

# INTRODUCTION

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In the Fall of 2021 and Winter of 2022, the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research (“the Center”) brought together thirty-five scholars and advocates for an Antibigotry Convening (“the Convening”) that examined fifteen identified categories of bigotry:<sup>1</sup> ableism, ageism, anti-Asian/Asian American racism,<sup>2</sup> anti-Black racism and colorism, anti-fat bigotry, anti-Indigenous bigotry,<sup>3</sup> anti-Latinx racism,<sup>4</sup> anti-Pacific Islander bigotry, antisemitism, classism, heterosexism and transphobia, Islamophobia,<sup>5</sup> linguisticism, religious intolerance, and sexism. Together with this group of “Antibigotry Fellows,” we sought to examine bigotry in the United States from multidimensional, intersectional, and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Bigotry is generally discussed in terms of individual attitudes and acts but is less frequently examined through a structural lens. This project focused on the structural aspects of bigotry, including laws, policies, practices, norms, and narratives. We examined ways that these structural aspects of bigotry work together with bigoted ideas about the superiority and inferiority of particular groups to cause and normalize subordination. We also considered connections and intersections between multidimensional categories of bigotry.

This Antibigotry Convening Report includes independently authored contributions from the teams of scholars and advocates who focused on each category of bigotry addressed by this project, as well as a contribution from the Center faculty and staff who facilitated the Convening. The Antibigotry Fellows’ contributions examine structural manifestations of bigotry, potential areas of convergence and divergence among categories, and possible interventions. The Center’s contribution to the report defines bigotry in structural terms, analyzes emergent themes from the Fellows’ contributions, and considers possibilities for moving toward antibigotry.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>As discussed further below, this project represents just one endeavor to examine multidimensional bigotry, and these categories are not exhaustive. We hope to build upon this work and encourage a broader examination of additional categories of bigotry in the future.

<sup>2</sup>This category includes bigotry that occurs in the United States based on a person being or being perceived as Asian American or of Asian descent. We recognize that one manifestation of bigotry is the mischaracterization of Asian American people as foreign. We have included both “Asian” and “Asian American” in the title of this category to include bigotry against people who identify as American, as well as people who do not.

<sup>3</sup>In the context of this project, the category of “anti-Indigenous bigotry” examines bigotry towards peoples who are indigenous to what is now the continental United States, and/or are affiliated with (recognized or unrecognized) tribes. Since tribal affiliations are political designations rather than racial ones, we have titled this category “anti-Indigenous bigotry” rather than “anti-Indigenous racism.” That said, we recognize that anti-Indigenous bigotry is sometimes racialized. Additionally, we have included a separate category for anti-Pacific Islander bigotry to examine the distinct experiences of Indigenous peoples in Oceania.

<sup>4</sup>The term “Latinx” refers to people with roots in Latin America. We use the term “Latinx” to be mindful of the gender binary imposed by the terms “Latino” and “Latina.” We recognize that the term “Latinx” is flawed as it relies on English pronunciation conventions rather than Spanish ones regarding the letter “x.” While alternatives such as “Latine” have arisen to align more closely with Spanish pronunciation, those have not yet been widely adopted.

<sup>5</sup>When we started this project, we initially formed one team to address anti-Middle Eastern/Southwest Asian/North African racism and another to address Islamophobia. Ultimately, these teams determined that their work was overlapping, and decided to combine their efforts into one group addressing Islamophobia and its intersections.

<sup>6</sup>As discussed further below, each contribution represents only the views of its authors.

## The Vision: Why Bigotry, and Why Now?

The Center’s vision for the Antibigotry Convening project is rooted in our acknowledgment that bigotry in all its forms and manifestations serves to consolidate power in a few at the expense of many. Bigotry operates as a unifying force among those who benefit from social inequity, and thus demands a unified response from those seeking equity. Each manifestation of bigotry examined by this project arises in a particular context, but all serve to elevate insiders who have been historically privileged based on factors including race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability, physicality, linguistic usage, immigration, class, age, and other characteristics.

Only by interrogating the interrelated aims and effects of bigotry can we begin to dismantle it. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in 1963, while confined in a Birmingham jail cell, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”<sup>7</sup> Dr. King was responding to criticism that he and others who traveled to support civil rights demonstrations were “outside agitator[s]” whose actions were “unwise and untimely.” He challenged the idea that any of us can be outsiders to injustice, when “[w]hatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” He emphasized “the interrelatedness of all communities and states.” Recognizing our interrelatedness, we seek to confront multiform bigotry and promote equity for all.

Our hope is that this Antibigotry Convening Report will contribute to public understanding of bigotry by focusing particularly on its structural aspects. Through this project, we have endeavored to explore the ideologies that connect individual expressions of animus with structures that perpetuate widespread social inequity and identify potential points of solidarity. In doing so, we hope to contribute to a unified antibigotry concept and movement.

## The Process

### The Teams

The Center identified fifteen categories of bigotry to focus on as part of this project. For each category, we composed a team of Antibigotry Fellows. Recognizing that diverse sources of knowledge are critical to understanding and dismantling bigotry, our aim was to create teams with a combination of scholarship and advocacy experience. We sought to break down artificial barriers that have traditionally existed between academic research and organizing efforts, to strengthen our collective work.

### The Convenings

In the Fall of 2021, the Center facilitated five virtual modules that included a mix of instructional seminars, discussions, and writing workshops. In these modules, we examined: (1) the use of the term bigotry and ways to define structural bigotry; (2) relevant structural frameworks of analysis; (3) the use of narratives, rhetoric, and propaganda to perpetuate bigotry, and strategies for developing a narrative of antibigotry; (4) laws, policies, practices, and institutions that perpetuate bigotry, and potential interventions to promote equity; and (5) strategies for developing antibigotry interventions.

