

GAPS IN RACIAL EQUITY AND STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING THEM

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“More than any other country, America defines itself by a collective dream: the dream of economic opportunity and upward mobility. Its proudest boast is that it offers a chance of the good life to everybody who is willing to work hard and play by the rules.” So begins an essay, *“Inequality and the American Dream,”* published in the London-based magazine, *The Economist*, June 17, 2006. “Although the US is seen as a world of opportunity, the reality may be different. . . . There is a particular fear about the engine of American meritocracy, its education system. Only 3% of students at top colleges come from the poorest quarter of the population. Poor children are trapped in dismal schools, while richer parents spend ever more cash on tutoring their offspring.”

Data consistently show such gaps or disparities in the performance of society’s various systems and markets, yielding very different results not only for different income groups, but also for different racial and ethnic groups. Considering group averages, America’s schools don’t perform as well for African American children, our justice system metes out softer punishment for Whites, our job and capital markets are more closed and less rewarding to non-Whites.

Disparities in Black/White experience

Table 1: A Short Inventory of Gaps in Racial Equity presents an inventory of such gaps, in several major arenas of public and private life in this country:

- Education
- Income and Wealth Development
- Housing, Infrastructure and Amenities
- Health
- Justice
- Dignity and Respect
- Civic Participation

The list of gaps in this inventory intends only to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Many more and perhaps better examples can be found all over the internet simply by searching under racial disparities in health, racial disparities in education, racial disparities in justice, etc.

The inescapable finding is that in each of these arenas, there are data showing that our systems and markets produce very different outcomes for Blacks and Whites, with Blacks benefiting significantly less well, on average.

These gaps do not exist in isolation of each other; they are interconnected. It is not difficult to construct theories of action showing the domino-like, cascading effects of disparities:

- Bad experiences in school lead to diminished opportunities to produce good income, which diminish the chances of buying a home, which puts a cap on wealth. Putting a cap on wealth diminishes the chances for the next generation.
- Bad experiences with police lead to a criminal record, which leads to diminished chances of finding a good job, with diminished opportunities to produce good income, which puts a cap not only on wealth but also the quality of family life.
- Bad experiences at home can lead to bad experiences in school and bad experiences with police, with diminished chances down the line.
- Blocking the paths to wealth development disadvantages the present generation as well as the next. Blocking the paths to *anyone's* positive development disadvantages the present generation as well as the next; a parent's bad experience is easily transmitted to the child. Positive experiences are transmitted as well.

Dozens of other permutations can be imagined, and are probably experienced in the lives of too many Americans.

Achieving greater racial equity means closing those gaps – in our educational systems, our justice systems, our job and capital markets, etc. This is not to say that everyone should or will benefit equally – that everyone will get the same grades in school, the same penalties after wrongdoing or the same jobs or salaries. Even with full equity there will be as much variation as there is now, *except that* access to opportunity, as well as the positive and negative consequences, will not be based on race. That is the vision of equity embraced in the U.S. Constitution, and in this project.

Various forces, all of which are subject to influence and change, maintain these gaps or disparities. The challenge is to discover the forces that maintain the gaps, and to change them so that the gaps can close. Strategies for reducing these gaps, drawing on the power of philanthropy, are within reach.

Technical and human issues with gaps or disparities

The phrase “reducing the gaps between Whites and Blacks” is shorthand for a more complex thought: “reducing the gaps between how Whites as a group are faring in educational systems (for example) and how Blacks as a group are faring.” Even though society may want good opportunities and good outcomes for all, in fact there are group differences in the data showing that many of our critical systems and markets do not work as well for Blacks as they do for Whites, on average. There's variation, by state, by age and gender, and especially from one person to the next.

Reducing gaps means bringing those group *averages* in line, by fixing or adjusting the way those systems work. Society can't expect our systems and markets to produce identical opportunities or outcomes for everyone *individually*. But we can expect them not to produce different outcomes for different racial and cultural *groups*.

In comparing data for one racial or ethnic group with another as in Table 1, one is typically comparing group averages. The data show how the system performs for Whites, on average, with how it does for Blacks, on average. In fact, there is a tremendous amount of overlap between the two groups, which is obscured by comparing only averages. Because of big variation within each group, any two Whites chosen at random (or any two Blacks chosen at random) are almost as likely to be as different (or similar) as any two people chosen at random without regard to color. Unfortunately, researchers or pundits pursuing a particular personal agenda can read very different things into the same data.

