history of US immigration policy](#)" (3 minutes)

Activity 3: Read "[Forgotten twice: the untold story of LGBT refugees](#)" (6 minutes)

DAY 16: Equity and The LGBTQI+ Community

Imagine not feeling accepted at home, in your community or at school because of your gender identity or sexual orientation. Like race and socioeconomic status, inequities for people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBTQI+) can be seen across many dimensions, including healthcare, education, and in the workplace. Research from the [American Progress Institute](#) shows that LGBTQI+ individuals experience widespread discrimination, often manifesting itself as getting passed over for promotions, being bullied in schools, being refused healthcare, or being denied equal treatment at a store or hotel.

The intersectionality of race and sexual orientation and gender identity also has compounding effects on individuals' well-being: Black transgender and gender non-conforming individuals [experience some of the highest levels of discrimination and threats](#) on their personal safety.

As you explore today's Challenge activities we encourage you to think and act on ways you can support our LGBTQI+ neighbors in WNY.

Today's Challenge

Activity 1: Watch "[Why Respecting Pronouns Is So Important](#)." (3 minutes) **Bonus:** Add your personal pronouns to your email signature to show your advocacy for LGBTQI+ individuals.

Activity 2: Watch Ted Talk "[Effective Allyship: A Transgender Take on Intersectionality](#)" by Ashlee Marie Preston, whom gives her perspective as a Black transgender woman. (15 minutes)

Activity 3: Explore resources the [Pride Center of WNY offers](#) LGBTQI+ People of Color and see what you can do to support their efforts.

DAY 17: Building a Race Equity Culture

Every day in the workplace, individuals face challenges being their authentic selves. As leaders and colleagues, we each have a role to play in creating inclusive workspaces. Diverse perspectives enrich our workplaces, and [studies are showing](#) that involving diverse voices improves performance, problem solving and decision making. Yet, [people of color and women are underrepresented](#) in C-Suite, upper management, and Board roles compared to their representation in the overall working population. The culture of an organization provides insight into the racial dynamics and racial equity/parity within the organization. Today we will focus on how you can create a race equity culture at your organization and in your community.

Today's Challenge:

Activity 1: Read [“3 Ways to Get Started Talking About Race at Work.”](#) (4 minutes)

Activity 2: Watch [“Inclusion Starts With I”](#) which sheds light on common struggles people face bringing their authentic selves to the workplace. (3 minutes)

Activity 3: Complete this [Racial Justice Assessment Tool](#) to determine what steps your workplace has taken toward racial justice. (5 minutes)

DAY 18: Being an Ally

The dictionary definition of **ally** is “*a person or organization that cooperates with or helps another in a particular activity.*” In today’s society, the term has taken on a more urgent and active meaning, however it is often misunderstood or misused to imply good intentions, often without action or with action for unproductive reasons. For this reason, ally or allyship can be triggering terms for those who experience racism, oppression, and discrimination on a regular basis. Informed action is important for those who strive to be genuine allies with marginalized people and communities.

According to Amélie Lamont in the guide in Activity 1, being an ally doesn’t necessarily mean you fully understand what it feels like to be oppressed. It means you’re taking on the struggle as your own, and adding your voice or action alongside those who are oppressed. Being anti-racist is not a spectator sport, nor is it an individual activity. It requires recognizing and owning the privilege that you hold, to help carry the weight of oppression for, and in collaboration with, others.

There is a place for each of us in this work. As you complete today’s challenge activities reflect on how you can become an informed ally? What are concrete ways that you can practice allyship in your daily life?

