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## African Americans: The State of the Disparity

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Racial discrimination is illegal in the new millennium. It has even become socially taboo. There are more prominent, powerful and wealthy African-Americans now than at any other time in the nation's history. While these advances give legitimate cause for celebration, they have also created treacherous illusions about the actual state of racial equality in the United States. Anecdotal evidence of African American advancements disguises the alarming truth. Racial disparities have never disappeared. In many important areas, including education, economics, and health, the inequality is actually growing.

### Educational Indicators

A recent analysis published in *The New York Times* finds that the best predictor of a school's score on standardized tests is the race and class of the student body. Schools with predominantly white and wealthy students have a 1 in 4 chance of earning high test scores for multiple years while only 1 in 300 schools attended by poor children of color will do the same.

In 2005, just 12% of the nation's black 8<sup>th</sup> graders tested proficient in reading; three times fewer than the number of white students taking the test. Fourth grade math results were more promising. The number of black students proficient in math tripled grew from 5% to 15% between 2002 and 2005. Unfortunately, this did not bring black students to parity with their white counterparts who were, again, three times more likely to achieve proficiency.

There is also tremendous racial disparity in educational attainment. As shown in the chart below, the percentage of African-Americans graduating from high school decreased between 1991 and 2004 while it increased for white students. The percentage of blacks completing college went up, but it simply kept pace with improvement in white college graduation rates. The disparity maintains.

**Table 1: Educational Attainment by Race in 1991 and 2005**

Race	High School Diploma 1991	High School Diploma 2005	College Graduates 1991	College Graduates 2005
African-Americans	82%	80% (2 point decrease)	12%	18% (6 point increase)
White Americans	87%	90% (3 point increase)	25%	31% (6 point increase)

### Economic Indicators

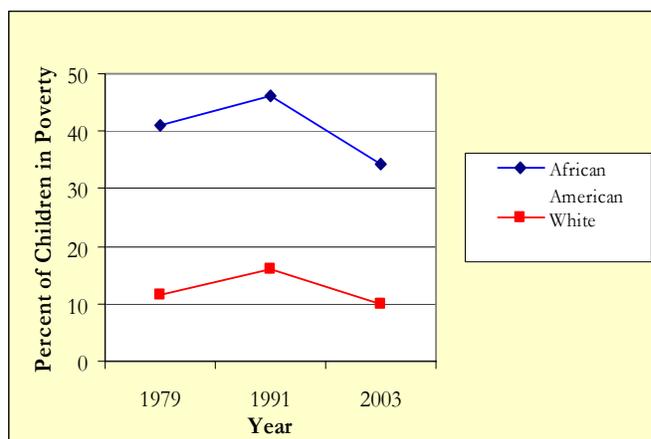
African Americans face challenges in every measure of economic status. While African Americans make up about 13% of the U.S. population, they own just 3% of the assets. The average total net worth of white families is \$70,000 compared to just \$6,000 for African American families. One part of this gap is explained by the fact that African Americans are twice as likely to be unemployed as the average American. The unemployment rate is 10.6% for blacks compared to 5.3% nationally. Those African Americans who are employed earn about \$13,000 a year less than whites. Another source of the tremendous racial disparity in wealth is the racial gap in homeownership, the size of which has doubled in recent decades.

**Table 2: Black and White Homeownership Rates in 1992 and 2004**

	1992	2004
<b>African-Americans</b>	56%	49%
<b>White Americans</b>	67%	76%
<b>Size of the Gap</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>27%</b>

When African-Americans do buy homes, they receive the highest interest mortgage loans 30% more often than whites, even when their income and credit scores are the same. This differential in lending terms cumulatively costs African American homeowners more than \$6 billion dollars each year.

**Figure 1: Child Poverty Declines while Racial Disparity is Unchanged**



A predictable result of the disparity in wealth, home ownership and employment is that 24.5% of black families live below the poverty line, compared to 8.2% of white families. Poverty statistics are even worse for black children. One in three black children lives in poverty. This number has improved from 1991 when 1 in 2 black children lived in households under the poverty line but, if the rate of change simply holds steady, it will take more than 20 years for the percentage of black youth living in poverty to match the national average.

## Health Indicators

Poor outcomes in education and economics are closely tied to poor outcomes in health. Like the disparities in education, disparities in health persist from the beginning of life onwards. The black infant mortality rate is more than twice as high as that for white infants. The following statistics give some illustration of other grave health concerns that disproportionately affect African Americans.

- African Americans make up 13% of the American population, but half of all cases of HIV and AIDS. Once diagnosed, African-Americans are less likely than whites to receive the most effective HIV treatments such as antiretroviral therapy.
- African Americans are 25% more likely to die of cancer than white Americans, and more than twice as likely to die of diabetes.
- Seven in ten African Americans suffer from obesity, compared to 6 in 10 white Americans. African American children are also more likely to be obese than white children.

When it comes to caring for these disorders, adult African Americans are 13% less likely than whites to have any form of health insurance. These statistics make it clear that racial disparities continue to be, literally, a matter of life and death.

In nearly every key indicator of well-being, African Americans continue to fare worse than the national average and far worse than white Americans. In the areas where there are advances, the rate of change is such that parity will take decades to arrive. If we are to address the disparity we must be willing to confront it head on, recognizing that it is not a black issue, but an American one. True racial equality benefits us all. The path to it remains ahead of us.