

Why are we talking about racism in the church?

Presbytery of West Virginia

The Rev. Cindy Kohlmann, Connectional Presbyter and Stated Clerk
New Castle Presbytery
Co-Moderator of the 223rd General Assembly

Bias and Structural Racism

Two small lenses to help us answer our question

- Open with Prayer
- Introductions
- Unpacking Implicit and Unconscious Bias
- Unchecked Bias → Structural Racism
 - Housing as one example
- Application for our work as a Presbyterians
- Next steps

Unconscious/Implicit Bias

Bias: a disproportionate weight in favor of or against an idea or thing, usually in a way that is closed-minded, prejudicial, or unfair

- Biblical example: Jesus and the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15) or Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman (Mark 7)
- Bias can be innate or learned, can be in favor or against, and is often unconscious or implicit
- Another way of understanding bias is by thinking of your defaults and assumptions; these can point to underlying biases that have not yet been confronted or understood
- Biases can be most obvious when you are startled, or feel threatened or in danger; looking back at those moments and seeking to understand your reaction can help uncover unconscious bias

Unconscious/Implicit Bias

- Harvard Implicit Bias measurement tool
 - <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- Deciphering messages from our childhood and from the dominant culture
 - Think of a time when you understood that you were the outsider or “other” than the people around you. How did you feel?
- Countering bias once it’s uncovered
 - First notice and then counter your internal narrative

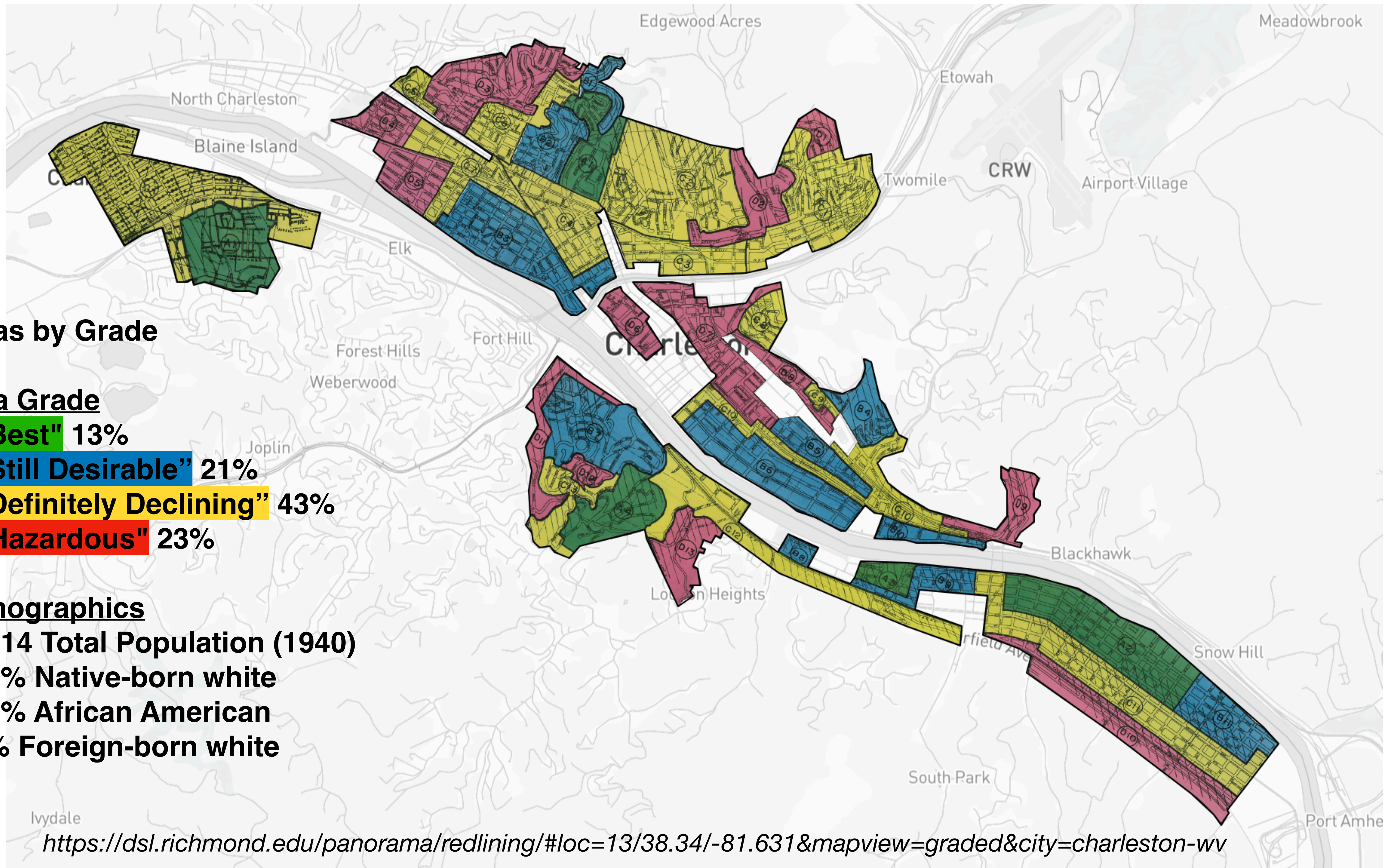
Moving From Unconscious/Implicit Bias to Structural Racism

