



Divided

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Design

FINDINGS FROM THE AMERICAN SOUTH

A REPORT BY E PLURIBUS UNUM



Introduction

by Mitch Landrieu

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson poetically wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” Yet, that equality has never been reality. Born in contradiction, the United States has been divided from its earliest days by anger, hate, and fear.

If we do not reckon soon with our country’s past, we face a future of even greater fissures and failures. The future belongs to open, inviting, and inclusive communities. The fact is that America’s racial profile is changing, and we are becoming more racially diverse than at any point in our history. This is especially true in the South. Given our past, I believe that we, as Southerners, have a special obligation to do more.

I launched E Pluribus Unum last year to help find common ground and to seek new solutions. We have to redesign the systems that hold us back and keep us apart. E Pluribus Unum believes that we are better together than apart. We know that cities and towns will only thrive if they find a way to unite around a common purpose, with shared responsibility and opportunity.

This report is the culmination of our team’s travels to 28 Southern communities over the past year. At each stop, we interviewed people from all walks of life. Through these conversations, we identified key challenges and learned about what separates us and what unites us. We saw how deft local leaders are able to help residents reach common ground. We met countless angels among us who are doing the hard work of lifting other people up and moving them forward. Though we found that tremendous, unaddressed challenges remain in most Southern communities, a sense of strength and resolve shines through.

While our journey was sobering, it reaffirmed my belief that our diversity is our greatest strength. Regardless of our differences, we must all come to the table of democracy as equals. We must act as one nation, not two; indivisible with liberty and justice for all, not some. Through this work, we will ultimately prove our American motto, “E pluribus unum” — “out of many, one” — and we are better for it.



About E Pluribus Unum

E Pluribus Unum is an initiative created to fulfill America's promise of justice and opportunity for all by breaking down the barriers that divide us by race and class. In the initiative's first year, the E Pluribus Unum team traveled extensively across the American South to uncover and confront the challenges we face, to learn from people about what separates us and what can bring us together, and to find bold and effective solutions to tackle the modern legacy of Jim Crow so that an inclusive South may be born. Incubated by Emerson Collective and led by former New Orleans Mayor, Mitch Landrieu, E Pluribus Unum seeks to create and amplify creative solutions for finding common ground. We do so by cultivating courageous leadership, changing narratives that perpetuate systemic and interpersonal racism, and championing transformative policy change, ultimately proving the American motto that "out of many, one" — and we are better for it.

Where We've Been

We've been to 28 different communities across 13 Southern states. We've visited diverse parts of the region, geographically, demographically, and culturally. Along our journey, we've had discussions in many different settings, from one-on-one interviews, to small groups in roundtables, to focus groups, to community listening sessions.



Our Findings

KEY INSIGHTS

Despite differences in demography and geography, we heard similar themes relating to race and class across all of the communities we visited. We have organized those themes into 15 insights across three main chapters:

— THE ENDURING LEGACY OF RACISM —

— BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY —

— BUILDING A SHARED FUTURE —

CHAPTER 1

THE ENDURING LEGACY OF RACISM

1. Many white people lack an understanding of the scale of racism in America, including our racial history and how it still permeates today's institutions.
2. Education and inequality go hand in hand.
3. We continue to lead deeply segregated lives.
4. The legacies of the Confederacy and Jim Crow are still widely felt by residents in the South, but the degree to which there is contemporary impact is not agreed upon.
5. Political leadership and media have power and some are setting a permissive tone for racist behavior and reinforce stereotypes.
6. Communities of color, low-income individuals, and those living in the margins have seldom been in control of telling their own stories.
7. Honest and fact-based conversations about the depth of the challenges presented by racism and classism in mixed racial company seldom take place and rarely lead to action.

