

Legacy of Inequality

Racial and Economic Disparities in West Virginia



Partnership of African American Churches
West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy
American Friends Service Committee

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Legacy of Inequality: Racial and Economic Disparities in West Virginia

A Project of

Partnership of African American Churches
West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy
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Foreword

The roots of African Americans have grown as deep into West Virginian society as the seams of coal are in these precious mountains that we all love so well. The contributions that people of color have made to the culture of West Virginia are unarguable, substantial and eternal. Black men and women have walked out of and through these mountains onto the pages of history carrying with them ideas that have not only impacted Appalachia but also all of humanity. Individuals such as Carter G. Woodson, Booker T. Washington and Elizabeth Drewry would be members of that fraternity. Unfortunately, West Virginia has not always been as kind to them.

The report briefly chronicles the experience of African Americans in West Virginia. It presents a data analysis of the inequities that have always been and continue to be central to that experience. For example, the infant mortality rate for African Americans in West Virginia is 12 per 1,000, which is worse than Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Russia, Ukraine, Costa Rica, Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹ The poverty rate for African American children under age five is 57.5 percent. The overall poverty rate for the entire African American population in West Virginia is 28.6 percent, which is almost twice that of whites.

In addition to a brief history and data analysis, the report also includes a section on the causes of these disparities and a section that contains suggested policy initiatives that, if enacted, would be effective in eliminating the aforementioned disparities. When read and analyzed the report will educate its readers. However, education is not the primary purpose of the report. The purpose of “Legacy of Inequality: Racial and Economic Disparities in West Virginia” is to form a foundation for community empowerment.

A community is empowered when it has the capacity and the opportunity to take the necessary actions to engage the existing power structures and change them in such a way that community-desired outcomes are achieved.

It is clear from the catastrophic nature of the disparities listed in this report, that no one agency or initiative will be successful in addressing the underlying social causes of these problems. It is hoped that the readers of this report will take this opportunity to engage in those actions that will write a new chapter in the legacy of people of color in the State of West Virginia.

— **Reverend James Patterson**

Charleston, West Virginia

February 1, 2010

A Short History of African Americans in West Virginia

“Those who have no record of what their forebears have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of biography.”

– *Carter G. Woodson*

The first African Americans were brought into what is now West Virginia as slaves, but when blacks arrived in great numbers, they came to build railroads and mine coal. The ancestors of today's African American population constructed schools, created businesses, organized churches and built a solid middle class out of backbreaking work and a belief in the power of education.

When coal industry employment began a sharp decline in the years following World War II, black miners suffered proportionately more job losses than their white counterparts. A great outmigration reduced the African American population to only about four percent of the state's total population. Yet many of those who remain are dedicated to honoring their ancestors while locating new opportunities for the black families who still call West Virginia home.

Slavery and Statehood

The first 20 slaves arrived in Virginia in 1619, according to a West Virginia Archives report. However, it was not until the 1700s that slaves were sold to wealthy farmers in the western counties, where they worked on large farms that grew tobacco and other cash crops.²

The 1860 U.S. Census documented 18,451 slaves living in western Virginia, or four percent of the population. A majority lived in the Eastern Panhandle, but a substantial number provided labor for the Kanawha Valley salt industry, the first major industry developed in the state. Slaves also were used to mine coal to fuel the salt works; the Archives report said in many cases these workers were leased and insured rather than bought because of the high risk of death or injury in the coal mines.³

As political leaders in the western counties began to lay the groundwork for separation from Virginia, slavery was an issue that had to be addressed. Some opposed slavery on moral grounds, while others spoke out against the practice because they believed the existence of slavery harmed the developing industrial economy by discouraging immigrants from settling in the region.⁴

Among the moralists raising their voices against slavery in what is now West Virginia was the famed abolitionist John Brown, who came to the area in 1859 with the intention of establishing a colony for runaway slaves.⁵ “These mountains are the basis of my plan,” he said. “God has given the strength of the hills to freedom; they were placed here for the emancipation of the Negro race.”⁶

Although Brown and his men seized the U.S. armory and arsenal at Harpers Ferry, the plan for the colony fell apart when slaves did not revolt. Brown was hanged for treason, but not before accurately predicting that slavery would not be abolished without great bloodshed.⁷

As originally drawn, West Virginia's constitution banned the introduction of slaves or free African Americans and failed to address the issue of immediate or gradual emancipation.⁸ Constitutional authority Robert M. Bastress said that early in the state's constitutional convention of 1861-63, a resolution was introduced “calling for a ban on the further import of slaves into the state and for gradual abolition beginning almost immediately.”⁹ When this proposal failed, delegates worked out a compromise providing that “no slave shall be brought, or free person of color be permitted to come, into this State for permanent residence.”¹⁰

When Congress considered the West Virginia statehood bill, an amendment was added freeing slaves over the age of 21 and providing that younger slaves would be freed when they reached 21. In February 1865, Gov. Arthur I. Boreman signed an act officially freeing all slaves.¹¹

Education and Civil Rights

Even before they were emancipated, African Americans in western Virginia established a school to educate their children. The Sumner School, which opened in Parkersburg in 1862, was the first publicly financed black school south of the Mason Dixon Line when the state took over support in 1867.

Soon blacks began to establish schools in towns across West Virginia, creating a need for teachers to educate black students. Historic Storer College was established at Harpers Ferry in 1867, consisting of a grammar school and a normal school to train teachers.¹² In 1891, the state created the West Virginia Colored Institute, now West Virginia State University, followed in 1895 by the Bluefield Colored Institute, now Bluefield State College.¹³

A number of influential African Americans passed through the state, including two men who were central to the making and preserving of black history. In 1865, Booker T. Washington left a tobacco plantation in Virginia to come to Malden, West Virginia, where he worked in a salt mine and dreamed of getting an education. "I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study would be about the same as getting into paradise," he wrote in his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*.¹⁴

Washington walked and begged rides across Virginia to attend Hampton Institute, established to educate freedmen.¹⁶ Later, as principal and guiding force of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was considered by many to be the nation's foremost black educator of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Carter G. Woodson, whose family came to Huntington from Virginia, is widely regarded as "The Father of Black History." Woodson, who worked in coal mines in the state, graduated from and served as principal of Huntington's Douglass High School and later as dean of the West Virginia State College. Only the second African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard, he founded the Association for the Study of Negro (now African American) Life and History and devoted his life to preserving black history

and struggling for racial justice.¹⁷ "If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated," he said.

