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[00:00:20] **Speaker 1** And the following program is a PBS Wisconsin original production. We have to.

[00:00:31] **Speaker 2** Talk about that elephant in the room. Racism has been a part of Wisconsin history since it began as a state.

[00:00:43] **Speaker 3** Gosh, as white folks, we have so much to learn.

[00:00:48] **Speaker 4** History can help us understand why we are where we are.

[00:00:57] **Speaker 5** Funding for Wisconsin in black and white is provided by IRA and an Iva Riley Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment, the Ali Family Foundation. Joe and Mary Ellen Sensenbrenner, law and be Christianson. The View Foundation, the charitable arm of the Capitol Times. Madison College, National Guardian Life Insurance Company UnityPoint health. Murder donors to the Focus Fund for journalism and friends of PBS Wisconsin.

[00:01:32] **Speaker 2** Hello on PBS Wisconsin. Special projects. Journalist Merv Seymour in a series of special reports, we take an in-depth look at systemic racism here in Wisconsin. Is history across the state, is painfully complex, and opens lots of old and new wounds. In this first episode of Wisconsin in Black and White, we take a look at history in the criminal justice system.

[00:01:53] **Speaker 6** There are more black Americans in prison than white Americans right now. That is and should be completely shocking. It is apartheid.

[00:02:03] **Speaker 2** It takes a society to look.

[00:02:04] **Speaker 5** At this in a different way. That's a statistic that I don't think any of us should be proud of.

[00:02:11] **Speaker 3** Oh my God, this is such a big problem.

[00:02:14] **Speaker 2** We asked the question, how did we get here? Systemic racism means that within that society, you have factors about people's lives that you can predict the outcomes of their lives on the day that they're born. Based on the racial groups that they belong to. Reggie Jackson educates people about diversity. Racism has been a part of Wisconsin history since the beginning as a state. I oftentimes joke with people that I call, Wisconsin, Mississippi because we generally think of racism in the South.

[00:02:59] **Speaker 4** Lincoln opposed slavery's expansion, not its existence.

[00:03:07] **Speaker 2** Doctor Christy Clark Paja is an author and she teaches African American history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

[00:03:14] **Speaker 4** Systemic racism. Much of it is an extension of the creation of race based slavery. And race based slavery was created through law, and that was done in the colonial period.

[00:03:27] **Speaker 2** Jesus, give me some tough love. Racism is huge here in Wisconsin and is worse than it's ever been. Milwaukee is kind of special. This is the Selma of the North. Now I got when I go to other places. People don't even know that Milwaukee had black folks living here. This says black folks in Milwaukee. Yeah, and they've been oppressed like crazy.

[00:03:54] **Speaker 6** Not surprisingly, the highest demographic representation of African Americans.

[00:03:58] **Speaker 2** University of Wisconsin Law professor Ion Mean teaches race in the law. Civil rights and wrongful convictions.

[00:04:05] **Speaker 6** White society is addicted to racism.

[00:04:07] **Speaker 2** He has a lot to say about the racial climate in Wisconsin.

[00:04:11] **Speaker 6** I don't know what makes Milwaukee the most segregated city in the United States. It is. And I don't know what makes the practices in Milwaukee generate a overrepresentation of black people in prison. So that's the highest in the nation. If you're a black person, black resident in Wisconsin, you have a 12 times higher chance of being incarcerated than a white Wisconsinites.

[00:04:39] **Speaker 2** History tells us the overpolicing of blacks in Wisconsin and across the country dates back to the end of slavery, when the 13th amendment to the Constitution was ratified in December of 1865. Most people never ran what it says.

[00:04:54] **Speaker 4** It abolished slavery. And then there's a semi-colon, except for punishment for those who have been found guilty of a felony.

[00:05:01] **Speaker 2** It creates, the ability for you to be back in slavery in a different form. Something like loitering, which had never been illegal before. It becomes illegal.

[00:05:11] **Speaker 4** Whistling in public, like. I mean, like that level of nonsense walking along, a railroad track, not being able to produce employment papers on demand. You steal a pig. You go to prison for life.

[00:05:27] **Speaker 2** Instead of sending you to prison, someone who owns a plantation or a mine or some business who wants some free labor, they'll be able to come in and grab you and put you into that system so that you're not going to go to prison. Now you're going to go back and work for free.

[00:05:42] **Speaker 6** Society says, oh my gosh. Black people have a propensity to commit crimes versus what was going on, which was they were arresting black people for committed no crime and then sending them to slavery.

[00:05:57] **Speaker 2** The small town of Appleton was once the center of one of the most racist tactics used across the country to keep blacks out of white communities.

[00:06:04] **Speaker 6** I'll stop there after Appleton doesn't really have any black people. And if you ask people in Appleton, it's just because black people didn't want to move there. That people lived in Appleton before 1880s, and they attempted to join a growing community during the 40s and 50s, but it was the sun downtown through 1970 and enforced by the police.

[00:06:27] **Speaker 2** Sundown towns were places that didn't allow blacks and other people of color after dark. They were all over Wisconsin. Nearly 250 in all, according to a database created by Washington, D.C. sociologist James Loewen.

[00:06:42] **Speaker 4** So black people can be there as workers. They can come to fish during the day, but you better be out by night.

[00:06:50] **Speaker 2** Some places had a horn that would ring in the evening, when it was time for black people to get out. Some places literally had signs on the side of the roadway that said, you know, after the sunset, black people, you're not welcome here. About that time, the prison population in Wisconsin and everywhere else begins to explode.

[00:07:12] **Speaker 6** Six days of rioting in a Negro section of Los Angeles after the watch riot. White people blame black people for the problems. The response was a call for federal funding to provide a more robust policing of these areas. We start to see this war on crime.

