

Transformative Equitable Development for Healthy Communities

MAKING THE CASE FOR CHANGE

The Twin Cities region is experiencing a building boom. Billions of dollars are being invested in public and private infrastructure while community members consider the long-term impacts of this growth. If built with equity in mind, these developments—which include public transportation, sports stadiums, housing, government buildings, and commercial nodes—could be leveraged to anchor healthy outcomes in low-wealth communities and communities of color.

Combined with the existing assets and expertise in local communities, large-scale developments could generate long-term economic opportunity. Yet history shows that the benefits of large public investments often bypass communities of color. To ensure that urban developments yield tangible community benefits, we need to understand the history of disinvestment that has led to pervasive racial and economic disparities in our region.

- What are the policy decisions that have contributed to longstanding gaps in homeownership, employment, health, education, and personal income?
- What are the development practices that have intentionally isolated low-wealth communities and communities of color?
- How can we change these institutional practices today to secure better outcomes tomorrow?

At the launch of the Alliance's Transformative Equitable Development series, economist Bruce Corrie joined Alliance staff members Russ Adams and Ebony Adedayo to explore the history of Minnesota's development, acknowledge the assets present in our communities, and consider how our region can prioritize transformative equitable development.

The Alliance
ADVANCING REGIONAL EQUITY



The Alliance for Metropolitan Stability is a coalition comprised of 34 members working to advance racial, economic, and environmental equity in the way growth and development occurs in the Twin Cities region. We work at the intersection of these issues, understanding that a holistic approach to equity will lead to a more vibrant region. Our integrated approach has secured major victories for transformative equitable development.

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HOW WE GOT HERE

Minnesota has long been known as a progressive state that offers economic opportunities, an educated workforce, a clean environment, and a high quality of life. But when we consider Minnesota's growth and development through an anti-racist lens, we can begin to understand how historical oppression impacts Native people and people of color living in the state today.

Before it was made a territory and settled by Europeans, the land in this region was home to Anishinaabe and Dakota American Indians. Like other states around the nation, Minnesota was an active participant in marginalizing, isolating, and killing American Indians.

The most well documented case is that of the Dakota War of 1862. Even as Minnesota fought against the confederacy in the Civil War and was one the first infantry units to fight for the Union, the state—with President Abraham Lincoln's authority—executed 38 Dakota men. The remaining Dakota—mostly women, children, and the elderly—marched from Mankato to Fort Snelling in the winter, before they were exiled from Minnesota to western reservations.¹ Although this atrocity occurred more than 150 years ago, the law that banned the Dakota from their homeland has never been revoked.

African Americans have also suffered in Minnesota. While laws did not allow for institutional slavery in Minnesota, soldiers stationed at Fort Snelling were permitted to own slaves. One famous case is that of Dred and Harriet Scott, African American slaves who were held by Fort Snelling surgeon Dr. John Emerson. Although the Scotts sued for their freedom, in 1857 the Supreme Court declared that because the Scotts were considered "property," they could be taken anywhere by their owners. Justice Roger B. Taney declared that African Americans "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit."²

In 1896, the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* gave the county legal license to systematically exclude African Americans, and later other communities of color including Southeast Asians and Latinos, from county services. A recent audit conducted by Ramsey County showed that rulings such as this affected more than a century of negative outcomes for people of color. The county's analysis showed how this led to housing discrimination, job discrimination, denial of medical services, widespread poverty, and higher mortality rates in communities of color at the turn of the century.³ These challenges persist today.

The post-World War II G.I. Bill offers a more recent example. Considered to be one of the United States' largest affirmative action legislations, the bill provided housing, education, and employment opportunities to returning veterans. Despite the service of many soldiers of color and indigenous soldiers in the war, the U.S. primarily used the G.I. Bill to benefit white men and their families.⁴ Veterans of color returned home from serving their country only to be denied the basic rights they had fought for.

1 <http://www.historicfortsnelling.org/history/us-dakota-war> accessed 2.22

2 Slavery at Fort Snelling - <http://www.historicfortsnelling.org/history/slavery-fort-snelling> accessed 2.16

3 Ramsey County Anti-Racism Institutional Audit

4 *ibid*, page 2

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In the 1950s, hyper-growth policies built out our nation's highways and spurred the development of our suburbs. New highways that carried white families out of the central cities to these newly founded developments devastated African American communities like Rondo in [St. Paul](#) and Bryant in South [Minneapolis](#).⁵ As white people left, jobs and infrastructure investments went with them. Government subsidies and incentives given to private businesses intensified these trends, leaving behind central city residents. Maps of the two central cities from 1935 show distinct and intentional residential segregation patterns that persist even today .