The Niagara Movement, an early civil rights organization founded by a group that included W.E.B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter and generally considered the forerunner of the NAACP, held its first meeting on U.S. soil in 1906 in Harpers Ferry. DuBois described the gathering as "one of the greatest meetings that American Negroes ever held." As participants walked from Storer College to the site of John Brown's quest to free enslaved blacks, they removed their shoes and socks to honor the hallowed ground, according to the National Park Service.¹⁸ DuBois said that "here on the scene of John Brown's martyrdom... we reconsecrated ourselves, our honor, our property, to the final emancipation of the race which John Brown died to make free."¹⁹

Carter Woodson also was a prominent member of the Niagara Movement, as was J.R. Clifford, a West Virginia teacher, newspaper publisher and attorney. In 1896 Clifford, the first African American to pass the state's bar examination, brought a landmark suit challenging the state's segregated school system. He represented Thomas Martin, a black parent in Morgan County who sought to have his children attend a local white school because there was no school for black children. In *Martin v. Board of Education*, the state Supreme Court ruled the Martin children could not attend the white school even though there was no separate school available to them, a decision that stood until the United State Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.²⁰

The Great Expansion

The construction of the C&O railroad in the late 1860s and the ensuing development of the southern West Virginia coalfields brought African Americans into West Virginia in great numbers.²¹ Marshall University professor Cicero M. Fain III said of the African-American immigration to the coalfields, "The [railroad] provided the ignition; coal provided the fuel."²²

Historians Ronald T. Lewis and Joe William Trotter, Jr., noted that, although blacks had worked in the coal mines as slaves, the emergence of the African American community in southern West Virginia dates back to the 30-year period of great expansion from 1880 to 1910 when the ancestors

of most black West Virginians entered the state. Trotter wrote that the black population in southern West Virginia increased from 4,800 in 1880 to more than 40,500 in 1910.²³ Lewis said the black migration into southern West Virginia began as a “trickle in the 1880s and crested in the early 1920s.”²⁴ The black population of the state increased from 17,000 in 1870 to 64,100 in 1920 and reached a high of nearly 115,000 in 1930.²⁵

McDowell County, which became the county with the largest African American population in the state, also mined more coal than any other county.²⁶ McDowell County had no black residents recorded in the 1860 census. A total population of only 7,300 in 1890 exploded to 94,354 by 1940. As early as 1910, approximately 30 percent of McDowell’s population was African American.²⁷

Miner Joe Harvey of Lorado in Logan County related a story of how companies brought black miners into the southern West Virginia coalfields in Janet Greene’s 1984 publication, “Black Workers in the Logan Field.” “They used to run what we called ‘transportations,’” Harvey said. “The company had a man that they would give money and tell him to go down south and bring up a trainload of men. That’s the way a whole of lot of people got up here.”²⁸

Trotter cited factors that made West Virginia more attractive to black migrants than other mining states. “Racial lynchings were fewer, educational opportunities were greater; and voting was not restricted by race as elsewhere in the south,” he wrote.²⁹

Some historians estimate that one-third to one-half of the miners who helped organize the United Mine Workers of America’s District 17 in southern West Virginia were African American. The UMWA was integrated from its beginning, and black miners held leadership positions in District 17 before the turn of the twentieth century.³⁰ The district’s first three vice presidents were African Americans, including J. J. Wren, who served as the district’s president after the death of the previous president in 1893.³¹

Fain wrote that “miners worked long shifts, and when not fighting injuries caused by fatigue, faulty machinery and darkness, they regularly faced fire, falling rock and explosions. But, despite the dangers and labor strife, the railroads and coal mines provided unparalleled opportunity for blacks seeking gainful employment.”³²

Declining Populations

The peak employment year for the coal industry in West Virginia was 1940, when 130,457 workers were employed, according to the West Virginia Office of Miners’ Health, Safety and Training. Mechanization of equipment and the introduction of mining methods that used fewer workers resulted in a massive loss of coal jobs in ensuing years. By 1990, the mining industry employed only 15,000 workers (even though the greatest coal production was recorded in 1997 when 182 million tons were mined, according to state records).³³

As West Virginia lost high-paying industrial jobs, a great out-migration occurred in the coal-producing areas of the state, leaving behind high levels of poverty and unemployment. Over the 50-year period between 1940 and 1990, as West Virginia’s total population dropped by six percent, the population of the southern coalfield counties declined by 31 percent and lost much of their African American population.³⁴

McDowell County, which once had the third highest population of any county in the state, experienced the most dramatic decline. In 1950, McDowell was home to 24,128 blacks. A decade later, the number had fallen to 15,913 and by 1970 the black population was only 9,083. Within a 20-year period, the county lost more than 62 percent of its black population, according to state records, and the decline continues.³⁵ The 2000 Census showed only a little more than 3,200 African Americans living in McDowell County.³⁶

A 2003 report by the U.S. Civil Rights Advisory Committee offered the opinion that while mechanization of the mines adversely affected the region as a whole, “its impact was harshest on blacks.”³⁷

Rhonda Janney Coleman wrote that this was because “the black coal miner usually held jobs that were hardest hit by mechanization,” and African Americans “were not given a proportional share of the newly-created jobs.” As a result, “when layoffs occurred, the proportion of black miners affected was significantly higher than for whites in the industry.”³⁸

In *Black Coal Miners in America*, Lewis shared this conclusion, writing that mechanization had a greater impact on African Americans because black workers

“were concentrated in the unskilled classification of hand loading and . . . had fewer and fewer opportunities to learn the skills necessary to become machine operators or maintenance men.”³⁹

Lewis said the loss of jobs and resulting exodus from the coalfields completed a black migration pattern from the south begun in the late 1880s. In *Black Coal Miners in America*, he cited a 1950 study of Raleigh, West Virginia, that examined three generations of black families and found that nearly all of the parents of the black miners and 58 percent of the miners themselves had been born in southern states. More than 90 percent of their children were born in West Virginia, but these children were migrating to northern cities. “Eighty percent of the young adults believed they would make more and have a better chance in life doing work other than mining,” Lewis wrote. To do so, they had to move away, leaving West Virginia with an African American population that now hovers at about four percent of the total population.⁴⁰

A Lasting Legacy

From slavery to salt mines, railroading and coal mining, through the creation of schools, churches and communities, in the areas of civil rights, union movements, law, politics and business, African Americans have made vital and lasting contributions to the history and culture of West Virginia. Those who remain understand the necessity of remembering that past as they continue to strive to improve the well-being and future of members of the current generation and their children after them.

As the great poet Maya Angelou wrote in “Still I Rise”:
“Out of the huts of history’s shame, I rise; Up from a past that’s rooted in pain, I rise . . . Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave; I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise, I rise, I rise.”