[00:07:30] **Speaker 5** I'm aware that the current criminal justice system has a disproportionately large number of persons of color involved in it. It makes me somewhat sensitive to hopefully being able to address the needs of that population in a way that is fair to everyone.

[00:07:51] **Speaker 2** Former Madison Police Chief Noel Ray sits on the governor's pardon board.

[00:07:55] **Speaker 1** The politics back then was tough on crime.

[00:07:58] **Speaker 2** Tough on drugs. Say no to drugs. It was, you know, a zero tolerance approach. You're not going to hire all of these police officers for them to sit around and do nothing.

[00:08:10] **Speaker 6** It was billions of dollars. Open the door. Left. Right window. Open the door, man. It was changing the face of corrections and policing. So if you cooperate, all that money, focus on those communities of color.

[00:08:24] **Speaker 2** You end up with a disproportionate.

[00:08:25] **Speaker 5** Population that are under the criminal justice system.

[00:08:29] **Speaker 4** If you live in the quote unquote hood and in poor areas, you are policed in a way that people in affluent areas are not. Right. And so you are just more likely to find yourself in front of a judge.

[00:08:43] **Speaker 6** White individuals, their cases get dismissed at a rate 50% higher than the black individuals. There's a higher rate of sentencing black individuals for the same crime and every part of the system. By the way, there's a higher rate of black individual for the same thing being sent to a higher level of security prison. And then there's a higher rate of white people in prison getting good time credits than black people. If you look at every part of the system, it doesn't matter where you look. You're going to find these drivers of disparity.

[00:09:18] **Speaker 2** Today, former Governor Tommy Thompson and others admit building more prisons was the wrong approach. Now retired, Thompson is a passionate advocate for more educational opportunities for those incarcerated.

[00:09:29] **Speaker 6** The increased crime indicated that we needed more more prisons at the time and which I been commentator. But every time I, I did this, I always tried to balance on the other side. I was big on welfare reform. I was big on workforce development. I was big on expanding education.

[00:09:50] **Speaker 1** In February of 1992, I had been expelled.

[00:09:53] **Speaker 2** At age 15, Dominique received a life sentence for taking the life of Warren Smith Junior, an innocent bystander. Domini believes he and other black and brown teens receive harsher sentences compared with whites the same age convicted of the same crime.

[00:10:07] **Speaker 1** When I was incarcerated, only one person that was white, that was sentenced as a juvenile to life in prison. They took black boys. And said to Joel, are black men. And they punished us like men. That included two white boys. That the numbers. They gave him.

[00:10:42] **Speaker 6** Help. And Wisconsin. The number of kind of criminal, referrals is three times higher for black kids than white kids.

[00:10:54] **Speaker 1** You got 2 or 3 generations of black parents who have been incarcerated. The majority of people locked up are black and brown. So when you got the majority of us locked up, you can't be a parent from prison. So when a child looks for that only place he goes to get it is in the streets. So we need Father Figure to step up. Somebody to be that I can call at 2:00 in the morning to say. More. I'm locked up. Can you come get me or. I'm scared. Can you come get me or more? And when I disappoint more, they're still going to love me like mother will. Love is all children.

[00:11:30] **Speaker 2** In 2020, Domini walked out of Oak Hill Correctional Institution after 28 years. He says he doesn't feel free.

[00:11:38] **Speaker 1** When I left prison in September. One hole was filled, but one wasn't. Or one can never come back and hug his mama. Hug his baby girl. I live my happiness and I live this life. But I'm never forget about one. The goal is to prevent another Domini killing in another war.

[00:12:07] **Speaker 2** Domini is a former student of Odyssey Beyond Bars, a college jumpstart program in Oak Hill. Peter Marino runs it on behalf of the University of Wisconsin. Out of 40 institutions in the state.

[00:12:19] **Speaker 6** We've learned through experience that long prison sentences. While they may be appropriate for certain crimes, are not appropriate for a lot of crime, and long prison sentences combined with a lack of programing in the prisons can be especially harmful because we're keeping people in an environment where they're unable to learn, unable to grow, unable to socialize, and then we're letting them go back to their communities expecting them to do well.

[00:12:46] **Speaker 2** Marino encourages a closer look at the conditions of neighborhoods and fixing problems, leading to people entering the criminal justice system. We know how to deal with.

[00:12:55] **Speaker 5** Many of these issues.

[00:12:57] **Speaker 2** With a recidivism rate of just over 31%. Ray says there are four support systems proven to help close the sometimes revolving door back to prison. Do you have a place to.

[00:13:07] **Speaker 1** Live when you get out.

[00:13:08] **Speaker 2** And is that place solid?

[00:13:09] **Speaker 1** Does it, reinforce?

[00:13:11] **Speaker 2** Does it support you too? Do you have.

[00:13:13] **Speaker 1** Employment? Which is big?

[00:13:15] **Speaker 2** Three. Do you have the people around you that support you and that.

[00:13:19] **Speaker 6** Will help.

[00:13:20] **Speaker 2** You in terms of doing the right things, making the right decision? And the fourth one is treatment.

[00:13:26] **Speaker 3** Wisconsin should be less worried about getting a bad rap and more worried about improving. The lives of the people in this state who live in our communities of color.

[00:13:40] **Speaker 2** In 2016, Supreme Court justice yield for us. We took part in a course called Justified Anger. Black history four new date program is run by the Madison organization Nehemiah, which focuses on strengthening the African-American community in Wisconsin. Justice Crossley says the course on racial disparities in the criminal justice system gave her a new understanding of how, at times, the criminal justice system unfairly impacts people of color.

[00:14:03] **Speaker 3** This country was founded by white men who were well-intentioned, and who created a system of laws and the constitution that was built on the idea, of of freedom. But but back in the, in the late 1700s, we know that they didn't mean freedom for all people. Because of that, it has been, the white majority who has been in control of so much of this country business, of government, of the financial world. It is going to need to be leaders in those areas that are going to have to help make the change that so many of us want to see.

