Addressing housing insecurity: what are the reasons, who's affected, and what can you do about it?

Why is it so easy for people to slip into poverty and homelessness?

Short answer: <u>market failures</u>. Let's explore a few faults of the market that are leading causes for homelessness.

1

Capitalism's mantra of profit over people:
The prioritization of the value of a housing unit over fulfilling one's physiological needs is embedded into markets. The commodification of such basic resources, like housing, has resulted in its ability to be sold for profit, resulting in scarcity of affordable housing and a high homeless population.
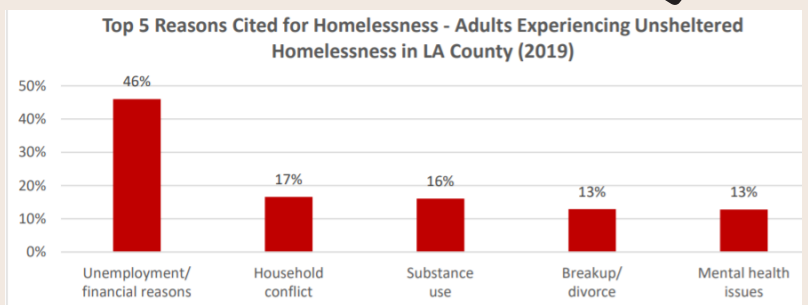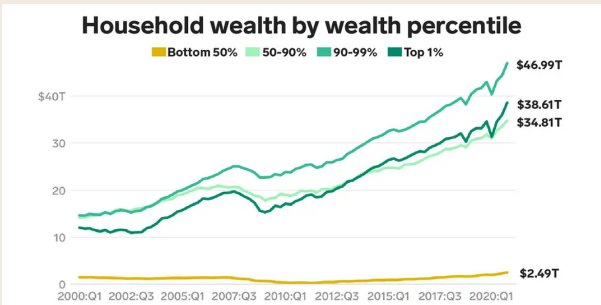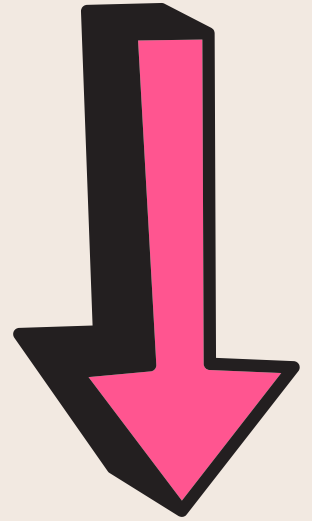
2

The cycle of unemployment and homelessness:
In midst of a pandemic, unemployment is a leading cause of homelessness. Being unhoused, one doesn't have an address to put down on an ID or job application and limited internet access. Or, without a job, one cannot show proof of income to get housing or might not be able to pay for housing.
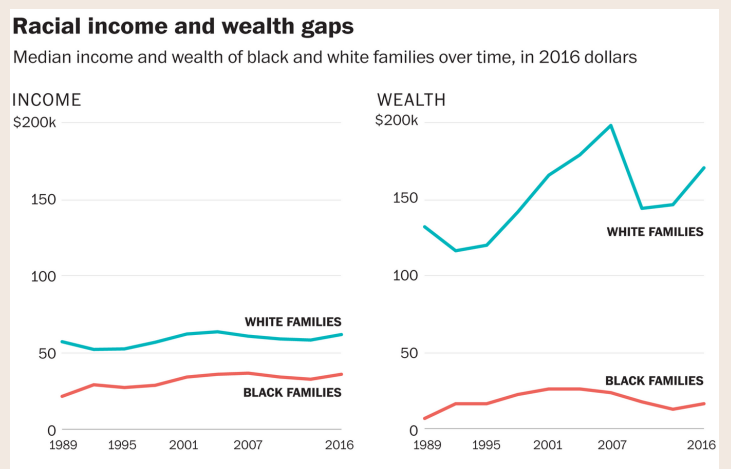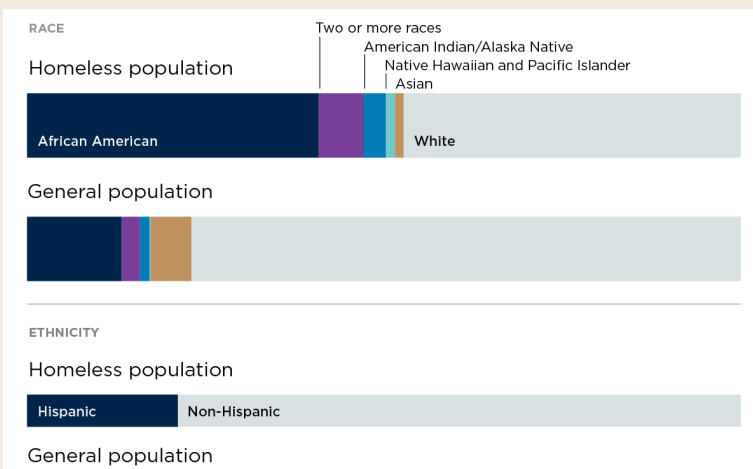
3

Wealth and housing hoarding:
The wealthiest 1% of people own an excessive amount of wealth in real estate, restricting opportunities for affordable housing to the bottom 50%. This overconsumption of resources is a critical problem keeping many from becoming homeowners. The wealth gap in the US continues to increase, showing how difficult it is for poor families to generate wealth and support themselves.

Household wealth by wealth percentile

Bottom 50% 50-90% 90-99% Top 1%

$40T

30

20

10

2000:Q1 2002:Q3 2005:Q1 2007:Q3 2010:Q1 2012:Q3 2015:Q1 2017:Q3 2020:Q1

$46.99T
$38.61T
$34.81T
$2.49T

Top 5 Reasons Cited for Homelessness - Adults Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness in LA County (2019)

50%	
40%	
30%	
20%	
10%	
0%	

46% Unemployment/financial reasons
17% Household conflict
16% Substance use
13% Breakup/divorce
13% Mental health issues

Who faces the most housing insecurity and why?

Disproportionate amounts of people facing homeless are black and brown people. These trends have remained consistent for decades with little to no improvement. Why? <u>Racism and classism cannot be separated from markets.</u> Black and brown people will always be hit the hardest from harmful effects of capitalism because of systemic racism. Decades of racist policy created to perpetuate poverty among black people has created a substantial racial wealth gap. This translates into housing insecurity as significant disparities between black and brown homeless people and their white counterparts.

RACE
Homeless population
African American   White
Two or more races
American Indian/Alaska Native
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
Asian
General population

ETHNICITY
Homeless population
Hispanic   Non-Hispanic
General population

Racial income and wealth gaps
Median income and wealth of black and white families over time, in 2016 dollars

INCOME
$200k

150

100

50

0
1989 1995 2001 2007 2016

WHITE FAMILIES
BLACK FAMILIES

WEALTH
$200k

150

100

50

0
1989 1995 2001 2007 2016

WHITE FAMILIES
BLACK FAMILIES

What can you do about the housing crisis?

1

Get involved legislatively! By participating in local politics and putting pressure on politicians, you can advocate for change within your community. Local governments have the power to implement rent control on housing units to ensure that landlords don't over-exploit their tenants, change zoning laws to accommodate multi-family housing, and increase shelters and permanent supportive housing units.

2

Actively break stereotypes to humanize homelessness and join organizations dedicated to support unhoused people. Challenging stigmas about homelessness and raising awareness about the housing crisis is something everyone can partake in.

3

Engaging in mutual aid, especially when you have wealth or benefit from systems of oppression, is an effective way to redistribute wealth within your own community.