CHAPTER 2

BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY

8. Rapid population growth, changing economies, and shifting demographics in some thriving Southern cities have reinforced stark racial and economic divisions between people, exacerbating long-standing issues related to inequality of opportunity, tension between groups, and distrust of local government and institutions.
9. People want financial security, but the barriers to accessing good work look different in every city. It is often the unfair influence of the "who-you-know" economy, and the numerous effects of racial discrimination and exclusion in the workplace, that diminish access to true economic opportunity.
10. Many attribute poverty to laziness or individual failings and decry those who receive government assistance, rather than asking, "Why?" and taking to task the systems that perpetuate and benefit from poverty.
11. Pain and trauma caused by racial inequities are mutually reinforcing, creating ripple effects across generations.
12. For many people of color, efforts made toward equity, inclusion, and integration have often come with deep costs, both hidden and overt.

CHAPTER 3

BUILDING A SHARED FUTURE

13. Exposure to different cultures and ways of life helps people to develop an awareness of others and of possibilities for the future, furthering their acceptance of differences, and their ability to pursue their full potential.
14. Where local political, community, and philanthropic leaders openly prioritize diversity and inclusion, there is more hope and optimism in their community's future.
15. Opportunities for people to connect and find a common purpose across racial lines are often centered on cultural and sporting events.





The Road Ahead

PUTTING INSIGHTS INTO ACTION

Driven by what we have heard and learned, in 2020 E Pluribus Unum will launch a series of programs and initiatives to **(1)** cultivate courageous leaders who are committed to realizing an inclusive vision for a new South, **(2)** champion transformative policies to reverse the enduring harms of America's Jim Crow era past for those who continue to experience them today, and **(3)** change narratives that perpetuate systemic and interpersonal racism in order to shift people's attitudes and behaviors.



CULTIVATE COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

We talked to and learned from residents, including elected leaders, who are deeply committed to strengthening their communities and who are working in creative ways to address issues of race and class. Our research has taught us that people place a great deal of hope in their local political leadership — particularly young leaders who openly prioritize diversity and who are building more inclusive systems. We also heard how leadership has the potential to set a permissive tone for perpetuating the harms of racism. Entrenched distrust and disappointment in leadership bred by persistent racial disparities and perceived lack of transparency can have a deeply harmful effect on residents' hope for their community's future. Our future work will ensure Southern leaders are empowered to act on issues of race and class in new ways.



CHANGE NARRATIVES

Too many people in our country lack an understanding of the scale of racism present in America, including our racial history and how it still permeates today's institutions. Racism is often narrowly defined as overt individual actions rather than systemic injustices. This is because race is not easy to discuss openly. But without doing so, scholars argue that racism will still persist. We must teach about the lasting impact that racism has had on our institutions, and persistently advance intentional efforts toward creating racial equity. Our work will focus on empowering storytelling that highlights the impacts of racial injustice in our institutions, holding the media accountable when it broadcasts implicit racial bias in its reporting, and ensuring that our full and accurate racial history is told and not whitewashed because it is inconvenient or too difficult to acknowledge.



CHAMPION TRANSFORMATIVE POLICIES

The vestiges of America's Jim Crow era are vivid to those who continue to experience them through unequal access to opportunity, democracy, safety, and protection under the law. The issues we seek to change have plagued our communities since our country's founding. We do not claim to be the first to take an interest in breaking these barriers; rather, we are committed to supplementing the deep knowledge in this field with insights shared with us by communities across the South. We also hope to accelerate reform by building greater public awareness and influencing action around transformative policy and political change at the local, state, and federal level.

How We Will Impact Change

While our initial travels are complete, our journey continues. If successful, we will see change at the national, systems, and local levels in the following ways:

NATION LEVEL

In national public discourse, issues of race and class are discussed in more nuanced and thoughtful ways that do not exacerbate social divides, but rather build common ground.

SYSTEMS LEVEL

Leaders — at all levels — set new, ambitious priorities and enact substantial changes in policy to redesign institutions and support more equitable communities.

LOCAL LEVEL

Residents have a deeper understanding of systemic racism and the ways in which they can act on issues of racial and economic equity every day.



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