



## ISSUE BRIEF

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# COLLECTIVE REMEMBRANCE AND DETROITERS' VIEWS TOWARD RACIAL INEQUITY

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DETROIT METRO AREA  
COMMUNITIES STUDY

## OVERVIEW

This report is part of a series of reports from the [University of Michigan's Center for Racial Justice](#) (CRJ) that explores Detroiters' attitudes toward reparations and racial inequity with data from a recent survey of the [Detroit Metro Area Communities Study](#) (DMACS). [The first report](#) in this series showed how a political candidate's support for reparations could mobilize eligible voters in Detroit. This report explores the relationship between Detroiters' perceptions of racial inequity and levels of support for reparations for Black Americans.

The survey was fielded between June 16, 2022, and August 26, 2022, and captures the views of a representative sample of 2,339 Detroit residents. Results have been weighted to reflect the population of the City of Detroit. You can find [all CRJ research here](#) and [full results from DMACS surveys here](#).

## KEY FINDINGS

- A majority of Detroit residents support some form of reparations (63%) and more than two-thirds of Detroiters (70%) say addressing racial and ethnic inequality should be a high policy priority for elected officials.
- There is a strong link between awareness of racial inequity and support for reparative policies. Detroiters who agree that the legacy of slavery and discrimination continues to affect Black Americans today are more likely to support reparations (73%) compared to those who disagree with this statement (30%). Similarly, Detroiters who believe the average Black person is worse off than the average White person in terms of income, wealth, and overall financial situation are more likely to support reparations (71%) compared to Detroiters who do not hold this belief.
- Opposition to reparations is not necessarily the same as opposition to addressing racial and ethnic inequality. Thirteen percent of Detroiters oppose reparations, yet 41% of those who oppose reparations still say addressing racial and ethnic inequality should be a high policy priority for elected officials.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the median White household in the U.S. had about *eight times* the wealth of the median Black household – \$184,000 compared to \$23,000, respectively. Economists have highlighted that these disparities are far from new and deeply rooted in slavery and discriminatory policies. Specifically, “[l]arge racial disparities in wealth holding began to decline after slavery ended. The decline slowed in the segregation era, accelerated in the civil rights era, and has reversed since the 1980s.”<sup>1</sup> While wealth refers to the amount a household owns, minus what they owe,<sup>2</sup> the racial gap in household income is also quite substantial: the median Black household had an annual income of about \$46,000 in 2020, compared to \$75,000 for White households.<sup>3</sup> The magnitude and persistence of these differences in earnings and wealth highlights the enduring consequences of America's racially stratified society.<sup>4</sup>

The lasting impacts of Black enslavement and discriminatory practices have led to calls for reparative policies. Last year, the Detroit City Council, like a handful of state and local governments across the country, created a [reparations task force](#) to help determine how to address the legacy of systemic racism. At the same time that there has been growing momentum to implement reparative policies, there has also been a rise in [legislative bans on teaching the history of U.S. racism](#) (including books and concepts like critical race theory). Both of these issues have sparked national debates about how to think about, teach, and resolve historical and contemporary



