



# The State *of* Black California

Assessing 20 Years of Black  
Progress in the Golden State

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Executive Summary Prepared for the  
California Legislative Black Caucus



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**“The State of Black California II builds on the original State of Black California report published in 2007.”**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Despite the long history in the United States to expand basic rights to Black Americans, racial inequality in American life remains a central concern. While many think the eradication of de jure segregation and discrimination as well as the enactment of civil rights protections over a half-century ago solved our country’s racial issues, today, we are seeing increasing efforts to roll back those rights. These efforts include targeted attacks on ethnic studies education, on affirmative action policies meant to increase diversity in schools, and diversity, equity, and inclusion policies at workplaces. Although California is often considered a more progressive state – indeed, its policy environment is more friendly to initiatives that push for increased rights and equity – even in the Golden State, much work remains to achieve true equality.

The State of Black California 2024 builds on the original State of Black California report published in 2007. The new study examines demographic changes and the degree to which the socioeconomic position of Black people in California changed in the 20 years between 2000 and 2020. The study demonstrates its findings using an “Equality Index” (the Index) an objective tool to compare the degree to which Black people experience equal conditions with other ethnic groups, particularly with Whites.

The Index summarizes an extensive set of outcome data in several areas, including economics, housing, health, education, criminal justice, and civic engagement. This allows one to clearly see how Black Californians fare relative to other racial and ethnic groups in the aggregate and how their relative standing changed from 2000 to 2020.



## Summary Of Key Findings

The results reveal that racial inequality remains a stubbornly persistent social problem, even in the Golden State of California and especially between Black and White Californians. The racial gap in important social and economic outcomes remained quite large in 2020 and is driven primarily by racial differences in economic outcomes. And while the evidence shows the racial gap in overall outcomes narrowed over the 20 years between 2000 and 2020, the change was exceedingly modest. In fact, the rate of observed change was so small that it would take nearly 248 years to close the gap between Black and White Californians completely.

The racial gap in outcomes between Latinx and White Californians also remained large in 2020. However, the results indicate that that gap is less stubborn in closing, as larger gains were made over the same time period than that for Black Californians. Indeed, given the pace in closing the socioeconomic gap between Latinx and White Californians over the 2000 to 2020 period, it would take about 80 years to close that gap.

The outcome gap between Indigenous and White Californians was also large in 2020, though smaller than that between Black and White

Californians. However, racial progress for Indigenous socioeconomic outcomes stalled between 2000 and 2020, principally due to significant declines in health outcomes over this period.

The socioeconomic outcomes of Asian Californians exceed those of Whites, and this advantage grew between 2000 and 2020.

These changes in racial equality over the 20-year period occurred during a time of tremendous change in Black Californians' communities and in their residential locations. The Black Californian population declined in size over the 2000 to 2020 period and its residential concentrations have changed, sometimes in dramatic fashion. Factors including racial gentrification and high housing costs have led to shrinkage of Black communities in major cities such as Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. On the other hand, Black communities are growing in the Inland Empire, Sacramento, and in areas outside of California's largest metro areas. Some of these areas are also where racial inequality is less pronounced between Black and White Californians, suggesting racial inequality in California may continue to narrow over time.

Importantly, the report reveals glimmers of hope for closing racial gaps in socioeconomic outcomes in California. First, despite only modest gains in closing the racial gap in socioeconomic outcomes between Black and White California, those gains came from absolute improvements in Black Californians' socioeconomic outcomes such as increased educational attainment, rather than from declines in White Californians' socioeconomic outcomes. This indicates that Black Californians' quality of life improved over this period. Yet, the rate of improvement remains far too slow, indicating new solutions are needed to close the gap completely and more quickly.

The second and arguably most important bit of hope for continued and accelerated progress is that Black Californians' progress was noticeable in those areas where public policy changes took place in California. Black Californians made both relative and absolute progress between 2000 and 2020 in education and criminal justice outcomes. During this period, California invested in resources and policies to lower high school dropout rates and improve access to courses required for admission into the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU). In addition, in 2014 and 2016, Californians enacted criminal justice reforms via Propositions 47 and 57, respectively. These changes are associated with significant improvements in Black Californians' education and criminal justice outcomes and helped narrow the racial inequality gap overall.

