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MAGAZINE

EVERY CHILD A GRADUATE

By Bob Wise

Fifty-two years following the Supreme Court's landmark decision on *Brown v. Board of Education*, unanimously ruling that separate schools are inherently unequal and, as such, violate the 14th Amendment of the Constitution, the nation remains a long way from guaranteeing the educational opportunities that *Brown* envisioned. This is especially true when it comes to providing the high-quality high school education that every student needs to be successful in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

Despite some progress toward equality and opportunity in education in the decades that followed the Supreme Court's definitive decision, the nation has regressed over the last ten years or so. Schools are more segregated, high-quality teachers are lacking in many high-poverty and high-minority schools and school districts, and few low-income and minority students have access to the challenging curriculum that is associated with success in college and the workforce. Even more troubling is the fact that more than 1.2 million students—more than half of whom are kids of color—fail to graduate from high school every year. That is approximately 7,000 students who drop out of school *every school day*.

This dropout crisis hits across all neighborhoods and affects students from every income level, but students from low-income and minority families are disproportionately affected by it.

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Check out David Bositis' bi-weekly updates on the 2006 elections on our website, www.jointcenter.org. Following the elections, look for his post-election analysis.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

In the last issue of *Focus*, we asked readers to tell us what they thought were the most pressing issues that this year's candidates for public office needed to address this fall. You will find responses on page 11. The questions are not surprising to those of us who have been following public policy debates recently, but finding concrete and effective answers to many of the questions is a complex process. As a voter or a political candidate, you should find much in this issue of *Focus* to help you think through the options.

In a new feature, Point/Counterpoint, two economists take on immigration policy. Is immigration hurting African Americans by taking away jobs and lowering wages? Does it help build the "Rainbow Coalition" that will pave the way for passage of a more progressive policy agenda? The Point/Counterpoint offers insights into the complexities of this issue, from both economic and political perspectives. The remaining articles in this issue, each in their own way, support the need for a broad coalition to move social issues back to the top of the policy agenda if the goal is to increase economic opportunity for African Americans and other communities of color. Whether it is food security, quality education, Social Security, or community rebuilding, the authors of these articles present problems or offer solutions that require government resources. Those resources have not been forthcoming at the levels that these analysts believe are needed.

In some cases, government policy is currently moving in the opposite direction from that suggested by our authors. The article on food security by Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba and Madina Agénor suggests that work requirements under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) be designed in a way that is more supportive of TANF families who face significant barriers to employment. However, the regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on June 29, 2006, go in the other direction. Analysis by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) describes the more restrictive definitions of work and discusses how this makes it more difficult for parents to improve their work skills through education and training. In a separate publication, CLASP also offers suggestions for state legislators and administrators who want to maintain these opportunities because in the long run they are likely to lead to greater self-sufficiency for these families (<http://www.clasp.org/publications.php?id=2>).

Congressional efforts to increase the minimum wage, another policy solution addressed by several of this issue's authors, were also unsuccessful. No doubt there will be lengthy debates about whether or not it was a good thing to sacrifice the first increase in the minimum wage since 1996-97 because it was tied to increased relief from estate taxes for the well-to-do. But what we do know is that African American workers, Hispanics, and women would have been disproportionate beneficiaries of the minimum wage increase.

Many of these discussions and policy debates occur "below the radar" for the vast majority of potential voters in the United States, especially people of color. The Joint Center's findings on African American adults' knowledge of the Social Security program, highlighted in this issue, point to the importance of information to assist in understanding how policy changes will affect this group and whether or not these changes will achieve goals that African Americans support. The article, by Joint Center research assistant Danielle Huff, notes the fact that many African Americans think the Social Security Trust Fund pays for programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. Given this erroneous belief, some might think that cutting these two health programs will solve the Social Security "problem"—that is, the shrinkage in the Trust Fund over time. These impressions might lead some to support reductions in these federal health programs as the lesser of two evils (health care versus basic income support for the elderly).

The Joint Center tries to help provide policymakers and voters with the information they need to make intelligent choices. Regardless of which side of the issues they come down on, their decisions should be based on knowledge and understanding of the issues and the alternative solutions. We hope that our readers continue to find this information in the pages of *Focus*, in our research reports, and on our website.

MARGARET C. SIMMS
INTERIM PRESIDENT



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MASS IMMIGRATION, AFRICAN AMERICANS, AND THE “RAINBOW COALITION”

By Steven Shulman

Immigration is not just another “issue.” Its concrete consequences are only part of the reason that the arguments about immigration policy are so emotionally charged. The questions that immigration inevitably raises—first and foremost about who we are, how many we are, and who has a claim on our resources—go to the heart of our national identity. That is nowhere more evident than in the debate about the impact of immigration on African Americans.

African Americans have a special claim on the United States precisely because they are the only citizens whose ancestors came here involuntarily. Immigrants, by definition, come here by choice. The U.S. is a “nation of immigrants” only to the extent that it denies the history of slavery. The integration of immigrants into the American nation stands in stark contrast to the historical exclusion of African Americans. Although it is fashionable to talk about a “rainbow coalition,” the group identities and interests of African Americans and immigrants appear to be antithetical. Conflict seems inevitable. But is the conflict real, in the sense that it is grounded in observable economic outcomes, or is it an ideological by-product of an ethnically divided society?

The thesis of this brief essay is that the conflict between immigrants and African Americans is, unfortunately, real. I will present some evidence to that effect and discuss some of the problems in interpreting it before turning to its political implications.

Mass Immigration

Immigrant inflows to the United States are so large that Vernon Briggs of Cornell University has coined the phrase “mass immigration” to describe the modern period. Almost 50 million people have been added to the U.S. population since 1990, and most of that growth is due to immigration (including the U.S.-born children of immigrants). On average, over 900,000 immigrants have come legally to the U.S. each year since 1990. According to Jeffrey Passel of the Pew Hispanic Center, illegal immigration now exceeds legal immigration, which means that about two million persons enter the U.S. each year (about 0.3 million leave each year). Estimates of the number of illegal aliens working in the U.S. range from 7 million to 12-15 million. The scale and persistence of these inflows is historically unprecedented.

