

**A SURVEY OF RACIAL ATTITUDES  
IN  
CINCINNATI: A PRELIMINARY REPORT**

March, 2006

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The survey data referenced throughout the report comes from the University of Cincinnati's *Greater Cincinnati Survey Conducted by the Institute for Policy Research*

Funding support for this research was provided by:

The Stephen H. Wilder Foundation  
The Murray and Agnes Seanson Good Government Foundation  
The Greater Cincinnati Foundation

## **A SURVEY OF RACIAL ATTITUDES IN CINCINNATI**

A new survey of racial attitudes in Cincinnati reveals a significant gap between the views held by African American and white residents concerning race relations in this city. Conducted for Applied Information Resources by the University of Cincinnati's Institute for Policy Research, this random telephone survey of 537 Cincinnati residents included 203 African-Americans and 300 Whites. Coming four years after tensions between African-Americans and the police triggered inner-city disturbances, the survey's purpose is to measure the city's attitudes toward race relations and race-related issues.

Survey participants were asked to respond to a series of questions that were written to probe a variety of race-related subjects. The ten survey questions ranged from inquiries designed to gauge general perceptions about race relations to a request for information about personal examples of prejudicial treatment. Questions were also aimed at discovering the survey respondents' views on issues and trends in Cincinnati and on specific topics concerning the police and the media.

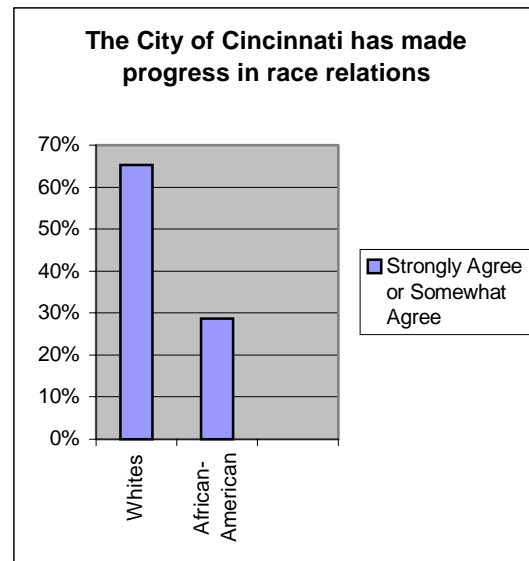
Questions were also selected because they matched up with questions from two existing national surveys. Thus, the results from this Cincinnati survey can be compared to these national studies.

### **Progress In Race Relations**

One of the largest gaps shows up in the response to the statement about racial progress in the city. "Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement. In recent years, the City of Cincinnati has made progress in improving race relations." 65.3% of the white respondents compared to 28.6% of the African-Americans strongly agreed or agreed somewhat with this statement.

Meanwhile, 68.7% of the African-American survey participants compared to 32.6% of the whites strongly disagreed or disagreed somewhat with it. Only 4.1% of the African-Americans strongly agreed that progress had been made, while 42.5% strongly disagreed. This compares to a 26.2% strong agreement and a 16.1% strong disagreement by whites to this assertion.

A review of the survey responses of African-American and whites according to classifications such as age, income, education, and gender reveal some interesting percentage variations. For instance, only 49.3% of white renters agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that progress had been made in recent years (71.6% of white home



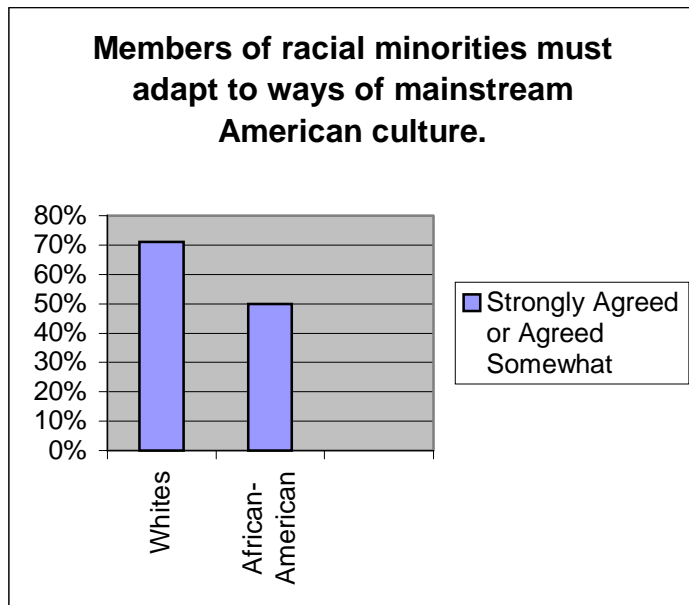
owners agreed strongly or somewhat). Meanwhile, a very slim majority of eighteen to twenty-nine year old white respondents agreed strongly or somewhat that progress had been made, and this contrasts with the large majority of participants over 65 years old who took that position.