Today’s Challenge:

Activity 1: Read Amélie Lamont’s “[Guide to Allyship.](#)” (7 minutes)

Activity 2: Watch “[5 Tips For Being An Ally.](#)” (3 minutes)

Activity 3: Read “[The Role of ‘Privileged’ Allies in the Struggle for Social Justice.](#)” (10 minutes)

DAY 19: Tools for the Racial Equity Change Process

Over the past 19 days, we have learned how racial inequities permeate our communities on individual, institutional and systemic levels. We are all impacted by the system of racism in our country and therefore all responsible for dismantling the structures that allow it to persist. Change is possible and there are many tools we can employ as individuals and organizations to drive individual and community transformation. We will highlight a few of these tools below, but encourage you to explore [Racial Equity Tools](#), a comprehensive site of resources designed to support learning, planning, acting, and evaluating efforts to achieve racial equity.

Creating equitable outcomes also requires that we change the way we talk about members of our community, focusing on their aspirations rather than their challenges. In practice, this is called asset-framing and uses narratives to change the unconscious associations ingrained in our society. The opposite practice of deficit-framing, or defining people by their challenges, encourages continued stigmatization of groups of individuals.

Today's Challenge:

Activity 1: Read this "[Beginner's Guide to Asset Framing](#)", to learn more about why how we communicate impacts our ability to achieve racial equity. (8 minutes)

Activity 2: Read "[10 Ways to Start a Conversation About Race](#)" by Race Forward. (3 minutes)

Activity 3: Use these strategies of [Being an Active Bystander](#) when faced with the emergence of bias in interpersonal interactions.

DAY 20: Final Reflections

Today's challenge is to take time to reflect on your experience. Research shows that a critical component to learning is taking time to reflect or being intentional about processing the lessons being taught by your experiences.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are my identities and in what ways have my identities impacted my life? Are there identities of mine that have provided me higher social capital or privilege in certain environments, or vice versa?
2. What were some of my assumptions about race and racial inequity before I started this 21-day challenge? In what ways have these assumptions been challenged? In what ways have they been reinforced?
3. Where have I seen evidence of inequities and systemic and structural racism in my community?
4. What two to three shifts, changes or actions, can I take to create a more inclusive and equitable environment in my home, workplace, and community?
5. What do I want to learn more about? What topics related to racism, oppression and/or discrimination do I need more research on?

Today's Challenge:

Activity: Write down a goal you have moving forward to help in dismantling racism and inequity. Research shows that when you write down your goals, you are more likely to commit to them and achieve them.

DAY 21: Take Action in WNY

Congratulations on completing the Western New York 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge! Thousands throughout WNY have taken part in the Challenge and we are incredibly thankful to have you join us on this journey as we move forward in learning and reflecting on topics of equity. It is said that it takes 21 days to form a habit. When we began this challenge our goal was to provide tools and resources to learn and take action to support a more racially just community. We know these conversations and the feelings they evoke are not always easy, but making space for brave and vulnerable dialogue is one of many steps we can take toward achieving equity in Western New York and across the world. We challenge each of you to share a reflection on your experience with a family member, friend, or co-worker to continue the momentum from this challenge.

Today's challenge is all about not only continuing these conversations, but turning conversations into actions that address the issues we've discussed during the past 21 days. Like the rest of the Challenge, the activities below are by no means comprehensive and we encourage you to continue to take actions that will help lead to a more equitable community.

Today's Challenge

Lookup who your [federal](#), [state](#) and [local](#) elected officials are and continue to contact them to tell them to support anti-racism and anti-poverty policies that will lead to racial equity. **Tip:** Ask your representatives to meet in-person.

Sign up for an equality-focused volunteer opportunity through [VolunteerWNY](#).

Help to remove the racial wealth gap by [supporting Black owned businesses throughout WNY](#).

Expand on what you've learned during this Challenge by signing up for a [Racial Equity Impact Analysis Training](#).

Explore Diversity and Inclusion initiatives for the workforce offered by the [Buffalo Niagara Partnership](#).

Challenge Post Survey:

We would appreciate your input so we can learn about your experience with the WNY 21 Day Racial Equity Challenge. We ask that you take two to three minutes to [complete a brief survey](#). Your answers will remain anonymous and confidential.