Reparations for Amherst, Massachusetts

Report on Anti-Black Racism and Black/White Disparities in the Town of Amherst

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March 9, 2021
This draft has been prepared for stakeholder feedback
Not for public circulation

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NOTE ABOUT DATA

Throughout the research for this report we continually confronted a lack of basic data about race in Amherst. Astonishingly, we aren't certain of the size of Amherst's Black population. The 2010 Census counted 5,068 Black residents, or 13.4% of Amherst's populace. Yet, because some college students list Amherst as their home when filling out the Census, 13.4% is likely an overestimate of the local Black population. In 2019, the American Community Survey (ACS) estimated that Amherst had 2,435 Black residents, or 6.1% of the populace. Since the ACS is only a survey, not a census, and since it differs so dramatically from the 2010 Census, we suspect that 6.1% is an *under*count of the Black population. For the purposes of this report, we will use the 2010 Census.

Meanwhile, during the compilation of this report, the Town of Amherst mailed paper census forms to every household. This annual survey could collect information on race/ethnicity, but it does not. Repeatedly throughout our research we found that town data are not disaggregated by race; to put that another way, most town data ignore race. One form of racism is omission.

In the report that follows, we have used what town-level data are available, and where appropriate we have used indicators from the region or state to help us better understand Amherst. We have also conducted interviews. Much work remains.

Executive Summary

The information provided in this report describes a present-day and historical Amherst that is not the progressive, equitable place that many white residents imagine. Instead, research in key areas—housing, education, health, income and employment, transportation, and policing—reveals systemic racism and classism that marginalizes Black residents and inflicts harm.

Housing

- Communities of color have faced implicit and explicit racial discrimination in housing in Amherst throughout its history. Often deprived of full participation in the local economy, many Black residents or would-be residents find Amherst unaffordable.
- Only 1.8% of owner-occupied housing is occupied by Black residents.
- A disproportionate number of Black households are "rent burdened," that is, forced to spend one third or more of their income on housing alone.

In Amherst today, racial bias in housing has primarily taken the form of NIMBYism, or Not In My Backyard. Many white residents say they support the idea of affordable housing—just not in their own neighborhood. Butternut Farms, a 26-unit affordable rental development, was delayed for five years and cost its developer over $150,000 in legal fees in a suit brought by Orchard Valley abutters, who claimed harm for reasons that included 20% of the units would be set aside for minority households.

Education

- The **Amherst-Pelham Regional School District**'s own data over the past 30 years show that Black students are disproportionately disciplined relative to their white peers and tracked into lower-level courses, and that staff are disproportionately white relative to the student body.
- Complaints from students, parents, staff, and the local chapter of the NAACP have cited harmful racist incidents against both students and faculty of color.
- In meetings with an outside consultant, some stakeholders have question whether both racial equity and academic excellence can be achieved, as they are, in their view, mutually exclusive.
- The balance of power in the school district remains overwhelmingly white, with white stakeholders failing to express sufficient discontent to alter a school system that disfavors people of color.

Public records from the district reveal a pattern in which staff and students of color are asked to participate in time-intensive diversity or equity committees and to make recommendations

based on their findings. In the wake of such efforts, administrators undertake little in the way of meaningful change. Subsequently, there is administrative turnover, and the pattern repeats.

Racism also permeates the campus of the **University of Massachusetts**, where hurtful and sometimes dangerous acts of racial hostility erupt against students and faculty. Likewise, **Amherst College**, whose founding was supported in part by the intergenerational white wealth accumulated through slaveholding, continues in the 21st century to be an institution where overt racially-threatening acts occur, and where alumni describe a culture that is alienating and in which Black faculty were 33 times as likely to be denied tenure as their white colleagues between 2000 and 2016.

Health

The culture of a community is a strong determinant of the health and well-being of its residents. Marginalization, isolation, and exclusion that results from interpersonal and institutional racism have negative consequences for Black residents in Amherst. The mechanism is clear: living under systemic racism perpetuates a state of physiological stress, ultimately causing physical and mental illness.

- According to Cooley Dickinson, local Black communities bear a disproportionate burden of disease, suffering higher rates of chronic illnesses, including cardiovascular conditions, asthma, and diabetes. Both adults and children suffer disproportionate levels of depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm.
- Racism affects Black patients in the form of medical bias. Local providers acknowledge that bias and prejudice exist throughout their agencies, specifically in a lack of staff diversity, policies, assumptions, prejudgments, and intolerance. Meanwhile, health outcomes, including survival, vastly improve when Black patients receive care from Black providers.
- A significant threat to health, food insecurity affects 38% of all Hampshire county households. Last year, 24% of those using the food pantry at the Amherst Survival Center were Black.
- In Amherst, the safety-net health facilities Musante Clinic and Amherst Survival Center Free Clinic cannot meet all the needs of the local at-risk population.
- Black communities show higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death from Covid-19. Although vaccines are now available, Black residents of Massachusetts have a vaccination rate that is half that of whites.

Income and Employment

- A disproportionate number of people of color in Amherst live below the poverty line.
- As of 2019, the Black median family income in Amherst was $45,464; white median family income was 2.4 times greater, $108,500.

- The University of Massachusetts is the largest employer in town, yet only 5.1% of all employees identified as Black/African American. Already underrepresented, Black employees were more likely to be furloughed indefinitely due to Covid-19.
- Black residents may hold two or even three jobs in order to make ends meet.
- Most small businesses are white-owned, and Black would-be entrepreneurs face particular barriers to establishing a business in Amherst.

Transportation

- Black residents are considerably more likely than their white counterparts to rely on public transit and to be among the 52% of PVTA riders who have no alternative means of travel.
- While the PVTA is fairly reliable and convenient for riders from the Five Colleges, permanent residents face considerable hurdles, including service interruptions and a lack of basic amenities such as sheltered bus stops.
- There are no consistent routes from Amherst to Holyoke, Springfield, and Greenfield, where technical and community colleges are located, affecting access to higher education.

The high cost of living in Amherst and racially-biased practices that routinely impose higher costs for Black people to purchase, finance, and insure automobiles, make care ownership out of reach for many. Lack of reliable transportation then interferes with the ability to access essential health care, fresh food, and educational and employment opportunities, all of which negatively and materially affect overall health.

Policing

Amherst's Community Safety Working Group is conducting a detailed assessment of policing in town using data provided by the Amherst Police Department. This report does not duplicate their efforts. However, preliminary data from the APD indicate that,

- Black drivers in Amherst speed less and are involved in fewer car accidents than their white peers, but are stopped and searched disproportionately for "investigatory" reasons.
- Black drivers are 1.5 times more likely than whites to be arrested following a traffic stop.

Introduction

Like many other rural New England towns, Amherst is a primarily white enclave. Its settlement as a mostly white community was not coincidental but rather intentional, the product of systematic reinforcement of social conditions since the town's founding in 1759.

Simple Timeline of the Black Population in Amherst

The first Black residents of Amherst were enslaved people who had been abducted from Africa or who descended from those who had been abducted. Records kept by a local doctor in East Hadley, as Amherst was then known, show that numerous Amherst households enslaved human beings in the mid 18th century. Though Massachusetts had been the first colony to legalize slavery, the practice dwindled in the state by the turn of the 19th century. (Romer, 2009)

By the middle of the 19th century, according to Davis-Harris (1982), "The population of blacks [in Amherst], designated 'colored people' at the time and settled principally in homes south of Northampton Road near the Hadley line, was ninety-one counted at the end of the Civil War."