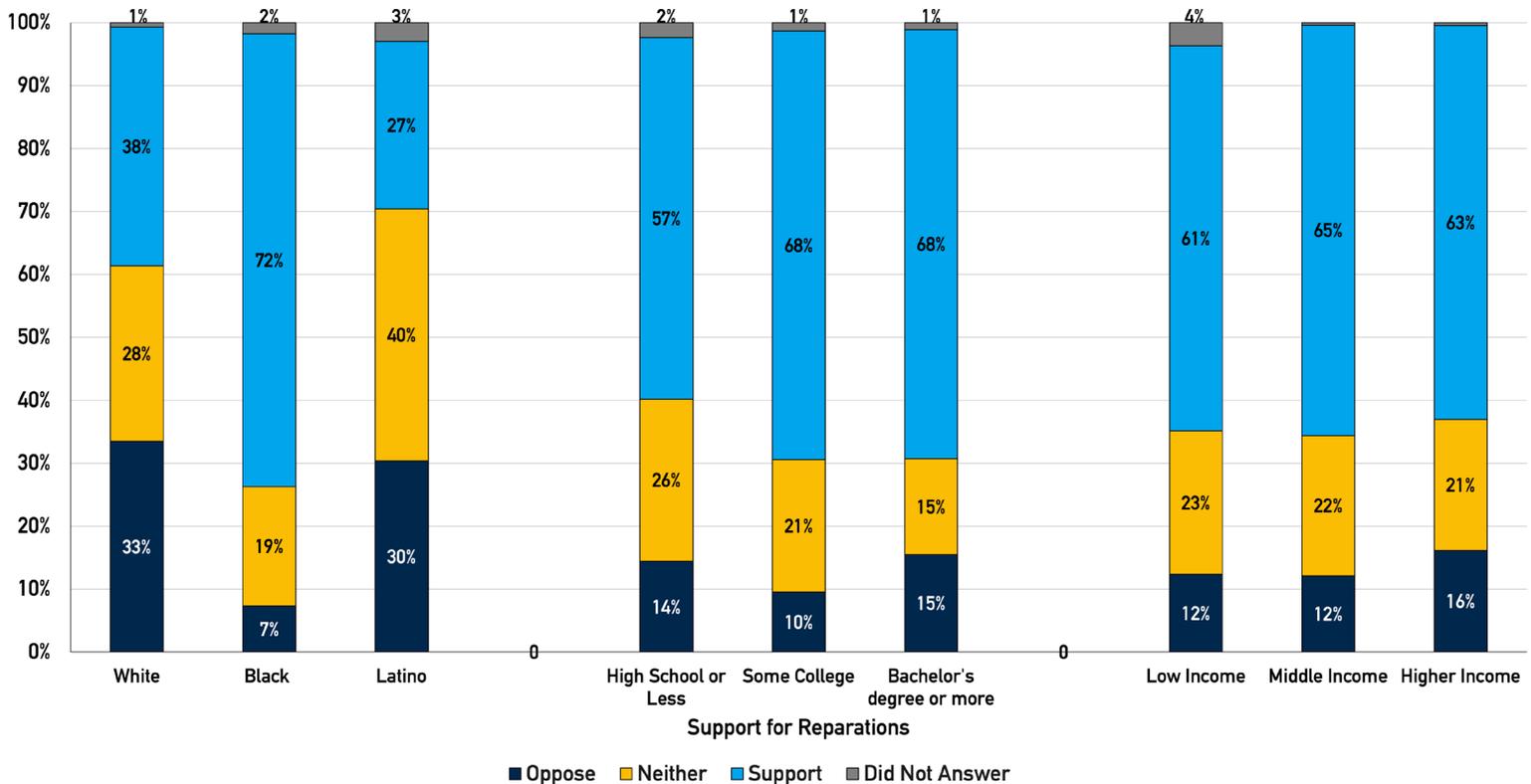
injustices. Experts emphasize that [how the public collectively remembers and understands its history](#) shapes what it imagines as appropriate for redress. Perceptions of the history of Black oppression and ongoing inequalities are therefore critical to explore, including how these beliefs relate to support for policies that address racial inequity, like reparations. This report explores this relationship.

Although most Detroiters support reparations and view policies that address racial inequity as a high priority, there is significant variation in Detroiters' level of support for reparations based on their perceptions of racial inequity. These findings underscore the stakes of current debates about how U.S. history is presented and understood.

## DETROITERS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT REPARATIVE POLICIES.

- The majority of Detroiters (63%) support some form of payment to Black Americans to “counter the lasting impacts of slavery and discriminatory policies,” compared to 22% who say they “neither oppose nor support” and 13% who oppose such payments.<sup>5,6</sup>
- While the vast majority of the city's Black residents support reparations (72%), 38% of the city's White residents support reparations, and 27% of Latino Detroiters support reparations.
- Support for reparations tends to be the same across income and education levels, though Detroiters with a high school education or less (57%) are less likely to support reparations than those with some college or more (68%).