[00:14:48] **Speaker 2** Just as she says. Inspiration from attending justified anger led her to bring the Nehemiah anti-racism trainings to other judges across the state in the form of intense one day sessions. Do you think that we have too much emphasis on race these days?

[00:15:03] **Speaker 3** No. Most Supreme Court justices don't do interviews like this. The reason I am doing this interview, and I agreed to do it, is because I think and I believe and I know, and I see that it is a problem in our state. And maybe if I stand up and sit here, as uncomfortable as it may be for me, that that may help be part of the change. One of the ways we can do that is to try to reach out to our colleagues of color, to mentor them, to learn from them, because their experience is very, very rich and can be different than ours. And then to help them succeed, should they want to run for judge, or should they want to ask for an appointment?

[00:15:50] **Speaker 2** Secretary Carr says he sees a shift from simply locking people up for public safety to providing more treatment, more education, more trauma based care.

[00:16:00] **Speaker 5** We have started to rely more on alternatives to revocations, such as short term sanctions and community based programing. And for instance, like, drug treatment, referral for minor possession cases as opposed to sending that person back to prison.

[00:16:22] **Speaker 3** Each of us needs to figure out what is it that we can do. If it's only one thing, then, then it's only one thing. We really wanted to have a brick and mortar space, like in the heart of the city, where people could come together.

[00:16:38] **Speaker 2** Short Stack Eatery in Madison serves up a lot more than food.

[00:16:41] **Speaker 3** Gosh, as white folks, we have so much to learn.

[00:16:44] **Speaker 2** Its owner says their spot serves as an example of how to help equalize what they consider the uneven intersections of race and inequality.

[00:16:53] **Speaker 3** We definitely, unapologetically, trying to become less and less racist every day. That's our goal. We figure if we can unravel some of our racist tendencies and indoctrination.

[00:17:08] **Speaker 2** Everybody can at her restaurant. Linden. My job applications look different. There is no box to check if you have a felony conviction.

[00:17:17] **Speaker 3** The fact that we don't have a box on our application and we don't do background checks and we don't do drug testing and all those things.

[00:17:24] **Speaker 2** For years, they have also routinely sent its managers to the Nehemiah's nine week justified anger course.

[00:17:30] **Speaker 3** We have huge, huge systems to figure out how to disassemble and reassemble, and so it's going to be lifelong work.

[00:17:38] **Speaker 2** They said 92% of our community didn't even know that there was a mayoral election.

[00:17:44] **Speaker 3** Black folks can't do it alone. They can't do it without us. We're the one causing the violence.

[00:17:50] **Speaker 2** Stop running, people. All we hear out in the streets. Stop shooting, folks, man. Yeah, they need to fix it. Are you going to fix that, man? We're the hated ones. We continue our reporting on race and the criminal justice system in Wisconsin. We are here at Short Stack Eatery in Madison, and we are joined by the owner of Short's factory, Alex Lenin Meyer. And we've also got Doctor Alex, Chief Nehemiah's just defining project, and Karl Fields, who is with XPO, which stands for Incarcerated People Organizing. And he's also representing wisdom, a faith based group that operates out of the state of Wisconsin. Alex, I want to start with you. You mentioned during our pre-interview that you felt like Wisconsin business owners could do more to help, impact the disparity that we see in a criminal justice system. What do you think they can learn? From some of the things that you're doing here? And I'd love to hear what you guys have to say about it to.

[00:18:44] **Speaker 3** People that are justice involved, have so many things that they're dealing with. So employers need to internally start having the conversation about what the criminal justice system even looks like. Now, if you're not justice involved or you don't have a family member or you don't have an employee, that's that's justice involved. It's designed on purpose for you to not care for you to not know. And so employers really need to get educated internally about what's going on and what these barriers are that people are up against, and then figure out how they can set up support systems within their culture and within the organization to make sure people get what they need.

[00:19:16] **Speaker 2** And we know that you purposely hire folks that do have barriers. Carl, how does that help folks that are transitioning.

[00:19:24] **Speaker 1** To know that there are companies that are sticking to what society intended for criminal justice to be is huge. And that is tangible to say, yeah, oh, you paid to do. Come on. We not only will we'd like to work with you, but we'd be honored to because you got something you want to show you got something you want to prove. And we're also creating opportunities that that's a real job, you know, opportunity to give to somebody who was really in need of the industry.

[00:19:51] **Speaker 2** Your organization runs a reentry program.

[00:19:54] **Speaker 1** It does, it does.

[00:19:56] **Speaker 2** And how do you see, businesses being able to impact things.

[00:20:00] **Speaker 1** If we want to attract large businesses to this community, where, again, there's low unemployment, we have to help people who are in this community wanting to work, willing to work to become employed. So one of the things that we do through our reentry program is we help find jobs for men and women, particularly men who are programing to find jobs. You know, my vice president for reentry, gentleman named Anthony Cooper, has placed over 1000 men over the past 8 or 9 years. That's significant because when you come out of prison and you have stable employment, you can have stable housing, which means you can live a stable life in the community. And it drastically reduces the temptation to recidivism. So we have a responsibility to our own state's economy and to the well-being of good people. We need them in order for our economy to be stronger in this community.

[00:20:47] **Speaker 2** I would love to hear what you folks think. Are some of the biggest challenges facing our criminal justice system.

[00:20:52] **Speaker 1** And when we talk about, you know, alternatives to, whether it be a department program to the court on pretrial or, during incarceration or post incarceration. Those programs, those options that come up are always met with a zero margin of error. And that is so problematic to me because the current system and what it produces is not held to any sort of standard on that level. But in fact does have a low effectiveness rate, but we can't seem to take some chances to try something else because it's not politically advantageous always. It's not, classy. It's not sexy.

