

Audio Transcript: Culture x Policy: Racial Economic Justice

January 21, 2021

Solana Chehtman:

Hello, and thank you all for joining us tonight for the first of three Culture meets Policy conversations in conjunction with the exhibition *Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water*, curated by Adeze Wilford and now on view at The Shed through the spring. My name is Solana Chehtman. I'm the director of civic programs at The Shed. I am a Latina woman with short salt-and-pepper hair in a blue short-sleeved dress and very red lips coming to you from my living room surrounded by some art and some plants. Tonight we are providing live captioning that you can turn on by clicking on the CC button on the bottom right side of your Zoom screen and American sign language interpretation, that should be visible throughout the conversation, and we'll be asking all participants to share visual descriptions when appropriate. At any point if you have any questions or comments please feel free to share them through the Q & A button also on the bottom right of your screen and we'll hear more from our moderator, but at the end we'll have space for your questions. Over her nearly 60-year career, Howardena Pindell has been a trailblazing artist, curator, and activist, and her current exhibition at The Shed is a testament to her incredible talent and her tireless commitment to both denounce and fight racial violence in our country as well as meditate on and celebrate beauty and joy. Although we had been working on the exhibition and its contextualization for a few years, they couldn't feel more timely and relevant in this moment after a global pandemic and a broken state and government put a magnifying glass to the increasing inequalities in our society, particularly affecting Black Americans and BIPOC communities broadly. With the complete conviction that culture can effect social and policy change and vice versa, and deeply inspired by Michelle Alexander's op-ed and call to action last year, "America This Is Your Chance," we created a series of conversations that will center on our deeply and intentionally unfair economic system tonight, the overpolicing and underprotecting of our communities on February 18, and our broken democratic system that, given yesterday's moving inauguration we can only say that it's still barely surviving in spite of it all, on March 18. I invite you to check out our website TheShed.org and come back for them as well as for our Pindell's Legacy conversations with curators, activists, and educators coming up, as well as to walk our city with *Fighting Dark*, our audio tour created by Kamau Ware's Black Gotham Experience, connecting Pindell's exhibition with the history of racial violence in New York City. I'd like to thank the Ford Foundation and then New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for their generous support of this commission and for our public programs. I also want to thank the Howard Gilman Foundation for providing the Zoom platform that we will be using for this evening's conversation, and I want of course to thank the amazing speakers that we will hear from in a minute. And I want to thank very particularly our co-presenter for the series, Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, and introduce Zenzele Cooper, their program manager, to share a few words and welcome you all.

Zenzele Cooper:

Thank you Solana. Revolutionary greetings everyone, how are y'all feeling out there? I suspect we're all feeling a teensy bit better after yesterday's momentous occasion, breathing a sigh of relief. I hope you're healthy and in

good spirits. I'm Zenzele Cooper, the program manager at Weeksville Heritage Center, a historic house museum and cultural site in Central Brooklyn dedicated to the preservation of the historic Hunterfly Road Houses and to the history of Weeksville, one of the earliest free Black communities in the United States of America founded in 1838. Please visit WeeksvilleSociety.org to stay in reach. I just wanna quickly give thanks to all of you for joining us this evening. Thank you to Solana and to The Shed for extending the invitation to Weeksville to be a co-presenter for these very important conversations about culture and policy in connection with the very important and timely exhibition, *Rope/Fire/Water*, by our dear sister and the giant Howardena Pindell. Howardena, if you're out there, we love you. We thank you for your courage and tremendous contributions to the culture and you have a home at Weeksville. And lastly I just wan to give thanks to the amazing women on the panel tonight for sharing your brilliance with us and for helping us to continue the work of making this country and the world a more just and equitable one. So peace, y'all. Thank you.

Solana Chehtman:

Thank you Zenzele and as you know, we're such big fans and loved partnering with you on this. So thank you, thank you once again. Finally, and I don't want to take any more time from our wonderful speakers, I want now to introduce tonight's moderator, my colleague and friend and someone that I deeply admire, Prerana Reddy, former director of programs at A Blade of Grass and the Queens Museum, who will introduce our wonderful speakers and begin the conversation. Thank you all and thank you, Prerana.

Prerana Reddy:

Thank you, Solana, for the honor of being able to moderate this series of conversations. You know, cultural work is being done, not just by artists but by you know, everyone in their own communities, by folks in community-based organizations, by folks doing policy work as we shall see today. And I wanna get right into it because we have four amazing speakers in just an hour. And let you know a little bit about the format for today. So I'm gonna present a couple of questions to each of the panelists one on one in turn. And then we're gonna have a group conversation amongst all the panelists. Please use the Q & A function to put your questions in at any time as they come up for you as people are speaking. I'm going to be looking through that and trying to incorporate that in that conversation at the end. Apologies in advance that I may not get to all of them. But I'll do my best and hopefully we can also have the panelists jump in and ask each other questions as well. One thing before I start introducing our first speaker is that I may be referencing the work of the organizations that they work for or formerly worked for but I'm really addressing these questions to the panelists as individuals and the answers that they provide are to be understood as their personal opinions and not the positions of the organizations that they work for. So with that I'm gonna jump right in with our first speaker. Barika X. Williams is the executive director of the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, a leading nonprofit focused on creating housing and economic justice for all New Yorkers. Barika, welcome. So part of *Rope/Fire/Water's* strategy is to present the data around anti-Black violence plainly, to list the history of atrocities, for them to speak for themselves. If you could pick two and I know that's hard because there are many, housing and policy planning, sorry planning and housing policy decisions, in New York City that most harmed Black people in the past 50 years what would they be? What were the consequences in terms of reinforcing anti-Blackness and what

violences were committed that should be more broadly known outside of the field?