Measures of Well-Being

“ To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. ”
 – W.E.B. DuBois

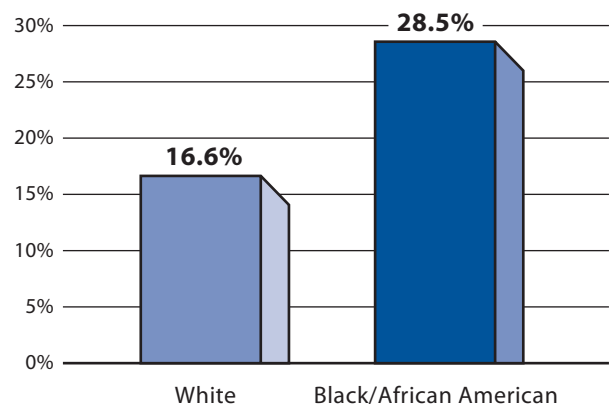
More than 45 years have passed since the federal Civil Rights Act was enacted, yet significant economic and social inequities persist for African Americans. This chapter analyzes key measures of well-being for African Americans in West Virginia, as compared to the white population. The findings confirm that deep disparities exist across a broad range of variables, including income, poverty, education, health and incarceration.

The analysis was based on data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey and other sources. Racial comparisons are graphed using the Census Bureau categories of “White” and “Black/African American.” These findings do not reflect the current economic recession, which most likely has amplified many of the disparities found in this chapter. (See Appendix for data limitations.)

Poverty

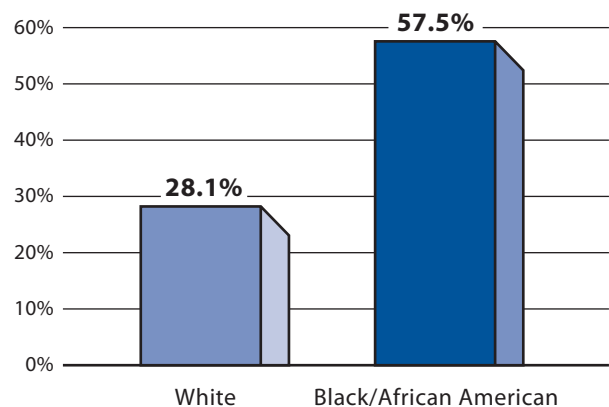
West Virginia has one of the highest rates of poverty in the nation. While both whites and African Americans have poverty rates above the national average, deep racial disparities exist across all age groups. Overall, 28.5 percent of African Americans are in poverty compared to 16.6 percent of whites. African American children under age five are more than twice as likely as white children to be poor, with 58 percent living below the poverty line. African American adults also experience significantly higher poverty levels, including one in four working-age adults and one in five seniors. (See Figures 1-4.)

FIGURE 1
Percentage in Poverty, West Virginia



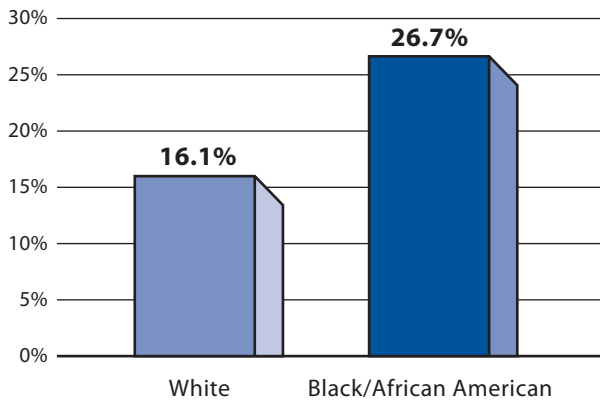
Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

FIGURE 2
Percentage of Children Under 5 in Poverty, West Virginia



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

FIGURE 3
Percentage of Working Age People in Poverty, West Virginia



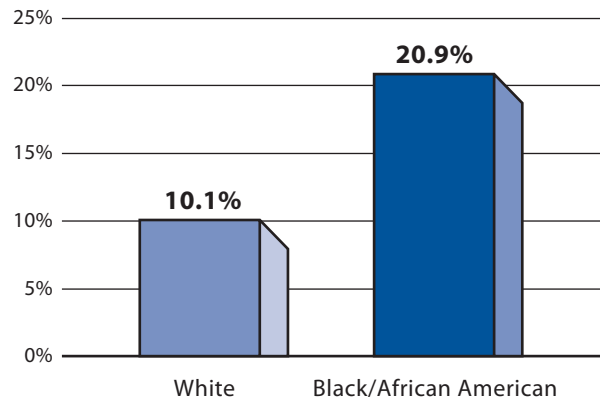
Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

Wages and Income

On multiple measures, African Americans in West Virginia have less economic security than their white counterparts. Per capita income for African Americans is less than \$15,000, which is 30 percent lower than per capita income for whites. The median wage for African Americans is about 20 percent lower than the median wage for whites. The wage gap is even larger among men, with African American men earning just 70 cents for every dollar earned by white men. At the family and household level, African American incomes are less than two-thirds the amount for whites. (See Figures 5-8.)

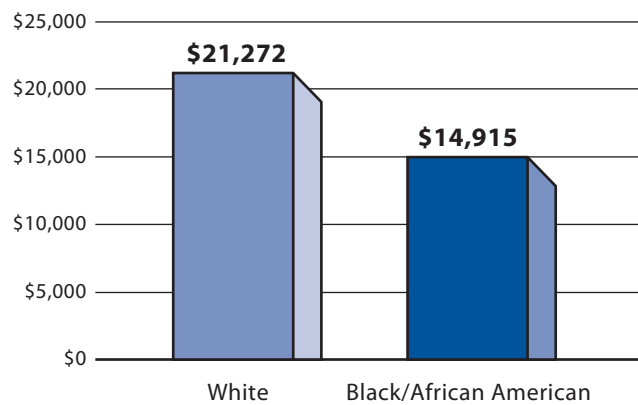
The deep disparities in wages and income derive largely from the places where people work. African Americans disproportionately work in lower-wage fields of employment. Almost one-third of African Americans in West Virginia are employed in service occupations, while only 17 percent of whites are. Moreover, a low share – just under five percent – of African Americans work in higher-wage occupations, such as the construction and extraction industries. Almost three times as many whites work in these occupations. (See Figure 9.)

FIGURE 4
Percentage of Seniors (65 & Up) in Poverty, West Virginia



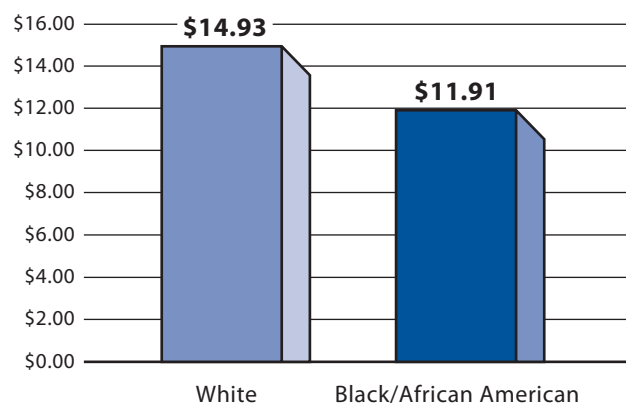
Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

FIGURE 5
Per Capita Income, West Virginia (In 2008 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey!

