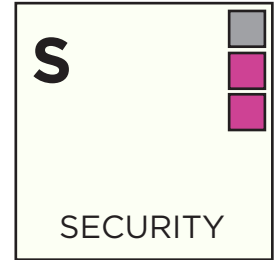
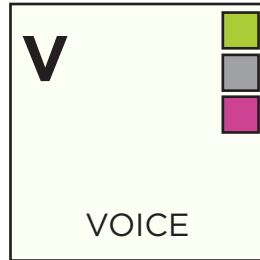
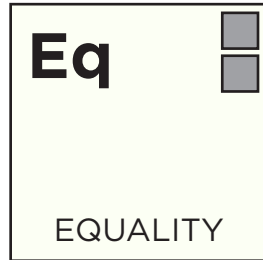
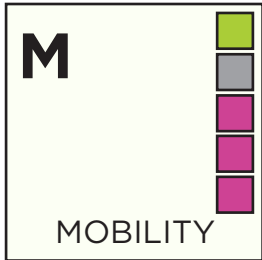


the State of opportunity

2007



In February of 2006, The Opportunity Agenda released *The State of Opportunity in America*, which assessed the nation's progress toward expanding opportunity for all. This report measured the nation's progress along six dimensions of opportunity—mobility, equality, voice, redemption, security and community. One year later, we find that significant opportunity gaps continue to persist in wages, education, housing, health care, and other areas. Americans generally believe that opportunity is available for everyone in the United States, regardless of circumstances at birth. But the nation is falling short of its egalitarian ideals, and millions of Americans are less likely than ever to achieve full opportunity. This chart summarizes some of the full findings of our review.

M

MOBILITY | STATUS: STAGNANT TO DECLINING



College Enrollment

Rates of college enrollment increased slightly from 2003 to 2004, consistent with a 25-year trend. A record 38% of 18- to 24-year olds were enrolled in college in 2004. Women and minorities continue to make modest gains. Over 2.5 million more women than men were enrolled in college in 2004, and college enrollment among Hispanic high school degree-holders increased from 31.7% in 2002 to 37.3% in 2004.¹



Homeownership

Homeownership increased slightly between 2003 and 2005, but a substantial racial/ethnic homeownership gap persists. In 2005, white homeownership increased to 72.7% from 72.1% in 2003. It increased among African Americans from 48.1% to 48.2% and among Hispanics from 46.7% to 49.5%.²



Financial Barriers to Higher Education

As a result of rising tuition costs and insufficient levels of need-based aid, the nation's colleges and universities have become less affordable since the early 1990s. Between 2004 and 2006, college affordability declined in 17 states.³



High School Graduation

Since 2004, there are fewer 25-29 year olds with high school degrees. And racial and ethnic gaps have widened in this area. For example, between 2004 and 2005, high school degree attainment for white men and women both fell about 1%, but fell about 4% among African-American males.⁴



Wage Distribution and Family Income

While family income increased for all groups between 2003 and 2004, it increased the most for the top income groups. For example, income grew nearly twelve times more rapidly among the top 1% than the bottom 90% between 2003 and 2004—consistent with trends since the early 1980s.⁵

Eq

EQUALITY | STATUS: STAGNANT

Gender Wage Gap



Real median earnings declined from 2004 to 2005 for both men and women, but the gender earnings gap remained just under \$10,000, with men earning \$41,386 and women earning \$31,858. With similar work experience, women still earn less overall. In 2004, women earned 77 cents for every dollar men earned, which held true in 2005.⁶

Housing Discrimination



National data on fair housing practices does not exist, but regional and local information highlight housing discrimination in rental markets across the nation. The National Fair Housing Alliance conducted audit studies in major metropolitan areas that identified racial discrimination in rental markets.⁷ In New Orleans, instances of housing discrimination have been documented in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.⁸

V

VOICE | STATUS: UNDETERMINED

Gender Diversity: Congress



Two more women occupy seats in the U.S. Senate in the 110th Congress than the 109th, and six more holds seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. For the first time, a woman was elected Speaker of the House.⁹