Barika X. Williams:

So thank you, can you guys hear me okay? And everybody at The Shed for having me. I think the, you're absolutely right that it's hard to choose two and I think the important piece for folks to understand is how foundational settler colonialism, slavery, institutional racism, and systemic oppression and disenfranchisement is in land use and in planning and in policy, right? Like the exclusion of property and ownership is really fundamental to our system of exclusion and of oppression. And so it's difficult to pick two but I think the two that I would lift up in this conversation are redlining and exclusionary zoning. And the consequences of them, we continue to live with today. They have been foundational and instrumental in shaping our neighborhoods and who has access to what and really the, which Walis will show, is the maps that were created around redlining are the blueprints of neighborhoods as we understand them today and are the blueprints of neighborhoods that continue to be segregated, oppressed, repressed to this day. That continue to struggle for access and for equity and for justice day in and day out. And then I think the other piece is really understanding the role that exclusionary zoning has played for decades and that's tied of course to redlining but continues to manifest as certain neighborhoods deemed their area safe. Also not just neighborhoods but endorsed and facilitated by the city and state and federal government for generations, which manifest itself in a way that we see now of a Black homeownership rate that has been pretty much static at 25 percent for years and we continue to see where Black tenants and especially POC tenants continue to pay an extraordinary amount of 35 percent of their income to rent, and that eats up their ability to go, to put to things like healthcare and education and culture and art, right? And this is how we continue to repeat this violent cycle year after year, and it's regenerative. Like, we just continue to build and compound on what we've done before.

Prerana Reddy:

Yeah and that connects me to my next question which is that I'm inspired by the dynamic in Pindell's work that balances the kind of dark and very direct work that confronts racism with these beautiful, radiant, abstract compositions that allow for joy and respite and beauty and I'm wondering in terms of housing, you know, where it's such a struggle to even demand adequate and safe housing, but there's more than that. What kind of amenities and services should we and can we be providing that also, you know, privilege rest, beauty, spaciousness. That's kind of foundational for healing trauma and building thriving communities and not just surviving communities.

Barika X. Williams:

Well and you, you gave a perfect phrase when you said thriving communities because one of the things that ANHD does is we run and lead and facilitate a coalition called the Thriving Communities Coalition that is folks who come together in nonprofit organizations from across the city that are like, what we really want are thriving communities. There's a big difference between folks who build units that people live in and people who are in the business of creating homes and communities, and I think one of the things that we really have to take a moment to ask ourselves and analyze, and I think this is very much

viscerally felt in so many Black neighborhoods, is that there's a difference between putting up a building, which can happen fast and maybe it looks pretty, but that's very different than the slow and deliberative process of having a conversation about what a community needs, what it wants, green space, a cultural center, a new school space, right? And to create that space for a community so that they can come together, interact, people have space to step away. Maybe we need space for people to be in silence and in quiet and these are conversations that oftentimes we're not having with communities. We're just rushing to do the next thing and so we've been talking a lot about what is it that a community needs as a development and as a project as opposed to just getting the units done?

Prerana Reddy:

And you know, since this is a conversation that is connecting policy and culture, as a Black planner and designer in a field that's often dominated by a white perspective of beauty, of what's good housing, or how people think about notions of kinship, or what public and private spaces should you know, how they should be distinct. If folks of color and Black planners in particular were able to build communities, you know, understanding the social relationships as you mentioned what kinds, like, how would it look different you know aesthetically or like in a design way?

Barika X. Williams:

I think it's a, I hate to admit it, but I think it's an incredibly difficult question to answer. In part because the planning field and the planning industry is so overwhelmingly white and so overwhelmingly white, male, and cis. Right that is what the field is and so, I go back to this poet Juante who has this framing in one of his poems that does like slam poetry around white supremacy is not a shark, it's the water. Right and so asking that is like reenvision the water when our entire field, education, upbringing has been to make tweaks, right? To, and so I think many of us are really starting to push and say how, how would we engage in our own communities, how would we change that, but it still understanding that even if you created your Black community right, oasis, island, POC island, whatever it is, that it still exists in this broader water of white supremacy and that at some point in time, we as a neighborhood, as a community are gonna have to step and interact into that. But I think we see communities find ways to do it. Porches become public spaces, right, it looks very different. Whereas in certain communities that's a very private thing. Why is, why are people gathering on the porch, why are they talking? But for Black communities that's a place of, that's a place of neighborhood right? You interact in your kitchen and you interact on the porch and I think some of this is things that we really need to push the overall planning field to, to not, to confront their own racism and their own flawed lens and really think about where we're heading overall.