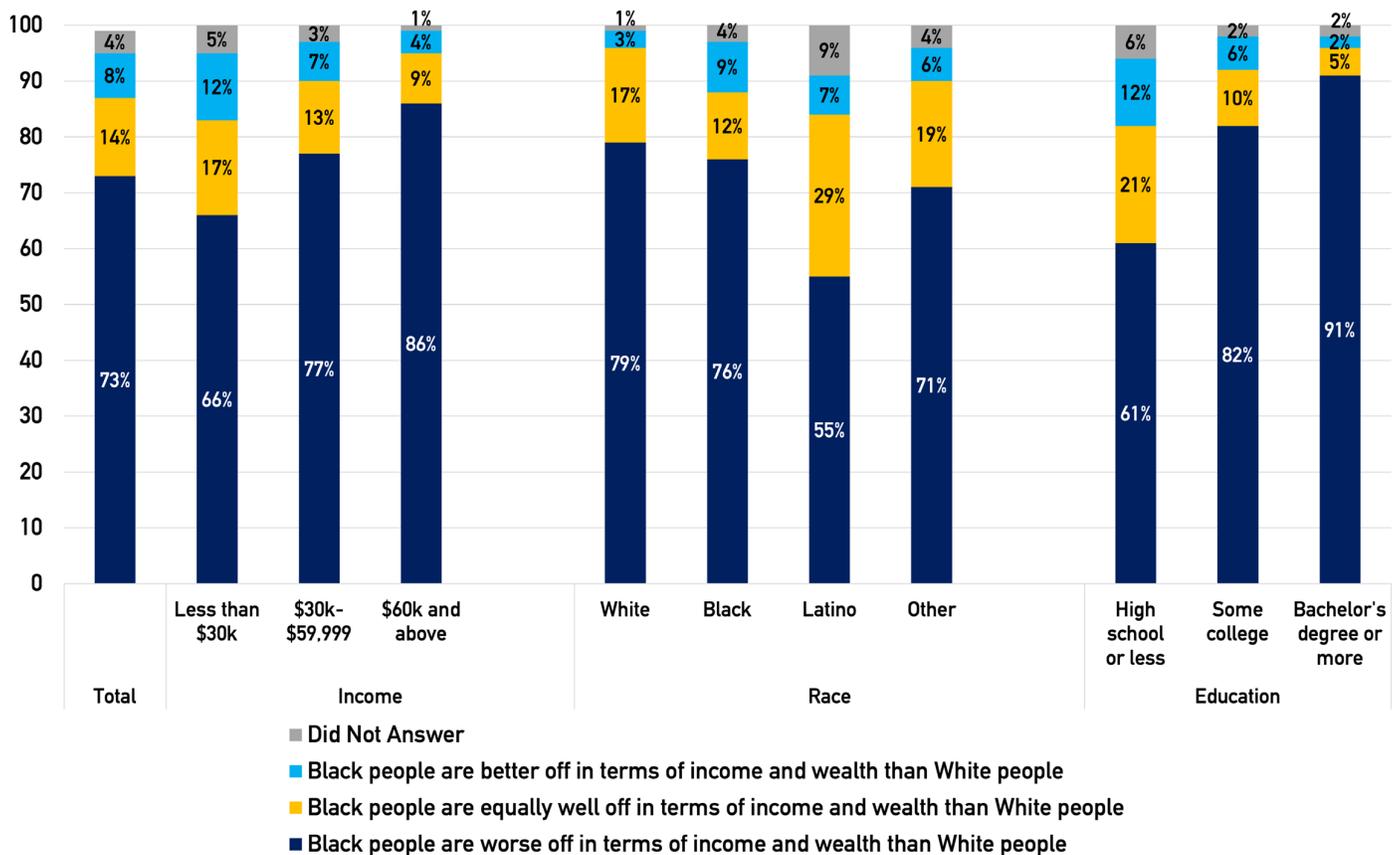
Figure 1: Support for Reparations by Ethnoracial Identity, Education, and Income



# THE VAST MAJORITY OF DETROITERS SEE BLACK PEOPLE AS ECONOMICALLY WORSE OFF THAN WHITE PEOPLE, BUT PERCEPTIONS VARY BY ETHNORACIAL IDENTITY, EDUCATION, AND INCOME.