By 1900, according to the U.S. Census, there were 199 Black residents—which was considered significant in a town the size of Amherst, and "attributed largely to the need for servants in the homes of well-to-do Amherst College faculty." By 1950, that number had been nearly cut in half, to 110. (Essays on Amherst's History, 1978)

The U.S. Census in 2010 counted 5,068 Black residents in Amherst, out of a total population of 37,819.

The Great Migration and Aftermath

Black people were legally enslaved in the U.S. until Emancipation in 1863. In the 20th century, more than 6 million African Americans fled conditions of economic deprivation, discrimination, legal racial apartheid known as Jim Crow, the specter of white terror including sexual violence and lynching, and migrated from the southern U.S. to cities in the Northeast, Midwest, and West, in what became known as the Great Migration. (Anderson, 2016) Yet even as "many African-Americans moved north in hopes to escape the racism they experienced in the south, many found that discrimination continued, even in supposedly progressive places like Springfield and Amherst." (How We Settled, 2019) Indeed, once arrived in new cities and towns across the U.S.,

> Many Black people found that they could only be hired for low-paying work, including as janitors, maids, and drivers. In addition, they were often excluded from renting or buying

> property, disabling them from settling down or building wealth. The social inequities faced by Black community members after the Civil War and well into the 20th century laid the groundwork for exclusion from opportunities that we continue to see today. (How We Settled, 2019)

Racist Amherst

In contrast to the overt anti-Black racism of southern communities, many white Amherst residents purported indifference toward Black residents. To this day, some refer to Amherst's Black community as "invisible." Two white residents share their experiences of Amherst's Black community members:

> There was a small number of black families here in town, and I believe that most of them came as servants in some category or another. And we didn't - I think we were like everybody else. We didn't dislike Negroes, but we didn't associate with them. I'm sure these people were just about 100 percent ignored, although this brings to mind there were on the football team at least two blacks and maybe three. I don't think we disliked them, we kind of admired them, but after they got off the football field, I don't believe we had one iota to do with them. (Essays on Amherst's History, 1978)

> They were treated with, I think stiff kindness, but they stayed in their place. I'm afraid in Amherst there was a bit of a barway there. It wasn't violence really, it was just a bit of indifference to hobnob. Just as we didn't hobnob with the Slavic people. They never worked in stores except, perhaps, as janitors. They rode the trolley, of course, but I don't know that we would sit with them, though we should have for we went to school with them. (Essays on Amherst's History, 1978)

Racism also took the form of overt anti-Black attitudes. A white resident recalls a section of town populated with Black residents:

> We weren't scared of coloreds. They were just different, you know? We never had any trouble with the colored people, down Northampton Road and Snell Street. That used to be called N----- Heaven [slur omitted].

Classist Amherst

One could argue classism was (and is) Amherst's most egregious form of discrimination, and likely contributed to Amherst being a white enclave. Advertisements for sale of land in the early 1900s, listed by prominent townsperson and real estate agent W.R. Brown, demonstrate exclusionary sales practices: "Price to first-class people very reasonable, to others very high." In his book *Attractive Amherst*, published in 1912, Brown describes the people of Amherst:

> The many advantages of Amherst have kept here a large percentage of the descendants of the early settlers, who are now engaged in agriculture, business and professional life. The new-comers likewise, for the most part, are men of high character and principles. (Brown, 1912)

Amherst Social Order and White Denial

In 1953-4 an Amherst College student, David Chaplin, did his thesis on the Black community. His research, though limited to the early 1950s, tells an important story about why Amherst remained primarily white while surrounding communities like Springfield and Holyoke were growing their Black communities. Chaplin found that, by the 1950s, the number of Black residents in Amherst had dropped nearly in half since 1900. “Earlier economic opportunities for small scale businesses, cleaning shops, and catering and hauling services had diminished along with the employment of household servants.” (Essays On Amherst’s History, 1978)

Most of the Blacks still in Amherst by the mid 1950s were from long-established families who owned their own homes, as it was difficult for younger Blacks coming of age to find jobs in Amherst. Employers did not easily hire Blacks because of potential issues with fellow employees. A director of staff employment at one of the educational institutions asked: “What are you going to do if five of your best workers tell you they won’t work with a prospective Negro employee?” (Essays On Amherst’s History, 1978) This created an age gap, with most Black residents being either children or older persons “who had found some ‘place’ in the town and who knew where they were and where they were not welcome.” (Essays On Amherst’s History, 1978)

Of four barbers in town, only one was willing to cut a Black customer’s hair. Several dozen restrictive real-estate covenants, though illegal, were being actively enforced. And up until 1945, the Lord Jeffrey Inn, owned by Amherst College, banned Black guests.

Amherst has always considered itself a progressive and well-meaning community—a town that welcomes people from all over the world. The collective denial that any real discrimination exists is as present today as it was at the time of Chaplin’s research.

As one white resident explained: “I don’t know anything about the Negroes here, but I do know that there isn’t any discrimination.” (Essays On Amherst’s History, 1978)

Housing

For centuries the town of Amherst has used exclusionary housing policies to deprive communities of color from participating fully in local economic prosperity. There are many examples of implicit and explicit racial discrimination in the history of housing in Amherst up to the present day, which explain why Amherst remains overwhelmingly white.

Racial animosity has frequently surfaced in Amherst in the form of not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) attitudes. NIMBYism in Amherst can be traced as far back as the 19th century: in 1860, for instance, white Amherst residents derisively nicknamed a tenement house on East Main Street the "Beehive" for its continuous activity. (U.S. National Park Service, 2000) This tenement housed poor families and African Americans, and was known as the center of one of the few African American enclaves in the town. The boardinghouse was often the target of disdainful remarks from town residents and local reporters. (Amherst Historic, 2015)

In the early 1860s, local newspapers reported on a number of events that took place at the Beehive. The reporters often used a denigrating tone when talking about the Beehive and its residents (for example, referring to residents as the "swarm"), indicating that their presence was unwelcome. Tellingly, one of the events reported by newspapers in 1864 was an attempt to set the tenement house on fire after it was rumored that a Beehive resident contracted smallpox. (Amherst Historic, 2015) The fire was put out in time, but the event painfully reinforced the message that Beehive residents—African American people—were not welcome in Amherst.

Racially Restrictive Real-Estate Covenants

Racially restrictive covenants were contractual agreements that prohibited the purchase, lease, or occupation of property by a particular group of people, usually African American people and other racial minorities. (Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston) Across the U.S. and in Amherst specifically, this was a legal tool at the disposal of white people who wanted to maintain the racial homogeneity of their neighborhoods.

The most notable example of the use of racially restrictive deeds in Amherst can be seen on the property deeds of multiple lots on Blue Hills Road.[1] In 1947 alone, there were six registered deeds on this street that contained racially restrictive covenants. The deeds of these properties all contained exactly the same language: "That said premises shall not be sold or rented to any colored person or persons." (Hampshire Registry of Deeds) This indicates that the inclusion of

[1] The use of racially restrictive deeds in Amherst was not limited to this particular street. There is also a deed from 1926 of a property located on Ward Street that lists as a restriction: "Subject to the restriction that no part of said lots shall be sold at any time to a negro, Polander, or an Italian." (Hampshire County Registry of Deeds)

racist exclusionary language on these deeds was a concerted, coordinated effort among residents on this street.