Large, persistent inflows of foreigners create a variety of significant effects, both positive and negative, in the receiving country. Even in a country as large and as rich as the United States, it cannot plausibly be held that mass immigration has few or small effects. From the standpoint of the labor market, the concern is that mass immigration increases job competition and drives down wages for natives. This can occur at all skill levels. For example, George Borjas—described recently in *The New York Times* as “the pre-eminent scholar in his field” of immigration economics—has recently shown that a ten percent immigrant-induced increase in the supply of doctorates lowers

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SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW? IMMIGRATION AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

By Manuel Pastor

The demonstrations for immigrant rights that broke out across U.S. cities in spring 2006 were a remarkable social phenomenon. Struck by the millions mobilized and marching, some observers wondered whether this was the beginning of “another civil rights movement,” one that would, as in the 1950s and 1960s, seek voice for those who could not vote and basic protections for those who were exploited.

The comparison with the civil rights movement, however, has caused no small degree of discomfort. Some feel that the claims immigrants can and should make on the national conscience cannot match that of blacks, particularly given America’s legacies of slavery and Jim Crow, as well as continuing disparities in educational, residential, and income opportunities. Others suggest that these very same immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented, have had negative effects on African American economic fortunes, especially blacks who lack a high school degree. Still others argue that the rise in Latino and Asian political power prompted, in part, by immigration may reduce the space for black influence in America’s urban areas.

As with much in economics and politics, the clarity of the evidence does not square with the vigor of the assertions. Not only is the economic evidence hotly debated, the policy rationale for prioritizing immigration restriction is not clear. Shouldn’t we instead do something about high school graduation rates and employee skills? Shouldn’t we be more concerned about tax policies that have fueled an overwhelming concentration of income, wealth, and power? Aren’t there possibilities for coalitional politics that could bring greater prosperity to both immigrants and African Americans?

Are Immigrants Economic Competitors or Complements?

On the labor market side, virtually all economists agree that immigration has been a net gain for the American economy as a whole: immigrants are both substitutes and complements for U.S. labor, and the complement effect helps retain higher-skill jobs that might otherwise slip abroad. One study by Giovanni Peri of the University of California, Davis even suggests that the immigration of the 1990s improved average wages for U.S.-born workers. The problem then is the substitute effect and its relative strength, particularly for those with lower levels of education.

Among the most pessimistic estimates bandied about in the press are those of Harvard economists George Borjas and Lawrence Katz. They suggest that over the last twenty years, immigration has triggered an eight percent decline in the real wages for those U.S.-born residents without a high school education. But this estimate does not account for any shifts in industrial composition or adjustments in capital, and once such adjustments are made, the negative effect shrinks to five percent. Peri’s work is more optimistic, finding that that immigration induced only a one percent decline over the 1990s

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the wages of competing workers (i.e., natives with similar skills and credentials) by three percent. But the bigger issue is the impact on low-wage native workers. Most illegal immigrants and many legal immigrants have very low levels of education by U.S. standards. One-third of the foreign-born population, and one-half of the foreign-born population from Latin America, lacks a high school degree. Illegal aliens are especially likely to have low levels of educational attainment. To the extent that these immigrants increase job competition, they will drive down wages for low-wage native workers. African Americans are disproportionately likely to fall into this category.

One out of every five African American adults lacks a high school degree. More than one out of every three African American full-time workers—4.2 million—are employed in the low-wage sector of the labor market, defined in terms of earnings of \$25,000 per year or less in 2004. Many of the 1.7 million African Americans who are unemployed would also fall into this category, in the sense that they work low-wage jobs when they are employed, as would most of those who have left the labor force because they are “discouraged workers.” There are a variety of reasons that these figures are hard to pin down—not the least of which is accounting for the large number of African Americans on the street or in prison—but it would be safe to conclude that 5-6 million African Americans, at least one out of every four prime age adults, are in or potentially in the low-wage sector of the labor market. These are the workers most directly affected by the large-scale immigration of very low-wage workers, who are primarily from Mexico.

Job Competition

Some will object that most of these workers are not in direct competition with African Americans. Immigrants are said to “take jobs that Americans don’t want.” Certainly it is true that not all low-wage native workers are affected by competition from immigrants. But immigrants are not in a separate labor market. There is substantial occupational overlap between immigrants and natives. Daniel Hamermesh, a well-known labor economist at the University of Texas, has found no evidence that immigrants take jobs that natives reject.

Indeed, the very fact that immigration drives down wages means that immigrants and natives compete for the same jobs.

The negative impact of immigration on the wages of low-skill native workers has been documented in a number of studies over the past decade. One of the best known is by Borjas, Richard Freeman, and Larry Katz, all well-known economists at Harvard University. They show that immigration “has had a marked adverse impact on the economic status of ... high school dropouts and those in the bottom 20 percent of the wage distribution.” Because African Americans are especially likely to be low-wage workers, immigration has had an especially large impact on them. Borjas shows in a different study that the immigrant influx from 1980-2000 reduced the wages of all native workers by 3.7 percent, of high school dropouts by 7.4 percent, of African

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American workers by 4.5 percent, and of Hispanic American workers by 5.0 percent. To put these numbers in perspective, Borjas calculates that the percentage loss for a worker making \$25,000 per year (the mean for male high school dropouts in 2000) is equivalent to a wage reduction of \$1,800 per year. This could fairly be called an “immigration tax,” paid mostly by those workers least able to afford it.

Borjas’ findings have not gone unchallenged. David Card, a prominent economist at the University of California at

Berkeley, believes that Borjas has overstated the negative consequences of immigration because more immigrants mean more spending and more investment incentives for employers. In other words, immigration causes both labor supply and labor demand to increase, and the two effects tend to cancel each other out. The result, in his view, is that immigration has a relatively small impact on the wages of low-wage native workers.

Card is right to emphasize the dynamic effects of immigration. But they do not all work in the direction that he emphasizes. There are also reasons to think that Borjas’ results understate the actual effects of immigration. For example, Borjas uses data on workers. To the extent that competition from immigrants encourages low-wage natives to drop out of the labor force, the negative effects of immigration on the wages of those remaining in the labor force will be statistically smaller (research that I conducted with Hannes Johannsson shows that immigration has large, negative effects on the labor supply of low-wage native workers). Furthermore, if immigration gives employers an incentive to substitute low-wage labor for capital, it will depress productivity growth and hence wages. Mass immigration also means that workers are leaving their home countries and moving here. That worsens the balance of trade (by increasing the demand for imports and reducing the demand for our exports) and increases the ability of foreign workers to compete with U.S. workers (by giving them access to U.S. technology). On this basis, Donald Davis and David Weinstein of Columbia University conclude that immigration lowers native incomes by \$72 billion per year.

