Marcus and his family: How racism shapes opportunities for Black families

Image descriptions

[Slide 1] This image shows three Black family members who are illustrated as graphics. The three family members are: a grandmother and an adult male who is holding his infant.

The text at the top of the page reads: This is the story of Marcus, his grandmother Helen, and his daughter, Mia. Their experiences show how racist policies rooted in the past continue to affect people today.

On the left side of the page next to the image of the grandmother, the text reads: Helen. Growing up, segregation and discrimination by race were legal and directly limited Helen’s opportunities in life.

On the right side of the page next to the image of the Black male, the text reads: Marcus. By the time Marcus was born, the laws had changed and he had more opportunities. But the legacy of racist structures and policies that affected his grandmother still influenced his life and the possibilities available to him.

At the bottom of the page, underneath all three characters reads: Mia. Marcus and his wife recently had a baby named Mia — and he wonders what it will take to make sure Mia has a fair chance to succeed.

[Slide 2] This image shows Helen wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt, green pants, and brown shoes. She is sitting on the steps of a house. Helen has long gray hair and wears glasses. There is a small plant and a blue door.

From left to right surrounding the image, the text reads:

Helen, 1935-1990

Marcus’s grandmother attended segregated schools but left high school after two years to start working to help support her family.

In 1950, only 15% of Black women completed high school or attended college, compared to 38% of white women. There is an icon of a school building and the numbers “15%” above this text.

Helen and her family lived in a rental apartment. Her parents wanted to buy a house but they were not allowed to get a mortgage in their neighborhood. Because they were Black, they also weren't allowed to buy a house in the new suburban developments.

A federal agency deemed neighborhoods with more residents of color to be “high risk” – a process known as REDLINING. Those classifications were used to deny home loans in “high risk” neighborhoods. Many of these neighborhoods experienced decades of disinvestment. There is an icon of a fence and the number “1930s” above this text.

[Slide 3] This image shows Helen wearing a purple long-sleeve shirt and an apron. She is standing behind a counter with a cash register and a container of salt.

From left to right surrounding the image, the text reads:

Helen married and had three children.

Because of her limited education and discrimination in the workforce, her job opportunities were limited. She worked as a waitress and hospital attendant.

In 1940, more than half of employers had policies against hiring Black women as clerical workers, and by 1960, even with the same level of education, Black women were significantly less likely to work in clerical jobs than white women. Instead, 60% of employed Black women worked in service jobs, compared to 20.3% of white women. There is a graphic of yellow gloves and the number “1960” above this text.

At the bottom of the image, the text reads: Helen died at only 55, far younger than many of her white colleagues. Black women born in 1935 had a life expectancy of 55.2 years – a decade shorter than white women born in the same year. “10 years” is emphasized in larger text next to this text.

[Slide 4] This image shows Marcus who is wearing a long-sleeve green shirt, blue pants, and black shoes. He has short black hair and is crossing his arms. He is standing on a sidewalk in front of a two-family house that has blue doors and shrubs in front of the house.

Above the image, the text reads: Marcus, 1990-present. Marcus grew up hearing stories of what life was like for his grandmother. His world was different but the legacy of racist policies persisted. On the right side of the image, the text reads: Marcus’s parents bought a unit in a two-family house near where Helen grew up. Unlike Helen's family, they had the right to live anywhere, but with limited family wealth, they had fewer choices.

Below the image there is a blue text box that emphasizes the years “1990” and “2020” with text below that reads: 71.5% of white families owned homes, compared to 52% of Black families. By 2020, that gap increased: homeownership among white families was 74.5% compared to 44.1% among Black families.

Next to this text box is another blue text box an icon of a for sale sign with a house on it. The text reads: Homeownership is one of the main ways American families build wealth, allowing them to pass homes down to their children and build inherited wealth. Redlining effectively eliminated that possibility for Black families. The result has been an enduring gap in homeownership and wealth.

[Slide 5] This image features Marcus wearing a long-sleeve purple shirt. He is sitting at a desk reading a green book with a purple backpack behind him. From left to right, the text reads:

Growing up, Marcus’s schools didn’t have the same resources as nearby suburban schools; his school had outdated textbooks and no college readiness programs. Still, Marcus overcame these challenges and got into the college of his choice after high school.

Schools located in neighborhoods deemed least desirable by redlining decades ago were found to have lower per-pupil funding and lower math and reading scores today compared to schools in other areas. This text is inside a purple text box with a dark purple icon of a bus.

Marcus had to take out big loans to go to college. He now spends a lot of his salary paying them off, making it harder to save up for a house.

Black college graduates have $25,000 more in student loan debt on average than white graduates four years after graduation. This text is inside a purple text box with dark purple larger text that emphasizes the number “$25k”.

[Slide 6] Marcus is sitting at a desk with a mug. He is typing at a laptop and there is a file cabinet behind him. Marcus is wearing a dark blue long sleeve shirt with a light blue collared shirt underneath.