It was not a matter of chance that these restrictive deeds were common on Blue Hills Road. This street bordered a historically African American neighborhood in the center of Amherst known as the Westside Historic District. This neighborhood encompassed approximately 44 properties on Hazel Avenue, Northampton Road, and Baker and Snell Streets. Many of the residents in this neighborhood were working-class people who had come from the southern U.S. to Amherst, with the hope of finding less racial hostility, opportunities for advancement, and acceptance in the larger community. (U.S National Park Service, 2000)

Unaffordable Amherst

Housing in Amherst is expensive relative to the rest of Hampshire County and to comparable towns across the U.S. (Town of Amherst Master Plan, 2010) About 45% of the Amherst population is *rent burdened*, meaning they spend more than one third of their income on housing, in a town that is increasingly financially out of reach for many.

There is little housing data in Amherst broken out by race. But it is easy to deduce that a disproportionate share of those who are rent burdened are Black residents, considering that 51% of the Black population in Amherst is below the poverty line. (League of Women Voters, 2020) In terms of home ownership, only 1.8% percent of owner-occupied housing in Amherst is occupied by Black folks. In contrast, whites make up 78.7% of town residents but account for 84% of owner-occupied housing. (League of Women Voters, 2020)

According to the most recent Amherst Housing Production Plan (2013), there was an unmet need for a total of 4,730 extremely low- to moderate-income housing units. But despite the severe need for production of affordable housing, Amherst residents are often unwilling to accept new developments.

Our Neighbor Springfield

Not far to the south of Amherst, the city of Springfield boasts a population that is 22% African American. Both Springfield and Amherst are the largest towns in their respective counties. Springfield's history and its present-day policies can help us understand why the city's racial demographics are so different from Amherst's.

According to *Our Plural History* (2009), "During the period leading up to the Civil War, Springfield was a locus of abolitionist sentiment and activity." By the 1830s, Springfield was a key station along the Underground Railroad. During the Great Migration, many African Americans "fled the segregationist Jim Crow system in the South to join a thriving, long-established black community in Springfield." (Our Plural History, 2009)

In Springfield today, high-rise apartment buildings may be up to 150 feet, and certain business districts allow for structures up to 400 feet. These zoning regulations made it possible for more affordable housing opportunities than in Amherst. (How We Settled, 2019)

According to Amherst's 2016 zoning bylaws, the maximum structure height of any building in a business or residential district is 55 feet. This regulation has limited opportunities for affordable housing by preventing the construction of higher-rise apartment buildings and multi- family housing. Whether or not these policies were intended to exclude people of color, they have surely impacted the town's demographics. (How We Settled, 2019)

NIMBYism in Amherst Today

Today NIMBYism takes the form of opposition to affordable housing developments. Since people of color are disproportionately in need of affordable housing due to historic economic exclusion, town residents' opposition to affordable housing serves as a proxy for racial discrimination and effectively reduces the number of African Americans and other racial minorities who can live in Amherst. (Shriver Center of Poverty Law, 2018)

One of the most salient recent examples of opposition to affordable housing involved Butternut Farms in Orchard Valley. In 2002, the Amherst Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) approved a comprehensive permit for HAP, Inc. (now known as Wayfinders) to build Butternut Farms, a 26-unit rental affordable housing development. Immediately, Orchard Valley residents filed a suit in Land Court seeking to invalidate the zoning approval. The abutters argued that the ZBA lacked authority to approve the comprehensive permit because the town had exceeded the 10% subsidized housing threshold. They also claimed injury specifically due to the permit's requirement that 20% of the units be set aside for minority households.

The state Supreme Judicial Court ultimately ruled in favor of the ZBA and upheld its authority to issue the permit. (Citizens' Housing and Planning Association, 2008) Yet, even though the abutters lost this battle, their legal action significantly delayed the project—for five years—and cost HAP $150,000 in legal fees. This is the kind of time-consuming and costly opposition that advocates can expect when trying to create housing in Amherst that is within reach for those who've been historically excluded.

Another more recent instance of NIMBYism has to do with a proposed 28-unit single-room occupancy development at 132 Northampton Road, which would house homeless and extremely low-income individuals. This development faced opposition from neighboring residents who cited concerns about the size of the development, the potential for increased criminal activity, the possibility of drug and alcohol use, and the endangerment of neighborhood children. Many of these abutters publicly stated their support for affordable housing *in general*, but concluded that *this location* just wasn't right. (Office of the Town Manager, 2020)

A single-room occupancy development like the one proposed at 132 Northampton Road could help mitigate the crisis of homelessness in Amherst. Craig's Door, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing services to the town's homeless population reported that during the 2017-2018 season they served 172 individuals and had to turn someone away 32 times a month due to capacity issues. Of the guests Craig's Door served during this period, 15% were Black. (Craig's Doors)

Education

Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools

Decades of data on the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools (ARPS) reveal a school district in which African American students are disproportionately disciplined relative to their white peers, and in which staff are disproportionately white relative to the student body and community from which they are drawn. The effect is the marginalization of Black students and a sense of unequal, and sometimes hostile, treatment.

In the 1995-1996 school year, Black students were 9.5% of the high school student body but accounted for 25.9% of suspensions. Fifteen years later, in 2009-2010, Black students were 7.8% of high school students but 15.2% of suspensions. (ARPS, 1996; 2010) And 25 years later, in the 2019-2020 school year, Black students were 8.2% of the ARHS student population but 18.75% of suspensions. (Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020)

In 1990, the Amherst chapter of the NAACP filed a complaint against the ARPS, voicing concerns that included not only unequal disciplinary treatment and a faculty who did not reflect the students' racial makeup, but also specific harmful racist incidents, and the disproportionate tracking of Black students into lower-level courses. (Watson, 1990) Following the NAACP's legal action, the school district agreed to form a committee to study the effects of instructional grouping; to co-host community forums on race in the school district; and to pay the NAACP's attorney fees. (U.S. District Court, 1993)

Little changed. Twenty years after the NAACP's complaint, in 2010, an outside consultant conducted an equity audit of the ARPS and reported that "Staff, community members and students told stories of communities feeling marginalized. . . and of disparate treatment in access to courses and high quality instruction, and in discipline referrals and special education placement." (Ray-Taylor, 2010) Moreover,

> Both teachers and students described what they viewed as cultural and/or race-based negative activities. Students stated that they feared nothing would be done to improve the issue, and teachers stated that they feared negative repercussions in response to raising complaints. . . . Throughout the visit there was evidence of pent up concern for disparities and for insensitive and unfair treatment. (Ray-Taylor, 2010)

The same audit also showed significant disparities between white and Black student achievement, noting, for example, that participation in the advanced 8th grade mathematics program was listed as 75% white and 3% African American. (Rossi-Taylor, 2010) Importantly, the audit also found a lack of consensus about whether stakeholders were "on the same page" with goals for equity and diversity, with some stakeholders questioning if "both equity and excellence can be achieved, as they are, in their view, mutually exclusive." (Ray-Taylor, 2010) This may be a primary tension in the ARPS, as some white stakeholders may see the central value—and

positive reputation—of the ARPS to be its impressive record at supporting affluent white students on their path to college, even as some students of color or low-income whites may be excluded or left behind.