- Approximately 3 in 4 Detroiters (73%) believe the average Black person is worse off today in terms of income and wealth than the average White person.<sup>7</sup>
- Lower-income Detroiters are the least likely of all income groups to believe the average Black person is worse off in terms of income and wealth than the average White person.
  - Sixty-six percent of Detroiters with an annual household income of \$30,000 or less believed the financial situation of Black people is worse than that of Whites, compared to 77% of Detroiters with an annual household between \$30,000 and \$60,000, and 86% of Detroiters with an annual household income greater than or equal to \$60,000.
- Detroiters with more formal education are the most likely of all education groups to say the average Black person is worse off in terms of income and wealth than the average White person.
  - Nine in 10 Detroiters (91%) with at least a bachelor’s degree or more believed the financial situation of Black people is worse than that of Whites, compared to 82% of Detroiters with some college or an associate degree, and 61% of Detroiters with a high school degree or less.
- Among Detroiters, Black and White residents were nearly equally as likely to say Black people experience worse financial situations than White people. However, Black residents are significantly more likely to view the average Black person as **better off** in terms of income and wealth compared to the average White person.
  - Nine percent of Black Detroiters believed the financial situation of Black people is worse than that of Whites, compared to 3% of White Detroiters, 7% of Latino Detroiters, and 6% of Detroiters who identify as some other race.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 2. Perceptions of Economic Inequality Between Black and White People, by Income, Ethnoracial Identity, and Educational Attainment**



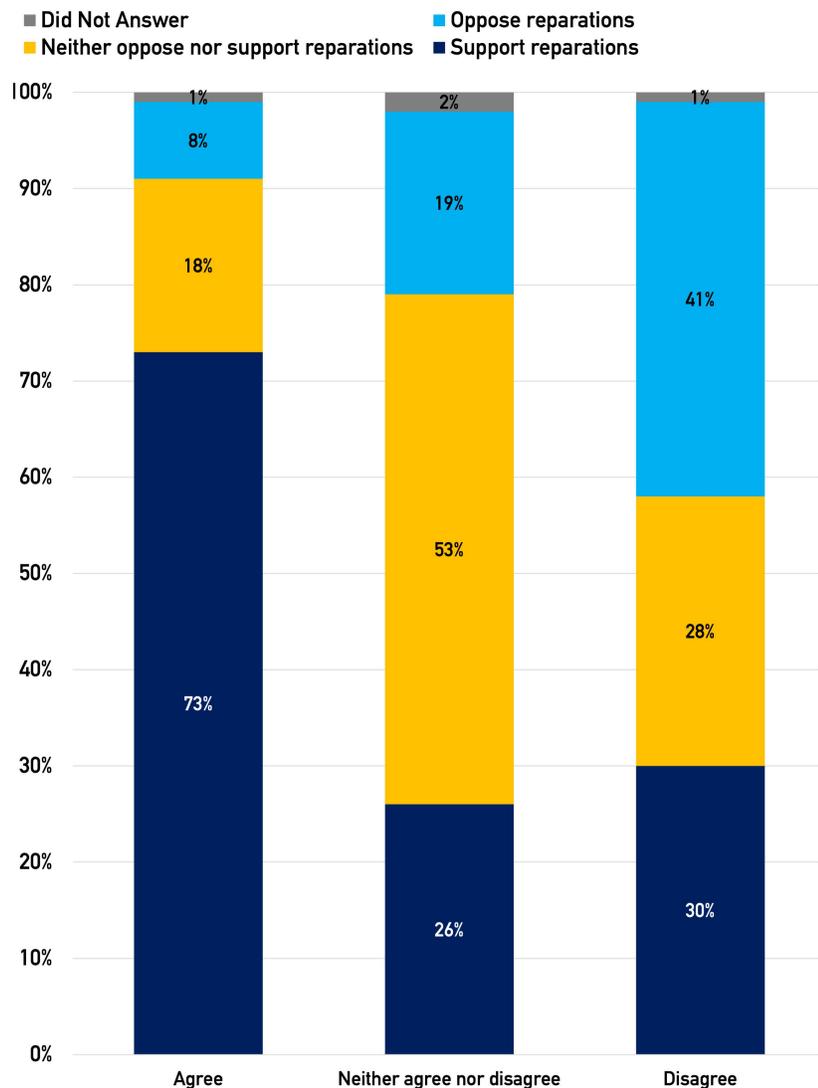
- Compared to the city’s Black and White residents, Latino Detroiters were the least likely to say that the average Black person was worse off in terms of income and wealth compared to the average White person.
  - The lower perceptions of economic inequality among Latinos may be driven by foreign-born Latinos, who tend to be less familiar with U.S. racial dynamics and more likely to believe in American ideals of meritocracy relative to U.S.-born Latinos.<sup>9</sup> Forty percent of Latino

respondents to our survey identified as foreign-born. Relative to U.S.-born respondents, foreign-born respondents were significantly less likely to believe the average Black person is worse off in terms of income and wealth compared to the average White person. Seventy-five percent of U.S.-born respondents believed the average Black person was worse off, compared to 50% of foreign-born respondents.

