

How did we get here? The Racial Wealth Gap simulation

At the very least, we need to know our history, and there are many pieces to this puzzle.

Bread for the World has developed a *Racial Wealth Gap simulation* to help us begin to sort out how these gross inequities developed. On May 15, some of us from Westminster, along with a number of other participants, attended a simulation that modeled this process.

The simulation:

- Randomly assigns designation of Black or white to each participant.
- Examines 13 public policies beginning in 1865 and continuing until the present.
- Compares the effects of each of these policies on both Black and white families.
- Distills these into three categories, and uses these cards to tally the changes.



Money



Land



Opportunity Lost

Does this simulation reflect reality?

No model is perfect, and all models incorporate approximations. But a good model is useful in making predictions. This simulation produced a 13:1 white to Black ratio of money cards, which correlates well with the known data, where median white wealth is about \$141,000, compared to Black wealth of \$11,000, a ratio of 13:1. There is, of course, more to this story, but this helps us to understand how some of these inequities came to be.

Comments from Participants:

In this Southwestern Pennsylvania *Bread for the World* workshop, there were nine different churches engaged with 37 participants, including six from Westminster. We thought it would be interesting to hear what some of Westminster's participants thought of the experience.

The Racial Wealth Gap exercise was extremely valuable in helping us understand the history and impact of US racial bias. Through break-out discussion opportunities, facilitated presentation of racial bias statistics and a means of assessing costs and benefits based on those statistics, we came away with a better understanding of how much privilege white people have been afforded, and of the huge burden people of color continue to bear. –Paul and Sandy Conley

The simulation was an engaging way to learn about the impact of federal policies implemented over the years. The concept of "wealth" was clarified by looking at the opportunities made available (or denied) to citizens in various communities. It was an eye opener. –Carol Galbreath

The simulation made a complicated subject easier to understand...the graphic representation of losses and gains clarified the long-term impact of federal policies on economic inequality. However, It did not make the message any easier to hear. --Tom Hartman

A brief word about *Bread for the World*



Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. *Bread* equips people to write personal letters and emails, meet with their members of Congress, and to work with others to end hunger. Working through churches, campuses, and other organizations, they engage people in organized advocacy.

Westminster has been supporting *Bread for the World* for more than a dozen years, both financially and with participation in their *Offering of Letters* to Congress. In the past few years (before COVID) Westminster members have sent over 500 letters on various social justice related issues.

So what is an organization fighting hunger doing in racial justice work? Their comment: "*We can't end hunger without ending poverty – and we can't end poverty without addressing the racial wealth gap.*"

To learn more about *Bread for the World*, visit them at www.bread.org.

Future Plans:

Our thought is that this *Racial Wealth Gap* simulation would be helpful for Westminster to experience more broadly. Perhaps we could connect it to Martin Luther King Day or Black History Month. (Maybe in person!)