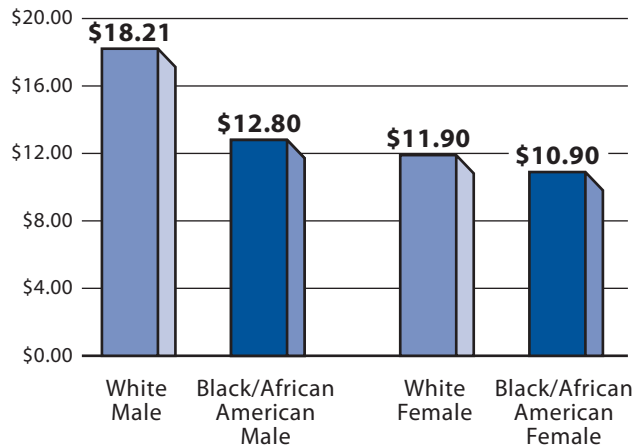
FIGURE 6
Median Wages, West Virginia (In 2008 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

Note: The universe for this data is full-time, year-around worker.

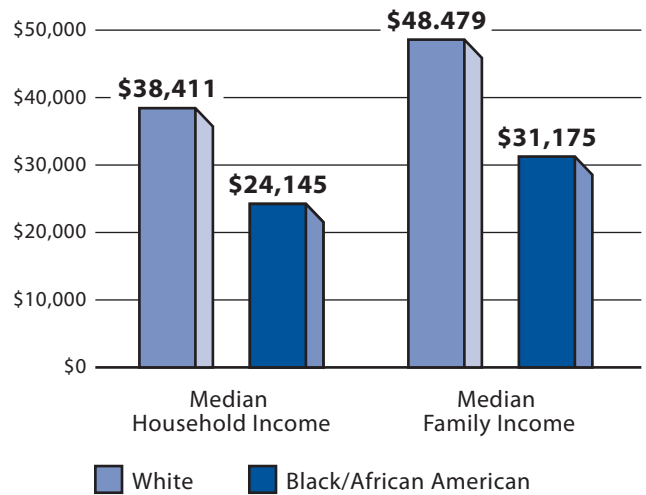
FIGURE 7
Median Wages by Gender, West Virginia
(In 2008 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

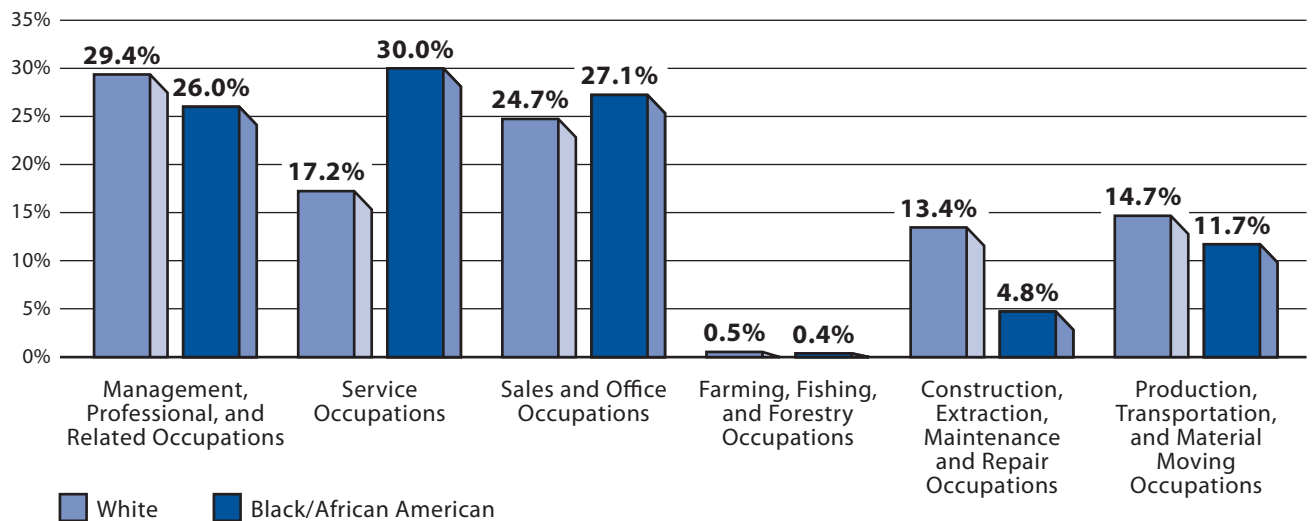
Note: The universe for this data is full-time, year-around worker.

FIGURE 8
Median Household and Family Income, West Virginia
(In 2008 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)



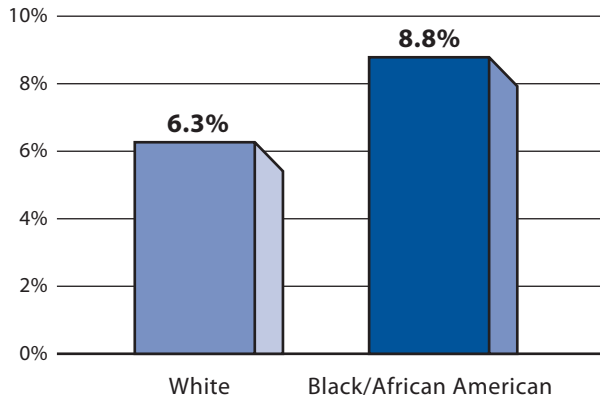
Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

FIGURE 9
Place of Occupation, West Virginia



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

FIGURE 10
Unemployment Rate, West Virginia



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

Unemployment

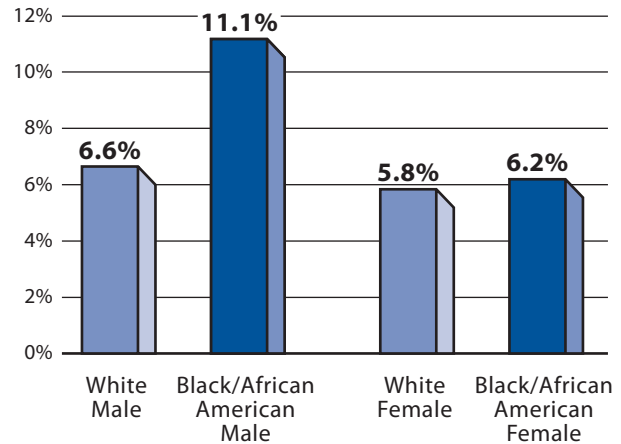
The three-year average unemployment rate is 40 percent higher for African Americans than for whites. Among white and African American men, the gap is almost 70 percent, while the gap among women is less than 10 percent. One significant limitation of the unemployment rate is that it does not include those who have dropped out of the labor force because they have given up looking for a job. (See Figures 10 and 11.)