Political Implications

For all these reasons, the dynamic effects of immigration cut both ways. Even acknowledging Card’s point, it hardly follows that Borjas is wrong. It may even be the case that, on balance, Borjas has understated the negative wage effects of immigration. Of course, there are many other reasons that low-wage and African American workers have done poorly over the past quarter-century, including technological change, globalization, the decline of unions, and the decline of marriage. But to dismiss the negative effect of immigration relative to these other factors is to deny reality. Immigration has

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for less educated native-born, while David Card of the University of California, Berkeley finds essentially no effect when the wages of lower-skill residents in metropolitan areas with high levels of immigration are compared to those in areas with lower immigration. Steven Shulman and various co-authors have questioned these findings, stressing that the real issue is that new immigrants can dampen labor force participation in the short term.

To explore these issues further, Enrico Marcelli of the University of Massachusetts and I have studied the impact of *undocumented* workers on job displacement and wages for low-skill African Americans. The idea is that this group should have the most pronounced competitive impact. The problem, of course, is that data on undocumented workers are hard to come by since such workers seek to hide from government authorities and benign academics alike. However, Marcelli and others have devised a novel approach that utilizes a combination of broad surveys and census data to generate estimates that are remarkably accurate when compared with micro-studies done by community-based researchers.

Marcelli and I have applied these estimates to census information for California, a state that some researchers estimate has about one-fourth of all the undocumented immigrants in the U.S. Calculating the share of undocumented workers by residence, industry, and skill level for the year 2000, we found no evidence of net job displacement at a geographic level—indeed, at the level of local labor markets, black and undocumented immigrant employment generally grew in tandem. There was, however, some suggestion of negative wage impacts on low-skill African Americans. This could be because of black migration to more highly skilled employment; indeed, that is likely why evidence of job displacement is hard to come by at an aggregate level even though there are clear cases of industries and occupations (such as janitorial services and domestic work) in which Mexican immigrants seem to have replaced blacks in California.

The persistent employment challenges and barriers faced by low-skill black workers should be a major concern for all Americans. Michael Stoll of UCLA recently completed a report for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation entitled “Taking Stock of the Employment Opportunities of Less Educated African American Men.” It listed job competition from other workers,

such as immigrants or women, as one factor that could contribute to the lower wages and employment rates of African American men. But the list also included nine other contributing factors, such as the rising level of skill requirements of jobs, racial discrimination, and spatial mismatch between the location of employment opportunities and residential locations of blacks. In the policymaking process, the small size of immigration’s impact on the labor market must be kept in perspective, as well as the fact that immigration is just one of many reasons for the poor employment rates of African

We need a firm commitment to addressing the widening economic inequality in our country and tackling the educational crisis that really lies behind any negative effects immigrant labor might have on blacks.

American men—a problem that requires an assortment of tailored policy solutions, and one that restrictive immigration policy is unlikely to fully remedy.

Are Immigrants Political Friends or Foes?

Alliances are critical in policymaking, and choices made in one arena can affect political possibilities in another. In my view, it makes more sense for African Americans to bet on alliances with striving and vibrant immigrant communities than to cast their lot with the Minute Men patrolling America’s long border with Mexico. Detailed multivariate analysis of the Survey of Urban Inequality conducted by Marcelli and me suggests that most African Americans get the point: blacks are no more pessimistic than whites about the effects of immigrants on the economy but are far more optimistic about the ways in which increased immigration might actually enhance their political voice and effect.

Of course, the current debate about immigration may be shifting sentiments. Both a June 2003 nationwide Gallup poll and a 2001 California poll conducted by

the Public Policy Institute of California found that blacks were more supportive of immigration than whites, but recent polling for both the nation and the Golden State has indicated that now the opposite is true.

This shift in opinion may reflect changed economic realities, but it is also true that feelings have been inflamed by politicians seeking to stir their base. Some members of Congress focused almost exclusively on border security during congressional hearings this summer, yet many of these same members would not permit an increase in the minimum wage without attaching to it an effort to eliminate the inheritance tax. Even using the most pessimistic eight percent wage decline figure estimated by Borjas and Katz, the minimum wage increase—shipwrecked by the inheritance tax attachment—would in two years have had five times the effect on these low-skill workers’ incomes as would be obtained by rolling back immigration levels to those extant twenty years ago.

In any case, our own research on black attitudes suggests that the rainbow possibilities are perhaps more solid than some observers believe—and that ordinary black voters realize that the anti-immigrant position taken today may be the undoing of the progressive coalition to be forged tomorrow. It is partly for this reason that the Congressional Black Caucus has historically tended to favor more generous approaches to reforming the nation’s broken immigration system.

Policies and Politics for a Better Future

In my view, three principles should guide policy and politics. The first is that we need a comprehensive approach to immigration policy. As supportive as I may be of immigrants, enhanced border security and strictly enforced (but larger) quotas will be part of the mix. And as worried as others might be about the immigrant presence, ten to eleven million people, many woven into the fabric of workplaces and communities cannot be wished away; some path to legalization, however arduous it might be, will need to be part of the package.

Second, we need a firm commitment to addressing the widening economic inequality in our country and tackling the educational crisis that really lies behind any negative effects immigrant labor might have on blacks. Such an approach, which would

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dramatically increased over the same period that the wages of low-wage workers have declined. It simply is implausible to hold that huge inflows of immigrants have little or no effect on the native workers who most directly compete with them.

Nor is the immediately observable wage impact the only cause for concern. Carolyn Hoxby of Harvard University has shown that immigration reduces the probability of college graduation for African Americans; Julian Betts has shown the same for the probability of high school graduation. Schools with high immigrant shares of their student populations are forced to devote a rising fraction of their scarce resources to solving the special problems of immigrant students. The result is the “educational crowding out” of African American students. The future consequences include slower wage growth for African Americans. Immigration thus harms their economic prospects in both the short term and the long term.

Policies such as amnesties that reward and encourage mass immigration make it harder to achieve racial justice. Immigration will not strengthen the “rainbow coalition” if it harms African Americans. To the contrary, it diminishes the likelihood that African Americans can successfully exercise political leverage.