A sizable minority of African-American respondents who earned less than \$15,000 or who reported less than a high school education answered that progress had been made in race relations. In contrast, very few African-Americans with incomes greater than \$60,000 and with college degrees indicated progress had occurred.

### **Cultural Assimilation Questions**

A second question that reveals a major difference of opinion between African-Americans and whites dealt with cultural assimilation. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement. “In order to have a smoothly functioning society, members of racial and ethnic minorities must adapt to ways of mainstream American culture.”

While 71% of the white participants agreed somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement, only 50% of the African-Americans who were queried strongly agreed or agreed somewhat. Conversely, 29% of the whites strongly disagreed or disagreed somewhat as compared to 49% of the African-Americans in the survey. Even more revealing is the fact that 30% of the black respondents as opposed to 15% of the whites strongly disagreed with the assertion about adapting to mainstream American culture.



Finally, 39% of the whites strongly agreed with the statement and 22% of the African-Americans strongly agreed with it.

In the analysis of group classifications, African-Americans who graduated from or attended college or who earned \$45,000 or more responded with solid majorities that disagreed with the statement. In contrast, African-Americans with high school degrees or less than a high school degree (or respondents who earned \$15,000 to \$30,000 or less than \$15,000 ) provided majority percentages that affirmed the statement.

Among the white participants, college graduates and 18 – 29 year olds provided the lowest majority percentages that agreed with the statement. These percentages, nevertheless, were solid majorities.

## **Cultural Assimilation Question II**

A second cultural assimilation question, however, showed a coming together of African-American and white opinions. Respondents were asked to react to the following statement. "Racial and ethnic minority groups will never really fit with American mainstream culture." While 92% of the whites surveyed disagreed somewhat or disagreed strongly to this statement, 77% of the African-Americans responded the same way. In the strongly disagree category, whites registered 60% and African-Americans totaled 47%. Only 5% of the white residents agreed somewhat or strongly agreed, and 22% of the blacks surveyed fell in this range. While 10% of the African-Americans strongly agreed with the statement, only 1% of the whites gave that response.

Although African-Americans of all classifications provided solid majorities that disagreed with this statement, a sizable minority of black respondents over 65 years of age and college graduates voiced agreement with it. Broken down in their various categories, white survey participants offered few discrepancies worth noting. White respondents who earned less than \$15,000 registered the highest percentage that agreed with the statement.

## **Cultural Assimilation Question III**

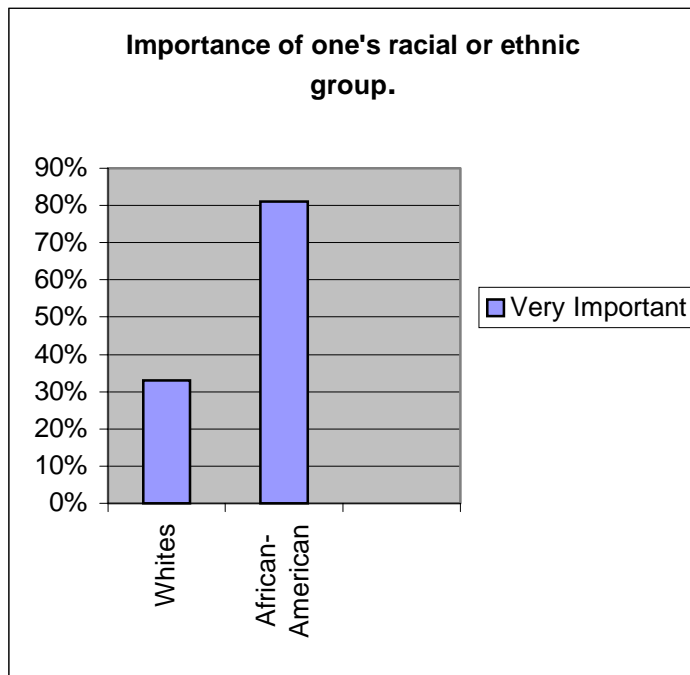
A third assimilation question also produced similar responses from the African-Americans and whites in the survey. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with this statement. "If we want to help create a harmonious society, we must recognize that each racial and ethnic group has the right to maintain its own traditions." Ninety-five percent (95%) of the white respondents strongly agreed or agreed somewhat, while 91% of the African-Americans did likewise.

