

VISION: Growing Healthy Communities



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Assessment, Evaluation and Strategic Planning

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INTRODUCTION

The Skagit County Population Health Trust (PHT) was established in 2015 to promote collaboration among the various organizations and agencies in Skagit County to assure a healthier community. The primary responsibility of the PHT is to advise the Skagit County Board of Health on issues that can improve the health and wellness of all. Since it was established, the PHT has engaged in a variety of activities to enhance member knowledge and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues that impact the health of Skagitonians.



One of the first steps on this journey was the development of a PHT equity vision statement and commitments to health equity. Trust members also participated in numerous learning activities, including presentations from and conversations with representatives from underserved groups and training on specific DEI topics such as LGBTQ+ issues and Targeted Universalism.



The Community Health Assessment (CHA) conducted in 2020-2021 focused on the needs of the county's most underserved and vulnerable populations. Representatives from these key populations were interviewed as the first step in the CHA to help develop a CHA framework focused on health equity issues and addressing disparate health outcomes. These representatives later met with the PHT to share their stories and concerns and to dialog with PHT members.

The result of the CHA - and subsequent PHT discussions about its findings - was the 2022 COVID Recovery Plan (https://bit.ly/2022RecoveryPlan).



The 2022 COVID Recovery Plan includes goals and objectives to address health issues related to equity, housing, access to care, behavioral health, child care, economic and financial security, and food security. The PHT intentionally included a separate equity goal and objectives but also embedded equity into objectives in each goal area. Several cross-over strategies emerged that had equity as the foundational principle. This approach to addressing DEI was also used successfully in the development of PHT's First 1,000 Days Plan for maternal and child health created in collaboration with community partners (https://bit.ly/First1000DaysPlan).

The very first cross-over strategy in the COVID Recovery Plan was to "identify appropriate equity training and make that training available to all Skagit County health care providers, behavioral health providers and the community at large."

As we began to grapple with what the training would look like and the logistics of making the training widely available to providers and the community in general, the PHT Steering Committee embraced the notion of learning from the PHT members who had started their DEI journey. We would then share those stories and lessons learned with the community. This report is the culmination of that work and includes the experiences and insights from PHT members as well as a wealth of resources provided by them. We hope you find this information insightful and useful.

"It is critical to include and elevate the voices and experiences of those who have historically and currently been the most marginalized so that the transformed system is one that is established with and for them."

ISMAEL VIVANCO

SUPERINTENDENT MOUNT VERNON SCHOOLS

PHT EQUITY VISION AND COMMITMENTS

OUR VISION FOR HEALTH EQUITY IN SKAGIT COUNTY

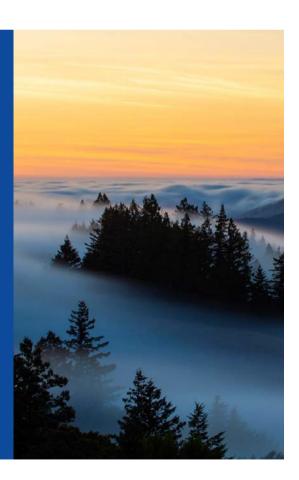
Health Equity means that everyone in our community has a fair and just opportunity for healthy living. This requires that we address and remove barriers to individual and community health that arise from poverty and discrimination (whether based on race, education, gender identity, sexual orientation, job status, housing status, or disability) that result in compromised health and powerlessness, and are often derived from lack of access to:

- good jobs with fair pay
- quality education
- healthy housing
- nutritious food
- safe environments and active lifestyles
- quality health care

We are especially committed to eliminating disparities in health for excluded or marginalized groups within our community.

HEALTH EQUITY IN OUR WORK

The PHT will use Health Equity to frame all aspects of our work and will encourage our partners and stakeholders to do likewise. Each of us assumes responsibility to illuminate and address disparities within our individual and collective work. In our commitment to Health Equity, we will act with empathy and extend grace to ourselves and to others.



INFORMATION GATHERING STRATEGIES

As we began this work, PHT members shared information about their organization's or agency's DEI work during a series of PHT meetings in 2021/2022 in conjunction with the development of the COVID Recovery Plan. Members discussed the progress and challenges along their path including assessment processes, training and education activities, organizational culture and practices, and evaluation.