Economic facts do not automatically lead to political or moral conclusions, but I read them as follows. Policies such as amnesties that reward and encourage mass immigration make it harder to achieve racial justice. Immigration will not strengthen the “rainbow coalition” if it harms African Americans. To the contrary, it diminishes the likelihood that African Americans can successfully exercise political leverage. This is the case because mass immigration transforms African Americans into just another ethnic group rather than a group that has a special claim on the American conscience. It distracts attention from the real history of American racism by constructing a false analogy between people who came here voluntarily in search of opportunity, and people who came here at the point of a gun (witness the claim that the “immigrant rights movement”—whatever that may mean—is the “new civil rights movement”). The numerical reality that immigration is reducing the preponderance of European Americans in the population does not mean that African Americans will have more political leverage to achieve their goals. It very well may mean the exact opposite. □

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The Point/Counterpoint is a feature that will appear periodically in order to inform readers of differing perspectives on issues of national debate. Please see the back page of this issue for a question asking readers to voice their own views on immigration.

include improving public schools, expanding community colleges, and enhancing worker training programs, would have beneficial impacts on both African Americans and new immigrant youth and adults.

Finally, all of us must understand that a more supportive approach to immigration does not displace the centrality of the black struggle

As a group with perhaps the most experience in the struggle for justice in the U.S., leadership on balanced immigration policy from African Americans is critically needed.

in American history and America’s future. After all, the 1965 immigration reform that opened the gates to sojourners from Latin America, Asia, and Africa came about because of the civil rights movement. At the heart of virtually every progressive movement in the U.S. has been black leadership calling on the conscience and intelligence of the country. And this is a point and a history that must be drilled home over and over again to the immigrants now coming to their own sense of power and voice.

As a group with perhaps the most experience in the struggle for justice in the U.S., leadership on balanced immigration policy from African Americans is critically needed. Fresh from one of the spring marches, Van Jones, the young director of the Ella Baker Center in Oakland, California, wrote about the immigrant mobilization as the continuation of a national conversation about dignity, equality, opportunity, and fair play. He noted:

... during the two prior centuries, it was the African-American community that performed this service for the country. And we paid a high and awful cost in blood and martyrs. Unfortunately, we did not achieve all of our aims. But we did tear apartheid from the pages of U.S. law books.

And in the course of that struggle, we did improve the lot of all Americans—expanding social programs, democratic rights and social tolerance for all people. And our efforts opened the doors for today’s equality struggles. Our marching feet moved the whole nation forward...

Latinos and other immigrant communities are starting to raise core questions about their own children’s access to education, health care, jobs and safety. As they do so, if history is any guide, every American community will benefit greatly from their efforts. Including my own.

I wrote Van to thank him for his words; he reported that others had attacked him for his sympathetic approach. This is, after all, a debate in which passions run high but it is also one in which a commitment to both rational economic analysis and collegial discussion may eventually shed light on a policy package with which we can all live. □

Manuel Pastor (mpastor@ucsc.edu) is a professor of Latin American and Latino Studies and co-director of the Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community at the University of California, Santa Cruz. For additional information, see: Peri, http://www.aifl.org/tipclinfocus/2006_skillswages.pdf; Card, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w11547>; Borjas and Katz, http://post.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/katz/papers/mex_immig_nber_wp.pdf; Pastor and Marcelli, The Review of Black Political Economy, vol. 31, no. 1-2 (Summer-Fall 2003); Stoll, http://www.cbefinc.org/pdf/Taking_Stock_Doc.pdf; Van Jones, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=1459>.

ECONOMIC REPORT

ANOTHER GENERATION GAP: DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS BY AGE

By Danielle Huff

THIS IS THE SECOND IN A THREE-PART SERIES REPORTING ON THE JOINT CENTER'S NATIONAL OPINION POLL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADULTS ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY AND WEALTH

The future of the Social Security system, especially the potential insolvency of the Social Security Trust Fund, has been a topic of considerable (and often contentious) discussion in recent years. To gauge the opinions of African Americans ages 18 and older on a variety of issues related to retirement, wealth, and the Social Security system, the Joint Center conducted the National Opinion Poll of African American Adults About Social Security and Wealth in late 2005. This article examines the survey's findings on variations among African American adults by age group.

The most striking age differences exist between the youngest and oldest African Americans. As might be expected, older African Americans generally have stronger feelings about the Social Security system and are more reluctant to support proposals to change it than are younger African Americans, who have a shorter history with and less investment in the system. Younger African Americans are also less likely to expect to rely heavily upon Social Security when they retire. Other findings from the survey, however, suggest less predictable differences, as well as some similarities, across the various age groups.

Sources of Retirement Income

The oldest African American adults are more likely than the youngest adults to expect Social Security, rather than their personal savings and investments, to be their largest source of retirement income. According to the survey, 35 percent of 51- to 64-year-olds and 40 percent of African Americans ages 65 and older expect Social Security to be their main source of retirement income, while smaller proportions expect personal savings and investments to be their primary source of retirement income. The opposite is true among younger African American adults (ages 18-25, 26-35, and 36-50); about half of each of these younger age groups expect to depend most heavily on their own savings

and investments, while between 21 percent and 28 percent of each group expects to rely primarily upon Social Security during retirement.

Social Security Challenges and Reform Proposals

Younger and older African American adults also differ in their opinions on the magnitude of the problems facing the Social Security system. When asked whether they think it is a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all that people on Social Security are living longer and,

as a major problem or as a minor problem fall in the middle among all the age cohorts.

While African Americans ages 26-35, 36-50, 51-64, and 65 and older are similarly likely (between 62 percent and 68 percent of each age group) to think it is a major problem that there will not be enough workers to pay for Social Security retirement benefits in the future, the youngest age cohort of African American adults (ages 18-25) is much less likely to agree. Only 47 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds consider this to be a major problem.

Although African American adults are cognizant of the problems facing the Social Security system, they express only modest support for various proposals designed to ensure the solvency of the Social Security Trust Fund. They offer the strongest support (41 percent of all respondents) for a proposal to raise the cap on wages subject to Social Security taxes. This proposal is supported fairly equally among age groups; 45 percent of both 18- to 25-year-olds and 51- to 64-year-olds support it, as do 39 percent of 26- to 35-year-olds, 36- to 50-year-olds, and African Americans ages 65 and older.

Age differences are much clearer with regard to a proposal to partially privatize the Social Security system, which is much more popular among younger than older African Americans. About one-third of younger African Americans (32 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds, 34 percent of 26- to 35-year-olds, and 30 percent of 36- to 50-year-olds) support it, compared to only 18 percent of 51- to 64-year-olds and 16 percent of African Americans ages 65 and older.