[00:21:34] **Speaker 2** What role do you think? Our federal government and our state government, what role do you think they play in, affecting the criminal justice system here in the state?

[00:21:43] **Speaker 1** I think that these governmental agencies need to really own up to the fact that this criminal system is really producing what it was designed to produce, this ugly, ugly cycle that needs to be called out and dismantled so we can build something that's equitable. And that really does, rehabilitate the history of how systems were built and what they were built for. That plays out, continues to play out even to this day, 100 plus years later. And that is a weight on any person who enters the system. As an ex knucklehead myself turned professional, I've messed up in life. I made some poor choices. But no one anywhere in the criminal justice system told me that felonies were going to be forever. I've seen that the barriers just continue seeing that no matter what I do or how much of a great effort I put forward, society is still allowed to socially acceptably mistreat me. You could buy someone a house and send them to college for what it costs, you know. At least put a down payment on a house for what it cost to incarcerate. So what are we really trying to do? We have the money. Are we locking people up when we could use resources or redirect them to really help people out of a hole?

[00:22:55] **Speaker 2** I learned in my reporting, the term, crime list revocations. I'd love to get you to kind of let our viewers know what is, what exactly means and, and how it leads, and, it feeds the, the pipeline to prison.

[00:23:11] **Speaker 1** The working definition of, crimes revocation is, placing a person into prison or placing a person back into incarceration, for not having committed a new crime, but for a technical violation of rules. Violation of some kind. The way that plays out specifically is perhaps you bought a car and didn't get it clear that your agent.

[00:23:29] **Speaker 3** Used a computer.

[00:23:30] **Speaker 1** You used a computer. You got married and didn't ask for permission. I know that those are some of the extreme things, but I know folks who have feared for their lives or their freedom for doing things just like that. But just think about this to crazy numbers, to Alex's point of people in prison are folks who returned on technicalities.

[00:23:49] **Speaker 3** We look at states like Oregon. We look at states like Washington that are putting huge dollars into programs of figuring out how to get parents things they need while they're locked up, figuring out how to get families reunited while folks are locked up, figuring out to get families that have somebody locked up the resources they need. And our state has a lot of catching up to do, for sure.

[00:24:08] **Speaker 1** Minnesota has a comparable, demographic to Wisconsin, but they don't incarcerate nearly as as much as we do it. It really is big business. That's not just cliche, it's really big business.

[00:24:19] **Speaker 2** Another learning, process I went through an on in this reporting is I learned about language. I learned that, I'm guilty of saying some things that, you know, aren't, humanizing people. How important is the language of incarceration?

[00:24:35] **Speaker 1** When we're talking about, felons or convicts or inmates. You know, last I checked, I was a person, and I continue to be that. And so person first, language is something that we've been driving on, in this work that we do for quite some time. It's the language that helps us to reinforce barriers. This person can't be trusted. I don't want you around my family. You can't go to my church. You can't work at my my job. So it begins with even the language. And what, again, what it conjures in our minds about what this person is capable of. But when you use those terminologies, you don't really think that they're really ex or former. It's just you did some time, but you still in that same place. And that's why we keep that same title. We just put X in front of it.

[00:25:17] **Speaker 3** I have employees that go to UW who are 19 and white, and I have employees who are 45 on paper. And we got we have some disparity, some differences, and we if we actually want to figure out how to make this a safe place for everybody to work, it's a lot of internal conversation about things like, hey, you can't you can't say convict, you can't say felon. Here's, here's, here's why. We got to figure out how we got here. I can tell I can preach at you all this stuff about the lingo and the language and why it's ineffective or what have you. But until people have a basis or an understanding of how we ended up here. It's a mute point.

[00:25:55] **Speaker 2** In talking to you. How do we get all Wisconsinites to get vested on this?

[00:26:00] **Speaker 1** I don't even know if that's my expectation, but if I can have an impact on employers and their new employees or individuals who want to make a difference. When you invest in people who want to make a difference, you trust in a ripple effect. But I've learned that if I want to live a healthier and longer life, I can't keep it in my head against the wall. For people who want to argue these points. I need to take the time to invest in people who want to be allies, who want to speak out, and who want to make sure that everyone has judicial justice in their lives. And so I try to invest in the people who want to be a part of the change, and hope that at some point we will have an impact on Wisconsin. But I don't go out to the whole state. I just try to really work with the people who want to get it.

[00:26:43] **Speaker 2** We have to leave it there. Thank you all for being here, doctor G.

[00:26:47] **Speaker 1** My pleasure.

[00:26:47] **Speaker 2** Mr. fields, sir Alexander Meyer, on behalf of PBS Wisconsin and our crew. We appreciate you for providing a space for us to have this important conversation. And we thank you, folks, for joining us to. And this episode was coated in black and white. We take a look at the history of race and education in the state. Educators and students weigh in on long term challenges black and brown students face in the classrooms throughout Wisconsin, and we hear about the work being done to increase opportunity and put all students on equal footing on death.

[00:27:26] **Speaker 7** A look at how black students are doing. It is terrible.

[00:27:40] **Speaker 6** Whatever efforts there have been by the federal government to create integrated schools have not worked.

[00:27:51] **Speaker 5** Education is the kind of a to freedom.

[00:27:53] **Speaker 3** We have a lot more work to do.

[00:27:56] **Speaker 2** Wisconsin.

[00:27:57] **Speaker 7** We're a microcosm of the nation.

[00:27:59] **Speaker 3** We want to create change.

[00:28:00] **Speaker 2** A conversation about race and education in this state.

[00:28:03] **Speaker 7** It is a complex one. We've never given full education access to everyone.

[00:28:10] **Speaker 2** Author and retired University of Wisconsin education professor Doctor Gloria Larson Billings travels the world learning, teaching and training people about education.