- Unconscious bias can lead to prejudicial actions
- When you add power and privilege, prejudicial actions can become normalized and even legal
- Power is necessary to move from bias to racism, and power and the ability to impact laws and social structures are necessary for racism to become embedded in structures
- Awareness of your own context:
 - Black West Virginians were almost twice as likely to be living in poverty. Black households have only 70 percent of the income of white households. Black men and women face higher unemployment rates and lower wages. Disparities persist in education, wages, health, and throughout the criminal legal system.

<https://wvpolicy.org/state-of-working-west-virginia-2020-the-state-of-racial-inequality/>

Moving From Unconscious/Implicit Bias to Structural Racism

- Let's look at housing:
 - An individual realtor who is prejudiced may choose not to show properties to people who “wouldn't fit” in the neighborhood
 - Structural racism occurs when laws are passed that disadvantage people of color, like redlining, restricting the G.I. Bill, and banks being unwilling to grant mortgages or using higher interest rates



Areas by Grade

Area Grade

- A "Best" 13%
- B "Still Desirable" 21%
- C "Definitely Declining" 43%
- D "Hazardous" 23%

Demographics

- 67,914 Total Population (1940)
- 87.3% Native-born white
- 10.3% African American
- 2.4% Foreign-born white

Ivydale

<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=13/38.34/-81.631&mapview=graded&city=charleston-wv>

“Today about three-quarters of students at Mary C. Snow West Side Elementary are black. More than 90 percent of students there qualify for free or reduced school lunch.”

“West Virginia has a complicated history with race and civil rights”

Charleston Gazette-Mail, June 30, 2014

By David Gutman

https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/west-virginia-has-a-complicated-history-with-race-and-civil-rights/article_4805cb60-d947-5946-ab37-8f2e7f410fb3.html

Moving From Unconscious/Implicit Bias to Structural Racism

- What impact can structural racism in housing have, both long-term and short-term?
 - Ability to accumulate generational wealth through home ownership
 - Educational opportunities
 - Employment opportunities
 - Access to clean water, safe facilities, healthy food, public transportation
 - Generational cycles of trauma, poverty, violence, and substance abuse

Application

Why does this matter for ministry as the Presbytery of West Virginia?

- Being aware of our biases can help us be better leaders in general, allowing us to respond to situations and people in healthier, more self-aware ways
- Considering the generational impact of structural racism in our communities can open our eyes to a deeper understanding of why things are the way they are
- Applying the lens of housing to our mission and ministry conversations in the local context can uncover new ways to love our neighbors
 - Reports of analysis of impediments to fair housing choice are easy to find online for West Virginia:
 - <https://www.wvhdf.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-West-Virginia-Analysis-of-Impediments-To-Fair-Housing.pdf>

Next Steps

- Consider engaging in a racial justice challenge
- Discover ways to learn something new every day, like the Anti Racism Daily email
- Check out online learning opportunities or future conferences exploring these issues
- Connect with local groups and leaders
- Keep doing your own internal work