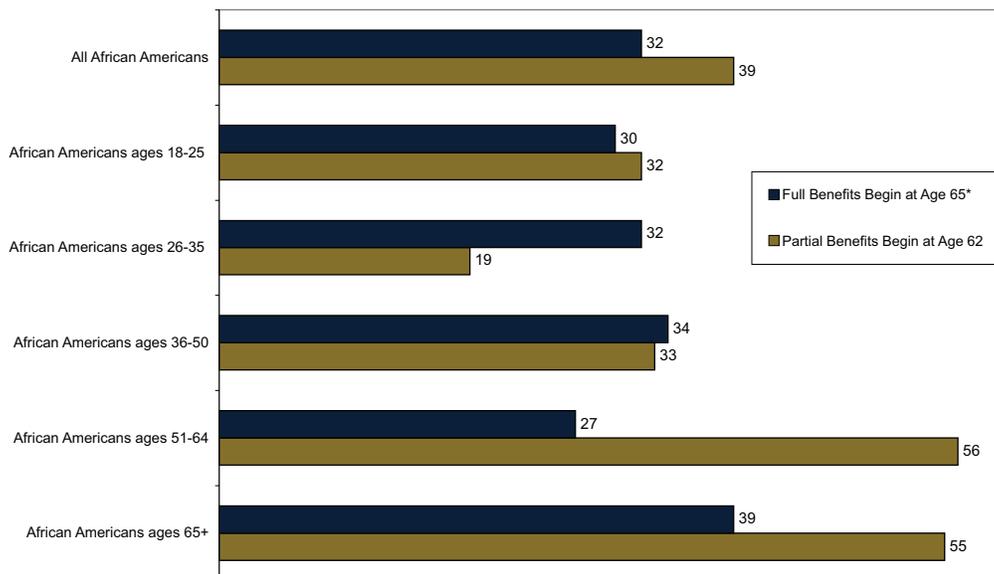
The least popular proposal (supported by only 23 percent of all respondents) calls for raising the Social Security retirement eligibility age. This proposal garners the most support among those who see themselves as least affected by it—the youngest (ages 18-25) and oldest (65 years and older) African American adults. About three in ten respondents in both groups support this proposal. African Americans

Older African Americans generally have stronger feelings about the Social Security system and are more reluctant to support proposals to change it than are younger African Americans, who have a shorter history with and less investment in the system.

therefore, costing the program more money, the youngest African American adults (ages 18-25 and 26-35) are less likely than the oldest (ages 51-64 and 65 and older) to believe it is a major problem. More than two-fifths of 18- to 25-year-olds and 26- to 35-year-olds (44 percent and 41 percent, respectively) see this as a major problem, while 59 percent of both 51- to 64-year-olds and African Americans ages 65 and older share this view. Correspondingly, the youngest African American adults (ages 18-25 and 26-35) are more likely to view this as a minor problem than are their older counterparts. The shares of African Americans ages 36-50 who view this either

Knowledge among African Americans, by Age, of Eligibility Ages for Full and Partial Social Security Benefits, 2005
Percent

Q6. What do you think is the youngest age you can retire and start receiving full Social Security benefits?
Q8.1. What is the earliest age you can retire and start receiving some Social Security benefits?



*In 2005, the eligibility age for full retirement was 65 years and 6 months.

Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, National Opinion Poll of African American Adults About Social Security and Wealth, 2005.

ages 51-64 are the least likely to support it (17 percent).

Knowledge about Social Security

While African American adults of all ages overwhelmingly reject raising the Social Security eligibility age, the majority do not actually know the ages at which one currently can retire and begin receiving *partial* or *full* Social Security retirement benefits—ages 62 and 65 and 6 months, respectively (in 2005). Surprisingly, 51- to 64-year-olds, who are closest to the eligibility age for full benefits, are the *least* likely (27 percent) to know that one can begin receiving *full* benefits at age 65 and 6 months. African Americans ages 65 and older are the most likely (39 percent) to know this. African Americans ages 51-64, however, are the *most* likely (along with those ages 65 and older) to know that one can begin receiving *partial* benefits at age 62 (56 percent and 55 percent, respectively). In comparison, only 19 percent of 26- to 35-year-olds and about one-third of 18- to 25-year-olds and 36- to 50-year-olds know the correct eligibility age for partial benefits.

The survey also reveals a lack of knowledge concerning Social Security

payroll taxes. Many African Americans incorrectly believe that Social Security taxes are used to fund programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. One-half (51 percent) of respondents of all ages believe that Social Security taxes pay for the Medicare program. The youngest African American adults (ages 18-25) are less likely (46 percent) to hold this erroneous belief, while the oldest African Americans (ages 51-64 and 65 and older) are more likely (both 56 percent) to believe this. In addition, nearly two-fifths (38 percent) of African American adults of all ages believe that Social Security taxes support the Medicaid program. This misconception is similarly pervasive among African Americans of different age groups, ranging from 34 percent of 26- to 35-year-olds to 41 percent of 51- to 64-year-olds.

Conclusion

Despite the gaps in their knowledge of the Social Security system and their reluctance to support proposals that could ensure its solvency, the vast majority of African American adults recognize the importance of Social Security to America's seniors. Nearly four-fifths (78 percent) of respondents across all age groups correctly believe that Social Security is the largest single source

of income for most elderly Americans—between 74 percent and 82 percent of each age group. In addition, 60 percent of all African American adults agree that Social Security plays a major role in keeping many senior citizens out of poverty—ranging from 56 percent of both 36- to 50-year-olds and 51- to 64-year-olds to 66 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds.

Overall, the survey suggests that changes to the Social Security system would be unpopular among African American adults of all ages, although this seems to be particularly true among older adults. Members of older cohorts are *less* likely than their younger counterparts to support proposed solutions even though they are *more* likely to view the problems facing the Social Security system as major. African American adults in older generations, who expect to be more dependent on Social Security benefits in retirement, appear to fear any changes that might jeopardize when they can retire and how well their retirement years will be supported by the system into which they have paid. □

Danielle Huff is a research assistant at the Joint Center. For more information on the Joint Center's National Opinion Poll of African American Adults About Social Security and Wealth, go to www.jointcenter.org/socialsecurity/.

HEALTH REPORT

HOW WILL NEW ORLEANS BE “RE-PEOPLED”?

By Gail C. Christopher

People who have been disadvantaged in the past are at the greatest risk in each [life] transition. This means that welfare policies need to provide not only safety nets but also springboards to offset earlier disadvantage. Good health involves reducing levels of educational failure, the amount of job insecurity and the scale of income differences in society. We need to ensure that fewer people fall and that they fall less often. Policies for education, employment and housing affect health standards. Societies that enable all their citizens to play a full and useful role in the social, economic and cultural life of their society will be healthier than those where people face insecurity, exclusion and deprivation.