Another technical issue is the assumption the two groups are cleanly distinctive; all Whites are White, and all Blacks are Black. It assumes that any one person is completely of one group and completely not of the other group. Of course, the facts of life show otherwise, so that disparities data are comparing groups whose individuals show quite a color continuum. This reality gives rise to a reasonable conclusion that race is no longer a meaningful basis for recognizing or distinguishing people, if it ever was – at least in this country.

Still another statistical assumption made by this method of comparing group data is that each group of Whites we're measuring is just like every other group of Whites we could have drawn for measurement (same with Blacks). Wrestling with this assumption is daily fare for good researchers, and rules have been worked out that permit generalizations within a measure of error. These rules require that we be careful about the judgments we make based on limited evidence. Nevertheless, these studies of gaps, drawn from so many different places and compared in so many different ways, reveal that gaps are everywhere. The fact that they change over time, place and jurisdictions suggest that they can be reduced with careful strategy.

Human issues

The advantage to examining gaps is that they reveal the extent of unfair discrimination being exercised by our society's systems and markets. But that's just assessing facts and figures on paper. The human experience is different.

Looking at the data, if one is Black, one can say, "I'm not just imagining this. And while there might be non-discriminating White people, the fact is the system works against me and others like me. The data prove it."

Looking at the data, if one is White, one can say "It's not *me* that's doing the damage, it's the system. I'm no racist." He or she might be speaking from the heart, but our systems and markets are made up of individuals, operating by a set of rules or expectations, either

explicit or veiled. And while this person probably didn't create the problem, he or she is probably benefiting from the imbalance, and he or she can certainly become part of the solution. Because these rules and expectations are largely man-made, they can be addressed and adjusted so that one cultural or ethnic group is not so automatically favored.

Changing policies and practices – whether in the law, in places where key policies operate (on the job, on the street, in the school), or even at the dinner table where conversation promotes norms of behavior – could go a long way in fixing various systems and markets to produce more equitable results.

Strategies for reducing these gaps, drawing on the power of philanthropy, are within reach.

Strategies for reducing gaps in racial equity

How can philanthropy address gaps or disparities in racial equity?

Step 1. It is probably difficult to choose where to start, given the prevalence of so many gaps. But it is important to focus on a particular gap that is within reach. Considering your philanthropic interests and the well-being of your community, review the Inventory of Gaps and pick one, two or three where you would like personally to make a difference. Because the dynamics that maintain these gaps are very much influenced by local context, pick just a few for which there is local commitment, resources and skills for creating change.

Step 2. Discover, through study and inquiry, what are the root causes of this particular gap. What maintains it? What systems or markets are involved? What, exactly, is creating the problem? Ask around, particularly people you might not ordinarily think of asking. Hint: Look upstream! See “*Saving the Babies: A Clash of Philanthropic Approaches*,” by Steven E. Mayer, in Resources.

Step 3. Meet with your allies – those with similar interests – and ask yourselves, how can society create progress in meeting this challenge? Hint: Refer to the Pathways to Progress in the main pages of this Web site.

- **Solutions:** What specific changes would need to be made to this system, to produce more equitable outcomes? How can good ideas be advanced all the way to the point of implementation?
- **Organization:** How can we prepare our own philanthropic organization to make a difference? Do we have the right people? Are we getting the right advice? Are we organized to generate momentum? Do we know what we're doing?
- **Conversations:** What conversations, and with whom, do we need to have to create opportunities for change? Who's with us, and who's not? How can we find

common ground, or win-win strategies? With whom do we need to place more trust, and how can we do that (without getting burned)?

- Relationships, networks and leadership: Who knows about the issues connected to this gap? Who can we learn from? Whose help do we need? Who should we be meeting with to promote the kind of change that would fix this problem?
- Philanthropic resources: What kind of money will this take, and where can we get it? How would we use it to put all these other balls in play? How can we use the influence, time and talent of our many partners? What sort of people-power is needed?
- Gap-closing strategy: Where exactly should we put our own time, talent and treasure – as well as our influence and muscle? What more can we do to improve the chances of success?

Step 4. Develop a plan and work the plan that will create as much action as possible on each of these pathways, singly and in combination, using a widening circle of partners.

Step 5. Notice and celebrate progress, and improve the plan to be more successful.

