

## Working Toward a Solution

Most people of good will know that there is something wrong with the circumstances experienced by people of color in general, and by Black people in particular. There are inequities abounding, not the least of which is the enormous gap in wealth just discussed. There are inequities in education, employment, housing, voting rights, and health care, just to name a few.



People of good will also often say, as a solution, “Let’s just try to treat everybody the same,” which on the surface sounds fair. But alas, that does not account for history. There is an image that has been circulating for a while that graphically illustrates the problem with the approach of treating everybody the same.

The racial wealth gap simulation teaches us some of the history that has given rise to the three folks in the cartoon having different access to the view over the fence. It’s easy to see that going for **equality**, or just treating everybody the same, does not fix the problem, and it doesn’t fix the problem for Black folks today.

Thankfully, there is a second half to that image that takes history into account. And this is where we want to be. **Equity** lets us account for the past, and find ways to adjust circumstances so that “equal opportunity” becomes real.

So what are the boxes that we can provide to allow our Black brothers and sisters to see over the fence and participate?

Over the years there have been efforts made to mitigate the long term effects that we all saw in the Racial Wealth Gap simulation.

Here are just a few of these:

***Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*** was a landmark 1954 Supreme Court case in which the justices ruled unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional.

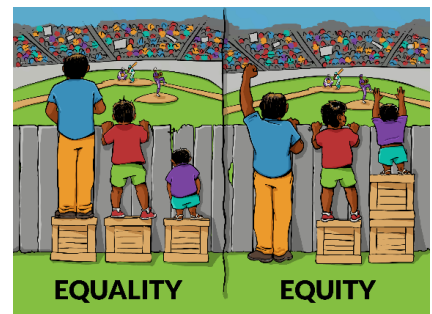
***The Civil rights Act of 1964***, outlawed segregation on the grounds of race, religion, or national origin in all places of public accommodation, including courthouses, parks, restaurants, theaters, sports arenas and hotels. No longer could Black people be denied service simply based on the color of their skin.

***The Voting Rights Act of 1965*** banned the use of literacy tests, provided for federal oversight of voter registration in areas where less than 50 percent of the non-white population had not registered to vote, and authorized the U.S. attorney general to investigate the use of poll taxes in state and local elections. It also prevented states, mostly in the South, from changing their election laws in such ways that would specifically disenfranchise voters of color without advance federal approval.

These are just a few of the efforts made through the years to address the inequities experienced by minorities. And they worked to varying degrees at **giving Black families a box to stand on**.

### What happened to the boxes?

Things are better than they were before the civil rights times, but they are not where they could be. In each of these cases, something happened to diminish or outright remove the support (the boxes).



In the case of ***Brown vs. the Board of Education***, a rise in private schools not covered by this ruling allowed parents to sidestep the integration intended by that ruling.

Much of the effect of the ***Civil Rights Act of 1964*** was mitigated by the privatization of restaurants, parks, and other recreational areas. The Hartmans' first date was at a swimming pool which has now become a private club. Also notable were public swimming pools which were filled with concrete to avoid integrating them. (1)

The ***Voting Rights Act of 1965*** is especially precious to Westminster as our founding pastor John Galbreath went to Selma, Alabama, to support that effort. It was effectively struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013, freeing nine states, mostly in the south, to change their election laws without federal approval.

### **Where are we today?**

The ***For the People Act*** (also known as H.R. 1 in the House, where it has passed, and S.1 in the Senate) is a bill in the United States Congress to expand voting rights, change campaign finance laws to reduce the influence of money in politics, limit partisan gerrymandering, and create new ethics rules for federal officeholders.

The ***John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act*** responds to current conditions in voting today by restoring the full protections of the original, bipartisan Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was last reauthorized by Congress in 2006, but gutted by the Supreme Court in 2013. Alas, this bill has not yet been introduced into the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress.

### **A review from the Brennan Center for Justice:**

*The ***For the People Act***, passed as **H.R. 1** in the House and pending as **S. 1** in the Senate, would curb voter suppression and make it easier for all Americans to register to vote and cast a ballot. It would outlaw partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts. And it would overhaul our campaign finance laws to amplify the voices of ordinary Americans, combat corruption, and make federal campaign spending more transparent. Together with the ***John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act***, which would restore the full protections of the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965 hobbled by the Supreme Court, the ***For the People Act*** would move us measurably closer to realizing the promise of democracy for all.*

These two pieces of legislation promise to repair at least some of the damage done between now and the original passage of the voter protection legislation. They promise to replace some of the “boxes” that have aided people of color in terms of voting rights, and that have been removed or weakened over the years.

(1) McGhee, H. (2021). *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*