In addition, the following organizations provided more in-depth information through panel discussions conducted during PHT meetings or in interviews. Organizations were selected for more in-depth discussion based on their engagement with DEI and their willingness to share. We also aimed to include insight from members representing a range of sectors, missions, and size. The 6 organizations selected were:

- 1. The North Sound Behavioral Health-Administrative Services Organization (BH-ASO)
- 2. Community Action of Skagit County (CASC)
- 3. Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County (EDASC)
- 4. Mount Vernon Schools (MV Schools)
- 5. Sea Mar Community Health Centers, Behavioral Health Program (Sea Mar)
- 6. Skagit Valley Family YMCA (YMCA)

The following questions provided the foundation for the panels and interviews.

- What was the catalyst for your organization's DEI efforts?
- What was the process and who was included in the planning for DEI training and similar activities?
- What kinds of training or other activities were implemented to support your DEI efforts?
- How were these trainings or related activities received by staff, stakeholders, and the community?
- What were the most significant surprises, benefits, and/or challenges that emerged from this work?
- Based on your experiences, what would you recommend to others who are traveling this path?

Notes were taken during each of the panels and interviews and panel discussions were recorded. This work was supplemented by activities conducted at PHT meetings, which gave PHT members an opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge about DEI efforts in the sectors they represented and their observations from the panel discussions. We appreciate those insights, many of which are included in this report.





ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

As an interim step in the process, a literature search was conducted to identify DEI models that could inform how the report might best be organized given the goals of this effort. We found the DEI Action Framework developed by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to be the model that best reflected the focal points of the PHT DEI work (https://diversity-inclusion.uncg.edu/the-training-commons/our-action-framework/).

While their DEI "roadmap" is designed for an educational institution, the purposes of the roadmap – "to engage the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levers of systemic inequality and pursue data-driven management of best practices and policies to sustain access, opportunity, and inclusive excellence" – are consistent with the PHT's purpose for embarking on this work.

Therefore, the following key elements of the UNC model have been used as the topic areas for the report:

- 1. Assessment, Evaluation, and Strategic Planning
- 2. Training and Education Opportunities
- 3. Attitudes, Behavior, and Intergroup Process
- 4. Organizational Practices

The final sections of the report include a summary of the insights and recommendations gained from the experiences shared by PHT members and an extensive list of resources gathered from our CHA and planning work along with those suggested by PHT members.

"Be curious, reject assumptions, and listen to understand. Move with caution and humility, but with the courage to act and not remain frozen in indecision."

DEAN SNIDER

CEO SKAGIT VALLEY FAMILY YMCA



ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

According to the UNC model, assessment, evaluation and strategic planning promote understanding of the sources and outcomes of systemic inequality, establish priorities for strategic action to promote equity and excellence, and identify appropriate metrics and accountability measures to achieve and sustain systemic change.

There was a considerable range in terms of initial assessment activities and starting points among PHT members. While there was often a catalyst - national or local events - that propelled the organization into this work, for most, their DEI journey developed organically rather than from a structured process.

Two organizations used survey tools to help assess current conditions. Community Action surveyed employees and performed a self-assessment using the Center for Global Inclusion's "Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Benchmarks" (GDEIB). Mount Vernon Schools surveyed teachers early in their process. The survey, conducted by the University of Washington, revealed that teachers had a misconception (or implicit bias) that Latino students were not equipped to achieve at the same level as white students. After identifying a need for a shift, the school district partnered with the University of Florida to build a racial equity plan with the goal of providing an equitable education for all.

How the DEI aspirations of the organizations were translated into planning efforts varied significantly. For some organizations, the DEI plan is a separate set of goals, strategies, and objectives. For others, the DEI plan has been integrated into the strategic plan. In some organizations, staff establish their own professional DEI development goals and are evaluated on those goals. Some are still in learning mode and have yet to determine where the organization's DEI outcomes and strategies fit within the planning framework and process.

Clearly, there was no single path to assessment and planning. Organizations utilized a process that worked for them at that moment in time and for the organizational culture and situation. As a result, processes were organic rather than highly structured.