TABLE 1: A SHORT INVENTORY OF GAPS IN RACIAL EQUITY

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS IN SYSTEM OR MARKET PERFORMANCE FAVORING WHITES	SOURCE
Education	Adequately supported, quality education	Class size	
Education	Adequately supported, quality education	Schools with non-classroom facilities, such as AP classes, career/college centers	
Education	Personal support, guidance, assistance, planning for future	Graduation from high school	US Dept of Education. http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub_2001/
Education	Personal support, guidance, assistance, planning for future	Dropout rates	US Dept of Education. http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub_2001/
Education	Personal support, guidance, assistance, planning for future	School-age children in poverty	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Education	Good instruction	Pre-school age school readiness	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Education	Good instruction	Achievement test scores, all levels	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Education	Post-secondary pathways, including support	Students taking college prep classes	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Education	Post-secondary pathways, including support	College entrants with strong high school curriculum	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Education	Post-secondary pathways, including support	Teacher quality	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Education	Post-secondary pathways, including support	Graduation from 2-year institutions	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Education	Post-secondary pathways, including support	Graduation from 4-year institutions	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS	SOURCE
Income and Wealth Development	Inherited wealth	Inheritance	http://www.manningmarable.net/
Income and Wealth Development	Fair employment practices	Complaints of unfair selection, training, supervision, compensation, termination	
Income and Wealth Development	Livable wage	Per capita income; per household income	MDC. Aspen.
Income and Wealth Development	Livable wage	Median income	Census Bureau, 2005. National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org .
Income and Wealth Development	Livable wage	Living below poverty line	Census Bureau, 2005. National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org .
Income and Wealth Development	Livable wage	Unemployment	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org .
Income and Wealth Development	Credit to buy a home or develop a business	Credit application acceptance rate	Natl Nbd Coalition
Income and Wealth Development	Credit to buy a home or develop a business	Mortgage application acceptance rate	
Income and Wealth Development	Wealth	Net worth	The Racial Wealth Gap: Origins and Implications for Philanthropy in the African American Community. Dalton Conley, NYU. http://nvs.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/29/4/530.pdf Also, Dalton Conley, "Being Black, Living in the Red." UCal Press, 1999.

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS	SOURCE
Income and Wealth Development	Economic development support	Agricultural assistance to farmers	National Neighborhood Coalition newsletter, Fall 2004
Income and Wealth Development	Economic development support	Foreclosure of farms	National Neighborhood Coalition newsletter, Fall 2004
Income and Wealth Development	Economic development support	Denial of loans from private and public sources to farmers	National Neighborhood Coalition newsletter, Fall 2004
Income and Wealth Development	Economic development opportunities/assistance (e.g. Training, OJT, small business assistance)	Program participation rates	
Income and Wealth Development	Transportation to work		
Income and Wealth Development	Family support (e.g. daycare, maternity/paternity leave)		
Income and Wealth Development	Paid work and career tracks	Futures planning rates	
Income and Wealth Development	Paid work and career tracks	Union/trade acceptance rates	
Income and Wealth Development	Poverty prevention	Welfare benefit rates	

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS	SOURCE
Income and Wealth Development	Poverty prevention	Poverty rate, child poverty rate	
Income and Wealth Development	Risk insurance		
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Fair housing practices	Home mortgage denial	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org.
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Fair housing practices	Government support programs acceptance rates, after World War II	www.MSNBC.msn.com/id/15704759/print/1/displaymode/1098/
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Fair housing practices	Mortgage interest rates	www.charlotte.com/mld/charlotte/business/special_packages/1ending/12496753.htm?5 (Charlotte Observer, Aug 28, 2005
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Fair housing practices	Home improvement loan acceptance rates	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org.
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Fair housing practices	Rental housing acceptance rates in the wake of Hurricane Katrina	http://www.nationalfairhousing.org/resources/publicPolicy/articles/Testimony.Housing%20and%20Community%20Opportunity%20Subcmt.2.28.pdf
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Safe and affordable housing	Home ownership	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org.
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Safe and affordable housing	Median net worth of home	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org.
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Safe and affordable housing	Living in neighborhoods of "concentrated poverty"	john powell, Institute on race and poverty, 2002

