



January 26, 2023

Road Map Bulletin: The Hidden Link Between Diet Culture and Racism

Happy Thursday, Mount Sinai Community—

Diet culture is the social construct and belief system that combines morality with nutrition, equating being thin to being good. The system is founded on the idea that an individual can control all of their health and nutrition choices—and stigmatizes those who do not meet this limited definition of “health.” This world view has racist, colonial roots. As one researcher **stated**: “During the height of slavery in the 18th century, there were prominent Europeans who believed that being thin and controlling what they ate made them morally superior ... And thus, African people were inherently viewed as inferior, because they tended to have larger bodies, which was equated to being lazy.”

In reality, many factors including the **social determinants of health**—the conditions and environments where people live, learn, work, play, and age that affect their health risks and outcomes—impact individuals’ body size and health.



Just one example is food deserts, or areas with limited access to affordable, healthy food options like fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean meats.

Just 8 percent of Black Americans live in a census tract with a grocery store, compared to 31 percent of those who are white.

Communities of color are more likely to live in food deserts, with [one report](#) from the Southern Poverty Law Center finding that just 8 percent of Black Americans live in a census tract with a grocery store, compared to 31 percent of those who are white. (For a deeper dive on food deserts, you can read more about a research paper by a medical student at the University of California-San Francisco Medical School in partnership with the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai [here](#).)

Similarly, nationwide there is [little diversity](#) among Registered Dietitians, with the vast majority—80 percent—identifying as white, compared to 6 percent as Hispanic, 5 percent as Asian, and 3 percent as Black. As a result, nutrition advice can often focus on the [narrow image](#) of “healthy” American and European foods, while ignoring nutrient-rich foods from other cultures. Increasing staff diversity—one of the goals of the Road Map—will help bring more perspectives into this conversation.

While this is just a small window into a societal issue, exploring the racist roots of diet culture reminds us of the larger structures at play and the importance of the Road Map work to break down these barriers.

All the best,

Angela and Shawn

Join Us for an Upcoming Event

Lunar New Year Tabling Events at Mount Sinai

Join Mount Sinai in celebrating the Lunar New Year with tabling events on Thursday, January 26, 11 am - 2 pm at Mount Sinai Queens, ST★R Café, hospital lobby or Friday, January 27, 11 am - 2 pm at the Mount Sinai Hospital, Guggenheim Pavilion lobby. Visit [Mount Sinai Daily](#) for more details. You may need to login with your Mount Sinai email and password.

Chats for Change: Deeper Dive Series | White Supremacy Culture

Characteristics: Worship of the Written Word—Chats for Change is a production of the Icahn School of Medicine's Racism and Bias Initiative. Why is anything that is documented or published valued more highly than other forms of knowledge and communication? Are policies more important than conventional wisdom? Are written biographies more important than oral histories? Are clinical trials more valuable than patients' lived experiences? Join us as we explore where this notion comes from, and the harm it does to our efforts to achieve justice and equity. Join facilitators **David Muller, MD** and **Jennifer Meyer, LMSW, MPH** for this conversation on **Tuesday, January 31 from Noon-1 pm**. [Register on Zoom](#).

[Road Map for Action](#)

[Past Bulletins](#)