— *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*,
World Health Organization – Europe

The risks and impacts experienced by impoverished African Americans after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita came as a direct result of our failure to address the myriad social, environmental, and economic disparities that existed for years in their neighborhoods. People were already suffering excess chronic disease and debilitation, which hampered their ability to evacuate. The hurricanes both revealed and exacerbated their ongoing vulnerabilities. Despite international leadership that emphasizes the urgency for developed nations to address social determinants of health and America’s Healthy People 2010 goal of eliminating health disparities, most U.S. health resources and policies are still only used to increase access to quality medical care. There is some leadership on the broader social determinants of health in research and philanthropic circles, but related political and policy movement is much too slow. While there is growing consensus on the importance of social determinants (social, economic, environmental, and behavioral influences) in reducing health disparities, direct cause-effect correlations are elusive. Researchers have difficulty proving that poverty causes diabetes or cancer and there are no pharmaceutical or surgical remedies for poverty. So national health policy reflects a greater emphasis on the “individual’s” responsibility to mitigate the effects of environmental conditions and to change high-risk behaviors. Such sentiments are reflected by those who blame the residents of New Orleans for not heeding advance warnings to evacuate before Hurricane Katrina struck. But this view ignores the ways in which community conditions influence behaviors and does not

consider historical patterns of racism and discrimination that shape behaviors and social conditions.

There are many lessons to be learned from the unparalleled consequences of Hurricane Katrina. The ongoing challenge is how to use those lessons to optimize rebuilding and re-peopling New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region. Nearly a year since disaster struck the Gulf Coast region, plans for redeveloping structures and systems do not include



New Orleans, Lower Ninth Ward, June 2006

a strategy for re-peopling New Orleans or addressing the equity issues that this process would raise. More than half of the population of New Orleans has not returned since Katrina. Several neighborhoods remain empty and desolate.

Federal funds for homeowners totaling \$4.5 billion will not arrive until the fall of 2007. Crime rates are escalating and basic services like telephone and medical are still woefully inadequate. Yet housing located in harm’s way, limited access to transportation, excessive exposure to environmental hazards and poor air quality, limited employment opportunities, poor schools, and limited access to quality medical care are conditions

that disproportionately burdened residents in New Orleans and other Gulf Coast areas long before Katrina. While 70 percent had some kind of job, their average household income was less than \$20,000 and more than a quarter at some point had used food stamps. Rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region into safe and healthy communities for all inhabitants requires restructuring of social policies, social programs, and economic opportunities to eliminate injustices and barriers to good health and quality of life.

The World Health Organization’s Commission on Social Determinants of Health has identified five key action areas to improve health outcomes for the world’s most vulnerable populations. The people living in the areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina deserve no less. These stated action areas are as follows:

- Improving living and learning conditions in early childhood;
- Strengthening social programs to provide fairer employment conditions and access to labor markets, particularly for vulnerable social groups;
- Developing policies and interventions to protect people in informal employment—i.e., those who work without formal contracts or social protections, often in sectors outside government regulation, such as subsistence farming, household based enterprises, and street vending;
- Developing policies across sectors to improve living conditions in urban slums; and
- Implementing programs to address key determinants of women’s health, such as access to education and economic opportunities.

The Joint Center Health Policy Institute (HPI) is partnering with several organizations to create the New Orleans Health Disparities Initiative. The goals of the Initiative include the following:

- Establishing a new framework for understanding and talking about health disparities grounded in the geographically specific history of race and class in the New Orleans area;
- Building new partnerships for eliminating health disparities that cut across traditional boundaries of

health, science, the ambient and built environment, jobs, wages, fair housing, and legal services;

- Implementing new community development and environmental training programs for community leaders;
- Securing health coverage for all residents of New Orleans; and
- Saving Charity Hospital and similarly challenged New Orleans healthcare providers and institutions.

This is part of a two-year project funded by the California Endowment, which supports HPI's efforts to research and design an inclusive framework for disaster preparedness and recovery. Fairness in targeting resources and redressing structural racism and economic discrimination faced by communities of color is the major goal of this HPI project. It promotes a comprehensive approach to planning and rebuilding that encompasses the social determinants of health.

The first meeting of the New Orleans Health Disparities Initiative was held on June 12, 2006, in New Orleans. Social activists, environmentalists, urban planners, policymakers, citizens, and healthcare providers came together to address issues such as air quality, schools, housing, transportation, mental and physical health care, and opportunities for employment. Attorneys talked to physicians. Physicians listened to community health workers. Housing advocates listened to transportation providers, and young people added authentic

voices of the future. Connecting the dots between different disciplines and policy areas will lead to more holistic and strategic interventions and will move the efforts "upstream" (more preventive in nature), thereby helping to address many of the negative factors and conditions made visible in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Access to quality medical care was and is crucially needed by many Katrina survivors, but above-poverty-level incomes, safe housing, excellent schools, and healthier indoor and outdoor air quality have been and remain equally strong imperatives.

Participants in the New Orleans Health Disparities Initiative agree that rebuilding in the Gulf Coast region should be guided by what is known about social determinants of health and by what have been framed as "related principals" in other developed nations. For example, the national health plan in Sweden includes goals of increased civic participation and poverty elimination. Civic participation is compromised when so many New Orleans and Gulf Coast region evacuees cannot return and are not organized within the many areas to which they have been displaced. Evacuees from the region need to have a more active voice and role in the redevelopment process. Plans for facilitating citizens' speedy return or "re-peopling" seem to be missing. Opportunities for basic civic participation, a cornerstone of addressing social determinants of health and well-being, need to be offered to more Katrina survivors. Among other recommendations, participants in the New Orleans Health Disparities Initiative June

12th meeting called for more thorough data and tracking to locate, identify, support, and establish ongoing communication among evacuees from the region.

August 29, 2006, marks the one-year anniversary of the Katrina tragedy. Far too little has been done to accelerate the re-peopling and rebuilding processes in ways that promote equity and fairness. According to a July 11, 2006, *Agence France-Presse* article, residents of New Orleans' 73 neighborhoods will now be able to craft individual redevelopment plans for their communities. Meanwhile, city planners will map out the reconstruction of New Orleans' infrastructure, including a storm-fractured water system that is losing 85 million gallons of water a day. The plans will be ready for state agency approval by December 2006. But participants in the first meeting of the New Orleans Health Disparities Initiative are questioning the inclusiveness of this process when so many residents of the hardest hit neighborhoods remain absent, neither informed nor engaged in this pivotal civic process. □

Gail C. Christopher (gchristopher@jointcenter.org) is vice president for health, women and families at the Joint Center, and director of the Joint Center Health Policy Institute. For more information on the World Health Organization's publication on social determinants of health, go to <http://www.who.dk/document/e81384.pdf>. For more information on Sweden's public health policy, see http://www.fhi.se/shop/material_pdf/newpublic0401.pdf.