When separating out the "strongly agree" responses, the percentages are 70% (African-American) and 62% (white). This agreement by large majorities of both black and white respondents translates into low percentages of disagreement (5% by whites and 9% by African-Americans).

With overwhelming majorities of white and black survey participants agreeing with the right to maintain one's racial and ethnic traditions, the only significant discrepancies between the various sub-groups appear in the "strongly agree" or "agree somewhat" responses.

## **The Importance of One's Racial or Ethnic Group**

A question posed about the personal importance of one's racial or ethnic group enlisted a significant difference of opinion between white and African-American survey respondents. The question was: "When you think about yourself, how important is your racial or ethnic group membership to the sense of who you are?"



Blacks by a percentage of 81% said that their racial or ethnic group membership was “very important” to them, and another 14% said that it was “somewhat important” (95%). Meanwhile, 33% of the white respondents answered “very important” to this question, while 35 % said that it was “somewhat important” (68%). Thus, only 5% of African-Americans replied that it was “not very important” or “not at all important,” compared to 32% of the white participants.

Among black survey participants, only minor differences in percentages exist

when reviewing the group classifications. A few differences are worth mentioning among the white sub-groups. Just under 45% of the white males answered “not very important” and “not at all important” as opposed to 17.5% of the females. Meanwhile, a large minority of respondents from the age of 18 to 29 replied either “not very important” or “not at all important.”

### **Fair Treatment Questions: The Media and the Police**

The Cincinnati residents who took part in the survey were asked a question about how they felt the media and the police treat whites, African-Americans, and Hispanic. The question was framed in two parts. “Next, I’d like to ask you about how you feel Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics are treated. Do you feel the opportunity for fair treatment by the media is equal for Blacks and Whites. (Then Hispanics and Whites.)” The same question was then asked with the police substituted for the media.

Responses to these questions about treatment by the media and the police show major differences between African-American and white Cincinnatians. Only 15.2% of the African-Americans surveyed said that they felt that blacks and whites received equal treatment by the media. Meanwhile, 44.4% of the white respondents stated that African-Americans and whites received equal treatment. Thus, 78.5% of the black participants felt that African-Americans were treated less equally than whites, as opposed to the white percentage in that category of 53%.

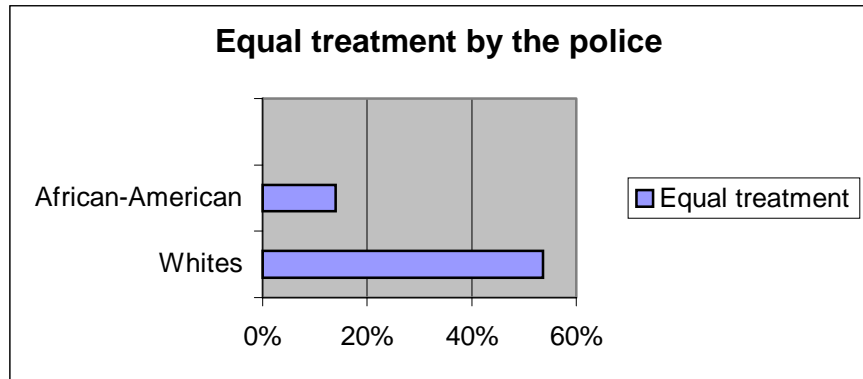
African-Americans in the highest income categories and with the highest levels of formal education registered the highest percentages of survey participants who said that blacks did not receive equal treatment with whites from the news media. Nearly all the

participants with college degrees and with incomes above \$45,000 answered “unequal treatment.” In contrast, African-Americans with less than a high school education and who earned less than \$15,000 opted in higher numbers that the media provides equal treatment.