Prerana Reddy:

Thank you, Barika. I am going to now introduce Walis Johnson. She's a multidisciplinary artist and researcher whose work documents the experience and poetics of the urban landscape through oral history, ethnographic film, and performance and artist walking practices. Walis, going back to Pindell's *Road/Fire/Water*, it really showcases Pindell's archivist instinct, the finding of resonant documents and images that tell a history that's almost hidden in

plain sight, and your redline archive projects similarly collects and shows both public and private archival material about the history of how Black communities have been excluded from home ownership and financial tools as Barika mentioned from the '30s through the '60s, effectively cutting off the means of home ownership, hindering the economic development of neighborhoods and that legacy is felt by so many people, not just in New York City but throughout the country where redlining occurred. But it somehow still has failed to become common knowledge. How is it that despite so much material evidence, so many people still deny the structural policy basis for this inequity and how have you seen art, your art in particular, to be able to create moments of acceptance of that reality.

Walis Johnson:

Thank you, Prerana. Just thanking The Shed and Zenzele and Barika for just setting up some wonderful points to this conversation that I can leap off of. Yeah, you know, part of the issue with redlining is that it's hidden in plain sight and people don't really understand how it has impacted their lives in very, very, very specific ways. And so, and even my own project. So this is a redline map of Brooklyn and I started this project after the death of my mother. I live in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, which is a neighborhood that has gentrified. I won't even say it's gentrifying, it's been gentrifying over the years, and when she died, I started getting notices. In fact, I got a note right away, first day. From somebody who wanted to buy our family home, and so the project came, the genesis of the project was from that moment where I said well you know, what's going on here? First of all, I was very upset, but but then I started to get really curious about, like, what is this thing that's happening in my own neighborhood and what are these maps? And so I decided to take a walk around redlined maps to see for myself and I realized at the point of death, of the death of my mother, that the personal, this personal experience, had become political and that I was able to, through walking, look at what was hidden in plain sight and try to understand its impact on me and my family and by extension the rest of Black people who lived in neighborhoods like mine, who had, who were not fully aware of what these maps were doing and how they were impacting their lives and impacting the lives of white people who didn't know about the maps. They became public fairly recently and you can actually go online now and see all 239 of them all around the country and basically they were the blueprint for how neighborhoods would be laid out and who was going to live in the most desirable areas and where investment was going to go and where banking mortgages were going to go and, and actually, if you look at this redline map of Brooklyn, which I walked during my research for this project, I walked the perimeter of this map. You'll see that in the northern part of Brooklyn, almost all of those neighborhoods are in fact gentrified now. So at one point they were red, which means that banks were not offering loans to people who wanted to buy homes in those areas, and now if you think about the neighborhoods of Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Clinton Hill, Fort Greene, all of these neighborhoods have been gentrified and so they've flipped and so the question is why did they flip? And so at one time in history, poverty was created in those neighborhoods and nobody invested in them, and now suddenly they are valuable and so, you know, one hallmark of real estate is you buy low and sell high, right? So these red areas, properties were undervalued and now they are highly valued. So that's part of the cycle of gentrification. The, the other thing that I wanted to show was just sort of how the personal is always politi-

cal in my view and how, and how these maps really kind of can determine your future generations after they were created. So could you put up the next slide? So this is what I created, it's, incorporates. It's called *The Redline Archive* and it's a mobile archive that I take to public spaces. Spaces that were being gentrified. Places like Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant that are aggressively being gentrified right now. Okay, and the next slide please. And then from that archive which has, which contains personal documents from my family and also copies of the redline maps that were made of the different boroughs of New York. From that project, which was a project in which I dialogued with people about their experience with redlining or living in Brooklyn, I created this redline labyrinth and I installed it in Brooklyn and this was an opportunity for people to reflect on their own personal relationship to redlining and what it means to them and how they were, through this awareness, coming to some sort of emotional acceptance perhaps of the experience of redlining and what it created in their lives. Next slide please. So people walk the line, the redline labyrinth and they choose it from a number of questions about their own experience of home, their own experience of freedom, citizenship, their dreams, their legacies of wealth and then they have an opportunity to meditate on that as they walk through the labyrinth and a lot has, a lot of wonderful feedback has been generated from that but it also offers people an opportunity to reflect and in some cases grieve and mourn and feel angry and come to some sort of awareness, acceptance, and perhaps action on how they are going to move forward in their lives, both personally and perhaps politically.

Prerana Reddy:

Thank you, Walis, for sharing this powerful work with us. And you know, what you were just saying about how going through this process, meditating, having this structure in which to guide you on this meditation really helps audiences, you know, or the visitor, the person who's experiencing this, figure out how trauma sometimes gets hidden deep inside and needs this type of experience to actually be released and addressed. Your work kind of reminds me of the social psychologist Minnie Fulleylove who described the type of traumatic stress reaction that happens when neighborhoods get displaced. As a kind of post-traumatic stress called root shock, and I think what you've shown and what your work has shown is that the ripple effects of that, even you know, 30, 40, 50 years you know after that policy might have been repealed still continues to impact, you know, entire communities. And I really thank you for this work and we'll come back to you at the end when we come back in dialogue. At this point I'd like to introduce Betsy MacLean who's the executive director of Hester Street where she and her team devote their time to urban planning, design, and development activities in support of community-led change. Betsy, like Walis's work, Hester Street addresses the you know, legacy, ongoing legacy of redlining and other racist policies on neighborhoods but from a land use and planning process and sometimes policy angle. Some examples from Hester Street's work include the New York City Fair Housing Assessment, People's Data Warehouse, and your community land trust work. And you talk a lot about radically reimagining the systems that shape our cities and our lives. Can you talk about what that means to you and how your work and Hester Street's work is different from a kind of typical community engagement process that might be stewarded by the city or the city planning department or other social impact design firms.