## DETROITERS WHO BELIEVE THERE IS ECONOMIC INEQUALITY BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE PEOPLE TODAY ARE MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT REPARATIONS.

- Detroiters who believe the average Black person is worse off than the average White person in terms of income and wealth are more likely to support reparative policies. Seven in 10 Detroiters (71%) who believe there are economic disparities between Black and White Americans support reparations, while 19% of this same group neither oppose nor support reparations, and 9% oppose reparations.
  - By comparison, four in 10 Detroiters (41%) who believe the average Black person is **better off** in terms of income and wealth than the average White person support reparations, while 28% of this same group neither oppose nor support reparations, and 31% oppose reparations.
  - Thirty-eight percent of Detroiters who believe the average Black person is **equally well off** in terms of income and wealth as the average White person support reparations, while 35% of this same group neither support nor oppose reparations, and 25% oppose reparations.

Figure 3. Reparations support by beliefs about the legacy of slavery



Level of agreement to the following statement: The legacy of slavery and discrimination against Black people continues to affect Black people in American society

## A HEIGHTENED AWARENESS OF THE HISTORICAL IMPACTS OF SLAVERY AND DISCRIMINATION IS LINKED TO HIGHER SUPPORT FOR REPARATIONS AMONG DETROITERS.<sup>10</sup>

- Overall, most Detroiters believe America’s history of slavery and discrimination continues to impact the experiences and opportunities of Black Americans today. Nearly 8 in 10 Detroiters (78%) agree with the statement that “the legacy of slavery and discrimination against Black people continues to affect Black people in American society.” Nine percent of Detroiters disagree, and another 10% neither agree nor disagree.<sup>11</sup>
- Approximately 3 in 4 Detroiters (73%) who think the legacy of slavery and discrimination against Black people continues to affect Black people in American society support reparations. By contrast, just 26% of Detroiters who are ambivalent about whether there are ongoing effects

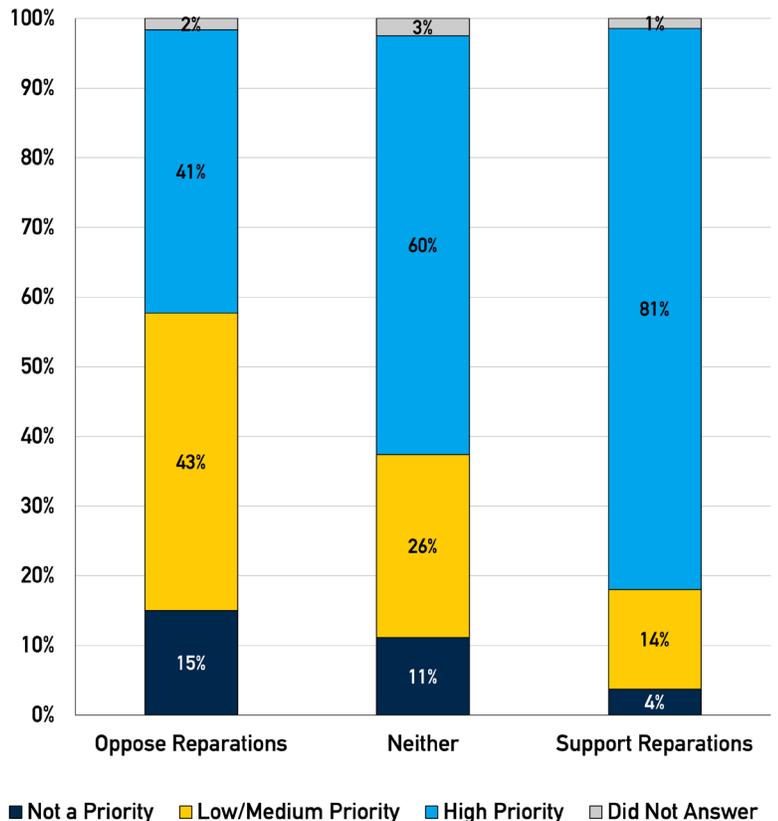
of slavery or racial discrimination in America support reparations. Interestingly, just under one-third (30%) of Detroiters who do not believe the legacy of slavery and discrimination against Black people continues to affect Black people in American society still support reparations.