A high labor participation rate is a key component for long-term economic growth and productivity. The labor participation rate is the percentage of working-age persons in the state who are employed or looking for jobs. The labor participation rate for African Americans is 59 percent, compared to 67 percent for whites. (See Figure 12.)

Home Ownership

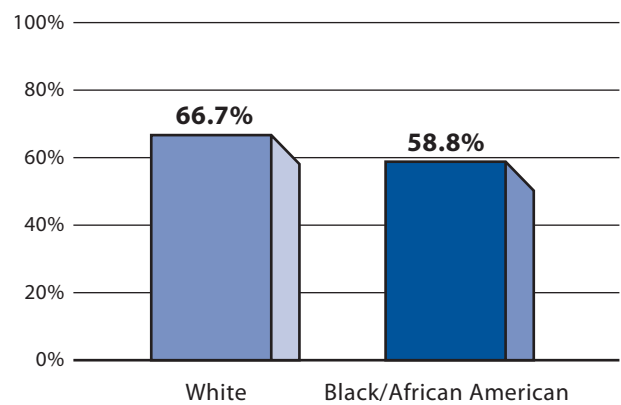
Home ownership, which is often viewed as a good barometer of middle class standing, also reflects the racial inequality that exists in West Virginia. Less than half of African Americans own their homes, compared to three-quarters of whites. (See Figure 13.)

FIGURE 11
Unemployment Rate by Gender, West Virginia



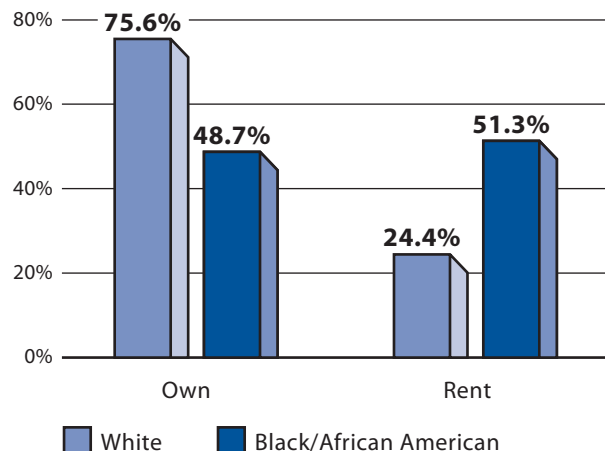
Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

FIGURE 12
Labor Force Participation Rate, West Virginia



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey!

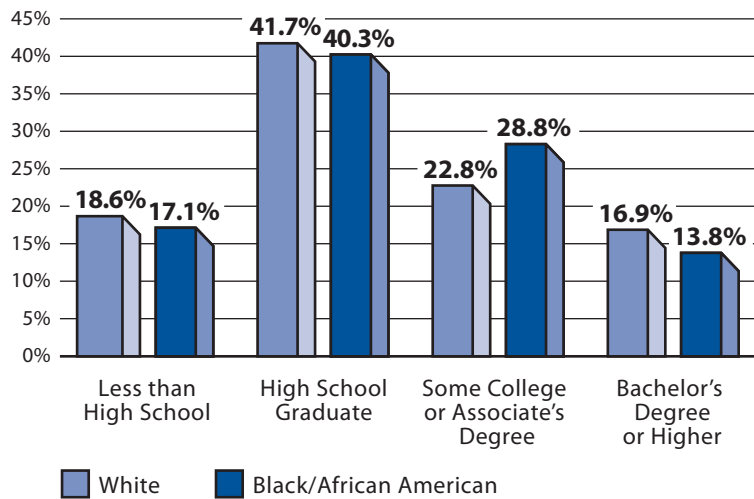
FIGURE 13
Home Ownership, West Virginia



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

FIGURE 14

Education Attainment, West Virginia



Source: WV CBP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

Note: The universe for this data is age 25 and higher.

Education

Racial disparities in educational attainment are less severe than for other social and economic indicators. The percentage of adults in West Virginia who are high school graduates is about the same for whites and African Americans, hovering around 40 percent. African Americans lead whites by six percentage points in terms of the number of those with some college or an associate's degree. When it comes to four-year college degrees and postgraduate work, whites have a three-percentage point advantage. (See Figure 14.)

Incarceration

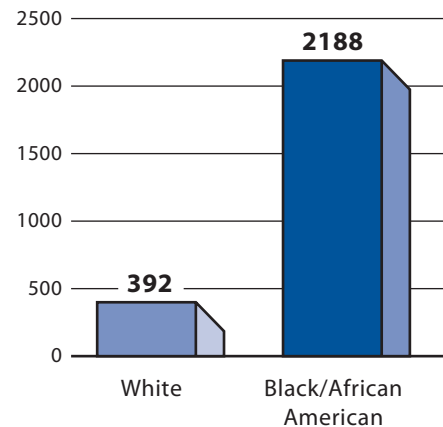
The disproportionate number of African Americans in prisons and jails in West Virginia is alarming. In 2005, the incarceration rate for Blacks was 2,188 per 100,000 residents, compared to 392 for Whites. In other words, 2.2 percent of all African Americans in West Virginia are incarcerated, compared to 0.4 percent of whites. (See Figure 15.)

The overrepresentation of African Americans in the state's correctional facilities begins early. A 2001 study by Carol Sharlip examined the disproportionately high number of African American youth in the juvenile justice system. The study found that "this overrepresentation of minority youth stems from decisions made at the system's earliest stages

FIGURE 15

Number of Inmates in West Virginia Prisons and Jails in 2005

(Per 100,000 Residents)



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

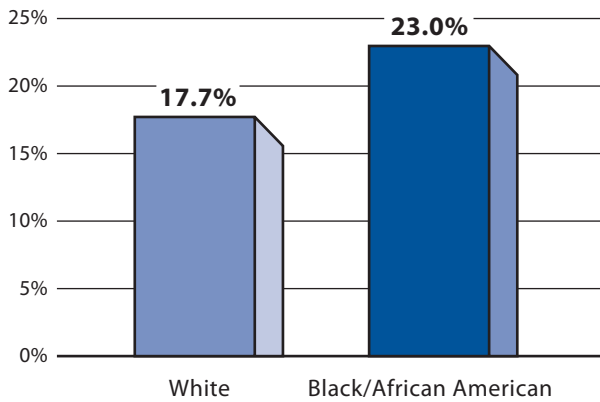
and is often marked by an additive effect at subsequent stages."⁴¹ Factors that bear on minority overrepresentation also include the differing effects of poverty and wealth, government policies, public opinion and its influence on policy and law, the availability of public and private funds to serve youth and families, and the role of the media in influencing public perceptions of youth.

Health Status and Insurance Coverage

In 2006, African Americans were 30 percent more likely than whites to be uninsured. African American men had the highest rate of being uninsured at 25.1 percent, followed by African American women at 20.8 percent, white men at 18.7 percent, and white women at 16.6 percent. (See Figures 16 and 17.)

