

A CENTURY APART

New Measures of Well-Being for U.S. Racial and Ethnic Groups

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CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Key Findings: Nationwide.....	4
Key Findings: State-by-State	5
How Do We Stack Up?	6
Conclusion	11
Understanding Human Development	12
Indicator Tables	16
About the American Human Development Project	22

Conclusion

That significant gaps separate Americans of different racial and ethnic groups at the national level is common knowledge—though the size of the gaps is often surprising to people outside policy, academic, or social service delivery circles. Less well known is the tremendous variation within racial and ethnic groups from state to state and among different race/state combinations.

What fuels these well-being gaps? Different combinations of factors contribute to the strikingly different outcomes, some of which include:

- **Policy and investment** at the state level related to key human development areas, such as public education, the public health infrastructure, health insurance coverage, social services, income supports like state earned income tax credits, and housing. There is a strong correlation, for example, between state expenditure per pupil on public education and that state's score on the educational index.
- **The overall economic condition of the state**, including the structure and health of the labor market, the types of industries active in the state/region, the rate and type of economic growth, and the rates of unionization. States with higher rates of unionization have higher median earnings, for example.
- **The particular characteristics of specific groups** within these very broad racial and ethnic categories. For instance, long-settled Asian American communities tend to fare considerably better than more newly arrived Asian American immigrant communities.
- **Political realities and the political culture** at the state level that affect the access to decision-making power and public resources enjoyed by different groups. There is evidence, for example, that the quality of governance and democratic participation in U.S. states is negatively affected in the presence of a relative abundance of natural resources such as oil or minerals.
- **The degree of residential segregation** by income, educational attainment, race, and ethnicity, which has significant impacts on life chances. Washington, D.C., geographically a single city, contains within it two completely separate, yet side-by-side, worlds, one home to whites experiencing some of the highest well-being levels in the nation, the other home to African Americans living, on average, drastically shorter lives, with less access to educational and income-generating opportunities.

Identifying disparities in well-being among different groups is the first step in determining why they exist and how to close them.

About the American Human Development Project

The American Human Development Project is dedicated to stimulating fact-based public debate about and political attention to issues that affect people's well-being and access to opportunity in the United States. The hallmark of this work is the American Human Development Index, a measure that paints a portrait of Americans today and empowers communities with a tool to track progress in areas we all care about: health, education, and income.

In July 2008, the project launched *The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008-2009*, the first-ever report on human development in the United States or any affluent country. In 2009, the project released two state-level human development reports. Through these studies and the project's interactive website, the American Human Development Project aims to breathe life into numbers, using data to create compelling narratives that foster understanding of and support for social change.

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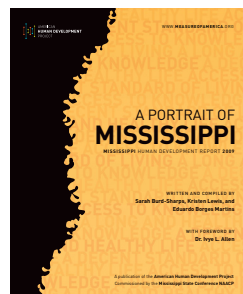
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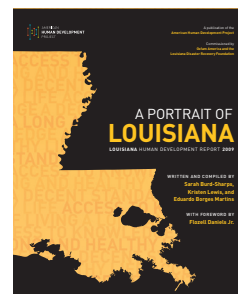
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THE MEASURE OF AMERICA: *American Human Development Report 2008-2009* uses a well-honed international approach to assess the well-being of different population groups within the United States. Contains rankings of U.S. states, congressional districts, and ethnic groups. For purchase through Columbia University Press or amazon.com.



A PORTRAIT OF MISSISSIPPI: *Mississippi Human Development Report 2009* was commissioned by the Mississippi State Conference NAACP and Oxfam America to examine well-being levels in the state by county, gender, and race and to stimulate action to address Mississippi's disparities. Available online.



A PORTRAIT OF LOUISIANA: *Louisiana Human Development Report 2009* was commissioned by the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation, Foundation for the Mid South, and Oxfam America. It calls for action to address the acute human vulnerability that persists five years after Hurricane Katrina. Available online.



A PORTRAIT OF CALIFORNIA: *California Human Development Report 2010-2011* (coming this fall)

To obtain copies of these reports and to use an array of interactive maps and tools, please visit:
www.measureofamerica.org