New Orleans Area Health Disparities Initiative Planners and Partners

Michael Andry
EXCELth, Inc.

Elodia Blanco
Concerned Citizens of Agricultural Street Landfill

Dr. Robert Bullard
Environmental Justice Resource Center

Lura Cayton
Church World Service Emergency Response Program

Johanna Congleton
Louisiana Physicians for Social Responsibility

Veronica Eady
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

AlMarie Ford
LA Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Mental Health

Steve Fischback
Rhode Island Legal Services

Marcheta Gillam
Legal Aid Society of Cincinnati

Shana Griffin
People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

Joanne Hale
Church World Service

Rebecca Harris-Smith
New Orleans Black Nurses Association

Albert Huang
Natural Resources Defense Council

Dr. Charlotte Hutton
LA Department of Health & Hospitals – New Orleans Adolescent Hospital

Joy Lewis
Community Environmental Activist, St. Bernard Parish

Judith May
REACH 2010: At the Heart of New Orleans/Black Women's Health Imperative

Mary Lee Orr and David Brown
Louisiana Environmental Network

James Perry
Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center

Erol Quintol
New Orleans Medical Association

Rev. Cory Sparks
Carrollton United Methodist Church

Wilma Subra
Chemist/Environmental Activist

Dr. Cheryl Taylor
REACH 2010: At the Heart of New Orleans

Phil Tegeler
Poverty Race and Research Action Council

Ranie Thompson
New Orleans Legal Aid Society

Dr. Sheila Webb
Center for Empowered Decision Making

Lynne Wolfe
Center for Social Inclusion

Dr. Beverly Wright
Deep South Center for Environmental Justice

Bob Zdenek and Ralph Scott
Alliance for Healthy Homes

POLITICAL REPORT

YOUR PERSPECTIVE: KEY QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES IN THE 2006 ELECTIONS

In the July/August 2006 issue of *Focus*, we asked, “What, in your opinion, is the most pressing question that candidates who want to represent you need to answer?” The following is a selection of the responses.

- How would you address the lack of affordable housing for lower- and middle-class residents of cities experiencing gentrification? What are your feelings about economically diverse neighborhoods?
- What is your ideal timetable for when U.S. soldiers should leave Iraq? Do you believe we should leave right now, and if so, do you think the violence and terrorism plaguing Iraqi citizens (often overlooked by what is going on with Israel) is likely to end on its own?
- With the current American casualties totaling 2,600 and the official number of wounded at 19,270, what does the United States expect to accomplish by continuing to be involved in the conflict in the Middle East?
- Where do you stand on immigration? Are you in favor of illegal immigrants gaining citizenship? How do you feel about enhanced border control? How do you feel our Senate and House can compromise to find an acceptable solution to this issue?
- What are your plans for restoring and maintaining America’s moral leadership in this global battle with religious terrorism?
- What are your plans for restoring a broken public education system for all citizens?
- What are your plans for building a national health insurance program to serve all citizens?
- How can government for the people overcome the influence of corporate lobbyists?
- The United States is one of the few industrialized countries that still has the death penalty. Considering the number of occasions where death penalty sentences

have been overturned as a result of advances in DNA evidence collection, do you think the death penalty is still an appropriate method of punishment?

- What would be your priorities in attempting to reduce the budget deficit and the ballooning national debt? Do you support the repeal of the estate tax (sometimes known as the death tax)? Do you support increasing funding for “safety net” programs?
- What steps would you take to address the issues of poverty and racism to which President Bush referred when he spoke in New Orleans shortly after the Hurricane Katrina disaster? In that same context, what steps would you take to improve the effectiveness and the inclusiveness of disaster preparedness planning, particularly with regard to its impact on low-income people?

Some elected officials have made proposals to address these concerns. For example, in its alternative FY 2007 budget, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) described its proposals for some of these issues. Among many proposals included in the CBC’s budget,* the following correspond to some of the questions listed above:

- Over \$32 billion would go to education, with \$15.41 billion to fully fund No Child Left Behind, as well as additional funds for Safe and Drug Free Schools, 21st Century Learning Centers, Teacher Quality Programs, Education Technology, English Language Acquisition, and Migrant Education. In addition, \$3.3 billion more would go to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, \$2.5 billion more would be allocated to school construction, Head Start would receive \$2.2 billion in new funds, and more than \$1.5 billion more would go to financial aid for higher education, including more than \$500 million for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions. An additional \$2 billion would be allocated for rebuilding and restoring public schools and colleges in the Gulf Coast areas damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

- More than \$6 billion would be spent on investments in health, including \$1 billion to re-authorize and fully fund the Ryan White CARE Act, which focuses on preventing HIV/AIDS and caring for its victims, and \$700 million for Medicare. More than \$350 million in Medicaid cuts would be restored, \$630 million more would go to Community Services Block Grants, Social Services Block Grants would get \$500 million more, and programs focused on improving minority health outcomes and eliminating health disparities would receive more than \$300 million in additional funding. Another \$1 billion would be provided to rebuild the health infrastructure in the Gulf Coast region.
- In housing, increased funding would be directed to the Section 8 Housing Program, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Child Nutrition Programs, and housing programs for the elderly and for the disabled.
- According to the CBC’s calculations, its total budget proposal will save \$10.5 billion more than the Republican budget in interest on the national debt over the next five years and will balance the budget by FY 2011, while the GOP budget projects a deficit of \$163 billion in FY 2011.

In addition, this issue of *Focus* addresses some of the questions raised by readers. For a discussion of issues surrounding high school education in the U.S., see Bob Wise’s article on the front cover. For two different perspectives on immigration policy, see the Point/Counterpoint feature on page 3. For a report on social determinants of health and racial disparities in New Orleans, see Gail Christopher’s Health Report on page 9. For an analysis of the impact of federal “safety net” programs, see Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba and Madina Agénor’s article on page 12. □

* See the July/August 2006 issue of *Focus* for a report on the CBC’s budget.

Please see the back page of this issue for another question in which we ask you to give us your perspective on another salient topic of national debate: immigration.