[00:28:18] **Speaker 7** It's Thomas Jefferson who says, listen, we are not going to be able to maintain a democracy unless the common folks. Are educated.

[00:28:31] **Speaker 4** It goes all the way to the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

[00:28:34] **Speaker 2** Doctor Christy Clark Paja is a UW Madison history professor and also works with the Madison organization. Nehemia. She's an instructor and has justified anger. Black history for New Day course. Nehemiah focuses on strengthening the African-American community in Wisconsin. The nine week course teaches people about race, history, and justice. She and Lance and Billings help explain why the playing field of education began to take shape out of balance across the country, including here in Wisconsin.

[00:29:03] **Speaker 4** Slavery. The laws against teaching enslaved people to read actually come into play, after the founding of the nation in response to enslaved people doing things like forging fake passes.

[00:29:19] **Speaker 2** Written by their owners, passes were required for slaves to leave the plantation for extra work or errands.

[00:29:25] **Speaker 4** When we're talking about access to education post slavery. You just have. Cities, states, and counties not investing in the education of black people who are taxpayers. They would have inferior school buildings, inferior materials, inferior books or no books, right? The teachers were paid less. And so it was an active disinvestment. My father was functionally illiterate. His family was poor and he was sharecropping cotton most of his life. And his labor was essential to his family's survival. And the school that he could attend was underfunded.

[00:30:11] **Speaker 2** During the civil rights era, Milwaukee was the epicenter of protests demanding compliance in continued segregation in schools.

[00:30:18] **Speaker 4** We tend to think about the civil rights movement, like the institution of slavery, as something that is uniquely southern, and it was not.

[00:30:28] **Speaker 2** Well, the U.S. Supreme Court's Brown versus the Board of Education ruling in the late 1950s ordered all U.S. schools to desegregate. Milwaukee in other parts of the state, like much of the nation, didn't do so for decades.

[00:30:41] **Speaker 4** The schools in Milwaukee are not in line with Brown versus the Board of Education, and to 1979.

[00:30:49] **Speaker 2** The City of Milwaukee's public school system decided, well, we're going to build the schools, but we're going to build them on the south side, which is primarily the white part of town. Right?

[00:30:59] **Speaker 4** The schools that black people have access to were severely underfunded.

[00:31:05] **Speaker 6** What you saw in black communities was a continual kind of decline in the tax base, and the ability to support public education in those communities.

[00:31:15] **Speaker 2** A declining tax base due to declining property values and housing like this in Milwaukee.

[00:31:21] **Speaker 7** Housing policy is education policy. You go to the schools in your neighborhood, and we tend to fund schools through property taxes. Better than 60% of black and brown kids still go to segregated schools.

[00:31:38] **Speaker 2** Schools in the Milwaukee metro area are more segregated for black and white students than any other metro area of the country. That's comparing Milwaukee schools to those in the surrounding counties of Ozaki, Washington and Waukesha.

[00:31:52] **Speaker 6** Whatever efforts there have been by the federal government to create integrated schools have not worked.

[00:31:57] **Speaker 7** There are many white children who go to all white districts and nobody says, oh, this is a segregated district. They say this is a good district. If you look at performance, black and brown kids continue to legs.

[00:32:11] **Speaker 2** Those students test below white students in math in the early grades. And it's not just math.

[00:32:16] **Speaker 1** It speeds over.

[00:32:18] **Speaker 2** A hundred.

[00:32:19] **Speaker 1** Miles an.

[00:32:19] **Speaker 2** Hour. If there's one indicator of how students will perform.

[00:32:23] **Speaker 3** Reading proficiency, it's important across the races.

[00:32:26] **Speaker 2** It's their ability to read by third grade. And state assessments show that just one year later in the fourth grade, reading scores are black and Hispanic students also lag.

[00:32:37] **Speaker 7** The most revolutionary thing we could do is teach these kids how to read.

[00:32:40] **Speaker 6** Whoa!

[00:32:43] **Speaker 2** But educators across Wisconsin are working to reverse these trends. At one city grade school in Madison, the focus on reading is key.

[00:32:51] **Speaker 4** It kind of continues on.

[00:32:53] **Speaker 2** Third grade teacher Kirstie Blattner teaches reading skills at this public charter, where more than 80% of the students are black, Hispanic or multiracial. Blatner is passionate about making sure her students embrace reading.

[00:33:06] **Speaker 4** I have a deep passion for helping scholars that are struggling academically. If you have a scholar that doesn't feel confident and comfortable with reading, then they'll find other ways to sort of mask that, because no one wants to be seen as not knowing. Instead of I can't do this, I can't do this yet instead of I'm not good at this, what are you good at? Would you like to be good at this?

[00:33:30] **Speaker 3** America has trouble talking about race, period.

[00:33:33] **Speaker 2** Sarah Shaw researches education for a nonprofit think tank out of Milwaukee called the Wisconsin Policy Forum.

[00:33:40] **Speaker 3** There's a trope in literacy circles that before third grade, students are learning how to read, and after third grade students are reading to be able to learn. Think of how many of your daily activities become more difficult. Everything from reading street signs to menus, to engaging in the legal system or going to the doctor's office.

[00:34:01] **Speaker 5** Education is a kind of A to freedom.

[00:34:03] **Speaker 2** From grade school achievement to high school, where one superintendent can boast the benefits of a diverse student body.

[00:34:09] **Speaker 5** We were approximately 35% students of color here in the Bruner School District. Today we celebrate diversity here in Bruner School District, and we understand that a diverse, clientele and the students that we serve allows us to be a better, better district.

[00:34:22] **Speaker 2** Inside the district's signature $150 million high school. Verona area school superintendent Doctor Tremaine Clardy is straightforward about his commitment and obligation to create equity for all students in his district, especially those that are black and brown.