In general, the organizations have not engaged in rigorous evaluation of the impact of their DEI training/learning because that tends to require broad collaboration, long-term tracking, quantitative and qualitative measurement, a data collection and sharing system that is transparent and sustainable, and attention to the legal and fiscal aspects of evaluating DEI training outcomes. These capabilities are beyond the resources of many PHT organizations, but we hope to find options to guide and support such efforts. Similarly, organizations may or may not have the resources to hire outside consultants. However, if considering the option of using consultants for this work, we heard from members that it would be important that the consulting team include individuals with lived experience.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

In UNC's model, the goals of training and education are to promote engagement and self-awareness, knowledge growth and learning, and workforce development. Racism, bias, intergroup dialogue, and professional skills are targeted to address behavioral, cultural, and systemic factors that activate bias and inequitable practices.

A range of training and education opportunities were designed and implemented as PHT organizations began their DEI journeys. Some were mandatory; others were voluntary. The educational opportunities described by PHT members were both formal and informal. As was true with assessment and planning, leadership sought to accommodate the organizational history and culture, especially with regard to the readiness of individuals within the organization to participate in these efforts.

The journey of MV Schools is summarized on the next page. As might be expected, given the number of employees and locations of MV Schools, the training approaches used by smaller organizations differed significantly.





MOUNT VERNON SCHOOLS

<u>February 2017:</u> Day Without Immigrants protest surfaced tension within the community between different groups

August 2017: MV Schools put on a "Leading for Equity Institute" by the University of Florida

- School teams engaged in a year-long action research project following the institute training
- One school researched the impact of anti-bias professional development (PD) on teacher affect toward marginalized students

Spring 2018: Established a model for system-wide PD around equity: Equity Leads model

- Teams of 2-3 staff members at each school responsible for the delivery of PD at their site
- 3 levels of engagement:
 - Whole Staff What is essential for all to know?
 - Small group What PD can we provide a group of staff who opt-in?
 - o Individuals What opportunities can we provide for staff to engage on their own?
- Many PD activities were teacher-led, including organizing communities of practice, book studies, and social justice standards training

An Equity Institute is hosted each August to onboard staff with the equity initiative.

The work has become more centralized over time to include a lead facilitator who drives common work across all schools.

The district leadership entered into this work being very clear that racism was not about personal attributes, but about an inherited system, a system that needed to change and could be changed with awareness, understanding, and action.

Among the outcomes of this work were racial equity plans and related documents created by the district's very invested school board, available at www.mountvernonschools.org/schoolboard.

The BH-ASO launched their Diversity, Racial Equity & Inclusion (DREI) project in September of 2021. Following buy-in from the Board of Directors and the Advisory Committee, consultants – with lived experience – were hired to assist with the DREI project. The consultants held 6 foundational training sessions, mandatory for all staff, focused on awareness, accountability, advocacy, and action. These sessions included conversations about language, historical racism, and the impact of historical racism on current situations. Learning activities continue to be offered, with voluntary "lunch and learns" held each week along with other opportunities for discussions and sharing. Central to the DREI project is the notion that racism is about bad policies and ideas, not bad people. The goals of the training activities are to:

- Develop a shared understanding.
- Adopt shared language.
- Embrace shared concepts.
- Agree on shared strategy.

In another example, EDASC has promoted the advantages of a diverse workforce and DEI training as central to an organization's humanistic and economic goals. With this in mind, EDASC developed a Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) training program -- with input from underrepresented groups -- as a series of 6 videos used for both internal training and community awareness. The JEDI videos were initially presented from April to September 2021. They included topics such as unconscious bias, implicit bias in the workplace, and creating a culture of belonging. The videos were designed to encourage thoughtful discussion leading to positive attitudes and action, for example: unconscious bias is not about racism. It is unconscious. The important thing is how we deal with it. These videos are now available on YouTube for public viewing at: https://youtu.be/LmD64OuERa8. This series formed the basis for presentations at city chambers in the county and a project with Leadership Skagit.