In 2011, despite considerable work already completed to diagnose equity issues in the district, then-Superintendent Maria Geryk tasked an Equity Inquiry Group to "Uncover, identify, and understand inequities in our schools." (ARPS, 2011) This group went on to reiterate numerous long-standing problems, including: "De-facto tracking that prevents some students from accessing enrichment/electives and other programming"; "Teachers' culturally-driven values that shape instruction in the classroom"; "Unconscious biases and assumptions about students' potential that impact teacher expectations and beliefs"; "Surface commitment to diversity and equity in the district and community"; and the "Continuing challenge of recruitment and 'after-hiring support' of staff of color to develop a staff that is representative of our student population." (ARPS, 2011)

Underscoring the lack of support for staff of color, anonymous racist messages and threats forced ARHS math teacher Carolyn Gardner to leave her job in 2014. On July 10th of that year a special section of the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* ran with the headline "A year of racial tension in Amherst schools boils over." It described the events leading up to Gardner's departure:

> Amherst schools have been the site of multiple racist assaults throughout the 2013-2014 school year. Most of the vitriol has been aimed at Carolyn Gardner, a black math teacher who began teaching at Amherst Regional High School in September, 2013. She's been the target of graffiti and hateful notes. Other incidents include racially-based bullying that led to a social media post that scared the administration into closing the high school for a day and a "serious and aggressive" assault on a student. (Daily Hampshire Gazette, 2014)

Following these incidents, the school district conducted after-action reviews and pursued further staff trainings in cultural competency and "interrupting" civil rights violations.

Yet the balance of power in the school district remains overwhelmingly white, with primarily white administrators and white school committee members in charge and overseeing a staff that is 75% white. Today 5.4% of Amherst staff yet 10% of Amherst students identify as African American. (Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020) In the 2018-19 school year, 2.3% of 12th grade white students dropped out, while 6.3% of 12th grade Black students dropped out, and 38.8% of white graduates went on to attend a private, four-year college or university, while 0% of Black graduates went on to attend a private, four-year college or university. (Town of Amherst, 2020)

White stakeholders—who hold most of the power in the Amherst school district—have not expressed sufficient discontent to alter a school system that disfavors Black students. There remains a recurring pattern in which staff (and students) of color are called upon to participate in committees or engage in other time-intensive (and/or emotionally exhausting) work that is

ostensibly intended to address the schools' persistent inequities. Such work has been underway for more than a quarter century, yet today administrators and staff in the ARPS do not have organized access to the reporting and recommendations of prior committees on equity and multiculturalism. An apparent lack of consensus about whether the district should prioritize equity has meant only modest progress over decades.

The above constitutes just a brief description of anti-Black racism in the ARPS. A thorough report would span hundreds of pages.

University of Massachusetts

Originally the Massachusetts Agricultural College, or Mass Aggie, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, was founded in 1863 under the Federal Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act, and served only white male students for most of its first three decades. In 1895 the student newspaper *Aggie Life* published an unattributed editorial advocating for disenfranchising African Americans, claiming that Southern Blacks "are improvident, depraved, and strenuously resist any attempts at education," and calling them a "body of people unprepared for freedom." (UMass Special Collections, 2019) Just two years later, in 1897, the school admitted its first Black student. The university did not hire its first Black faculty member until the middle of the 20th century. As of Fall 1967, Black students constituted less than 1% of university enrollment. (Bell, 2012)

In 1954 the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional. White people across the U.S. responded with widespread and coordinated resistance, violent and otherwise. Black people turned to civic action and public protest in order to demand equal access; at UMass, Black students demonstrated and circulated petitions for equality and for the recruitment and retention of Black faculty. (Bell, 2012) In 1969, the inaugural volume of the UMass student publication *Drum* included the following statement:

> We, the Black Student Community, recognize that the Colleges are not, and have never been, seriously committed to satisfying our needs and the needs of the broader Black Community. Previous efforts to implement programs that speak to needs have led to meaningless dialogues between individual campus groups and their respective administrative structures. Innumerable meetings, countless proposals and 'advisory committees' have continually frustrated our efforts to determine the reality of our presence. (Drum, 1969)

Although this statement is more than a half-century old, it could have been written by university students today. "We have the same list of demands since 1969, and nothing has been changed," said a UMass student activist named Stacy Tchouanguem in 2015, during a protest over the university's lack of diversity. (Bowler, 2015)

Racism continues to permeate the UMass campus, which periodically erupts following a deeply hurtful act of racial hostility. When angry white students beat a Black student unconscious following the 1986 World Series, it made national headlines, with the *Washington Post* referring to UMass as "one of the most racially troubled campuses in the country." (Maraniss, 1990) In 1992, *The New York Times* reported that a United States Justice Department mediation team had been brought to the campus "to help heal the wounds." (Depalma, 1992)

Yet wounds remain, with new harms heaped on the old. In 2004, nine white members of the UMass student government were photographed with handmade images depicting themselves as members of the Ku Klux Klan. One image showed student senate speaker Patrick G. Higgins in a pointed KKK hat, holding a burning cross, captioned as "grand wizard," with a speech bubble that said "I love ALANA." ALANA stands for African, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American. (Amherst Bulletin, 2004)

In the fall of 2014, a Black student found the phrase "kill these n-----s" scrawled across his dorm room door in Coolidge Hall. (Ferguson, 2016) This was not an isolated incident; in the *Amherst Wire*, a publication produced by the school's journalism students, Black students described being the target of racial slurs, and the complicit silence of white witnesses who declined to intervene on their behalf. In 2015 the university convened a 'diversity planning committee' as well as listening sessions in which students were invited to share painful experiences. Yet following these sessions there was a lack of meaningful change for Black students, who have continued to protest. (Weaver, 2015)

In 2016, then-student Ellanjé Ferguson published an article called "Whiteout: Life as a black student at UMass Amherst," describing UMass as a Primarily White Institution, or an institution in which whites account for half or more of the student population. "My peers have protested poor treatment, demanded diversity plans and asked for more support from the moment I stepped foot on campus. . . . Students of color have the right to demand less talk and more action, especially when they're dealing with racial hostility at a place they call their home nine months out of the year." (Ferguson, 2016)

It is not only students who feel such hostility and isolation. At an orientation for new faculty in 2013, Dr. Karla Zelaya was presumed by a colleague to be in food service and asked to refill the orange juice. "I was crushed," she said of the experience, noting that on the same day, a fellow professor complimented her English (English is her first language). (Ferguson, 2016) Dr. Zelaya is now a professor at the University of North Alabama.

As of Fall 2020, just 4.2% of faculty, 5.5% of undergraduates, and 6.4% of graduate students at UMass identified as Black/African American. (UMass, 2020)

Amherst College

Reverend David Parsons and Oliver Cowls were among the first white settlers in Amherst. They also both enslaved Black people, and both had sons who became prominent town residents who made foundational donations to the establishment of Amherst College.