Diversity: Newspaper Workforce



Minorities and women made slight gains between 2005 and 2006 in job categories such as supervisors, copy and layout editors, and reporters, but large gaps still remain. For example, 88.8% of supervisors were white and 64.5% were male in 2006, declining from 89.2% and 65.2% in 2005, respectively.¹⁰

Diversity in Radio and TV Broadcast News Media



Diversity in the radio broadcast news workforce continues to decline. In 2006, only 6.4% of the radio broadcast news workforce was minority, down from 7.9% in 2005. Women are also severely underrepresented in the radio news media workforce; in 2006, fewer than 1 in 4 radio news workers were women. Diversity in the television broadcast news workforce remains steady, but women and minorities remain underrepresented.¹¹

R

REDEMPTION | STATUS: UNDETERMINED

Juveniles in Prison



Violent crime arrest rates have declined among all groups, particularly among youth of color. Between 1997 and 2003, the percentage of juvenile offenders in custody declined by 8% overall, 12% among African Americans and 34% among Asian Americans.¹²

Voting Rights After Imprisonment



Most states continue to deny voting rights to people convicted of felonies, some even years after these individuals are out of the criminal justice system. In 2006, 5.3 million Americans had temporarily or permanently lost their voting rights as a result of a felony conviction. 13% (1.4 million) of black men are disenfranchised, a rate seven times the national average.

Incarcerated Persons



The United States continues to set new incarceration records. The number of incarcerated persons increased between 2005 and 2004, as did the rate (491 per 100,000 people in 2005 vs. 486 per 100,000 people in 2004). The number of women behind bars continued to rise in 2005, surpassing 200,000 for the first time. Poor women and women of color remain disproportionately overrepresented among women in prison.^{13, 14}

Poverty

Rates of overall poverty have slightly decreased from 12.7% in 2004 to 12.6% in 2005. But the percentage and number of women in poverty increased from 13.9% to 14.1%—and the gender poverty gap deepened. Similarly, while the percentage of whites below poverty declined, poverty among most minority groups increased or stayed the same, increasing the racial and ethnic poverty gaps.¹⁵

Health Insurance Coverage

The number of Americans without health insurance increased from 45.3 million in 2004 to 46.6 million in 2005. In 2005, nearly 1 in 7 Americans (15.7%) lacked health insurance. Non-Hispanic whites (11.2%) had the lowest rates of uninsurance; African Americans (19.5%), American Indians and Alaskan Natives (29.9%), Asian Americans (17.7%), Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (21.8%), and Hispanic Americans (32.6%) were disproportionately uninsured.¹⁶

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing remains a crisis for low-income communities. Even two jobs at today's minimum wage is insufficient to afford today's rent. In 2005, there were only four counties in the nation where a person working full time at the minimum wage could afford a one bedroom apartment. Today, **there is not a county in the country** where a full time minimum wage worker can afford even a one bedroom apartment at the fair market rate.¹⁷

ENDNOTES

¹U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Available <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>, January 9, 2007.

²Ibid.

³National Center for Public Policy and Education, "Measuring Up 2006: The National Report Card on Higher Education." Available http://measuringup.highereducation.org/_docs/2006/NationalReport_2006.pdf, January 2007.

⁴U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education 2006," Available http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2006/pdf/31_2006.pdf, January 9, 2007.

⁵Economic Policy Institute, "Family Income," The State of Working America 2006/200, Available http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/swa06-01-family_income.pdf, January 9, 2007.

⁶US Bureau of the Census, US Census Bureau News, "Income Climbs, Poverty Stabilizes, Uninsured Rate Increases," August 29, 2006, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/007419.html.

⁷National Fair Housing Alliance, <http://www.nationalfairhousing.org/index.php>.

⁸Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center, <http://gnofairhousing.org/news.html>.

⁹Center for Women and Politics, "Women in 110 US Congress (2007-09)," Available <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>, January 18, 2007.

¹⁰American Society of Newspaper Editors, <http://www.asne.org/index.cfm>, January 18, 2007.

¹¹Radio-Television News Directors Association & Foundation, "Women and Minorities in Radio and Television News," Available <http://www.rtnda.org/research/2006diversity.pdf>, January 18, 2007.

¹²Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report," <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/nr2006/downloads/NR2006.pdf>

¹³Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Incarceration Rate, 1980-2005," Available <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/tables/incrttab.htm>, January 18, 2007.

