Institutional racism

Institutional racism is distinguished from the explicit attitudes or racial bias of individuals by the existence of systematic policies or laws and practices that provide differential access to goods, services and opportunities of society by race. Institutional racism results in data showing racial gaps across every system. For children and families it affects where his children will be raised in the same type of neighborhood that he grew up in, thus repeating the cycle. Ryan attends a top-ranked school where most of the students come from high income families. Jamal on the other hand attends his chronically underfunded poor-performing neighborhood school which has fewer resources, less experienced teachers, and higher dropout rates. Jamal's family lives in a high poverty neighborhood, like many African Americans. Jamal's family was one of the numerous middle class minority families targeted for a predatory, high-interest loan during the mortgage crisis. As a result, they lost their family home which wiped out decades of financial growth, setting them back almost an entire generation (Burd-Sharps, & Rasch, 2015). They currently rent an apartment that they share with Jamal's grandmother. Ryan's family was also hit during the mortgage crisis but they were able to rely on financial support from Ryan's grandfather to soften the blow. Ryan's grandfather took advantage of the GI Bill, which paid for his education and gave him a government guaranteed housing loan to buy a home in a fast-growing suburb. As a result, Ryan's grandparents were able to save money and used the equity in their home to give Ryan's family a down payment for a new home. This reflects the national pattern: 72% of White families own homes compared to 42% of Black families (US Census, 2018). For 2016, the median wealth for black families was $17,600 and for white families was $171,000 (Federal Reserve Board, 2017).

The cycle continues... Both Ryan and Jamal graduated from high school and went on to attend and graduate from very good, state-funded universities. However, because he was forced to take out student loans, Jamal was left with significant debt that made it more difficult for him to start accumulate wealth in adulthood. Even though Jamal and Ryan graduated with similar GPAs with majors in engineering, Ryan secured a job interview almost immediately from a friend of the family while Jamal did not get nearly as many callbacks. Studies show that you are 50% less likely to get a job interview if your application has a black-sounding name (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). In addition, Jamal earns substantially less than Ryan (Chetty et. al, 2019) and will likely run into the same difficulties he faced in buying a home and earning equity which will increase the likelihood that Jamal's family will be screened for the gifted and talented program. Instead, he is more likely to be subjected to harsh punishment if he commits a minor violation of the law. Ryan, on the other hand, is much less likely to be stopped by the police and more likely to be screened for college preparatory and advanced courses at his school.

For more information: http://gpo.gov/RacialEquity