Betsy MacLean:

Sure, hi everyone. Thanks so much Prerana, thanks just kind of first to all the folks on the panel. I'm super honored to share this space with you, to The Shed for inviting me, and I know there's some comrades out there in the audience, so like, hi. Happy to share the space tonight, wish we could all be together. Yeah I mean, so I'll talk maybe a little bit about like, you know I was really moved by both what, kind of Barika said and what Walis said about kind of you know, kind of the personal motivation that kind of brings, that brings us all to this work. You know my neighborhood where I live, where I'm raising my children is like, kind of the constant inspiration for my, for my work, for our work at Hester Street because it both exemplifies kind of the very best of community, of neighbors working together, looking out for each other, taking care of each other, especially in this last, really horrible, challenging year. And also the very worst of neighborhoods, the worst of the kind of racist systems that not only shape neighborhoods, continue to shape and distort neighborhoods, and do violence to the people who live in them. So you know I think what we're talking about tonight I think you know, that a city council member in Minneapolis, this guy Jeremiah Bey Ellison, he said, you know, the how we got here is known. You know from redlining to urban renewal to all of the many kind of policies and practices that got us here. We know all of that stuff and what he says is the path out is therefore knowable and I guess, I really believe that how we chart that knowable path, like how we radically rethink the neighborhoods, the cities, the country that we live in, that it's the process, it's almost as important as the work itself. You know at Hester Street I have the great privilege of working with this, a remarkable team of urban planners, designers, community organizers and developers who support like you said, Prerana, community-led change and we are really kind of all about radically recreating cities and confronting this kind of racist history by creating kind of deeply democratic planning and policy making that centers the knowledge, the wisdom, the experience of Black and Brown communities who've long been left out of, actively barred from the conversation. So our work, while it's kind of steeped in data and maps and kind of beautiful graphics, I will say, because beauty is so important, and also popular education and creative engagement tools, it really is fundamentally about power and we believe that it is within the, within process that we find the key to power. So you know, process is not exactly the most sexy thing to kind of talk about or to try to like get money from foundations to support. You know there's a reason why like #ProcessMatters doesn't have you know, kind of a ton of traction and same when I talk to my pops about the work that I do. I most definitely do not lead with process. That said, at the heart of our work, of our inspiration to do this work, is this drive for connection, to kind of blur the lines between government and a people which are so kind of entrenched, thick, deep, huge walls, which is not the way you know to kind of move towards more of like, a co-governance, of governance by and for the people. To embrace this concept of you know, kind of my favorite concept, of *ubuntu*, which is kind of I am because you are. South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu talks about ubuntu a lot. He says ubuntu is like the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is inextricably bound up in yours and that is, it's so beautiful. And I wish I had come to, well I don't know if I wish, but I didn't come to ubuntu through Archbishop Tutu. I know about it mostly because of basketball, because of Doc Rivers and the Boston Celtics. So I often, you know, get a lot of blank stares from my colleagues when I start talking about sports but I know some of my friends in the audience kind of

feel me on this and heartens that I share my passion for sports with Dr. Cornell West who says that sports are truth and beauty and excellence. To just—

Prerana Reddy:

Betsy maybe I can ask you to talk about a specific you know, project or a neighborhood process and something that came out of that that probably wouldn't have happened without your intervention, just so that we could understand how this process leads to perhaps different solutions than a traditional process would.

Betsy MacLean:

Sure, I mean I think, I think it's you know, kind of at the heart of the process is, is centering communities, Black and Brown communities, immigrant communities, native communities, ensuring that, that the process is shaped by, by their, their priorities, their needs, their, that are defined by community members. What we kind of really talk about is that whatever, we're not looking to kind of gather feedback or get buy-in from the communities we work with, which is traditional community, when it is done at all, is what community engagement is frequently about kind of checking boxes but that we're actively working to kind of reimagine the relationship between government and people, to move from kind of transaction to transformation. To kind of move from kind of from you know, this kind of community engagement arc from ignored to informed to real ownership and ownership of the process and so therefore ownership of the policy. So I'll say you know, in some of our, the work that we've done around fair housing in the city's fair housing assessment, our work with, with the Department of Cultural Affairs around the cultural plan, these are all kind of citywide processes that resulted in a range of policies that were shaped directly and concretely by community-members and that community engagement was inclusive and accessible and, you know, increasingly accountable. Though I will say that is the most challenging component I think of community engagement.

Prerana Reddy:

Great, I'm gonna shift from this attention and focus on process not, to also say that you build things and you work with community-based organizations as well. To help them.

Solana Chehtman:

Sorry I think we're having some technical Wi-Fi difficulties which is not rare in these times but Prerana you're back so I'll pass it back to you again.

Prerana Reddy:

Sorry I was about to move, apologies for that. I was just gonna say that before we move to the next speaker I want to give you an opportunity to talk about the immigrant center that you're building in Queens and how that worked with community-based organizations as another aspect of Hester Street's work.