Minister of the First Church of Amherst Rev. David Parsons (1712-1781) owned three enslaved Black people whose names were Pompey, Rose, and Goffy. Parsons's son Rev. David Parsons (1749-1823) contributed funds and land to Amherst Academy, an affiliated institution that preceded Amherst College, and was one of several people who signed a bond for the college's founding. Today the campus building known as the Octagon sits on the site of the First Church of Amherst, which was donated by the younger Parsons. Thus chattel slavery existed on the very land upon which Amherst College now sits, and was gifted to the College as a result of intergenerational white wealth created at least in part by slaveholding.

In 1824, Dr. Rufus Cowls, son of Amherst slave owner Oliver Cowls, donated to the Trustees of Amherst Academy a tract of land in Maine valued at $3,000 (more than $80,000 today). Amherst College received its official charter the following year; thus Cowls's gift directly supported the creation of Amherst College.

Edward Jones, class of 1826, was the first African American to enroll at Amherst College. Yet, from the 1830s until World War II, all-white fraternities were central to Amherst's social life. In 1948 a Black student named Thomas Gibbs from Evanston, Illinois, made national news by pledging the Amherst chapter of Phi Kappa Psi. Some fraternities at Amherst subsequently integrated; others remained entirely white until all fraternities were officially abolished from campus in 1984 (some continued to operate clandestinely thereafter). Whether officially or effectively excluded from Amherst's social life, many Black students felt isolated by racism. (Saxton, 2020)

In the 21st Century, Amherst College has made efforts to diversify its student body beyond its white roots, yet "while numerically speaking there may be greater diversity, brown students still suffer the same feelings of hostility and alienation." (Oka, 2015) In June 2020, alumna Chaka S. Laguerre submitted a letter to College President Biddy Martin undersigned by some 360 alumni describing that sense of alienation. Referencing a student protest known as Amherst Uprising, Laguerre emphasized that "the violence, harassment, and exclusion felt by students [of color] at other colleges and universities were also felt by members of their own community." (Laguerre, 2020) The letter pointed out that "From Fall 2000 to Fall 2016, Black faculty were 33 times as likely to be denied tenure as their white colleagues," and that in 2017 an unidentified person left a noose on Amherst College's Pratt Field.

On August 3, 2020, Amherst College President Biddy Martin issued the following apology:

> To our Black students and alumni, on behalf of the College and in my role as its current president, I offer you an apology for the harm you have experienced here and for having not made more progress. . . . [T]oo often white people deny responsibility for what they see as the sins of the past without recognizing how those sins live in the present, how

> systemic they are, and how much we who are white benefit from them, whether consciously and willfully or not. Against that backdrop, I offer you, our Black alumni and students, our recognition that the realities of structural racism in the United States have shaped our educational institutions, including Amherst, and my deep sorrow about the toll your negative experiences at Amherst have taken. (Martin, 2020)

Though Amherst College is a private institution, the College and the town support one another in a number of ways. Among other benefits, the town enjoys a reputational boost from having a prestigious and top-ranked liberal arts college located in its downtown. At present, the College is establishing a Steering Committee on a Racial History of Amherst.

Health

Racism has a profoundly negative effect on the individual and collective health of Black residents of Amherst. Because there is little town-level data on health, and even less information on health by racial subgroup, we have used a variety of county-level sources, personal interviews, and national research to inform our understanding of how racism affects the health of Amherst residents.

Health and health outcomes are influenced by multiple social determinants. (CDC, 2021) Some, such as income and employment, housing, transportation, and access to quality education are covered in other sections of this report. This section addresses health care access and quality and food insecurity. Most importantly, the social and community context of a town has a direct effect on health. Where that context includes systemic racism, those who live under its burden suffer real, direct, and harmful health consequences.

Direct Health Effects of Racism

The American Medical Society (AMA, November 2020) and the Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS, November 2020) have recognized that interpersonal, institutional, and systemic racism is a serious threat to public health and impedes the delivery of appropriate medical care and advancement of health equity. Cities nationwide, including twelve Massachusetts municipalities, have declared that racism is a public health crisis. (American Public Health Association, 2021) Racism affects Black people regardless of income, employment status, access to health care and ability to pay.

As we have seen throughout this report, race-based discriminatory practices are pervasive in Amherst. Such white supremacy is a form of historic, generational, social, and interpersonal discrimination, bias, and psychological trauma. (Darling A et al, 2020) The cumulative effects of surviving everyday under vulnerable conditions, with messages on multiple levels that your needs are not important or respected, is the harmful reality for many Black residents.

In physiological terms, internalized racial discrimination causes elevation in stress hormones. Chronic stress damages all bodily systems, increasing physical vulnerability to asthma and cancer (Cooley Dickinson, 2019), cardiovascular complications, obesity, diabetes, and early death, as well as mental health outcomes such as depression, substance use disorders, and sleep disturbances. (MA Public Health Network)

Nationally, African Americans bear a disproportionate burden of disease, are 50% more likely to have high blood pressure, and suffer the highest death rates among all racial groups for all cancers. (GARE, 2018) Within Massachusetts, Black residents have higher rates of diabetes, obesity, hypertension, chronic kidney disease, peripheral vascular disease, and heart attacks. (Tufts Health Foundation, 2018) Within Hampshire County and by implication in Amherst, Black

residents suffer higher rates of cardiovascular disease, asthma, and diabetes. (Cooley Dickinson, 2019) These medically complex conditions increase the need for more frequent, specialized care, and drive up medical costs for those affected.

Mental health hospital rates in Hampshire County are 1.7 times higher for Black residents than white residents. (Cooley Dickinson, 2019) Locally and throughout the county, more children are experiencing mental health issues, and this is disproportionately true for youth of color. According to the Community Action Pioneer Valley Community Needs Assessment, “increasing numbers of youth are also reporting depressive symptoms/suicidal thoughts/self-harm; low-income youth, LGBTQ youth, girls/young women, and people of color report these issues to a greater extent than other groups.” (Darling A et al, 2020)

The culture of a community, including civic engagement and nondiscriminatory safety, is an independent determinant of physical and mental health. (Cooley Dickinson, 2019) In Amherst, the Black population is not proportionately represented in local government bodies, and representation is often absent entirely. The inability to participate fully in community activities and feeling unsafe in one’s own community due to implicit and explicit racism—including in law enforcement practices—result in a sense of isolation and exclusion. Stress levels increase, precipitating chronic physical and mental health issues. (Cooley Dickinson, 2019; CDC, 2021) In the simplest of terms, by sustaining a culture of systemic racism, Amherst makes its Black residents sick.

The connections between chronic forms of stress and chronic forms of illness such as hypertension are clear. However, due to the longstanding societal stigmas surrounding mental health, coupled with an overriding mistrust of health care systems due to historic maltreatment (Bajaj SS and Stanford FD, 2021), Black residents in Amherst are less likely to disclose their health conditions to providers and are less likely to seek treatment.

Health Care Access and Quality

Mandatory health insurance coverage in Massachusetts means the state has a relatively small share of uninsured residents. However, in 2019, although the rate for uninsured white residents was a low 3%, the rate of uninsured Black residents was almost double, 5.5%. (KFF State Health Facts, 2019) As of 2018, over 70% of all Massachusetts residents received health care coverage through their employer. (MA 2018 Employer Survey, June 2019) For many, loss of employment or unstable employment means loss of coverage, and due to discrimination in hiring practices this is disproportionately likely to affect Black people.