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<sup>7</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, May 1963).

In January of 2022, we reconvened as a group and the Fellows presented their work regarding their assigned category of bigotry. The goal of these presentations was to help identify connections and intersections between the categories.

### The Conversation Groups

After the modules were complete, each team of Antibigotry Fellows was invited to conduct conversation groups with people who have been directly impacted by that team's assigned category of bigotry.<sup>8</sup> The conversation groups were designed in accordance with focus group analysis, a qualitative research methodology aimed at gaining insight into individual and collective perceptions, experiences, and attitudes.<sup>9</sup> The objective of these conversation groups was not to foster consensus, but to generate critical commentary that would be difficult to obtain in one-on-one interviews. Although the focus group methodology is not typically oriented towards reaching solutions, we recognize that the group participants are experts in their own lived experiences and encouraged discussions about both experiences of bigotry and potential interventions.<sup>10</sup>

The conversation groups were small, semi-structured group interviews that explored open-ended questions about bigotry. The Center provided general guidance and operational support, and the Fellows who participated in this part of the project recruited the participants, contributed to interview protocol design, facilitated the conversations, and incorporated excerpts and ideas from the conversation groups in their report contributions. The teams held one or two conversation groups of between five and fifteen participants, who were recruited through the Fellows' networks and referrals. Fellows were encouraged to consider diversity when recruiting conversation group participants. Although small-scale qualitative research of this kind cannot be fully representative or generalizable, the conversation groups provided a space for engaging additional perspectives and insights about experiences of bigotry and antibigotry interventions, which have helped to shape many aspects of this report.

### The Report Contributions

The Antibigotry Fellows were asked to compose short contributions to this report based on their knowledge and experience, insights from the conversation groups, and a review of relevant literature. They were asked to consider how they would define structural bigotry, how they would define their assigned category of bigotry, how that category of bigotry manifests and intersects with—or diverges from—other categories, and potential interventions.

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<sup>8</sup>Ten teams held a total of sixteen conversation groups. Some teams did not hold conversation groups due to logistical conflicts.

<sup>9</sup>See Barbara Schneider, "Homelessness: Emotion Discourse and the Reproduction of Social Inequality," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 2 (2014): 235-48; Shoshana Pollack, "Focus-Group Methodology in Research with Incarcerated Women: Race, Power, and Collective Experience," *Affilia* 18, no. 4 (2003): 461-72; Sue Wilkinson, "Focus group methodology: a review," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 1, no. 3 (1998): 181-203.

<sup>10</sup>We are grateful to Antibigotry Fellow Michaé De La Cuadra for sharing insights about conversation groups during one of our modules and encouraging the Antibigotry Fellow teams to incorporate solutions-focused questions in their respective conversation groups.

This report also includes a contribution from the Center faculty and staff who facilitated the Convening. The Center’s contribution defines bigotry in structural terms, examines common structural manifestations of bigotry addressed by the Fellows’ contributions, and considers how these potential points of solidarity can support a movement towards antibigotry.

## Considerations Regarding This Report

We want to highlight four important considerations as you read this report.

**First, the categories examined by this project represent experiences of bigotry, not identities of people.** In many instances, a person may be subjected to an experience of bigotry based on a perception that has nothing to do with how that person identifies. Moreover, categories of bigotry do not exist in isolation; many intersect with one another. The Antibigotry Fellows addressed particular categories of bigotry to ensure thorough consideration of the many ways that bigotry manifests.

**Second, none of the ideas expressed in one section of this report should be imputed to the authors of any other section.** Contributors to this report, all fighting against bigotry in their own ways, may disagree about some of the concepts, strategies, or recommendations that other contributors have proposed. While we have sought to confront bigotry in unity, we are mindful that “unity does not mean unanimity,” as Audre Lorde stated when reflecting on divisions within the struggle for Black liberation in the 1960s. Indeed, “any future vision which can encompass all of us, by definition, must be complex and expanding, not easy to achieve.”<sup>11</sup> We embrace the complexities of this endeavor, and respect the independent authorship of each contribution.

**Third, the contributions to this report vary widely in length and approach.** This project brought together participants from a range of fields and disciplines, with the goal of embracing different perspectives and styles rather than imposing standardization. Some Fellows wrote longer essays, while others provided shorter narratives appending extensive bibliographies. Both approaches provide valuable resources for the ongoing work of antibigotry. We are grateful for the Antibigotry Fellows’ willingness to contribute to this project in the middle of a global pandemic, on top of their many other commitments.

**Fourth, we recognize that this report does not encompass all categories or manifestations of bigotry.** We invite future consideration of structural bigotry with respect to additional categories, such as aspects of physicality not considered here, bigotry outside of the United States (including bigotry perpetrated by the U.S. government abroad), and bigotry against people who are or were incarcerated. Additionally, while xenophobia is considered as an aspect of several categories of bigotry addressed here, it merits further consideration as its own category. We know that this list is not exhaustive and, as our collective understanding of antibigotry continues to grow, additional aspects of bigotry that need to be examined and dismantled will be revealed.

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<sup>11</sup>Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 136.

This Antbigotry Convening Report is presented with recognition of our interrelatedness, and a commitment to developing antibigotry solutions that leave no outsiders. The collected works that follow do more than propose concrete steps to mitigate bigotry; they also contribute to the process of imagining a society that is grounded in collective liberation. We hope that this report encourages future antibigotry scholarship and activism.