



Live at ICIC's Economic Summit: Equity and the Changing Demographics of America

Written By [Alex Abboud](#)

Angela Glover Blackwell of [PolicyLink](#) kicked off the second day of the ICIC Summit with a keynote address focused on equity, and its importance to America's future.

The importance of equity got a lot of attention at the [New Partners for Smart Growth](#) conference I attended in February. Glover Blackwell's keynote focuses on a more explicitly economic argument, which she framed within some key statistics about the demographics of the country. Of note:

- More than 6,000 Latino and African-American students will drop out of school today. Last week's [Measure of America report on disconnected youth](#) noted 1 in 7 youth age 16-24 in the 25 largest metros is neither working nor in school. For African-American youth, it's 22.5%, and for Latinos, 18.5%, compared to the overall rate of 14.5%.
- It's expected that 45% of jobs in the future will require at least an Associate Degree. Today's attainment rates are 27% for African-Americans, 26% for native-born Latinos, and 15% for non-Latino immigrants.
- From the 1980 to 2010 censuses, the proportion of Americans who are people of color grew from 20% to 36%. By 2042, America will be a majority-minority country. Already today, a majority of babies being born are people of color, and by the end of this decade, the majority of those under 18 will be.

When you consider these demographics in light of the Measure of America report, and other indicators, it reminds you of how imperative the equity agenda is. There is good news, and good practices being implemented that can begin to address this.

First, many jurisdictions are becoming more conscious of transportation equity. Glover Blackwell spoke of examples in other jurisdictions (such as Maryland), but I'm particularly impressed with the work [Denver's Regional Equity Atlas](#) has done to identify opportunity in that city.

Second, many creative strategies to improve employment and human capital in the inner city are being employed. She spoke of what [ShopRite](#) is doing in Philadelphia to build local jobs, and in particular give opportunities to previously incarcerated individuals, who can struggle to find employment and get a second chance. In San Francisco, a local hire ordinance for public works will see 50% of jobs and 25% of work hours go to disadvantaged groups by 2017.

A point Glover Blackwell made in passing early on in her speech, however, is one that stuck with me. That is, that within a competitive global economy, America "can be a world nation within our borders". It's a reminder that diversity is an asset for many reasons, in particular by expanding a country's economic reach.

She also posed the question of "how do we make equity the standard of this nation?" This is a laudable, if not necessary goal, as her speech points out. Fortunately, there are lots of ways the country is moving closer to this goal already.

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