¹⁴Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Prisoners in 2005," Available <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/p05.pdf>, January 18, 2007.

¹⁵US Census Bureau, "Table 2. Poverty Status of People by Family Relationship, Race, and Hispanic Origin : 1959 to 2005," Available <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov2.html>, January 9, 2007.

¹⁶US Census Bureau, "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2005," Available <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p60-231.pdf>, January 18, 2007.

¹⁷National Low Income Housing Coalition, "Out of Reach 2006," Available <http://www.nlihc.org/or/or2006/?CFID=7086044&CFTOKEN=36084381>, January 18, 2007.

Recommendations

Solidifying opportunity in America is not simply a national aspiration; we should aggressively remove opportunity barriers and create conditions in which opportunity can thrive. Doing so improves America's internal security, stability, and ability to compete internationally. And perhaps more importantly, it aligns our nation's policies and practices with our national values.

Through bold leadership and innovative policies, the nation's elected leaders can ensure the promise of opportunity in America. We encourage policymakers to:

- Regularly assess the impact of public policies on opportunity;
- Modernize safety net programs that help people meet their basic needs, starting with equitable and affordable healthcare for all Americans;
- Build Americans' skills to adapt to a globalizing economy, evolving technology, and an increasingly diverse population;
- Renew a commitment to human rights in the United States;
- Prioritize crime prevention and rehabilitation over increased incarceration; and
- Protect voting rights and promote political participation.




The Purpose and Methods of this Report

The State of Opportunity in America measured the nation's progress along six dimensions of opportunity—equality, security, mobility, community, redemption, and voice. Dozens of national trends in housing, employment, health care, education, wages, and other areas served as indicators of opportunity dimensions. After reviewing this data, we concluded that “opportunity in the United States is at a crossroads.” While the nation has made great strides, many millions of Americans are denied opportunity, in ways that hard work alone cannot address.

For this report, we examined the same indicators as in The State of Opportunity in America to assess progress. Where possible, we summarize data—largely drawn from federal sources—indicating change since our last measurement. To supplement this information, we also draw upon published research and reports that help to illuminate specific dimensions of opportunity. These indicators, and our findings, are presented in the accompanying chart.

A ratings system was used to assess overall progress for each indicator. We examined how the nation fared since our last measurement point, both overall and for subgroups. Importantly, we did not base this assessment on equality of outcomes for all groups; rather, lack of opportunity occurs when the conditions of opportunity are unequal. So, for example, the fact that women and people of color are disproportionately impoverished is not merely an outcome of unequal opportunity, it is also a defining aspect of how and what kinds of opportunity—if any—are available.

The Ratings:

-  = equal opportunity, or signs of progress toward it
-  = no change: opportunity stagnant, or mixed results
-  = opportunity actively declining

Equal opportunity, or signs of progress toward it. This grade was awarded only when an indicator demonstrated equality of opportunity (e.g., no significant differences in the conditions of opportunity by gender, race, income or immigration status, should these data be available), or, far more commonly, when data trends suggested progress despite persistent historic inequality between gender, race, income, and immigration status groups.

Opportunity stagnant, or mixed results. This rating applied when data for this indicator were generally unchanged, or when some aspects of opportunity as measured changed significantly for some segments of the population but not for others.

Opportunity Declining. This rating applied when data indicate both a general decline in opportunity and growing inequality of opportunity.

Of course, many limitations and cautions are in order. We recognize that opportunity may be defined and measured in many ways. This assessment is limited in its ability to capture all dimensions of opportunity. For example, there are many dimensions of community—such as trust and reciprocity—that are difficult to measure at the community level. And in many other dimensions, annual data or updates from our last assessment are unavailable. In addition, we caution against over-interpreting the significance of changes in any one indicator of opportunity between a one-year or two-year period. Positive and negative changes always occur in brief periods, but changes that occur over three or more decades—which was the focus of The State of Opportunity in America report—are potentially significant, and are therefore highlighted in several places in this report. By assessing progress across the range of opportunity indicators, as this report does, we hope to provide a brief snapshot of how the nation is experiencing opportunity today. For more information, please visit www.opportunityagenda.org/update2007.