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS	SOURCE
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Safe and affordable recreation		john powell, Institute on race and poverty, 2002
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Safe and affordable transportation to work, markets, recreation		john powell, Institute on race and poverty, 2002
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Public accommodations	Rejection or mistreatment rates	
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Quality goods and services in the neighborhood		John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Research Network on Socioeconomic Status and Health. http://www.macses.ucsf.edu/Research/Social%20Environment/notebook/economic.html
Housing, Infrastructure, Amenities	Quality goods and services in the neighborhood	Households with computer at home	National Urban League, 2005
Health	Health care (e.g. education, prevention, treatment)	Life expectancy	Center for Disease Control and Prevention. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus.htm
Health	Health care (e.g. education, prevention, treatment)	Infant mortality	Center for Disease Control and Prevention. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus.htm
Health	Health care (e.g. education, prevention, treatment)	Age-adjusted death rates, all causes	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org .
Health	Health care (e.g. education, prevention, treatment)	Age adjusted death rates from many cancers, diabetes, HIV, heart disease, stroke (suicide not included)	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org .

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS	SOURCE
Health	Health care (e.g. education, prevention, treatment)	Covered by health insurance	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org .
Health	Health care (e.g. education, prevention, treatment)	Refusal to treatment	
Health	Health care (e.g. education, prevention, treatment)	Overweight and obese	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org .
Health	Opportunities for healthy development	Infant deaths, neonatal and post	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Health	Opportunities for healthy development	Percent of births to mothers 19 and under	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Health	Opportunities for healthy development	Percent of births to unmarried mothers	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Health	Opportunities for healthy development	Mothers with less than 12 years of education	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Health	Opportunities for healthy development	Low birth rate	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Health	Opportunities for healthy development	Vaccinations of children below poverty	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Health	Non-hazardous and non-toxic conditions	Illness/accident rates	
Health	Rescue from unhealthy or dangerous situations	Rescue rates	
Justice	Public safety	Murder victims	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org
Justice	Fair treatment/equal protection by law enforcement	Arrests for violent and non-violent crimes, under age 18 and 18+	US Bureau of Justice. http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/adducr/age_race_specific.pdf

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS	SOURCE
Justice	Fair treatment/equal protection by law enforcement	Average jail sentence for same crimes	National Urban League
Justice	Fair treatment/equal protection by law enforcement	Probation granted for same crimes	National Urban League
Justice	Fair treatment/equal protection by law enforcement	In prison, as percentage of population	National Urban League
Justice	Fair treatment/equal protection by law enforcement	Death sentence rates	Hank Sanders 960
Justice	Fair treatment/equal protection by law enforcement	Imprisonment rates	Grassroots Ldshp
Justice	Fair treatment/equal protection by law enforcement	Percent of population under correctional supervision	http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/gcorpop.htm#CorrPopRace
Justice	Fair treatment/equal protection by law enforcement	Mistreatment/abuse rates	
Justice	Genuine rehabilitation in prison, post-prison		
Justice	Restored rights	Record expungement rates	
Justice			MLK, 4 July 1965
Dignity, Respect, Healing	Freedom from harassment, abuse, hate crimes	Victim of hate crime	US Bureau of Justice. http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2005/victims.htm JHFranklin; Lynn Huntley
Dignity, Respect, Healing	Freedom from harassment, abuse, hate crimes	Victim of "intimate murder"	http://www.endabuse.org/programs/children/files/prevention/DomesticViolenceResearch.pdf

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS	SOURCE
Dignity, Respect, Healing	Freedom from harassment, abuse, hate crimes	Victim of homicide, males, age 15-24	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org.
Dignity, Respect, Healing	Opportunities for being part of the solution		
Dignity, Respect, Healing	Honest discussion		
Dignity, Respect, Healing	Emotional health	Depression/suicide/acting-out rates	
Dignity, Respect, Healing	Reparations	Wealth rates	
Civic Participation	Voting	(no substantial differences)	NUL
Civic Participation	Community development opportunities	Beneficiaries of foundation grantmaking	
Civic Participation	Community development opportunities	Beneficiaries of government programs	
Civic Participation	Community development opportunities	Beneficiaries of private programs	
Civic Participation	Philanthropic opportunities to give/participate in culturally appropriate ways	Volunteerism	National Urban League, 2005. www.nul.org

ARENA	CATEGORY	DOCUMENTED GAPS	SOURCE
Civic Participation	Philanthropic opportunities to give/participate in culturally appropriate ways	Donations to charitable organizations	
Civic Participation	Public office-holding		
Civic Participation	Representation		
Civic Participation	Employment in public and nonprofit sectors	Employment rates in public and nonprofit settings	