Among white participants, a majority of college graduates and people who attended college recorded a response that unfair treatment existed. Meanwhile, respondents who were 65 years and older and those making less than \$15,000 a year gave the highest percentages indicating “fair treatment.”

**Fair Treatment By The Police**

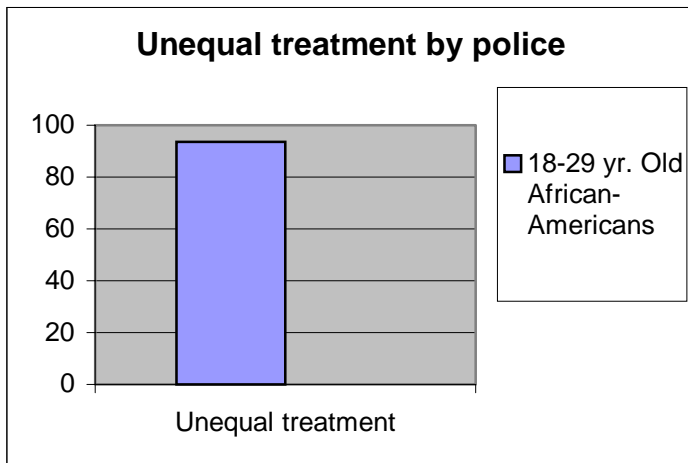
An even wider gap emerged when the survey participants were asked about equal treatment by the police. While 53.6% of the white respondents said that black and white citizens received equal treatment from the police, only 13.9% of the African-Americans gave that answer.



This means that

81.6% of the African-Americans and 42.5% of the whites replied that black residents received treatment from the police that is less fair than whites. The percentages concerning equal treatment for Hispanics were very similar to the percentages comparing the treatment of African-Americans compared to whites.

Although percentages recorded for “unequal treatment by the police” are very high



among all African-American classifications, 18-29 year olds scored the highest unequal percentage. Nearly every respondent in this age group answered that unequal treatment prevailed. In contrast, African-Americans 65 years and older, people with less than a high school education, and people who earned less than \$15,000 recorded the highest “equal” percentage. Slightly more than one/fifth of the respondents

from these categories answered that treatment is equal. Finally, African-Americans earning between \$45,000 - \$60,000 recorded the second highest “unequal” percentage.

A review of the same classifications for white survey participants reveals some interesting differences. Majorities of whites with less than a high school education, renters, and people in the lowest income brackets said that African-Americans did not receive equal treatment from the police. Meanwhile, solid majorities of white males and respondents who were 65 years and older replied that treatment is equal.

This large difference in answers concerning treatment by the police is significant in Cincinnati. Four years after the conflicts with the police that led to the 2001 disturbances, white citizens tend to give the police the benefit of the doubt, while a large majority of African-Americans feel that the police provide unequal treatment to their racial group. This fact probably correlates to the wide gap in the perceptions of blacks and whites concerning racial progress in this city.

### **A Questions Related to Specific Prejudicial Treatment**

Survey participants were asked to cite incidents of prejudicial treatment toward them in the thirty days before they were interviewed. “Can you think of any occasion in the last 30 days when you felt you were treated unfairly in the following places or situations because of your race or ethnicity. In a store where you were shopping. At your place of work. With police or courts. In any other situation.”

The positive finding in calculating the results from this question is the relatively small number of incidents of unfair treatment that were cited. Nevertheless, African-Americans reported many more incidents than the white survey respondents.

Eighteen point three percent (18.3%) of the African-Americans compared to 5.9% of the whites surveyed cited an incident of unfair treatment in a store where they were shopping. Meanwhile, 17.5% of the African-Americans and 3.1% of the whites cited unfair treatment at their place of work.

Incidents of unfair treatment shrank to 9.5% by African-Americans and 6.5% by whites when dealing with the courts or the police. This smaller percentage may be due to the fact that most of the respondents probably did not have contact with the courts or the police during the thirty-day period prior to the survey.