Access to local health care facilities and health providers is limited by individual economic resources and transportation options. The regional hospitals, Valley Medical Group, and even facilities in downtown Amherst require access by car or public transit, creating a barrier to health care access because local public transit options are limited. (See also Transportation.)

The Musante Clinic and the Amherst Survival Center's Free Clinic both provide care to underserved populations in Amherst. The Musante Clinic, a satellite of Hilltown Community Health Center, receives federal funds to provide underserved persons medical, dental, and behavioral health care, and provides assistance in applying for and navigating health insurance. (U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, 2021) The clinic also offers assistance in referrals to providers and navigating health insurance coverage. Approximately 8 to 10% of the Musante Clinic's patients are Black, drawn from Amherst and 90 other zip codes. There are no Black professional or ancillary personnel at the clinic. (Eliza Lake, CEO Hilltowns Community Health Center, February 4, 2021)

Until it was forced to close in March 2020 due to COVID restrictions, the Amherst Survival Center's Free Clinic was open three times a week, providing care without regard to insurance status or ability to pay. Although no formal data on patient race or ethnicity is collected at the clinic (Dr. Susan Lowery, February 4, 2021), patients reflect the same demographics as users of other Survival Center services, with 24% identifying as African American. (Lev Ben-Ezra, Director, Amherst Survival Center, January 29, 2021)

Health Care Providers' Race Affects Patient Outcomes

To the extent that staffing patterns could be determined through a review of relevant websites, professional and ancillary staff at local health care facilities are overwhelmingly white. (Websites of Valley Medical Group, Atkinson Family Practice, UMass Health Services, February 15, 2021)

Medical bias affects the care that Black patients receive. (Elgon J, 2020 May 10) Local community health partners, when recently surveyed, acknowledged that bias and prejudice existed throughout their agencies, specifically in a lack of staff diversity, language barriers, policies, assumptions, prejudgments, and intolerance. (Darling A et al, 2020) Efforts to instill "cultural humility" in white providers do not fully mitigate these attitudes.

Health outcomes, including survival, vastly improve when Black patients receive care from Black providers. In Massachusetts, the infant mortality rate for Black babies is more than twice as high as that of whites. (MA Department of Public Health, 2013) But research shows that infant mortality is cut in half when Black babies receive neonatal care from Black physicians. This demonstrates the essential roles of culture and respect in provider-patient relationships. (Greenwood, et al, 2020)

In interviews with local health providers, our questions about the racial breakdown of staff were generally met with the answer that the facility does not specifically track such information. To the extent that the race of providers can mean life or death for patients of color, this is a grave omission by the local health care community.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity, an often overlooked determinant of health, is “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” (USDA, 2006) Lack of reliable transportation, a problem for many Amherst residents, contributes to food insecurity by limiting access to food sources. (Mary Beth Ogulewicz, February 1, 2021) Local supermarkets are outside population centers, and the few year-round sources of fresh food are within walking distance for few Amherst residents. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has designated virtually all of Amherst a “food desert.” (Cooley Dickinson, 2019)

In 2018 in Hampshire County, fully 36% of all households were food insecure. Within the student population, students were 17 to 30% more likely to be food insecure (Darling A., 2020). Data available for Amherst, not disaggregated by race, identifies food insecurity as affecting more than 20% of households. (Cooley Dickinson, 2019)

The Amherst Survival Center provides a safety net for food insecure people in Amherst and twelve other towns. Statistics covering the year ending September 30, 2020, show that 24% of the persons accessing the food pantry and take-out meals were Black residents of Amherst. (Lev Ben-Ezra, January 29, 2021) This is much larger than the share of the town population that is Black. Thus we infer that a disproportionate share of those who are food insecure in Amherst are Black. Food insecurity substantially and negatively impacts physical and mental health, as well as school and job performance.

The Impact of Covid-19

Mirroring the U.S. at large, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a more profoundly negative effect on the Black population as compared to whites in Massachusetts. All the factors discussed in this report—including inequities in housing, education, health care, transportation, and employment, as well as a lack of social cohesion—contribute to greater physiological vulnerability, higher rates of infection, and worse outcomes. (NIH, 2020; Elgon J, 2020 May 10)

The death rate from Covid-19 for Black Massachusetts residents is three times higher than for white residents. (Boston Indicators, 2020). There is no data to indicate that Black folks in Amherst have fared any better than this deplorable state average.

Data on race and ethnicity of vaccine recipients demonstrates that communities of color in Massachusetts have not only been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 with respect to infections, hospitalizations, and deaths, but also have a vaccination rate that is half that of white people. Lack of access to reliable internet, transportation, or flexible work schedules necessary to take advantage of any available opening, all contribute to this disparity. (Schoenfeld Walker A. et al, 2021 March 5) Moreover, lack of trust that is the result of a history of abuse at the hands of white health care providers has contributed to a nationwide trend in which Black communities are wary or suspicious of the Covid vaccine. (Bajaj SS and Stanford FD, 2021) The

Amherst Health Department should take race, ethnicity, and income into account when devising vaccine outreach strategies.

Income and Employment

According to the Town of Amherst Master Plan, "Amherst is a highly desirable community in which to live, work, study, and play." Yet, as we have seen, not everyone has an equal chance of thriving here. White people in Amherst have less than a one in three chance of living in poverty, while for Black residents that number is one in two. As of 2019, the Black median family income in Amherst was $45,464; white median family income was 2.4 times greater, $108,500. (League of Women Voters, 2020) This is not a matter of chance but the product of economic exclusion, past and present.

In the mid 19th century, vital statistics for Amherst showed that Black residents were largely limited to work as domestic servants, for women, or as laborers, for men. Genealogist James Avery Smith has written that this historical record indicates "how hard it was for an unskilled black person to secure a job above a subsistence level" in Amherst. (Avery Smith, 1999) This historical circumstance helped shape Amherst's economy in the present.

Today the town's Economic Development Plan explicitly acknowledges that "Despite the relative affluence of many Amherst residents, there remains a . . . disproportionate number of people of color below the poverty line." (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, 2018) Yet this troubling reality has not been named a central priority in local planning. According to the Economic Development Plan, "It will be important to measure changes in these populations as Amherst pursues economic development strategies that benefit all residents." (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, 2018) That is, equitable economic growth is not a priority in its own right, but rather something to be tracked amid the pursuit of generalized economic gains that accrue primarily to white people.

The very first goal listed in Amherst's Master Plan is to "Maintain Amherst's existing community character." (Amherst Planning Board, 2010) But to which character does this refer? Black residents have been historically marginalized in Amherst and in the town's economy, and such marginalization continues today.

Employment in Amherst

The University of Massachusetts is by far the largest employer in town, and jobs at the University are typically sought-after due to the relatively high wages and associated benefits. As of Fall 2019, the University employed 6,274 people, inclusive of all faculty, administrators, and staff, of which 320, or 5.1%, identified as Black/African American. Among faculty specifically, the proportion that is African American is just 4.4%. (UMass, 2020) By comparison, 9% of Massachusetts residents identify as Black/African American.