[00:34:37] **Speaker 5** It is our responsibility to remove barriers, but not never, never lowered our expectations.

[00:34:41] **Speaker 2** While recent statewide data shows a gap in the graduation rates of black and brown students compared to white students, Doctor Clardy and other educators believe the difference in achievement has less to do with performance and more to do with something else.

[00:34:54] **Speaker 5** Opportunity is definitely not skill. It's not. It's not intellect. There's not any other internal barrier on behalf of our black and brown. It is purely about access.

[00:35:03] **Speaker 2** Opportunity and access, or why this school has windows in place of walls and wide open common spaces.

[00:35:10] **Speaker 5** We are modeling, you know, other students seeing that collaborative process. We set up our furniture that way. We set up the classroom structure that day because of, you know, the power of peer to peer interaction and what that means to strengthening education.

[00:35:22] **Speaker 3** What is that thing that's in you?

[00:35:24] **Speaker 2** Meet guidance counselor Carrie Hale.

[00:35:26] **Speaker 4** There's no typical.

[00:35:27] **Speaker 3** Day in the world of a high school counselor.

[00:35:29] **Speaker 2** In the spirit of strengthening education. In 2018, the district sent her and every other teacher to the Nehemiah justified Anger black history four New Day course.

[00:35:38] **Speaker 5** We really had to get to the root and heart of, the history of the systems that have caused barriers that we're trying to dismantle.

[00:35:45] **Speaker 2** Well, Carrie Hill.

[00:35:46] **Speaker 3** It just fed me.

[00:35:47] **Speaker 2** The course has been life changing.

[00:35:49] **Speaker 4** It's just grown in me over the years. And I realized at that time there was so much I didn't know. It benefits me as an educator so that when I'm working with a student who doesn't look like me or their families, speaks another language, whatever it might be, that I can respect them and value them and see them and honor them for who they are in the space we're in.

[00:36:07] **Speaker 2** I definitely struggle trying to figure out who I was, just like everybody else. Senior Geralmente Comer says attending Mr. High School has made him more culturally aware than ever. When I came here, it was kind of like a cultural shock, seeing.

[00:36:19] **Speaker 1** Not too many.

[00:36:20] **Speaker 2** Faces looking like me. It's one of the reasons Gerald got involved with the school's Black Student Union group. It's just more of like celebrating black culture, which anyone can join to the.

[00:36:30] **Speaker 1** First BSU here it was like small, like.

[00:36:33] **Speaker 7** Ten people when I was a freshman, and now.

[00:36:36] **Speaker 2** It's like 80. And just seeing like that group of black folks around me, I feel like that really helps.

[00:36:41] **Speaker 7** Keep in, like that balance.

[00:36:43] **Speaker 1** Of me going through school and everyday life.

[00:36:45] **Speaker 2** Gerald says he plans to go to college. If he goes to a University of Wisconsin school, he'll be one of a few black students doing so. Enrollment numbers show that in 1975, just 2.5% of students were black. Nearly 50 years later, their numbers in 2022 still make up just 2.9% of enrollment. Law professor Ian Main believes the numbers should mirror the demographics of the nation's black population of about 14%.

[00:37:11] **Speaker 6** If you guess the 3%, is that is that progress? No. We're not close to progress. We're not close to even reckoning with our problem.

[00:37:22] **Speaker 2** The UW system lists diversity as a core value, and its five year plan calls for boosting African-American enrollment to 15% by 2028.

[00:37:32] **Speaker 1** College is a aspiration that is not afforded to all. It's our honor to serve, and be one of the only majority minority institutions in the state of Wisconsin.

[00:37:46] **Speaker 2** Doctor. Equine Burrows is the dean of students at Milwaukee Area Technical College, where more than half the full time student population are minorities.

[00:37:54] **Speaker 1** It's important that we level that playing field, look forward to being the mentors.

[00:37:59] **Speaker 2** Doctor Burrows runs a mentoring program with about 100 black male students called the Men of Color Initiative.

[00:38:04] **Speaker 1** The goals are to educate and empower students.

[00:38:07] **Speaker 2** The program hopes to give students like Jeremiah Crawford a better chance to finish college and keep pace with other students who eventually gain their bachelor's degree.

[00:38:16] **Speaker 1** I've always wanted to go to college. My home life was in shambles. It was rough having a father on drugs.

[00:38:23] **Speaker 2** If that wasn't enough.

[00:38:25] **Speaker 1** High school was a point where I started to retreat into.

[00:38:28] **Speaker 2** Myself. Jeremiah has something else that makes learning in life more difficult.

[00:38:32] **Speaker 1** My sickle cell stood in the way.

[00:38:34] **Speaker 2** He copes with the blood disorder sickle cell anemia.

[00:38:37] **Speaker 1** The last thing that you want to do is pick up a book, and my illness will just take over. The men of color give us an opportunity to meet and share our emotions and our feelings and struggles we're having.

[00:38:49] **Speaker 2** When it comes to reading.

[00:38:50] **Speaker 1** It's a skill that a lot of people are missing in this day and age.

[00:38:54] **Speaker 2** Jeremiah knows its importance. Every day, he says, he does about an.

[00:38:58] **Speaker 1** Hour to two hours.

[00:38:59] **Speaker 2** Of reading.

[00:39:01] **Speaker 1** I would set alarm for 15 minutes. Read. Stop reading.

[00:39:04] **Speaker 2** Take a break. He agrees with experts like doctor Lance and Billings, who say reading about things you like organically leads to more reading.

[00:39:12] **Speaker 1** If you like self-help books, you should look for that. If you.

[00:39:14] **Speaker 2** Want to learn how to work on a car.

[00:39:16] **Speaker 1** You should read those type of books.

[00:39:18] **Speaker 3** I think that's really good. I liked it.

