

Beyond Equity: Seeking Liberation, Autonomy and Justice in Orange County



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Executive Summary

The root causes of inequity cannot be understood nor the pathways for addressing it be successful without examining the historical and cultural context that gave rise to it. For example, we cannot understand housing inequity in Orange County without knowing the historical context of the original theft of land from the Tongva and Acjachemen and other indigenous peoples, of redlining, and restrictive covenants. We cannot fully grasp education inequity without examining the historical context of school segregation right here in Orange County as well as the systematic efforts to overturn policies meant to remedy past discrimination.

This report aims to expose key actions and motivations that helped pave the way for modern-day inequities in property and housing, labor, education, and migration and diaspora. It builds upon the OC Equity Profile, the 2019 report sponsored by OC Grantmakers that used data to document inequity in our region across a wide range of issues and indicators. The Equity Profile provided a valuable disaggregated look at key issues by demographics, however, it did not include the root causes of disparities. It also did not disaggregate data beyond the standard Census classifications of race and ethnicity, which aggregate Asian and Pacific Islanders, for example. This report does present some data in the same categories because it is the data that is available, and this report also recognizes that a better system would be one that disaggregated data from the API and possible other communities further. To pursue this is a local, state and national issue. This report goes beyond the traditional concept of equity and expands to include justice, liberation, and autonomy for BIPOC.

Grounded in a brief review of academic literature on equity and inequity, this report provides an overview of the systemic causes of inequity in property and housing, labor, education, and migration and diaspora. It highlights historical and cultural examples of structural racism and oppression, white supremacy, and settler colonialism, from the first contact of Europeans with the Tongva and Acjachemen peoples, through the present day – finding common threads of discriminatory policies and practices as well as community-based movements fighting for equity and justice across all four of these thematic areas. It also highlights community-based successes in the pursuit of autonomy, liberation and justice.

To connect the historical context of inequity with lived experience from the present day, this report also shares findings from listening sessions with local community leaders and equity practitioners. It concludes with a set of recommendations for systems leaders in our region, including philanthropic leaders to:

1. Integrate an understanding of historical and cultural context into efforts to analyze and address regional inequity.
2. Ensure that marginalized population groups are represented in the collection, compilation, and presentation of data on regional inequity.
3. Support policy, systems change, and direct services, understanding that they are interrelated and historically oppressed communities cannot advocate if their basic needs are not met.
4. Incorporate principles of equity, justice, and liberation into decision-making processes for policy, grants, and budgeting.
5. Honor and respect the history of communities that have experienced injustice in the region and pursue healing, especially those, such as Native Nations, that have been rendered invisible by oppression.
6. Build infrastructure to support processes and outcomes that are just and equitable.

This report embraces the core principle that equitable outcomes cannot be achieved without equitable processes that embrace and seek justice, liberation, and autonomy. Ultimately, it aims to advance an ongoing dialogue about equity in our region, widen the circle of who can participate in this important dialogue, and spur more effective investment in strategies that address the root causes of inequity.