Betsy MacLean:

Sure, yeah, so you know, as much as we're kind of about like radical reimagining of kind of unjust systems, we're also, we also know that to be able to kind of deliver on the promise of democracy, to kind of institutionalize all of this stuff, we're gonna need some assets to make all of that possible, and in our

kind of current capitalist context, owning our own land and places and organizational homes allows for you know, a pretty gigantic degree of freedom, of independence, of protection that really then opens the door to possibility. So we work with community-based organizations to kind of leverage their deep roots in the Black, Brown, native, and immigrant communities that they serve as well as their decades of relationship building. So while they might not have a gigantic balance sheet with like tons of capital, they do have these like amazing relationships that we can really leverage to be able to kind of chart out the vision for a space, a home of their own. And then assemble the financing and design and construction know-how necessary to acquire vacant land and/or buildings and make them their own forever. So we're doing that with Make the Road New York in Corona in Queens, which is a remarkable project. I think especially in this time when we purchase the building this kind of, at the beginning of the, when we purchased the land, it was at the beginning of the Trump Presidency and for you know, a group of the New York City's largest immigrant-led group to really, like, kind of put a stake in the ground and say, you know this is ours, we're here and we're not going anywhere is hugely powerful on kind of a psychic, spiritual level and a political level but it also has like real, kind of, measurable impacts for the organization. It lowers their operating cost so more money can go into programs and services. It protects against, it protects them against the vagaries of a real estate market, of rapid gentrification, of shitty landlords and the threat of displacement, allowing organizations room to kind of breathe, to plan, to dream, and it also builds wealth in communities. It becomes, you know, this home that we're building for Make the Road, will be an asset that they'll be able to leverage in the future and equity that they'll continue to build. So I think you know, as much as, as much as we struggle with, or totally agree with Audre Lorde when she says you can't use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, I think we kind of embrace the complexity of our political ideology and work to deliver kind of these kinds of tangible benefits in ownership. In actual investments and assets within Black and Brown communities while we also play this kind of long game of political transformation.

Prerana Reddy:

Great thank you, Betsy, and we'll come back to you in the group conversation. Now I am happy to introduce Kriston Alford McIntosh who's a managing director at Hamilton Place Strategies, an analytical public affairs consulting firm, and she joined HPS from the Brookings Institution where she served as a managing director of the Hamilton Project, which produces innovative policy proposals on how to create a more just economy that benefits more Americans. My questions for you, Kriston, really have to do with racial wealth disparities and we know that these disparities are large between white and Black households and can you share the extent of those disparities for our audience and also some of the reasons that this statistic has endured over many decades.

Kriston Alford McIntosh:

Absolutely, thank you and again thanks to The Shed for inviting me to be part of this truly extraordinary panel today. I'd like to begin by sharing just a few brief reflections on wealth more broadly in the US. You know wealth is most commonly acquired by inheritance that's passed down through generations. For example, in 2020, Americans were projected to inherit about \$765 billion in gifts and bequests. And this excluded wealth transfers to spouses or even

those supporting minor children. Wealth is so consequential because it offers a safety net that can keep a family from being derailed and falling into poverty due to economic shocks like the unexpected loss of income or debilitating health conditions. It helps families access housing in safe neighborhoods with good schools and it allows people to take career risks or even do things like start businesses. So to your question of just how large and how persistent the racial wealth gap is in the US today, I'd note that today, wealth remains highly concentrated among white Americans. For example in 2019, the median white household held around \$188,000 in wealth. This is roughly 7.8 times that of the typical Black household. You know and it's also worth noting that the levels of average wealth which are more likely to be heavily skewed by households with the greatest amount of wealth, those are even higher. White households reported average wealth of over \$983,000 which is 6.9 times that of Black households. So again, while median wealth is going to be more reflective of the typical household, the scale of average wealth is indicative of the outsides left of wealth that are held by the richest households and then I just you know, want to close on this question and bring this back to the historical context for wealth creation and race in the United States. The Black-white wealth gap, it's really a continuation of wealth inequality. Efforts by Black Americans to build wealth can be traced back throughout American history but as we know, these efforts were impeded in a host of ways beginning with, you know, 246 years of chattel slavery, followed by things like the Congressional mismanagement of the Freedman's Savings Bank back in 1874, which left over 61,000 depositors with losses of over \$3 million. There was the violent massacre back in 1921 in Tulsa's Greenwood district which was commonly referred to as the Black Wall Street back then and then discriminatory policies throughout the 20th century including Jim Crow and Black Codes, which strictly limited opportunity in so many Southern states, as well as policies like the GI Bill, the New Deal's Fairer Labor Standards Act, which exempted many domestic agricultural and service occupations, and of course, as we've already discussed this evening, redlining. So you know, I just say that wealth was taken from these communities before it ever really had the opportunity to grow and this legacy continues to impact us today.

Prerana Reddy:

Another thing that I wanted to ask you about is I know some of the research that's come out about how communities have recovered after the recession in 2008, the mortgage crisis. We see that impact of how communities have bounced back is different and that Black communities have had a harder time. You know in terms of that recovery and that's another kind of moment in which this wealth gap has increased and perhaps you can also talk about when you add gender to that. How Black women in particular have been particularly challenged and the policy aspects to why they've had a harder time.