[00:39:20] **Speaker 2** Hitting the books is often new for a population that schools can leave behind. People whose incarceration cut learning short an innovative program hopes to change that. There are many.

[00:39:30] **Speaker 5** Many justifications for.

[00:39:31] **Speaker 6** Higher education in prison.

[00:39:33] **Speaker 3** You opened up a really important conversation.

[00:39:35] **Speaker 2** This college classroom is inside a prison. Odyssey Beyond Bars conducts this college level English composition course at Racine Correctional and three other prisons across the state on behalf of the University of Wisconsin.

[00:39:47] **Speaker 6** It transforms how they look at their lives. Virtually all of our students have reported to us at the end of the class that they experience. An odyssey has made them want to take more college classes. There are people in prison who look around and think, I don't ever want to be back here again, and I want to do something about my life that ensures that I don't.

[00:40:10] **Speaker 7** I gave the quote commencement speech at Oakwood Correctional Center.

[00:40:14] **Speaker 2** Each time Doctor Lansing Billings says she'd ask one question.

[00:40:19] **Speaker 7** Raise your hand if you were ever suspended. I've never had, less than 100% of the hands go up.

[00:40:36] **Speaker 2** Suspensions and expulsions from high school can lead to what has been called the school to prison pipeline and, at the very least, disrupt graduation and college attainment.

[00:40:45] **Speaker 7** Now the prisons are having to go back and say, listen, let's make sure you get the education you should have gotten.

[00:40:53] **Speaker 2** If fixing the opportunity gap for black and brown students is a puzzle. Another important piece of it is the shortage of minority teachers.

[00:41:00] **Speaker 6** They talked about how my dad would move out and how me and my sister, which.

[00:41:04] **Speaker 5** Our students want and deserve to see someone who looks like them.

[00:41:08] **Speaker 2** For his part, Superintendent Claudio is proud of his efforts and his district to diversify its staff with people like Canby. Home teacher of the year.

[00:41:17] **Speaker 6** And then if you look at this paragraph, for so many kids of color, they've never had, a teacher of color. A lot of the university programs are not diverse. So if your feeder pool of teacher applicants is not diverse, then of course you're not going to have a diverse teaching workforce.

[00:41:36] **Speaker 2** In 2020, researchers at the Wisconsin Policy Forum took an extensive look into the racial diversity of Wisconsin teachers and the student to teacher pipeline. The takeaway who?

[00:41:47] **Speaker 3** We have a lot more work to do.

[00:41:49] **Speaker 2** Shaw says, ideally.

[00:41:51] **Speaker 3** That the diversity of the student body would be reflected in the diversity of the teacher population.

[00:41:57] **Speaker 2** While almost a third of students in Wisconsin our students of color, only about 6% of their teachers are. And many don't state.

[00:42:04] **Speaker 3** Teachers of color who come into the workforce are leaving at a faster rate than our white teachers.

[00:42:09] **Speaker 2** Okay. Many educators say a diverse teaching staff positively impacts all students in a lot of different ways.

[00:42:16] **Speaker 3** We see positive impacts across everything from student motivation to strong student student teacher relationships, to absenteeism, graduation rates, and going on to college.

[00:42:28] **Speaker 6** When you look at the, educational inequities, I think it is just intrinsically tied to the inequities that are in society. But it's going to take policy changes, not just talk.

[00:42:39] **Speaker 2** For his part, Verona Superintendent Clardy is moving beyond talking and taking action.

[00:42:44] **Speaker 5** I'm not a worrier. I'm a doer. And so we're about doing the work.

[00:42:49] **Speaker 2** We continue our reporting on race and education in the state of Wisconsin here, from the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Here to continue the conversation, we are joined by Doctor Alex G. From the Nehemia Center for Urban Leadership and Development. Mr.. Clean care superintendent of one city schools here in Madison. And Doctor Courtney Bell who is with the director of the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research. As I've traveled and talk to folks across the state about this issue, I get the sense that it's a very touchy subject. Is there something to that?

[00:43:18] **Speaker 3** Race is a touchy subject in the United States? I think when we think about systemic racism, which exists in education, we think about these sort of interlocking layers of systems and policies. Right? So you only need to think about how do we draw the district boundary and the way that interacts with the neighborhoods, the neighborhood attendance zone, the teachers or school can attract the outcomes that then wind up in that neighborhood. Those are interlocking systems. So it is contentious, I think, partly because people do care, but the persistent inequalities are hard to look at in the state. In particular.

[00:43:55] **Speaker 2** Doc G, where people are afraid to talk about this.

[00:43:57] **Speaker 1** Because I think it's difficult to face up to the culpability. We like to, to quote statistics, but we don't really want to look at our ownership in the problem or why we've allowed it to persist. In educational services, systems, we want to, to fight against racism. But when we don't properly address it, the educational systems themselves become breeding grounds for racism. And I think we just like to pass the buck to someone else without taking full responsibility. I think they're both absolutely spot on. But I also think that we have divorced ourselves, from the problem that it is not only something that I'm embarrassed or I don't want to be culpable in, but it's. So it's been persisting for so long. And if I know about it, I'm tired of hearing of it. And so it brings me down. I've heard people say that like, I can't focus on the problem because it just brings me down because it's like we've not solved it. It's not going to be solved. And so I think there's a lot of hopelessness. I also think that we also live in a state that, by and large, has been privileged for a very long time. Particularly an area where we are in Madison. And so when you're privileged and things are going okay and you don't have to focus on the issue, you act like it doesn't exist.

[00:45:15] **Speaker 2** But this lack of success that we're seeing, is it more to blame, on the teachers or is it more, to the blame on students?