Above the image, the text reads: Today, Marcus handles information technology for a medium-sized company. It’s a stable job that he likes, but he wonders if he’ll earn enough to purchase a home, build wealth, and live comfortably.

To the left of the image, there is a bar graph that depicts young white family wealth and a tall blue bar that is labeled $25,400 next to a young Black family wealth and a short blue bar labeled $600. The text reads: Among adults under 35, the median Black family had $600 in wealth, compared to $25,400 for the median young white family in 2019, according to researchers at the Federal Reserve.

Below the image, there is a blue text box featuring a comparison using icons of dollar bills. There is a large stack of dollar bills with “white households” underneath it next to a short stack of dollar bills with “Black households” underneath it. The text reads: Among U.S. households in 2017, the median income for Black households was 40% lower than for white households – $40,258 for Black households and $68,145 for white households.

[Slide 7] There is a image of two people icons at a fence with a light purple background. One of the icons is standing on a ladder looking over the fence, whereas the other icon is standing on the ground and can barely see over the fence. The text above this image reads: What are the causes of the racial wealth gap? “The current racial wealth gap is the consequence of many decades of racial inequality that imposed barriers to wealth accumulation either through explicit prohibition during slavery or unequal treatment after emancipation,” economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland wrote in 2019.

Below the image, there is a green text box that reads: But the wealth and income gap isn’t the only cause of inequitable outcomes.

[Slide 8] Marcus is walking down a sidewalk wearing a green long-sleeve shirt, blue pants, and black shoes. He has his hands in his pockets. He is standing next to a purple building with blue windows and doors and a coffee icon at the top of the building. There is also a lamp post, as well as a dark purple building and a green building with blue and white window paneling. In front of the green building, there is a white woman and her daughter. The white woman is wearing a light brown shirt, brown pants, and brown shoes. She has one hand on her hip. The daughter is wearing a light purple shirt, light brown pants, and brown shoes. She has both hands on her hips.

The text reads, from top to bottom: As a Black man, Marcus is used to being treated with suspicion. People often cross the street when they see him coming and he gets followed in stores. He’s careful to avoid situations where he might be accused of doing something wrong.

Research has linked experiencing discrimination to negative health outcomes, including cardiovascular disease, depression, and anxiety. This text is inside of a light purple text box next to a purple triangle icon with a heart inside.

[Slide 9] Marcus is in a medical setting wearing a mint green hospital gown and white slippers. His arms are crossed. There is an exam table and a gray poster of a skeleton. The text to the left of the image reads: When Marcus goes to the doctor, he wonders if he gets the same quality treatment that his white friends receive. Research suggests that Black patients like Marcus are less likely than white patients to receive appropriate or even lifesaving treatment.

To the right of the image, there is a light green text box with an icon of two rectangles meant to depict medical records. One of the records has a heart with a lifeline, and the other has horizontal lines. The text reads: Black patients with heart issues were found to be significantly less likely than white patients to receive therapeutic interventions, including implanted defibrillator devices that can prolong long-term survival.

Below the image, there is another light green text box “64.5 years” emphasized in larger text next to text that reads: Marcus’s life expectancy is 64.5 years – compared to 72.7 years for white men born the same year.

[Slide 10] Marcus is wearing a long-sleeve blue shirt. He is holding his daughter Mia who is laying on a changing table. Mia is wrapped in a pink blanket and wearing a light pink hat. To the left of the image, the text reads:

Mia, 2020-present

Marcus hopes his daughter won’t face the challenges he and his grandmother did. But he knows if things don’t change, she will face steep obstacles.

Marcus knows that health is influenced by many things – including where you live, the opportunities you have, and the choices you make.

To the right of the image there is a light blue text box that reads: What will it take to assure every child has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible? Overcoming the effects of racist policies isn’t simple. Problems that developed over centuries will likely take years to undo. But there are steps we can take now. One is to ensure policies focus on equity – that is, recognizing and undoing additional barriers people of color face and making sure everyone has what they need to have an equal opportunity at success.

[Slide 11] There is a light purple background and a brown mountain. Two icons depicting people are climbing the mountain. One is further down trying to climb up, and the other is at the top of the mountain with a flag and backpack.

The text reads: What does equity look like? Policies that treat everyone the same won’t get everyone on a level playing field. Instead, we need policies that remove the extra burdens people face because of unfair rules rooted in the past.

For example, a policy that gives all schools the same amount of money treats them equally. But in some schools, students face significantly more barriers because of years of disinvestment.

It’s as if students are all climbing a mountain, but some start from the foot of the mountain and others start miles behind.

For them, having the same resources as everyone else might not be enough to get to the top.

At the bottom of the page, there is a dark purple text box with the text: Equitable policies in health care, housing, education and other areas are critical to ensuring a better future for everyone.

To learn more, please visit: [www.cthealth.org](http://www.cthealth.org)

The Connecticut Health Foundation logo is featured in white at the right end of the text box.