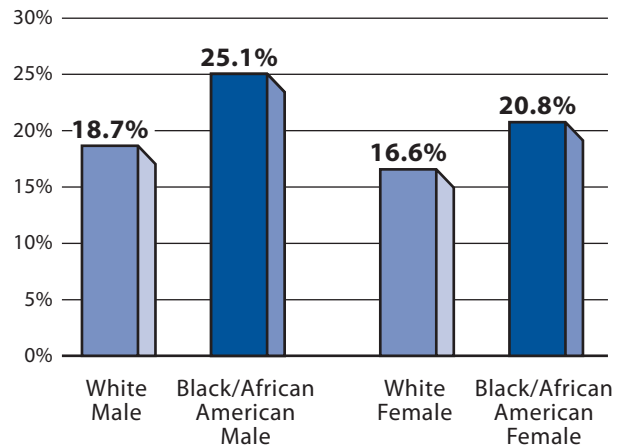
Some of the deepest social inequalities are in health outcomes. For example, the infant mortality rate for African Americans in West Virginia is 60 percent higher than for whites. The infant mortality rate is the number of children per thousand who die before their first birthday. It is a widely-used indicator of the health status of a population because it is associated with the availability of health services, education, and economic development. (See Figure 18.)

FIGURE 16
Percentage with No Health Insurance, West Virginia



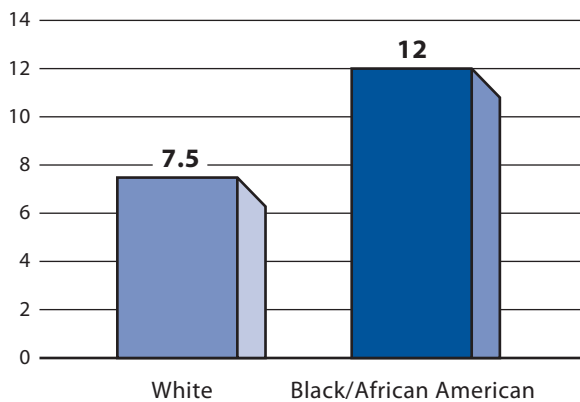
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates.

FIGURE 17
Percentage with No Health Insurance by Gender, West Virginia



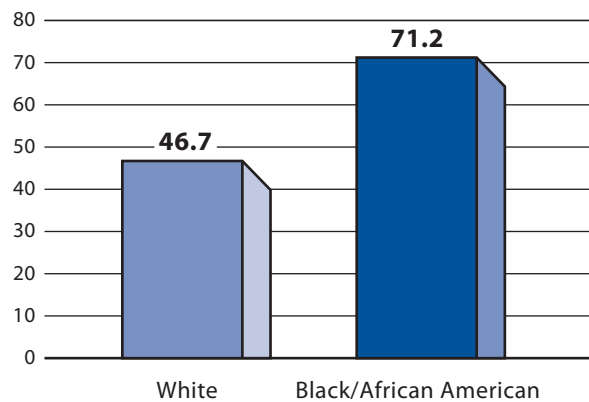
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates.

FIGURE 18
Infant Mortality Rate, West Virginia (Per 1000 Births)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

FIGURE 19
Low Birthweight, West Virginia (Per 1000 Births)

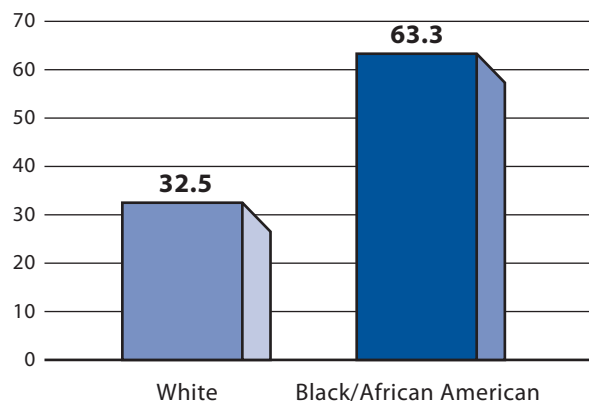


Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

One of the major predictors of infant mortality is low birthweight (babies born under 5.5 pounds). Low-birthweight babies also incur larger medical costs and are more susceptible to disease and other health complications. In West Virginia, 58 percent more African American babies are born with low birthweight than white babies. (See Figure 19.)

Diabetes is also a health outcome that disproportionately affects African Americans. Deaths due to diabetes are about 63 per 100,000 population for African Americans, compared to 33 per 100,000 for whites. (See Figure 20.)

FIGURE 20
Diabetes Death Rate, West Virginia (Per 100,000 Population)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

Causes and Consequences of Racial Disparities

“Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”
 – Reverend Martin Luther King

The previous chapter has provided a clear picture of a community in distress at many levels. Even with West Virginia's generally low earnings and high poverty rates, massive disparities exist between the African American population and the white majority.

While there is a powerful predisposition in America to view issues of inequality in terms of the personal traits of those involved, this approach is inadequate to account for such massive and systemic inequalities.

In such cases, it might be helpful to follow sociologist C. Wright Mills' distinction between *personal troubles* and *social issues*.

As he put it in *The Sociological Imagination*,

“Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of which he is directly and personally aware.”

Issues, on the other hand,

“...have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of individual and historical life.”⁴²

For example, if within a state like West Virginia a few individuals experience a greater degree of poverty

and joblessness than others, this could well be understood within the confines of the characters, skills and immediate opportunities of the people involved. But when these problems are widespread and are particularly concentrated in certain populations, structural and systemic issues are involved.

Loaded Words

In this case, it is impossible to discuss the difference in social outcomes between African American and white West Virginians without also discussing the emotionally charged issues of race and racism.

It is an unfortunate irony of history that the concept of race is as slippery scientifically as it is loaded socially. There is a general scientific consensus that the human race comprises one species and that physical differences in appearance between various groups are relatively recent and superficial adaptations to specific environments. In the words of cognitive scientist Steven Pinker, “People are qualitatively the same but may differ quantitatively. The quantitative differences are small in biological terms, and they are found to a far greater extent *among* the individual members of an ethnic group or race than *between* groups or races.”⁴³

Many social scientists tend to view race as more of a social construct than a biological fact. Dr. Camara Jones, a physician and epidemiologist for the Centers for Disease Control, offers this as a working definition:

“Race’ is the social classification of people based on phenotype. That is, ‘race’ is the societal box into which others put you based on your physical features. As such, it is distinct from genetic endowment or cultural

heritage...With regard to culture, each phenotype ('racial') group is diverse in cultures, and there are cultural similarities across groups. With regard to genes, the few genes that determine skin color, hair texture, and facial features (the principle aspects of phenotype used to classify people into 'races' in the United States) are not informative about those other aspects of the genotype at the individual level."⁴⁴

If race is often a controversial subject, this is probably even more the case with racism. Here again, the common bias towards individual explanations may be confusing the issue. In common usage, racism is often seen as an individual defect and accusations and denials of it may be hurled back and forth in a process that produces more heat than light.