Finally, 11.8% of the black participants and 7.6% of the whites reported unfair treatment in an “other situation.” A large majority of the incidents in other situations cited by whites occurred “in public/ on the street/in the community,” while the other situations acknowledged by African-Americans were more evenly divided between restaurants, government offices, polling places on Election Day, and in public/on the street/ and in community.

When reviewing the group classifications in terms of unfair treatment during the last thirty days, African-Americans in income brackets over \$30,000 and blacks with some

college or a college degree reported percentages of unfair treatment in a store that exceeded the 18.3% for all African-Americans surveyed. On the other hand, black respondents earning less than \$15,000, high school graduates, and those with less than a high school degree provided the lower percentages than the 18.3%.

Examining unfair treatment at work, African-Americans earning between \$30,000 to \$45,000 and those with some college education reported higher incidences of unfair treatment at work than the average percentage of 17.5%. In contrast, a very small number of blacks earning less than \$15,000 said they experienced such treatment.

Among white respondents, those earning between \$45,000 and \$60,000 and those with some college said they received unfair treatment in a store in higher numbers than the white average of 5.9%. The percentage differences between white categories when measuring unfair treatment at the workplace were insignificant.

A review of who experienced unfair treatment by the police or courts offers some interesting data. Whites with less than a high school degree recorded the highest percentage of unfair treatment among both white and African-American group classifications. Young adults – both white and black – followed with the next highest percentages of unfair treatment, and African-American and white males also gave higher responses than the black and white averages.

### **A Question of Closeness**

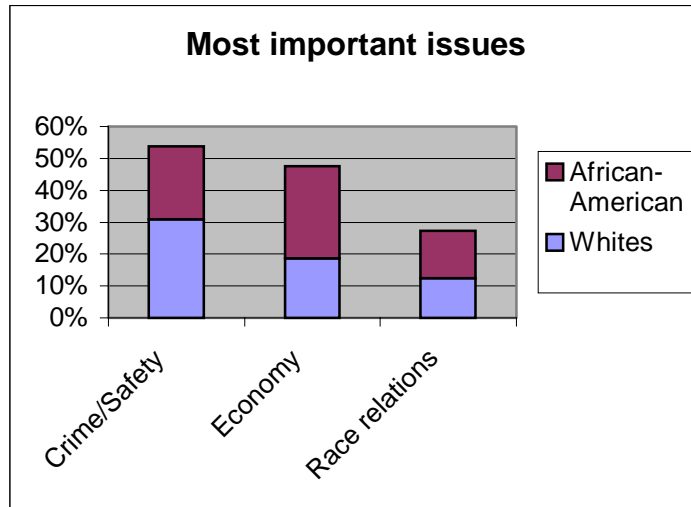
A question was posed during the telephone survey about how close the participant felt to a series of groups that included Whites, Blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Muslims, Gays, and Lesbians. “Here are some groups that have been in the news. Please tell me how close you feel to each of them .....very close, close, neutral, far, very far, or you don’t know enough about the group to say?” While black and white respondents said that they were closest to their own group (87% and 74% respectively), 55% of the whites surveyed reported being very close to African-Americans, and 51% of African-Americans cited being very close to whites. These percentages denoting closeness between African-Americans and whites were higher than for any other groups in the list.

African-Americans from 18 to 29 years of age record a greater closeness to whites than the average among black survey respondents. Slightly more than two-thirds of the survey participants from this category said “close” or “very close.”

A review of the various classifications of white survey participants showed no significant numerical differences in the responses to this question.

## **Most Important Issues Facing Greater Cincinnati**

Finally, survey participants were asked to name the most important issue facing the Cincinnati region. “There are many issues facing the Greater Cincinnati region today. In general, what do you think is the most important issue facing the Greater Cincinnati region today?”



By a percentage of 31%, white participants chose “crime/safety” as their top issue, while this issue ranked second among African-Americans with a percentage of 22.8%. The top issue selected by African-Americans was “the economy,” as 28.9% of the black respondents named it. Meanwhile, 18.7% of the whites surveyed gave “the economy” as their choice,

which made it the second ranked issue of this group.

The issue ranked third by both African-Americans and whites was “race relations.” Fourteen point seven percent (14.7%) of black and 12.5% of white respondents named this issue.