Addressing the needs of the population who live in poverty is at the heart of Sea Mar's work. They were founded to provide equitable access to care for those often excluded from services. Learning and training continue to be a focus for Sea Mar, because they understand the impacts of implicit bias. Their trainings bring in external experts on a wide variety of topics so that staff can continually examine their own biases and behaviors.



Book studies have been used successfully by multiple organizations to introduce DEI topics and inspire meaningful and authentic conversations. Book studies appear to be more effective when they include not only staff, but board members as well.

We also learned from PHT members that it can be both effective and efficient to tap into training available through other organizations, including state and regional agencies, funders, and online training resources. Industry-specific DEI trainings can also help individuals better understand why DEI is important from an industry perspective. One of the challenges with training, however, is the decision about the sequencing of training and topics for leadership versus front-line staff, especially if it is not possible to train the entire organization in a short time period. Again, this decision should be thoughtful, intentional, and based on the organizational situation and culture.

CASC, for example, started their process in conjunction with a statewide learning effort across the Community Action Agency network. The foundational principle of this effort was that to effectively address poverty at the local level, changing attitudes and practices about people living in poverty was as important as providing services. Because of the stark and disproportionate impact of poverty on BIPOC and other historically marginalized communities, the network approached the task by listening and learning, especially to those with lived experiences. Locally, CASC started their training and education in 2019 through a self-analysis using the GDEIB Benchmarks. In 2021, they hosted a series of trainings for their Board, which was then extended to staff. Staff members were surveyed about their understanding and needs, and an internal DEI committee was created. DEI training design and activities evolved from this employee input.

ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

The UNC model defines organizational processes as levers of access, opportunity, and resource allocation. We have reimagined this to focus on organizational practices, but the basics of this element remain the same: inclusive, just, and equitable processes promoted by intentional policies, management of best practices, and data-driven results to sustain desired outcomes.





Based on discussions and interviews, organizational practices that appear to have a significant impact on DEI efforts were related to human capital: recruitment, hiring, onboarding, etc. PHT members suggested that the first step for them was to examine hiring practices: reviewing job descriptions, interview questions, screening process, and pay practices. For example, both the BH-ASO and the YMCA added their diversity statement on all job descriptions.

MV Schools utilized an HR Equity Audit to take a deep dive into the minutia of their hiring practices, from how and where they advertise positions, to what is included in the job description and their interview questions. The goal is to hire candidates who are in alignment with their equity values.

To expand opportunities and career pathways, PHT members suggested that organizations need to recognize that leadership ability is not necessarily linked to education. In order to promote meaningful DEI, organizations need to provide employees at many levels opportunities for growth into leadership positions. Further, they suggested that organizations be mindful that staff are often asked to perform duties beyond their job responsibilities because they are bilingual, and that needs to be recognized and valued. For instance, CASC now compensates language capability and lived experience.

There were a variety of practices shared by PHT members to engage different groups, both internal and external, but what we often heard was the value of a focus on learning. For the YMCA, collaborative learning and being a learning organization have both been and continue to be the focus of their DEI work with their employees, board, and the community. As noted earlier, learning is a key focal point for Sea Mar and their work with staff and the community. Similarly, MV Schools has made DEI a significant organizational learning outcome and has intentionally created an "opt-in" approach and promoted small-group learning opportunities so that communities of practice develop naturally.

MV Schools and PeaceHealth have promoted affinity groups as a foundational practice - groups that recognize, respect, and give voice to individuals who have differing perspectives and experiences. PeaceHealth currently has a dozen affinity groups, with more being proposed by staff. Affinity groups may have a variety of goals and priorities - for example, awareness, advocacy, and policy.

Establishing DEI Committees was another strategy suggested to engage different group members and, obviously, these committees should be as inclusive as possible. Identifying, developing, and supporting DEI champions across the organization has also been successful for several PHT members.

Regardless of the specific strategy, PHT members agree that organizations need to ensure that staff are given both the time and safe spaces to share and reflect. Although Sea Mar has been doing this work for an extended period of time, they still encourage staff to step back regularly to check not only organizational goals and behavior but also to reflect on their personal behavior to ensure that DEI efforts are effective and expanding.