Jones offers a more useful definition, one that moves beyond the merely personal level: "First of all, racism is a system. It is not an individual character flaw, nor a personal moral failing, nor a psychiatric illness. It is a system (consisting of structures, policies, practices, and norms) that structures opportunity and assigns value based on phenotype, or the way people look."⁴⁵

As a system, racism is not the conscious and deliberate creation of any particular individuals but rather a cultural, economic and historical legacy. It belongs to the category of social facts that are external to and coercive of individuals. Emile Durkheim, a pioneer of sociology and anthropology, described social facts as "manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him."⁴⁶

Social facts such as systemic racism, however, unlike laws of nature, were created by people and can be changed by them.

Anatomy of a System

Based on extensive research on how racism and other forms of inequality affect health, Jones⁴⁷ has developed a global definition of racism as a system that arbitrarily disadvantages some members of society while arbitrarily advantaging others and undermining the potential of the larger society. It operates at three levels: institutionalized, personally mediated and internalized.

Institutionalized racism has to do with structures, policies, and norms that promote unequal access to material resources, information, opportunities, education and power. This could include lack of employment opportunities, access to good schools, quality health care, decent housing, credit, or a safe and clean environment. It often manifests itself in the failure to act in the face of urgent human needs.

Personally-mediated racism is the sphere in which individuals are viewed and treated differently, intentionally or not, on the basis of race. This can take place in many arenas, including encounters with the police and court system, schools, health care facilities, stores, the workplace, etc., as well as in ordinary personal encounters.

Internalized racism refers to the impact of various forms of unequal treatment on the self-consciousness of those who are targeted. It could manifest itself in such forms as resignation, self-devaluation, accepting limitations imposed from others, or any number of other forms.

Perhaps the most striking definition of this kind of racism was given by civil rights pioneer Carter G. Woodson, who had strong connections to the Mountain State. In his 1933 classic *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, he wrote:

"When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary."⁴⁷

Health Impacts

In the field of public health, there is a growing awareness that genes and personal habits alone cannot explain disparities in such health outcomes as life expectancy, infant mortality, and susceptibility to various diseases. More and more attention has been paid to social determinants of health such as status, income, education level, autonomy, and social inclusion.

Social conditions—the jobs we do, the money we're paid, the schools we attend, the neighborhood we live in—are as important to health and longevity as hereditary factors, personal behaviors and even the health care we receive.

A pioneer in this field of research is the British epidemiologist Michael Marmot, who among other things studied the health of English civil servants over a period of decades and summarized this and other research in his book *The Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Affects our Health and Longevity*.⁴⁹ He found that those higher up the ladder lived longer and were less sick than those below them, even when individual behavior was taken into account.

Marmot found this effect or social gradient to be constant throughout the hierarchy. That is, people just below the highest level tended to have shorter and sicker lives than those above them and so on all the way down. This was true despite the fact that England has universal health care. Marmot found two variables that seem to have a great impact on health and well-being: a sense of control over one's life and work, and the ability to fully participate in social life.

People with higher incomes and education levels tend to have more control and be less subject to shocks and setbacks than those with fewer resources and have more opportunities for social participation.

At the lower end of the social spectrum, jobs and situations that give people low levels of control and impose high demands and low rewards seem to be particularly toxic for health. Outside of the workplace, such situations might include living in bad housing or unsafe neighborhoods. These factors seem to increase the body's stress response, which was designed to deal with short-term threats but can lead to higher risks of various diseases when the stress is prolonged or chronic. This can mean greater susceptibility to such illnesses as diabetes and heart disease as well as greater risk of infectious diseases.

Racism in the various forms discussed above imposes an added health burden on people of color. Past and present discrimination in housing, jobs, and education means that African Americans are more likely to be lower on the class ladder. But even at the same socio-economic and educational levels, African Americans typically have worse health and die sooner than their white counterparts.

Collateral Damage

Racism exacts a high social cost on African Americans and other people of color. But it could be argued that it has also harmed the white majority, particularly those with low and moderate incomes. This group—far larger in West Virginia and the United States than the African American population—can be viewed as racism's collateral damage.

Many observers have noted that the capitalist economies of Western Europe tend to spend more public resources than the United States on social programs such as old age, disability and survivor's pensions; family and child benefits; and unemployment and labor market programs. These nations also have some form of universal health care, although they spend less of their gross domestic product (GDP) on this than the United States.

Harvard economists Alberto Alesina and Edward Glaeser and Bruce Sacerdote of Dartmouth College investigated the issue and published their findings in a paper titled "Why Doesn't the United States Have a European-Style Welfare State?" (Note: the term "welfare state" as used here doesn't refer simply to programs aimed at the poorest families but rather a range of programs and benefits across the population.)

They found many things influenced differences, such as different attitudes about inequality, different histories, and economic and constitutional factors. But one of the biggest factors was race.

As they put it, "Racial discord plays a critical role in determining beliefs about the poor."⁵⁰ Since members of racial minorities are often seen as more likely to be poor, public policies that would reduce poverty are seen as primarily benefitting those groups—even though that is not in fact the case.

They note that foes of such policies often use "race-based rhetoric" to oppose them. "Across countries, racial fragmentation is a powerful predictor of redistribution. Within the United States, race is the single most important predictor of support for welfare. America's troubled race relations are clearly a major reason for the absence of an American welfare state."⁵¹ States with higher percentages

of African Americans tended to have lower social benefits. In those states, white Americans are more likely to oppose social spending than in less diverse states.

When President Truman proposed national health insurance in the late 1940s, he was opposed by powerful southern politicians who feared this might lead to desegregation.⁵²

Alesina, Glaeser and Sacerdote note: "A natural generalization of race-based theory is that Americans think of the poor as members of some different group than themselves, whereas Europeans think of the poor as members of their own group. Racial differences between the poor and the non-poor in the United States will tend to create the perception of the poor as 'other'..."⁵³

The irony is that while many people think of poverty in racial terms, by far the largest number of poor people are white. While African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to be poor than white Americans, the Census Bureau

reported in 2008 that nearly 27 million white Americans lived below the poverty line – more than the number of African Americans and Hispanics (9.4 million and 11 million respectively) combined.⁵⁴

The same is true for health coverage. By far the largest group of the more than 46 million uninsured Americans is white (over 34 million), compared with African Americans (over 7.4 million) and Hispanics (nearly 15 million).⁵⁵

One could thus make the case that the greatest number of people harmed by a racialized view of poverty and social status are white Americans.