One cautionary note is that these data were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, which had disproportionately devastating consequences on Black communities and other communities of color in California. There is no doubt that the impact of the pandemic worsened outcomes in each of the domains measured in the Index, especially for Black Californians. In particular, outcomes likely declined in the health area, which measures death rates—a metric that saw significant increases over the first two years of the pandemic. The consequences of this pandemic thus likely widened racial inequality in California. Whether these impacts, and any changes to racial inequality as a result, remain durable will be

explored in a future State of Black California report.

## **Details Of Key Findings**

### **Demographic Changes**

- From 2000 to 2020, California's Black population declined for the first time in decades from 2.2 to 2.1 million. In 2020, the Black population represented 5.6 percent of California's population, down from 6.6 percent in 2000.
- Over this period, the Black population grew in only two of California's seven major metropolitan areas – the Inland Empire and Sacramento – and declined most significantly in Oakland (by 43 percent).
- A plurality of Black Californians still lived in Los Angeles (36%) in 2020, but this share declined from 41 percent in 2000. In 2020, more Black Californians were living in the Inland Empire and Sacramento, whereas fewer were living in large urban centers such as San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Oakland.
- In 2020, a greater share of Black Californians lived outside of California's seven major metropolitan areas. In 2000, only about 16.7 percent of Black Californians lived outside these areas. In 2020, nearly one quarter (24 percent) did.

### **Overall Equality Index Results**

- Using White Californians as the baseline, with an Index Score of 1.00, the overall Equality Index score for Black people in California in 2020 was 0.69. This means that across all socioeconomic measures observed in the analysis, Black residents' outcomes were 69% those of White residents. Comparable figures are 0.72 for the Latinx community, 0.74 for Indigenous Californians, and 1.14 for Asians.
- Black Californians' overall Index score varied over California's major metropolitan areas. Scores were highest in the Inland Empire (0.76) and lowest in San Francisco (0.58). The relatively higher scores of Black people in the Inland Empire are driven by better outcomes in health, economics, and housing. The scores were lower in San Francisco because



- of relatively worse outcomes in economics, health, and education.
- Black Californians' scores varied over sub-Indices. California's Black population has the highest scores in civic participation (1.23) and education (0.071) relative to other ethnic and racial groups. They scored the lowest in economics (0.63), and scores in the remaining areas of housing, health, and criminal justice also saw relatively low scores, close to the overall Index.

### **Change in the Equality Index from 2000 to 2020**

- The results indicate that Black Californians closed the overall racial gap with Whites by a modest 3 points (from about 0.66 to 0.69). Based on this rate of change, it would take 248 years for Black Californians to close the racial inequality gap with their White counterparts.
- The Latinx-White gap decreased by 0.07 points from 2000 to 2020, and the overall gap of 0.30 is predicted to close in 80 years. Asian Californians improved relative to Whites by 0.09 points, thus furthering their advantage over this period. The Indigenous-White gap widened over this period by 1.5 points.

- The closing of the Black-White racial gap varied over California's major metropolitan areas. It narrowed in the Inland Empire, Los Angeles, and San Diego (where Black people universally gained ground in important education outcomes) and stayed about the same in Oakland. It widened in Sacramento, and especially in San Francisco and San Jose, where Black people lost ground in homeownership and income gains.

### **Change in the Absolute Index from 2000 to 2020**

- The absolute change in the Index for Black people demonstrates that Black Californians' socioeconomic outcomes improved from 2000 to 2020 by an average of 21.7 percent. The biggest improvement in outcomes was in education, driven by increases in Black high school students taking courses required for entry into the UC or CSU systems and by increased shares graduating from high school.
- The equivalent gains for Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian Californians were 36 percent, 7 percent, and 24 percent, respectively. White Californians saw absolute gains in outcomes of 15 percent between 2000 and 2020.