Already underrepresented in employment at the University, Black employees were more likely to be furloughed indefinitely due to Covid-19. By Fall 2020, as compared to the previous year,

the number of Black people employed at the University had declined 17%, compared with a 9.9% decline for white people. (UMass, 2020) This indicates that white University employees enjoy greater job security than their Black colleagues.

Black people seeking employment in Amherst who cannot find a sought-after job with the University may encounter few options offering a living wage. According to the town's Master Plan, "Other [non-educational] job sectors in Amherst, particularly traditional businesses such as retail and service businesses, are disproportionately small for a community this size." Moreover, this "relative shortage of non-academic job opportunities and growth . . . hampers the community's efforts to support economic and social diversity." (Amherst Planning Board, 2010)

Family Outreach of Amherst, a social-services agency, increasingly serves clients who work two or even three jobs but still do not earn enough to meet their family's needs. (Executive Director Laura Reichsman, January 27, 2021) Black residents are disproportionately likely to experience such poverty.

A considerable share of the private-sector jobs that do exist in Amherst are derived from very small businesses. As of 2004 (most recent year available*), Amherst had a total of 1,192 workers employed in firms with three or fewer employees. (Town of Amherst, 2007) But business owners tend to hire people with whom they feel comfortable, which very often means people who look like them. Since most small businesses in Amherst are white-owned, white job applicants are likely to have a leg up in securing employment here, as in most places in the U.S. In this way it is fairly easy to see how an insular white economy of small businesses effectively shuts out the same people—of color—who have long been excluded. One former Black resident with whom we spoke expressed a sense of being "locked out" of Amherst professionally; he has since relocated to the Boston area. There is a need for more interviewing and data collection to document the experiences of Black residents.

Black Entrepreneurship

Of the 2,756 firms registered in Amherst in 2012, 8.5% were owned by non-white people. (League of Women Voters, 2020) There is no data specifically on Black business ownership in Amherst because, to date, the town has not prioritized collection of such information. However, if local business ownership were proportional to Amherst's population in the 2010 Census, there would be around 369 Black-owned businesses here; thus we can estimate that hundreds of Black-owned firms are "missing" from town. A recent presentation by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to the Amherst Planning Board underscored the need for local business data collection that includes the race/ethnicity of business owners. (Hall, 2021)

Black would-be entrepreneurs in Amherst and elsewhere are less likely to enjoy the intergenerational wealth that some white families have built over decades or centuries, which very often forms the seed capital to start a business. Yet, even when a Black person does set out

a shingle in Amherst, they will almost certainly contend with discrimination in a variety of forms. Such discrimination drives away some would-be entrepreneurs, depriving them of the benefits of commerce here and depriving their families of the associated financial gain. It is also a substantial loss for the local economy and culture.

Is the Black Population of Amherst Declining?

Over the course of compiling this report, informational interviews from several sources indicated that there has been an exodus of Black residents from Amherst. The Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey also indicated that the local Black population has declined. At present we are awaiting 2020 Census data to say definitively whether there has been negative growth in the town's Black population.

Transportation

"When people think about racial equity, transportation may not be
the first thing that comes to mind. Unless your bus or train is late
or your car won't start, people don't think much about transportation.
But transportation equity and access can be the greatest equalizer -
or [the lack of it] can do tremendous harm."
– U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, 2020)

The town of Amherst has not prioritized the collection of data from residents about race/ethnicity nor transportation access. Yet we know that 51% of Black residents in Amherst live below the poverty line (as compared to 30% of white residents), and that 65% of all riders in PVTA's Northern Region are living below the poverty line. (Amherst League of Women Voters, 2020; PVTA, 2016) Thus we infer that Black people in Amherst are considerably more likely than their white counterparts to rely on public transit, and to be among the 52% of PVTA riders who have no alternative way to travel. (PVTA, 2016)

Transportation inequities in Amherst mirror the larger nation. "While many people view the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as the end of government-sponsored discrimination in the United States, there is an obvious and ignored truth: equality in transportation has been established in name only. Half-century after the Montgomery bus boycotts—chronic inequality in public transportation is firmly and nationally entrenched." (Bullard, 2019)

Amherst Public Transit

Transportation inequity in Amherst is visible in the stark differences between transit service for college students as compared with year-round residents. While the PVTA is fairly reliable and convenient for riders from the five colleges, permanent residents face considerable hurdles, including service disruptions and lack of basic amenities. Many of these problems have been described in multiple reports by the PVTA yet remain unchanged. While Amherst prioritizes projects such as the construction of expensive new traffic circles, basic and egregious problems persist in transit service, including:

Lack of Bus Shelters: The PVTA Customer Service Survey of 2016 found that 63% of respondents ranked bus shelters their second-highest concern. The 2015 Amherst Transport Plan makes specific note of the lack of bus shelters in neighborhoods that heavily serve customers of color: "[At UMass] the school has installed many shelters and has larger shelters available in some locations. Downtown Amherst is the next highest activity location, followed closely by Hampshire College and the Boulders apartment complex. Unfortunately, none of these locations have… bus stops with typical amenities that would be found in communities with such high transit ridership, including more benches, better weather protection, lighting, information displays, etc." (PVTA, 2016)

No Public Transport to Holyoke, Springfield, and Greenfield: The 2015 Amherst Transportation Plan states that "Although PVTA recently implemented improvements as part of its Comprehensive Services Analysis project, there are continued concerns about lack of service in some areas and with regional

connections to Holyoke, Springfield, and Greenfield." These towns are important providers of technical and community-college education for area residents, as well as significant employers. (John Hornick, Amherst Affordable Housing Trust Chair, February 2021) Yet no meaningful transit options exist.

Problematic "Three Bag Rule:" Lev Ben-Ezra, Executive Director of the Amherst Survival Center, tells of a mobility barrier particularly problematic for Survival Center customers. Many who are reliant on the PVTA must take multiple busses to arrive at the Center, some with children in tow. Bus drivers are empowered to invoke a three-bag limit, and child strollers can count against that total. If a customer is carting as much food as needed for her household, she may exceed that limit and face the possibility that any one of the multiple bus drivers she will encounter during her travel will invoke the rule and prevent her from boarding the bus. (Lev Ben-Ezra, February, 2021).

College Calendar Bus Schedules Don't Work for Year-Round Residents: The 2015 Amherst Transportation Plan notes the frequently reported concern that "services are either reduced or unavailable for most of the current routes when school is not in session, such as the summer break, winter break, and spring break." (Town Transportation Plan Task Force, 2015) Indeed, Ben-Ezra speaks of the Amherst public transportation system as being woefully inadequate for non-students who need to utilize the bus year-round. She said many of the people who depend on Survival Center services struggle because it "absolutely doesn't work when bus service goes down to 25% when college is not in session. . . . [Amherst's transit system] badly needs to sustain what exists during the school year, across the full year. This would make it a functional service for the people who need food support." She feels this issue reveals "who was an afterthought, and who this system really was designed for." (Ben-Ezra, February 2021)

Problems with Frequency of Service, On-Time Performance, and Lengthy Commutes: The 2016 PVTA Onboard Customer Survey found that two-thirds of customers were dissatisfied with the frequency of service, while 60% were unhappy with the system's on-time performance. (PVTA, 2016) Another survey measured total commute times, including travel to stations and the time spent waiting for buses or trains. Riders reported commute times an average of 1.9 times greater than those who drove. (Maciag, 2017)