Significantly, the fourth ranked issue among African-Americans (7.9%) was “police relations,” while only 2.9% of whites chose it. Whites opted for “education/schools” as their fourth issue with a percentage 12.5%. African-Americans made “education/schools” their fifth issue (5.9%), and the fifth issue for whites was “government/city officials” (5%). “Health care” received a sixth place finish among black respondents (5%), but only 1.4% of whites selected “health care.”

Among white survey participants, gender produced a significant difference in rating the issues. While white women named “crime/safety” as their top issue, white males made it their second choice. The males acknowledged “the economy” as the most important issue. Meanwhile, whites with less than a high school education and those earning less than \$15,000 considered “crime/safety” far and away the most important issue. The percentages opting for “crime/safety” diminished as income and education levels increased.

Black males named “race relations” as the top issue with the economy and crime/safety ranking second and third respectively. In contrast, black women chose the economy as most important, and crime/safety emerged as the second most important issue. Race relations received the highest percentages among African-Americans earning more than \$60,000 and those who were 65 years or older.

Police relations received a higher percentage among some of the African-American group-classifications than it did when all the African-American participants were calculated (7.9%). For instance, it received higher percentages from survey participants earning more than \$60,000, homeowners, and respondents in the age bracket from eighteen to twenty-nine years.

## **CONCLUSION**

What conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this racial attitudes survey? Are there any lessons to be learned from the collected information? What do the responses of white and black Cincinnatians reveal about race relations in general, and more importantly, what do these responses say about race relations in Cincinnati?

Certainly the analysis shows significant differences in the perceptions of white and black residents. These differences come out in the responses to generic questions about racial/ethnic viewpoints, but they emerge even more strongly from the results of questions that relate to life in Cincinnati.

The largest gap between whites and African-Americans shows up in their differing assessments of “fair treatment” by the Cincinnati Police. After the recent history of bad relations between the police and African-Americans that culminated in the fatal shooting of Timothy Thomas by a Cincinnati Police officer and the April disturbances of 2001, this finding is not surprising. Despite reform efforts such as the Collaborative/DOJ Agreement, the fact that so many African-Americans perceive unequal treatment by the Police indicates that more work still needs to be done in this area.

Although a similar gap exists in terms of perceptions by black and white residents concerning equal treatment by the media, it is important to note that a slight majority of white respondents said that the media does not provide equal treatment to African-Americans. Further research is needed to discover the reasons behind these views.

Black and white residents sharply divide on the question of whether Cincinnati has made progress in improving race relations in recent years. While almost two-thirds of the white respondents answered that progress has occurred, over two-thirds of the African-Americans disagreed. Community leaders working to bridge Cincinnati’s racial divide dare not ignore this significant gap.

When asked to cite specific examples of unfair treatment “in the last thirty days,” African-American survey participants provided significantly larger numbers of citations than their white counterparts. Stores and the workplace were the primary places where unfair treatment occurred, and African-Americans in higher education and income brackets reported these incidents in greater numbers. The good news emerging from this question was the relatively small number of cases of unfair treatment.

A significant difference shows up in one of the questions dealing with cultural assimilation. While 71% of the white respondents agreed that “a smoothly functioning

society” required ethnic and racial minorities to adapt to mainstream American culture, only 50% of the African-American survey participants recorded that point of view.

Although the remaining survey questions prompted different responses from white and black Cincinnati residents, the differences are less pronounced. In fact, several questions show a coming together of the opinions of African-American and white Cincinnatians.

For instance, two cultural assimilation questions reveal this serendipity of opinion. Large majorities of both white and black respondents disagreed with the statement that racial and ethnic minorities will never fit in with American mainstream culture. Further, 95% and 91% of white and African-American survey participants agreed that ethnic and racial groups should have the right to maintain their own traditions.

Two final points need to be made in this conclusion. First of all, the researchers hope that the survey findings will not be viewed in a negative light as further bad news about Cincinnati. The authors offer the results as information that should be used by community leaders and concerned citizens who are involved in ongoing activities and projects to improve race relations in this city.

Secondly, surveys such as this one can supply large samples of public opinion. However, limitations of both methodology and scope prevent random telephone surveys from providing the reasons that lie behind the opinions. In order to go beyond those limitations, a further step of this project is to add meaning and context to the survey results through a series of focus groups and interviews with African-American and white Cincinnatians. This process is moving forward, and a review of this research will be included in a final report.