

UNDERGROUND

Racism is not dead.

Despite the persistent rumors that racism in the United States ended with segregation, White people in this country continue to willfully separate themselves from people of color—and to believe they are somehow better than people with a different color of skin. This racism started more than 200 years ago, as slavery began to fall out of fashion, and White slave owners needed a reason why Black people could be held as property. Their answer? Because Black people are inferior to Whites, intellectually and morally. And while slavery may have ended in 1865, racism did not.

As free Black people began to build lives for themselves after slavery, White officials passed laws that legalized segregation between the races, creating separate and unequal social



classes. Any Black person attempting to rise above his or her 'place' in society was faced with the possibility of arrest or mob violence. Little by little, the Civil Rights Movement changed the law of the land, but racism remained in the hearts and minds of many.

Today, there are no legal reasons why White people and Black people should remain separated—and yet we do. As school integration took hold in the 1960s, White families fled to the suburbs, creating a voluntary system of segregation in neighborhoods and schools. Inner cities are often policed more heavily than suburbs, leading to a greater number of stops, arrests, prosecutions, and convictions for people of color. We even worship separately, with Black and White people rarely crossing the color barrier on Sunday mornings. With no laws left to change, people of faith—who believe that God wants us to live in community with our neighbors of color—must deliberately and persistently find the lines of color in their own lives and cross them—in their homes, at their tables, and in their communities.

Statistics:

- The poverty rate for Black people in the U.S. is 20%, more than twice that for White people (8%).
- Segregation was not just a 'southern problem;' Jim Crow laws existed in 35 of the 50 United States.
- Blacks make up 12% of the U.S. population and 33% of the U.S. prison population; Whites are 64% of the U.S. population but make up just 30% of the prison population.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What incorrect assumptions or prejudices do people often hold about Black people?
2. Why do you think Black history has its own month?
3. Why do you think racism persisted after the end of slavery and segregation?
4. How do the wrongs of the past continue to influence Black lives today?

Ways to Learn More

- Visit the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati: www.freedomcenter.org
- Visit the Rankin House in Ripley, OH: www.ohiohistory.org
- Visit the *Underground* website: www.westohioumc.org/underground