Kriston Alford McIntosh:

Absolutely, you know it's indisputable that even the current Covid pandemic and the Covid recession has left Black households more vulnerable due to the wealth gap and in a recent analysis that I co-authored with some of my former Brookings colleagues, we looked at how the Black-white wealth gap has played a huge role in the uneven and unequal economic recoveries that are so often experienced during recessions like that in 2008 and even today's. Specifically we looked at things like how the household wealth leading up to

the pandemic diverged, the intersection between the Black-white wealth gap and the gender wealth gap, and then of course disparities within a labor market that are due to race, and so, just a couple of really interesting findings that we concluded are that you know, during the Great Recession, for example, the decline in median wealth for Black and white households was nearly equal between the years of 2007 and 2018 at around 28 and 27 percent, respectively. However, as white households began to gradually recover their wealth around the years 2010 through 2013 at a rate of approximately 1 percent, during the same period Black household wealth continued to decline by 23 percent and even in the second quarter of this, of last year, of 2020, right around the onset of the Covid pandemic, we found that white households who account for approximately 60 percent of the nation's population held 84 percent of total household wealth and meanwhile Black households held just 4 percent. So what this tells us is that in the short term, renewed support is really needed to curb the economic pain that so many households without wealth are experiencing due to the Covid recession but in the long term we're gonna have to look at much broader policies and then just quickly to your question about the gender disparities, you know it's really problematic because we know that women of color, Black women, Native American women, Latinx women are so often the linchpin of their family's economic security and so the central role of women of color, you know, it's even more pivotal going into the current Covid recession since women you know, made up the majority of the workforce at just over 50 percent, yet their ability to build wealth, it's been impeded both because of their race and their gender and just a couple of really quick statistics that I think really illustrate the gravity of the economic security that's faced by Black women and other women of color, just include reminders that you know, women of color are often more likely to work in service sector jobs which are typically lower wage and often lack adequate benefits. They're more likely to be the sole breadwinners in their households. You know we all know about the gender wage gap but you know, for, when you look at Black women. So today women overall earn around 80 cents on the dollar compared to men but the numbers get so much worse. When you look at Black women it's around 62 percent on the dollar and, you know, that causes Black women to lose more than \$800,000 a year on average over a 40-year career and then you know if they've gotta step out of the workforce to care for sick children, elderly family members, they're losing income, they're losing access to things like Social Security benefits and are sometimes forced to spend down whatever savings they might have. We're less likely to own stock and so just collectively, we're really trapped in a vicious cycle that can impede that, the ability to build wealth, and I'll stop there.

Prerana Reddy:

Thank you, I think that data really you know, puts a fine point on what we know, kind of, more generally and I think underlies like how urgent it is that we don't just go back to normal but we change things for the future and you know, in the past the narrative has been oh you know if you know, people of color and Black folks have the same level of educational attainment or if the wage levels you know, become you know, more regularized that would be enough but obviously what you're saying is that you know, historically the impediments to wealth building are you know, over generations is something that is not going to address. And so what are some of the policy recommendations that you think would do more than just you know, address some of these like smaller,

more short-term things but address the kind of large and multigenerational aspect, maybe perhaps like thinking of it as a reparations lens if that's useful. That you know, we can start to think of and push for. You know in this moment in which, of racial inequity is something that we're grappling more head on than perhaps.

Kriston Alford McIntosh:

Absolutely, so yeah, I really think it's important to stress that these, the situation that we found ourselves in today, it's not, you know, a predicament of lifestyle choices or you know, poor savings. Black households aren't going to educate their way out of a, you know, centuries long racial wealth gap. That we're not gonna save our way out of it. Really it's gonna necessitate substantive and systemic changes in a range of policy issues right? Everything from education, really big bold reforms there. Small businesses, healthcare, access to broadband. As the Covid pandemic has shown with the remote learning both in rural areas and even urban areas too. Things like tax reform, broader play space policies are all part of it and certainly looking at things like, you know, studying reparations and figuring out what that would look like, baby bonds. I mean I just think this is a time where we need to go big and bold and if we really wanna make progress and of course we do need to stem the pain that so many Americans in New York, here where I am in the DC region are, people are really in pain and they're hurting and those need to be addressed but we do eventually have to think bigger and more boldly to address this gap.

Prerana Reddy:

And now at this point I'd like to bring back all the panelists, so please turn your cameras back on so we can see you. And you know, some of the questions that have come up from the audience you know, has, you know, I think we've addressed a lot of. But some of them have to do with narrative. Folks talking about you know, how we talk about inequity. Is inequity or equity conversations you know, too, you know, too difficult. Are there better ways of talking about it? Guaranteeing equality of opportunity and what are the differences between speaking about it as an equity issue versus you know, other types of ways of addressing it or talking about it. We also have a very specific question around, you know, what reparations studies have already happened and, you know, that some of them happened in California as you know, recently as last year and you know, what can we learn from folks who've already you know, done some work on that? So, I don't know if any of you have, wanna jump in on either of those questions. Just jump in 'cause I can't see everyone, so. Well I'll let you think on that. In the meantime, one of the things that Kriston brought up is specifically about how Covid-19 has been a force that's exacerbated inequality along racial lines and, you know, in your various fields, what do you see? Are there urgent priorities right now in the communities that you're working in or what are the policy things that in your field you need to be advanced in, in the immediate term.