To this day, the gaps between people of color and whites in Minnesota are stark. While the state continually tops the charts in homeownership rates, educational achievement, health outcomes, and general well-being, people of color and American Indians suffer. Recent data from the state demographer shows that African Americans, African immigrants, Southeast Asians, American Indians, and Latinos consistently earn less, hold less wealth, achieve lower levels of education, and own homes at lower rates than whites.⁶

AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH

While it is important to shine a spotlight on racial disparities, it is equally important to lift up the assets in communities. Communities of color and indigenous communities are inherently valuable, smart, industrious, and powerful. The assets within communities of color are wide and varied and include cultural and spiritual institutions, businesses, social networks, and economic power. Far too many approaches aimed at tackling racial inequities offer a deficit-based point of view. A deficit-based approach can do further harm because it may ignore, and even exploit, culturally-relevant intelligence.



Dr. Bruce Corrie

“If I can devalue you and minimize your self-worth, I can exploit you,” said Dr. Bruce Corrie.

Sharing data from his recent report, ALANA⁷ Political Power: Strong Growth in House and Senate Districts 2012 - 2014, Dr. Corrie stated that Minnesota's communities of color and American Indian communities have a \$30 billion economy, pay an estimated \$2 billion in state taxes, and make up at least 19 percent of the constituents in 40 percent of state legislative districts. While the economic power of these communities is steadily increasing, Dr. Corrie noted that this growth has not translated into political power.⁸

Corrie said that increased political power could help erase racial inequities because enhanced political power could lead to more elected representation from communities of color.⁹

5 http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/www/groups/public/@cped/documents/webcontent/convert_254659.pdf accessed 2.25.16

6 <http://mn.gov/admin/images/the-economic-status-of-minnesotans-chartbook-msdc-jan2016-post.pdf>

7 ALANA stands for African, Latino, Asian and Native American.

8 <http://mn.gov/bms-stat/assets/the-economic-status-of-minnesotans-chartbook-msdc-jan2016-post.pdf> accessed 3.1

9 <http://chai.news/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ALANA-Economic-Interests-by-House-and-Senate-District.pdf> *ibid*

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TRANSFORMATIVE EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES PRIORITIZE SHARED PROSPERITY

Transformative equitable development reflects the vision of communities of color and low-wealth communities, builds wealth, and creates healthy outcomes. As our region invests billions of dollars in public and private infrastructure projects, we have an opportunity to ensure developments leverage catalytic investments for these communities.

People of color and allies are bringing their expertise to this work and creating pathways that generate health and long-term well-being. In the last year, the Alliance convened regional leaders and practitioners to share their experience and develop intentional strategies to anchor community-led, transformative equitable development in our region.

Increased private and public investment in infrastructure projects offers an emerging opportunity to ensure every community across the Twin Cities has the tools it needs to secure economic and social benefits from these projects.

Right now, groups across our region are paving the way forward and building community wealth through community cooperatives, entrepreneurship, and job training programs; improving the built environment with the connecting investments of transit, walk, and bike infrastructure; and advocating for policy that explicitly names race to change oppressive structures and practices at a fundamental level.

People of color around our region are already organizing around critical community issues. Leaders of color have built powerful coalitions such as \$15 Now, Black Lives Matter, Parks and Power, Restore the Vote, Stops for Us, and Ban the Box. They have won major victories, such as changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day in Minneapolis, contributing to successful campaigns for marriage equality, and defeating a recent Voter ID proposal. Despite barriers, residents of color are using the tools embedded in their communities to build power, preserve and promote culture, and stimulate wealth.

Fortunately, increasing the political and economic power of these communities benefits the whole region. Data from the Metropolitan Council's Choice, Place and Opportunity report shows that closing racial gaps would lead to 274,000 fewer residents living in poverty, 171,000 more residents obtaining a high-school diploma, 124,000 more employed people, and an additional \$31.8 billion in personal income.¹⁰

Equity is not a zero-sum game. Expanding opportunity to the most marginalized communities will create better outcomes for everyone. Our region must prioritize equitable policies and investments to create healthier outcomes for communities of color and low-wealth communities to ensure our region thrives into the future.

10 <http://chai.news/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ALANA-Economic-Interests-by-House-and-Senate-District.pdf>