[00:45:24] **Speaker 1** I think there's enough blame to go around, actually. But I think if we ignore the systemic issues and only point fingers to the parents, the students, teachers, now look at the larger issue. I think we continue just to, to kick the can down the road. And so I think we have to look at really how we how we got here. I think what makes it even more difficult is that education has been deemed the great equalizer. Education is what brings you into the mainstream and it keeps you from being discriminated against. It keeps you from being poor. And when that system that's meant to elevate us is keeping certain people down is the antithesis to what we think of when we think about education. And then we have to really begin to ask ourselves real, real tough questions. But we're trying to educate children in a system, in a world, in a reality where there's so much brokenness and pain and disregard for who they are, their pain in their culture. So I think we really need an overhaul in how we even look at what education means for us.

[00:46:20] **Speaker 2** And we know a lot of times we we find solutions looking at other communities, other school districts, things like that. Doctor Bill, we know you work across the world, the country, looking at different ways people do research to solve these kinds of issues. Is there any district out there, anywhere that's doing things? Well, in terms of, addressing these issues with, black and brown students falling behind.

[00:46:43] **Speaker 3** You know, there are success cases. My colleague Goodwill Cross Sweet is the superintendent in Lynwood Unified, which is in LA. They have community based schools. They have colleagues of color, professionals of color in those school buildings. Not only colleagues of color, but some. They are committed and they believe that all those kids can learn. They have tons of AP courses in those high schools. They are starting with early pre-K. And so they hold them tight and they treat them with dignity and those families with dignity the whole way up the climb.

[00:47:20] **Speaker 2** You've built a pretty unique environment in one city. What are some of the things that you're doing that you feel like other districts can learn from?

[00:47:27] **Speaker 1** Well, there's quite a few things. First and foremost, it's the number of our young people that are coming to us who are so far behind academically, doesn't matter the grade level that they're at, but it's even more depressing when they come to you in ninth and 10th grade. And we have a we have a third of our kids are at the somewhere between first and fourth grade level in math and reading. It's like you just pass them along to ninth and. 10th grade without intervening to address their real core challenges. First six to weeks we get to know our kids. Then we pivot because we see where they're at. We test them. We look at what their how they how they interact in school, how they show up as students every day and two hours in the morning. Students are in math, two hours in the afternoon, they're in language arts. And it's not just instruction all day. The first part of that is instruction at their level. And then we bring in tutors that we've trained. We've trained over 50 tutors to come in and work with them one on one, no more than one on two to help them get up to grade levels. So we have a personalized learning environment for them so we can move them forward so we won't be passing kids and our school forward to ninth and 10th grade who aren't ready to be there.

[00:48:32] **Speaker 2** You've got one superpower I'm going to give you to fix this problem. What are you going to do with it?

[00:48:38] **Speaker 1** We've got to really embed the importance of helping students to, and I'll speak specifically to our work with, African-American, African-American children with really understanding and appreciating the culture. You know, if we were to go back in time 60 years ago, we would not be having this conversation. Black people were going to historically black colleges and universities, building historically black colleges and universities, building churches and businesses. Highly successful educationally with integration. And one of my mentors and she mentioned all of the doctor Gloria Latson buildings has always said, but Alex, remember, with integration, 30,000 black teachers lost their jobs because they did not they were not integrated. Black students were, black teachers weren't. And many of them became, domestics. And so we have to understand that this is somewhat new, because, again, 60 years ago, we weren't saying, how do we educate our black children? We were probably asking, how do we vote for black children? We're becoming dentists and doctors and nurses and professors. And then something happened. So my superpower would be let's get them in places where teachers can relate to them, understand them, celebrate them, and where they see themselves in textbooks. I came to Madison advanced in second grade, but I had a black teacher in first grade who told me I was going to be the president of the United States. She's 102 years old, and we're still pen pals. We're talking as if we have to fix black children. But we have to really ask ourselves is, how are we breaking black children?

[00:50:01] **Speaker 2** So we know most parts of Wisconsin have a very tiny population of students of color, if any at all. So when you talk about the folks that sit at home right now and say, this has nothing to do with me, how do we get those folks, to have a stake in this game to to make things better?

[00:50:19] **Speaker 3** I'd like to go back to something that was said earlier about the function of education in an, I'll say, a democracy. This affects all of us, every single one of us, no matter what our racial background is, no matter where we live, if we do not have a democracy that functions with civility, where people can consider issues of science in the public domain of policy, around all manner of things housing, power, you name it, all the things social services, farm subsidies, whatever it may be. We need an educated citizenry. That's what the country was founded on. So for me, this is about all of us. These are all of our children. This is our country.

[00:50:58] **Speaker 1** And I would say America is at risk if you produce children who lack an interest and passion to solve the big problems of today and tomorrow, who's going to be there to solve them? We have to focus on education and make it, I believe, our number one priority in this country. And if we want a country that's not divided, we also have to have education and unifies people rather than divides them. And so if we do those things, we will succeed. If not, you know, our demise is we already have signs what it will look like if we don't learn how to work together and work for and with, be educated by and educating people who don't look like us, we can't fool ourselves in thinking that we're ready for a global market, that we want to compete in the global market, and so we can't boast of having world class school districts or universities if we don't know how to talk to people who are from our own state, who look different. And so I think we have to own the broader problem. Otherwise we can't boast in producing people who can compete internationally for jobs or awards or opportunities.

[00:52:02] **Speaker 2** Let's leave it there, doctor G. Thank you sir. Our pleasure. Here. Thank you. Thank you Doctor Courtney. Bill, we appreciate you. And we thank you folks at home for joining us as well. And.

[00:52:52] **Speaker 5** Funding for Wisconsin in black and white is provided by IRA and an Iva Riley Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment, the Ali Family Foundation. Joe and Mary Ellen Sensenbrenner, law ANB Christianson. The View Foundation, the charitable arm of the Capitol Times, Madison College, National Guardian Life Insurance Company UnityPoint health, murder, donors to the Focus Fund for journalism and friends of PBS Wisconsin.