Moving Ahead

Fortunately, undoing the damage of racism is not a zero sum game where one group wins at the expense of another. Racism constitutes a net loss for society as a whole by undermining the opportunities for some of its members to develop to their full potential. Further, concrete policies that reduce inequities will benefit people across all lines.

Policy Opportunities to Improve Racial Equity

“If you don’t like the way the world is, you change it. You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time.”
– *Marian Wright Edelman*

There has been substantial progress in improving opportunities and conditions for African Americans over the past century. Yet dramatic disparities persist, as illustrated in Chapter 2, in education, employment, wages, health, and other measures of well-being.

As described in Chapter 3, individual racial attitudes play only a small role in perpetuating these disparities. Strategies aimed at changing individual attitudes and behaviors will do little to reduce overall disparities unless the *systemic* issues are also addressed. These include the structures, policies, and norms that promote unequal access to material resources, information, opportunities, education and power.

Policymakers in West Virginia have a pivotal role to play in re-shaping public policy to promote racial equity. Recent examples include improved professional development for teachers in counties with high minority and poor populations, as well as legislation aimed at increasing economic development in minority communities.

Much more remains to be done, however. The following are recommended policy improvements in five key areas: jobs and economic development; education; family economic security; criminal justice; and planning and evaluation.

Jobs and Economic Development

- Appropriate \$3 million to the **West Virginia Economic Development Authority** to fund Senate Bill 573 in order to support economic development projects in heavily populated African American communities. Senate Bill 573 is an excellent piece of legislation but it lacks funding and oversight.

- Appropriate \$2 million dollars to continue funding the **Neighborhood Housing and Economic Stabilization Program** in minority neighborhoods. This program has the potential to have a tremendous impact in using housing rehab, new construction and weatherization as an economic development driver and an employment and training initiative in low-income communities around the state.
- Use **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Funds** to allow the state or another entity to create a subsidized employment program that specifically targets low-income communities. For instance, the state of New York used the funds to create a “Green Jobs Corp” program that provides public assistance recipients and other low income Individuals with employment opportunities in “green jobs.”

Education

- Reauthorize HB4669, which created Professional Development Schools (PDSs) in ten counties with high minority and low-socioeconomic populations, and include the following changes: (1) Require the formation of a PDS Team in each county would includes strong community involvement, at least quarterly meetings, and a structure of accountability; (2) Appropriate at least \$100,000 per county to fund the community and parent mobilization training and engagement component of the PDS School Initiative; and (3) Appropriate at least \$200,000 per county to support community tutoring and mentoring programs to support the PDSs.

Family Economic Security

- **Enact a State Earned Income Tax Credit.** At the federal level, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) has been one of the most successful anti-poverty and pro-work policies ever enacted. Each year the federal EITC pulls thousands of families in West Virginia out of poverty. West Virginia could build on the success of the national EITC by joining the 24 other states that have adopted a state EITC. A State EITC would further remedy the problem by supplementing income and improving tax fairness.
- Extend **Unemployment Insurance** to workers who are presently excluded. West Virginia is eligible for \$33.2 million under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act if the state adopts at least three reforms. The Legislature approved the first improvement last year when it adopted a more inclusive method for calculating benefits. To receive the remaining two-thirds of the funds, the state must adopt at least two additional improvements specified in the Recovery Act, such as covering part-time workers and workers with compelling family reasons for leaving their jobs.

Criminal Justice

- Enact legislation and appropriate \$1 million to fund a **Demonstration Re-Entry Project** in Kanawha County, which would be administered by community and faith-based organizations to help the over 250 ex-offenders returning to Kanawha County each year successfully transition back to the community. One of the keys to reducing the overrepresentation of African Americans in the state's juvenile justice and adult corrections systems youth in the effective community-based programs. West Virginia's Community Correction Centers are having some success in reducing regional jail costs, but are having no measurable impact on reducing the overrepresentation of African Americans in the system.

Planning and Evaluation

- Improve **data collection.** There is not one single data-gathering agency that collects scientifically significant data on the state's African American population. The Department of Health and Human Resources should oversample those counties that contain substantial African American residents so that current data is always available on this minority population.
- Create a **State Office of Minority Affairs** charged with reviewing information and coordinating agency-level programs across state government to eliminate the racial disparities identified in this report. Efforts to address these issues at the individual agency level are sporadic at best and in many instances nonexistent.

APPENDIX

Data Limitations

The data used in Chapter 2 came primarily from three-year averages contained in the 2006-2008 American Community Survey sponsored by the U.S. Census Bureau. These three-year estimates derive from data collected between January 2006 and December 2008. While one-year estimates (collected from January 2008 to December 2008) contained in the 2008 ACS are more current the using averages derived from three years, the sample size is comparatively smaller. Despite the larger sample size in the 2006-2008 ACS, it still has limitations in sample size for Blacks and African Americans in West Virginia. This is because Blacks and African Americans make up only four percent of the state's population.

Because the ACS is based on a sample rather than from all housing units and people living in a group, there's a degree of uncertainty associated with the estimates. This is called the sampling error, and each data point contains one. The larger the sample size, the more accurate the estimates are and the smaller the sampling error. The ACS expresses the sampling error by showing the "margin of error" contained in each estimate. The margin of error is the difference between an estimate and its upper and lower confidence bounds. Margins of error are often expressed beside numbers in polls taken by news outlets as +/- an amount.

For example, Table 1 below shows estimates and the margin of error in the 2006-2008 ACS data for median household income for Whites and Blacks and/or African Americans in West Virginia.

Median Household Income by Race, West Virginia

	Estimate	Margin of Error (+/-)
White	\$38,411	\$351
Black/ or African American	\$24,145	\$1,701

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

The ACS uses a confidence interval of 90 percent, meaning that you can be 90 percent confident that the median household income for Whites in West Virginia is +/- \$351 from the estimate of \$38,411. The margin of error is almost five times greater for Black and African American than for White. Expressed as a percent, the margin of error in the above estimates is +/- 1 percent for Whites and +/- 7 percent for Blacks and African Americans. Thus, the estimates given for Blacks and African Americans have a broader range and a less accurate estimate.

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The Partnership of African American Churches (PAAC)

is a 501 (c) 3 collaborative, non-profit, faith based community development corporation, based in Charleston, WV. While PAAC serves all communities, it intentionally targets African American communities in West Virginia. The PAAC is a specific initiative-driven organization focusing on holistic health, which encompasses education, physical health and absence of disease, economic security, crime prevention and youth development as intrinsic to its core programmatic solutions.

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The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy

is a policy research organization that is nonpartisan, nonprofit, and statewide. It focuses on how policy decisions affect all West Virginians, especially low- and moderate-income families.

www.wvpolicy.org

The American Friends Service Committee, West Virginia Economic Justice Project,

works statewide on issues affecting low-income and working families.

www.afsc.org/charleston

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