Interruptions to Transportation During Emergencies: Ben-Ezra reports that the Covid-19 pandemic shed light on the fact that Survival Center clients had organized themselves to work around the gaps in local transit service. They had set up elaborate systems to rely on one another—for example with car pools or borrowing or sharing cars. Schedules for shared cars had been established so that special needs could be met; one parent might borrow a car from another household to pick up food at the Center while kids were in school. After the onset of Covid-19, with kids schooling at home, this was no longer feasible. It was also no longer safe to carpool. "Where people had been piecing transportation together, Covid caused these structures to fall apart." To respond, the Survival Center hired drivers to make home deliveries. Nine routes were set up so that food deliveries could be made to individual homes. Additionally, nineteen "coordinated site delivery" spots were set up close to housing where clients are clustered. The Survival Center brings food in refrigerated trucks to these sites—to the Boulders, for example—so that people can walk to retrieve their groceries. In total, 1,200 people a month currently require food deliveries because they lack transportation to the Survival Center. (Ben-Ezra, February 2021)

Today's Inequities Echo Past Discrimination

To many African American residents, disparities in transportation in present-day Amherst echo discrimination of the past. Charlie Bhodi has lived in Amherst for more than forty years, and he recalls his family's "yearly pilgrimages" to Louisiana to see his grandparents. Many Black families who had fled the violent Jim Crow-era South made similar journeys to visit relatives who had not joined the Great Migration. Here's how Charlie describes his family's annual trips:

> They were long and arduous—there were no motels where we could stay, all food was pre-packed and eaten in the car on the go. Filling stations were reluctantly willing to sell us gasoline. . . restrooms for 'coloreds' were so foul. . . . Once we were travelling through Georgia and needed to stop for some fast food at a roadside stand. My father went up to the window to order and was told to go around the back—which he refused to do! . . . He came back furious. (Charlie Bodhi, February 2021)

Looking back, Charlie feels that the indignity felt by his father was particularly painful since both he and Charlie's mother were highly educated, with advanced degrees, and were successful professionals.

For the many Black residents of Amherst who carry such memories, injustices in Amherst today are likely to trigger the trauma of painful discrimination from the past.

Transit Can Determine College Access

In interviews with members of Hope Community Church, we were told a story of a young Black congregant who made her family and church community proud when she graduated from Amherst Regional High School and planned to attend Holyoke Community College. She was nearly unable to matriculate, however, because she could not find transportation from Amherst to Holyoke. Her family stretched to pay much more than they had budgeted for her education so that she could share an apartment within walking distance of HCC. She would otherwise have been unable to access the college, which is a half-hour drive from her family's home. (Steve Rogers and Mary Ellen Shea, February 2021) Massachusetts State Senator Jo Comerford has emphasized the importance of connecting and expanding transit routes so that Amherst residents have reliable transportation to points north and south. In addition to Holyoke Community College, Greenfield Community College, which lies a half hour north of Amherst, is an essential destination that's out of reach for transit riders.

U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley of Somerville, Massachusetts, might have been referring specifically to Amherst when she noted that "Everyone has a right to live and travel safely in community, but that right is denied to far too many in our communities. From subpar and overpriced housing in our neighborhoods to bus and train routes that force communities of color to spend hours more on transit every year, our basic infrastructure is exacerbating and reinforcing systemic racism in our community." (Presley, 2020)

Barriers to Car Ownership

In addition to problematic gaps in public transportation, Black folks in Amherst and elsewhere face higher barriers to car ownership than their white peers. Across the U.S., African Americans have the lowest rate of car ownership of all racial and ethnic groups, with 19% living in homes in which not one person owns a car, as compared to 4.6% of white people for whom this is true. (Rochester, 2017)

The cost of living in Amherst is high due in particular to the steep cost of housing. The Black median family income is less than half that of whites in town, meaning that Black residents on average have considerably less financial resources available to support the purchase and maintenance of a private vehicle. Moreover, when Black folks do acquire a car, they are likely to face inflated costs at every step of the process. This is not unique to Amherst, yet it is a hurdle that Black residents may face.

In *The Black Tax: The Cost of Being Black in America*, Shawn D. Rochester provides a variety of data to show how African Americans in the U.S. are routinely charged more than whites to purchase, finance, and insure a car. These overcharges include higher purchase prices, in which black male buyers pay an average of $1,100 more than their white male counterparts; and higher financing costs, in which Black borrowers were charged 110% to 454% higher rates than whites with similar credit ratings. (Rochester, 2017) In lawsuits initiated by the Justice Department, both Toyota and Honda were sued for charging Black borrowers higher rates than white counterparts with similar credit ratings, with those car companies ultimately paying out settlements for their discriminatory practices. (Rochester, 2017)

Racially-Motivated Traffic Stops

Traffic laws have been abused by police across the country as a pretext to pull over, search, and escalate violence against people of color. We address basic statistics about policing in Amherst in the final section of this report.

Transportation Obstacles Affect Local Health Outcomes

The Cooley Dickinson Hospital Needs Assessment has found that unequal access to “appropriate” transportation is a significant factor in racial and ethnic health disparities in this region. Transportation issues emerged from the hospital’s data “as a major and chronic barrier to health care.” Transportation was a prominent concern that arose in all the individual and group sources that were used to gather information for the hospital’s Needs Assessment report. (Cooley Dickinson Board of Trustees, 2019) This finding *predates* the Covid-19 pandemic, in which Black folks are at a higher risk of infection and death, but less likely to have access to basic transportation to a health care facility.

Policing

Amherst's Community Safety Working Group is presently conducting a detailed assessment of policing in town. This report will not attempt to duplicate their efforts. However, we can share some brief initial findings extracted from aggregate race data (2010-2020) that the Amherst Police Department submitted to the Community Safety Working Group earlier this year. These data show:

- Compared with white drivers, when a Black driver was stopped by police, the reason given for the stop was twice as likely to be "investigatory" rather than a traffic or equipment violation or accident. An investigatory stop is "for investigative purposes based upon reasonable suspicion that the person has committed, is committing, or is about to commit a crime, under circumstances that do not amount to probable cause for arrest." (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2019)
- Black drivers accounted for only 6% of all crashes but 8.4% of all stops and 14.5% of all "investigatory" stops.
- Black drivers stopped by police were 1.45 times more likely to be searched, and 1.5 times more likely to be arrested, than white drivers.
- When Black drivers were stopped by police, they were about 1.25 times more likely than white drivers to be stopped for over 30 minutes.
- When Black drivers were searched by police, the reason given was 20% less likely to be probable cause, and nearly twice as likely to be "reasonable suspicion," compared with white drivers. (Community Safety Working Group, 2021)

These statistics, which represent a decade of policing in Amherst, indicate that Black drivers speed less and are involved in fewer car accidents, but are stopped, searched, and arrested disproportionately relative to whites. When they are searched, the search is slightly more likely to result in a finding of "nothing found" than searches of vehicles owned by white people (61% of searches of Black drivers, versus 57% for white drivers). And Black drivers were significantly more likely than white drivers to be stopped, searched, and arrested by Amherst Police for an "investigatory reason," and under the auspices of reasonable suspicion, rather than for probable cause.

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