

# This 'Equity' Picture is Actually White Supremacy at work

by Equity in Education Coalition

We've all seen this picture, right? In a picture-is-worth-1,000-words kind of way, this image simplifies the profound difference between equality and equity. From this picture, people have actually begun to understand that treating everyone equally doesn't lead to equity, and, in fact, equal treatment often perpetuates and justifies racial hierarchies. Yes, this picture has taught us a lot.

But, it's time to move on. This picture — the noble imagery of the equity movement — is white supremacy at work.

Sorry folks. But it's true.

First and foremost, the shortest boy is positioned as the problem. He needs multiple boxes to see over the fence. He's the one who is the pathology: he's literally less than the others. The shortest boy is — by sheer presentation alone — not whole, not normal, especially compared to the tallest boy. And because he is shorter he is seen as the problem, he needs more help. He is by fact, needy.

Dominant and oppressive narratives about people of color bleed into this picture: people of color are less than and thus, need more.

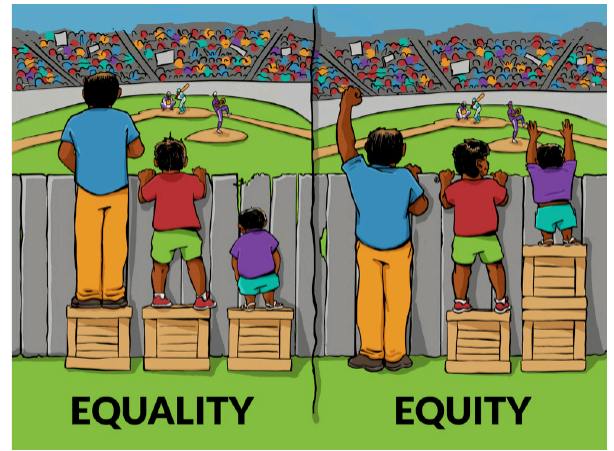
This is white supremacy. This feeds into the oh-so-familiar racist politic — people of color have little to offer, and yet take so many public resources. Heard that before haven't you?

Even those who "center equity" feed into this framework — people of color need our resources because they're too broken to have their own.

## Corporate White Supremacy

### Undermining the Ground Others Stand On

Since the inception of corporations in the 1600s, their white owners and managers have used corporations to undermine the foundation that most of the people of the world need to survive. The royally sanctioned armies of the very first corporation, the British East India Company, used violence in the 1600s to steal resources and economic power from the people of South Asia. The giant slave trading corporations stole lives, the cultural soul, and human energy of millions of Africans to build the wealth and estates of the white upper classes. The first industrial corporations in the US stole the lives and earning power of immigrant women so severely that they revolted by starting some of the first unions in this country. Huge land development corporations enticed Europeans and North American colonists to occupy and conquer all of North America, depriving the aboriginal people of their land, lives and livelihood. The damage to the ability of the global majority to survive at a humanly decent level needs to be healed if life on the planet can be vibrant for anyone in the future.



graphic: Equity in Education Coalition

Volunteered with that organization maybe?

It is high time to rid ourselves of these white supremacy-laden "equity" ideas, and actually recognize the full humanity and capabilities of people of color.

Imagine if you will, three people — all the same goddamn size. The ground beneath them slopes, buckling beneath one person so significantly that person cannot see over the fence at all. The foundation on which these people stand is unequal, and that foundation, might we even say systemic difference, leads to some being able to watch the baseball game, while others cannot.

Yes, the person who is on the slope requires a box or two to stand on, but it is only because they are on lower ground to start — not because they are shorter to begin with.

As useful as the picture was in starting conversations around "Equality vs. Equity," we are basically blaming the person for being short, when in reality, we aren't standing on a level playing field to start. We aren't "allowed" to stand on a level playing field.

In fact, we are — by reason of policy, practice, prejudice, and bias — forced to stand on a lower level ... AND then told we should be happy to be near the game at all. All while not given enough boxes to see over the fence.

The unequal ground we are forced to stand on is the aspect of the picture we need to change. Understanding that those boxes are necessary because of the sloping ground is key to undoing white supremacy. With this new picture, let us decolonize the rules of where we stand and why.

That is equity.

*The Equity in Education Coalition is a Washington State civil rights organization focused on revolutionizing education so that a child's race and zip code are not the predicated factors in defining their success. We envision a future where the opportunity gap is eliminated — a future where every child of color achieves success from birth through their careers.*