- Forty-one percent of Detroiters who disagree with the statement that “the legacy of slavery and discrimination against Black people continues to affect Black people in American society” oppose reparations. By comparison, only 8% of Detroit residents who agree that the legacy of slavery and discrimination against Black people continues to affect Black people in American society oppose reparations.

## THE MAJORITY OF DETROITERS SUPPORT REPARATIONS, BUT EVEN THOSE WHO DO NOT SUPPORT IT SAY THAT ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUALITY SHOULD BE A HIGH POLICY PRIORITY.<sup>12, 13</sup>

- While 13% of Detroiters oppose reparations, more than 4 in 10 (41%) of these Detroiters still say addressing racial and ethnic inequality should be a high policy priority. Among Detroiters who oppose reparations, 43% say addressing racial inequality should be a medium or low policy priority, while 15% say it should not be a policy priority.
- Among Detroiters who say they neither support nor oppose reparations, 60% say addressing racial and ethnic inequality should be a high policy priority. Meanwhile, 26% say it is a medium or low policy priority and 11% say it should not be a priority.
- The vast majority of Detroiters who support reparations say addressing racial and ethnic inequality should be a high policy priority (81%). Meanwhile, 14% of Detroiters who support reparations say addressing racial and ethnic inequality should be a medium or low priority, while 4% say it should not be a priority.

Figure 4. Attitudes toward Racial Inequality as a Policy Priority, by Views on Reparations



## ENDNOTES

- 1 Maas, S. 2022. [Exploring 160 Years of the Black-White Wealth Gap](#). *The NBER Digest*, 8.
- 2 For additional resources on studies measuring the Black-White gap in earnings and wealth, see [Has Wealth Inequality in America Changed over Time? Here Are Key Statistics](#).
- 3 See [Racial Inequality in the United States](#) for a deeper dive into racial disparities in household income.
- 4 For more information on studies measuring stalled progress in closing the Black-White wealth gap, see [How the racial wealth gap has evolved—and why it persists](#).
- 5 Two percent of all Detroiters did not report their views on reparations.
- 6 Two percent of all Detroiters did not report their views toward policies that address racial and ethnic inequality.
- 7 We collapse respondents who said that “Black people are a lot better off” and “somewhat better off” in terms of income and wealth relative to White people into the single category “Black people are better off.” We collapse those who said “Black people are a lot worse off” and “somewhat worse off in terms of income and wealth than White people” into a single category “Black people are worse off.” Four percent of Detroiters did not report their views on economic inequality between Black and White Americans.
- 8 Detroiters who self-identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin are categorized in the “Latino” category in this report. Detroiters who self-identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multi-racial, or a racial category not listed in the survey, are collapsed into the “Other” race category.
- 9 For more research on how nativity shapes beliefs and attitudes in the United States, see Wiley, S., Deaux, K. and Hagelskamp, C., 2012. Born in the USA: How immigrant generation shapes meritocracy and its relation to ethnic identity and collective action. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(2), p.171.
- 10 In this report, we define respondents' views toward the historical legacy of racial inequity as their level of agreement with the following statement: “The legacy of slavery and discrimination against Black people continues to affect Black people in American society.”
- 11 We collapse respondents who said they “strongly” and “somewhat” agree into a single category “agree.” We collapse respondents who said they “strongly” and “somewhat” disagree into a single category “disagree.” We retain the category “neither agree nor disagree” as its own category.
- 12 Two percent of all Detroiters did not report their beliefs about the legacy of slavery.
- 13 We collapse respondents who said addressing racial and ethnic inequality should be a “low policy priority” and “medium policy priority” into the single category “low/medium priority.” Two percent of Detroiters did not report their views on addressing racial and ethnic inequality as a policy priority.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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For more information on DMACS, please contact Sharon Sand, DMACS project manager, at [slsand@umich.edu](mailto:slsand@umich.edu).

**Learn more at [www.detroiturvey.umich.edu](http://www.detroiturvey.umich.edu)**

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