Another vital organizational practice we heard about was community engagement and listening. A Community-Based Equity Audit has been used by MV Schools to identify community assets and approaches to engaging the community in order to build deeper relationships and center community voices, experiences, and expertise in MV Schools. For the YMCA, strategic partnerships have been central to their DEI work. Consequently, they designed their DEI approach jointly with community partners.

"The very nature of creating a DEI initiative is counter to achieving full equity...but with the right people, the right questions, and the right strategies in place, we can work together to move the needle toward a more just and equitable reality for our communities."

ISMAEL VIVANCO
SUPERINTENDENT
MOUNT VERNON SCHOOLS

Similarly, CASC has focused on building community-focused DEI priorities and engagement activities through the Latinx Advisory Committee (LAC) which provides a venue for organizations and people serving and connecting with the local Latinx community. The LAC provides a space to listen to the Latinx population, better understand their needs, and to encourage Latinx leadership growth.

Listening sessions have proved very successful and insightful for several other PHT organizations and especially helpful in understanding how best to serve the community, especially marginalized and underrepresented groups.

For most organizations, it was critical that the governing and/or advisory boards be included in DEI efforts from the beginning. They also strongly advocated for recruiting individuals to ensure boards are representative of the community in terms of characteristics and lived experiences so that the voices of those traditionally underrepresented are heard.

Engaging board members in conversations, book readings, trainings and other learning activities were all methods for encouraging board members to engage with and support the organization's DEI work. Further, this engagement must be authentic. A CASC board member, Silvia Reed, who participated on a DEI panel talked about how she felt welcomed when she joined—the board wanted to hear her voice and to learn from her. "I was not invited just to check a box," she said.



ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOR AND PROCESS

In the UNC model, attitudes, behavior, and intergroup processes promote an inclusive climate where individuals have a shared sense of belonging, safety, and value regardless of social identity and group membership. On the other side, microaggressions, harassment, bullying, and abuse of power are tools of racism, bias, and marginalization that preclude an inclusive climate. The personal attitudes and perspectives shared by the PHT members during the panels and interviews support the importance of inclusive and thoughtful approaches to DEI. These attitudes clearly informed the design and implementation of the organizational practices noted in the previous section.

Several PHT members noted the importance of making the effort to talk with people, acknowledging and respecting wherever they are in their personal DEI understanding and experiences. They also felt that the willingness to be open and transparent regarding DEI work and to hold courageous conversations were important aspects of creating an environment that is safe, where people can be their authentic selves.

A CAREFUL AND COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION

A PHT member navigated an incident in the workplace where a patron had unknowingly made another patron feel threatened and uncomfortable. At first, the patron was adamant there was no wrongdoing, and that concern of the other was unwarranted. After listening carefully, the manager acknowledged their good intentions but recognized an apparent cultural disconnect between them. The manager affirmed that the patron had not intended to scare or offend anyone, pointing out that the discomfort and threat felt by the other, though unintended, was genuine. The careful, respectful conversation enabled better understanding and sensitivity and allowed for healing and restoration. Powerful stuff!

In addition to intentional and meaningful conversations with work teams about equity topics, affinity groups provided both access and the opportunity to create safe spaces for individuals to share experiences, address their challenges and bring forward collaborative ideas that might go against the inherited system or standard practice.

With regard to intergroup processes, members emphasized that this work should not feel like a personal attack. They suggest letting people know and feel that this work is not personal. It is about challenging an inherited system that does not treat everyone equitably. As Dr. Ibram X. Kendi has pointed out, racism is about bad policies, practices and ideas, not bad people.

One member pointed out that it takes allies across groups to address DEI issues. The question is: how do you enlist allies in a productive way and accompany that engagement with gentle education when it's called for? On the other side, members have noted there may be loud voices (albeit in the minority) opposing DEI work and foundational principles. They felt it was important to remember that most people want to do the right thing. They suggest that as these individuals become more aware of DEI, they will, hopefully, come to see the advantages of a more diverse and inclusive work and social environment.

Another significant question arose because many government policies and practices are designed to benefit white individuals - sometimes intentionally. We should ask: How do we lead with a different reality - given that most of us have benefitted from a racist system?