Barika X. Williams:

So I can take some of that. So ANHD, I didn't really explain who we are but we're a, non-for-profit group here in New York City that is almost 50 years old and works at the intersection of housing justice as economic justice as racial justice and serves more than 80 plus neighborhood-based non-for-profits across New York City's neighborhoods and we do policy and data analysis and organizing and advocacy and capacity building and one of the things that

we did in, quickly in the midst of Covid and actually one of the first to do this analysis in, specifically in New York City is because of our, our already existing understanding of neighborhoods and neighborhood-level data, we're able to combine and I think this speaks to somewhat, Kriston I think brought up was, combining where the data of where our essential workers are, where the heaviest impacts for Covid were, where our residents who are rent-burdened, so those people who are paying more than 30 percent threshold of their household income to rent and where our POC communities are and it very clearly showed that those things were, ended up all in the same place. Right we have a confluence of those various different factors and that speaks to so many of the different institutional policies and systems that are in place where we end up concentrating those same sets of residents and communities in the same geographic area. One way that also we've gotta really think about how this shows up is in the desire and the need to get resources out quickly, that we don't recreate the existing systems and framework of excluding people of color, of women, of other marginalized communities that tend to often be left out of policies. So actually, today, ANHD just did a quick, just did an analysis and did an infographic looking at New York City is slated to get 20 percent of our emergency rent relief that just got passed in December as part of the Covid package. That's because the analysis was done based on New York City's share of the state population. However, New York City is 68 percent of the state's renters. We're overwhelmingly a renter city and that number is only further exacerbated when we look at our people of color. Where 75 percent and plus of our people of color, renters in the state and so by New York City not getting its fair share of the state allocation of this money, we are adversely and disproportionately not serving New York City's renters and we're also specifically not serving our POC renters in the city and the state and these are the ways that we continue to manifest the same disparities and the same issues that we've continued to have and have plagued our policies for generations.

Prerana Reddy:

Anyone else wanna tackle any of the existing questions?

Betsy MacLean:

I might just, I'll just kind of jump in really quickly and a project that we recently did that kind of tackles, I mean kind of bridges both, like kind of Covid crisis, policy response, and a narrative shift. We worked closely with community organizers at Make the Road 'cause we love them and we do a lot of stuff with them. At that, kind of the really the apex of the Covid crisis, at least early on here in the city, in kind of April and May to survey immigrant folks in Corona, Upstate New York, in Long Island to get a sense at that point you know, that data that was coming out, there wasn't a ton of kind of race-specific, race and ethnicity-specific data coming out and organizers on the ground were seeing the impacts of the crisis on all these various levels and that just wasn't part of the narrative frankly about kind of the pandemic. And so you know, we worked with organizers to kind of develop a survey tool that then they kind of you know, not in your typical survey fashion where you're just like kind of extracting data from folks but really working together with the folks that were being surveyed to both gather data but also connect them to resources and connect them to ongoing advocacy opportunities and what we've found was that not only were kind of immigrant, especially undocumented immigrant communities suffering at rates that were significantly higher than other communities

throughout the city, especially white communities but that also, the impacts were multi-layered, that they were health impacts, economic impacts, education impacts and then mental health impacts, you know overwhelming mental health impacts and then we took kind of all of that data to then fuel kind of organizing advocacy efforts for, kind of just recovery policies but I think that kind of shift of like you know, really ensuring that it's folks from communities who are not only kind of reporting on what's happening but also mobilizing to really call for changes is an essential part of the kind of policy transformation that I think Barika's talking about, that we're kind of talking about in general tonight.

Kriston Alford McIntosh:

Can I note one more, jump in with just one more trend to look out for and that's the role of jobs that may not return in sectors that you know, are disproportionately held by women and people of color more broadly and these are some of the you know, lower to moderate and even mid-skilled jobs that are being increasingly automated and so what will these workers do in the years ahead if their jobs don't come back? You know so many restaurants and small businesses have closed. In grocery stores, you know we're pushed apps and delivery and some of these jobs are even less secure than the previous jobs that people had. So I just think that's another really big picture issue that we should be prepared to deal with because I think it will disproportionately impact both of women of color and people of color more broadly.

Prerana Reddy:

Well we have a question and I'm sure many people do now that we've you know, one day out of the inauguration and a change of administration at the federal level. You know, what are the federal policies? I think the question was if you had Joe Biden's ear, personal ear, what would be three policies that you would suggest that he could enact without Senate or Congressional approval that could impact the racial wealth gap? Any ideas, what would you whisper in Joe's ear?

Kriston Alford McIntosh:

I'll start more broadly, let's see. Well I mean first again, we've got to get the pandemic under control and we've got to spur economic recovery and I know he's working on that and some of that will take the House and Senate engaging and he can't do it totally unilaterally but I mean, that's the most immediate crisis right now. Right, is getting people back to work so they can pay their rent and getting kids back in school and obviously preventing you know, hundreds of thousands of additional deaths in the months ahead. But I think we do have to look at access to education, access to worker training. I think these are really important. I do think you know, I don't know if it's in the top three but I do think that looking at you know, things like reparations and setting that and understanding what that could look like, policies like baby bonds, Cory Booker's talked a lot about that. I mean those are examples of some of the much more bold and systemic changes that you know, will be needed but then we also do have to look at, so many policies, I don't think we can just silo it to you know, if we you know, have a wealth tax then this will all be solved or if you just put more money toward education it will all be solved. It's a constellation of different policies, both near-term, longterm, structural and across a range of areas. So I know that wasn't very concise policies but it's a huge issue that's occurred over centuries and so there's just gonna be a lot that needs to go into solving it

from a public policy perspective if we're serious about truly eradicating it and also finally, the intersection of gender because you can't address, you know it's tough to address the racial wealth gap or the gender wealth gap without really being serious about the intersectionality of the two.

Prerana Reddy:

Thanks, Kriston. And Walis, maybe you know, in the final minutes I'll bring you back into the conversation. We've been talking a lot of data and a lot of policy but we're here about the intersection of culture and policy. So I wanted to know you know, based on you know, the experiences you've had with this project, what's in the works for you in terms of future projects that you want, you're thinking about or are in the process of?

Walis Johnson:

Oh my, okay I'm not muted. Yeah you know, this project has taken on a life of its own. But it's also something that has been iterative. So one thing has led to the next thing has led to the next thing. So I'm hoping that the next project will be less about sort of the destructive aspects of racism and structural racism and more about the experience of Black joy and community and freedom. And because I think you know, those are things that not only I'm interested in focusing on but I think those things exist even within this framework that we're talking about of you know, the destructive and vicious aspects of racism and racial capitalism. So, I want to try to reimagine you know what that looks like and also remember what that looks like in terms of you know, the communities that have experienced these, you know some of these terrible things.

Prerana Reddy:

Well on a note of hope, I know we're a little past time but if folks want to close with, you know, what are the hopes you know, what are the hopeful things that you see in your field in terms of you know, long-wished policies or you know, even just how advances that we made on how issues get talked about now, that's even more hopeful. Or more precise you know, in the broader culture. So I'll let everyone have a last word on that before I turn it back over to Solana. So anyone wanna talk about what are they most hopeful for, about in how the work has changed?

Walis Johnson:

I can talk about that just quickly. Just to say, you know, what this project has, what I hope for most is that people stop blaming themselves for the way that this society has failed them. I think that this whole bootstrap myth, you know, you pull yourself up from your bootstraps and this will solve all your problems. I think, I think that all of the data here on what people are talking about really is a testament to the fact that that is not true and that we have to remember that and stop, especially Black people, stop blaming ourselves for things that are really out of our control.

Prerana Reddy:

Thank you, anyone else, Barika?

Barika X. Williams:

I think, I think, I'm hopeful in this moment of feeling like we're as a, as maybe not entirely as a nation but a larger share of the country and even the world

is really starting to understand, appreciate and respect the role of organizing and power-building in changing our communities and society. ANHD and our members have been organizing for 50 years. This is how we movement-build. This is how we impact and really change and make transformational lasting change and it's iterative. We continue to do this but I think for, for many years and many decades we've struggled with the fact that it is often dismissed and not respected and silenced by so many different entities. Be it government, philanthropy, writing and I think there's really a confluence in understanding of the role that organizing and power-building plays in changing the world and I think also to bring in some of what Walis said. Also understanding how art and culture is a part of that and that they're not separate and different and they always have been and storytelling and music and expression have always been a part of how Black people have conveyed their struggle and I think that there's really a bringing together of that that's happened in the community for generations that is now really starting to be recognized and respected outside and in the broader discourse.

Prerana Reddy:

Thank you. Kriston or Betsy, any last hopeful words before we conclude the panel?

Betsy MacLean:

I mean I'll just go quickly. You know Amanda Gorman, the poet laureate, gave me a whole lot of hope yesterday. That was really remarkable. I think also just in general, this kind of opening up, kind of in popular culture of like, let's, let's really ask the big questions, let's like kind of radically rethink this stuff so that we're not just kind of tinkering around the edges but kind of blow out the doors of possibility, what's possible, what's transformative. I feel like we're seeing that in, in kind of fits and starts. Ever since the Black Lives Matter movement and uprisings last spring. So that gives me a lot of hope.

Kriston Alford McIntosh:

And I'll just end by saying, being in Washington, I'm just so hopeful about the new administration and the end to the dark chapter that you know, our nation experienced for the last four years and that we can now move faster and quicker and we can end you know, like the horrible situation we had last year was Congress was unable to move and you know pass a stimulus bill and provide relief for people. So I hope those days are coming to an end and I just am really optimistic that we can start to achieve things for Americans again, so.

Prerana Reddy:

Well thank you all for being open, for you know, being pushed for you know, pie in the sky policy suggestions today and for you know, giving us hope and data and maybe organizing and all, all the labor that has gone into the change that we're starting to see and hopefully is just the beginning. So thank you all and I'd like to pass it over to Solana for some concluding remarks.

Solana Chehtman:

I just, I'm speechless. Thank you, thank you, thank you to all of you for your amazing, rich, deep personal and informative conversation but also for all the work that you do every day. Thank you Zenzele at Weeksville for your partnership, thank you Prerana for moderating this really tough conversation. We have

four amazing ladies here and there was so much to say so thank you. I wanna thank our civic programs team, our IT team, our marketing and development, our VX team that does such an amazing job in person. I want to thank again Ford Foundation and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for the generous support. Both with the commissioning of the programs, Howard Gilman for providing the Zoom, our curatorial team for having curated such an amazing exhibition, and if it's safe for you to do so we want to invite you much more to attend *Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water* in person at The Shed. It's open until spring 2021 and thank you again everyone for joining us tonight. We know we went a little past but we thought the conversation was worth it. Thank you and keep coming back for the next couple of conversations, there is much more ahead. So have a good night.