"White leaders have an interesting and important task: to listen deeply, to learn, to cede voice (and power) to the people and communities most impacted by things like poverty, COVID, etc. - and yet not remain silent. To get the balance right - of listening, ceding, and bringing our own power to bear on the issue - is a delicate balancing act, but I'm sure by continuing the journey, we will find our places in it."

BILL HENKEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMMUNITY ACTION OF SKAGIT COUNTY





INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The last question in the protocol was what recommendations PHT members would make for others who were initiating or engaged in DEI work. Below is a summary of the major insights and recommendations from this project.

- Make hiring a diverse workforce that reflects the community a priority. This creates multiple opportunities for both individuals and the organization.
- Be intentional and committed to the work. Lead by example.
 If your efforts are going to be effective, you must ensure that the work is relevant and meaningful, not just 'window dressing.'
- DEI work is about learning based on continuous individual and organizational self-assessment and reflection. It is essential to ensure time and safe spaces are set aside for this work.
- There is no universal DEI training solution. Base your DEI efforts on organizational culture, resources, clients, and the staff training needs identified using valid assessments.
- Provide time for staff to participate in DEI activities and resources for personal exploration.
- Output Description of the conducted by someone outside the organization.
- 7. It is helpful to identify broad DEI outcomes for the organization, but the culture of the organization will dictate when and how in the process this happens. Some PHT members suggested that a certain amount of learning should happen prior to trying to identify more specific DEI goals.
- This journey takes time! It will be challenging, but don't run away from the occasional discomfort. Focus on clear, steady steps and celebrate progress.

DEI RESOURCES SUGGESTED BY PHT MEMBERS

<u>Bridgespan Group – How Nonprofits can Incorporate Equity into Their Measurement, Evaluation and Learning</u>

• www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/performance-measurement/incorporate-equity-into-measurement-evaluation

Children's Council of Skagit County - Resources for Race and Early Childhood Development

https://childrenscouncilofskagitcounty.org/race-in-child-development

Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County - JEDI Speaker Series

www.skagit.org/news/jedi-speaker-series-videos

<u>Institute for Healthcare Improvement – Health Equity Resources</u>

www.ihi.org/Topics/Health-Equity/Pages/default.aspx

<u>National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine – Resources on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion</u>

• www.nationalacademies.org/topics/resources-on-diversity-equity-and-inclusion

National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO) – Roots of Health Inequity

www.rootsofhealthinequity.org

<u>National Equity Project – Liberatory Design</u>

• www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/liberatory-design

North Sound Accountable Communities of Health – Collaborative Action Network Resource Library

https://northsoundach.communitycommons.org

REACH Alliance - Cultural Humility Toolkit for Mental Health Service Providers

 https://alcoholstudies.rutgers.edu/reach-alliance-develops-a-new-cultural-humility-toolkitfor-mental-health-service-providers

Robert Wood Johnson Collection - Racism and Health

• www.rwjf.org/en/insights/our-research/2021/12/systemic-racism-and-health-equity.html

Skagit Valley Family YMCA – DEI Resources

www.skagitymca.org/equity-resources

The Center for Global Inclusion - GDEIB Benchmarks (user agreement required to access)

• https://centreforglobalinclusion.org/what-we-do/the-gdeib/user-agreement.html

<u>Undoing Racism, The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond – Foundational Bibliography</u>

https://pisab.org/pisab-foundational-bibliography

<u>University of Michigan – DEI Assessment and Evaluation Toolkit</u>

 https://diversity.umich.edu/strategic-plan/dei-strategic-planning-toolkit/evaluation-andassessment

Washington State Office of Equity

https://equity.wa.gov

World Professional Association for Transgender Health

www.wpath.org

BOOKS RECOMMENDED BY PHT MEMBERS

Coates, Ta-Nehisi | Between the World and Me

Cobb, Floyd | Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity: The Keys to Successful Equity Implementation

Kendi, Ibram X | How to be an Antiracist, and others

Oluo, Ijeoma | So You Want to Talk About Race

Rothstein, Richard | The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America

Villavicencio, Karla Cornejo | The Undocumented Americans

Wilkerson, Isabel | Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents

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March 2023