SAFEGUARDING THE HEALTH, NUTRITION, AND DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN OF COLOR

By Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba and Madina Agénor

When money is tight, low-income families are forced to make tough choices about the use of their resources. One of the results of constrained financial resources is food insecurity. Food insecurity refers to a household's limited or uncertain access to enough food for all household members to lead an active, healthy life at all times. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 2004 12 percent of all U.S. households (13.5 million) were food insecure at some point during the year.

Since blacks and Latinos are disproportionately poor and near poor

compared to their white counterparts, pronounced racial and ethnic disparities exist in the rates of food insecurity. In addition, USDA data show that all households with children are at a significantly higher risk for poverty and food insecurity than households of the same race/ethnicity without children. As a result, black and Latino households with children face particularly elevated rates of food insecurity.

Sound Social Policies Can Protect Children from Food Insecurity and its Health Effects

A recent study conducted by the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) pediatricians and child health researchers shows that a number of federal nutrition assistance and income support programs can help mitigate the negative health and growth effects of poverty and food insecurity on children in low-income households. Low weight- or height-for-age are important markers of inadequate nutrition, which, in turn, has other health effects. These poor growth outcomes are also linked to inability to fight infection and impaired learning. Nutrition assistance programs, such as the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), provide low-income

households with increased resources for food. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is an income support program, providing low-income families with minimal income to meet basic needs. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Subsidized Housing provide support for other survival expenses, such as heating, cooling, and housing costs. There can be serious consequences for young black and Latino children's health and well-being when their families do not receive benefits for which they are eligible.

- Black children from potentially eligible families who *did not* receive a housing subsidy were *more likely* to be underweight and shorter in height.
- Black children from potentially eligible families who *did not* receive fuel assistance were *29 percent more likely* to be at nutritional risk for growth problems.

In addition, contrary to some assertions, C-SNAP research demonstrates that receipt of food stamps, WIC, housing subsidies, or LIHEAP is not associated with overweight in young black children.

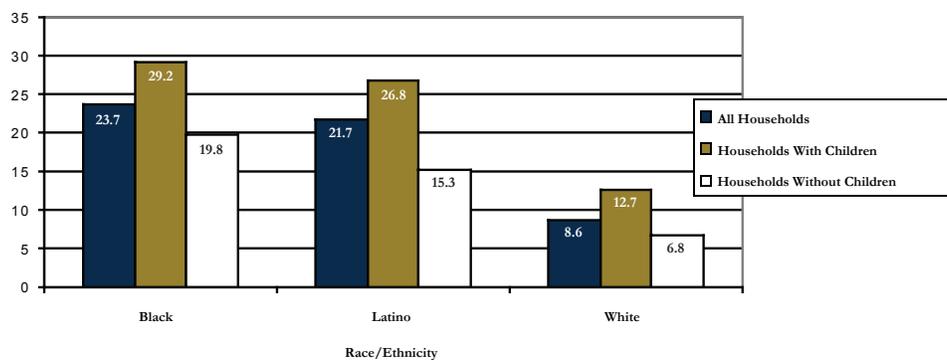
Young Latino children are healthier when eligible families receive benefits

C-SNAP found that the following programs have positive outcomes for low-income Latino infants and toddlers' growth, weight, and height: TANF, FSP, WIC,

and Subsidized Housing. (The associations between LIHEAP and Latino children's health and growth were not significant due to comparatively small numbers of Latino families in the study receiving LIHEAP) When Latino children whose families did not receive program benefits were compared to Latino children in recipient families, the findings were as follows:

- Latino children whose family TANF benefit was terminated were *63 percent more likely* to be food insecure.
- Latino children whose family food stamp benefit was terminated were *more than twice as likely* to be food insecure.
- Latino children whose families were potentially eligible but *did not* receive WIC were *more likely* to be lower in weight and shorter in height.
- Latino children whose families were potentially eligible but *did not* receive a housing subsidy were *90 percent more likely* to be short in height.

Figure 1. Food Insecurity in All U.S. Households vs Households With and Without Children, by Race/Ethnicity, 2004



Source: Nord, M. Andrews, and S. Carlson, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2004/ERR11*, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (October 2005), www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/err11.

Young black children fare better when eligible families receive benefits

C-SNAP data show that the following programs have positive outcomes for low-income black infants and toddlers' health status, weight, and growth: TANF, FSP, WIC, Subsidized Housing, and LIHEAP. When black children in families who were not enrolled in these programs were compared to black children in recipient families, the findings were as follows:

- Black children whose family TANF benefit was terminated were *78 percent more likely* to be food insecure.
- Black children whose family food stamp benefit was terminated were *84 percent more likely* to be food insecure.
- Black children whose families were potentially eligible but *did not* receive WIC were *more than twice as likely* to be underweight and shorter in height.

Similar to the findings for young black children, C-SNAP research demonstrates that the receipt of food stamps, WIC, or housing subsidies is not associated with overweight in young Latino children.

Food Insecurity Is Linked to Poor Child Development

While the link between food insecurity and the physical health of young children has been well documented, few studies have assessed the effects of food insecurity on the development of infants and toddlers. Child development encompasses the ways in which children acquire skills in a range of domains, including memory, cognition, language, gross and fine motor ability, social interaction and behavior, and perception. Research on preschool and school-aged children has shown that poverty and food insecurity affect children's readiness for school, as well as their level of achievement throughout their academic careers. Although Alderman and colleagues at the Pan American Health Organization describe the first three years of life as the brain's period of most rapid change, the intersection of poverty, food insecurity, and young children's development had not been adequately documented, particularly for infants and toddlers of color.

To address this critical research gap, C-SNAP recently studied the relationship between food insecurity and developmental risk in black and Latino children between the ages of four and thirty-six months who come from low-income families. "Developmental risk" refers to a continuum of vulnerabilities relating to slow or unusual development in one or more areas (e.g., speaking, moving, or behavior). Children who are found to be at higher developmental risk may face an increased likelihood of experiencing problems later in life, such as with learning, attention, and/or social interaction. Frances P. Glascoe's Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS) was used to detect developmental risk in the C-SNAP sample of children.

After controlling for potentially confounding child and parent characteristics, C-SNAP found that food insecurity is a powerful predictor of overall developmental risk among low-income black and Latino children under age three. Black children from low-income, food-insecure households have *57 percent higher odds of their parents reporting significant developmental concerns* than black children from low-income, food-secure households. Similarly, Latino children from low-income, food-insecure households have *more than twice the odds of their parents reporting significant*

developmental concerns than Latino children from low-income, food-secure households.

It is important to note that the impact of food insecurity on children is not always visible to parents, caregivers, healthcare providers, or policymakers. Food insecurity may have clinically meaningful effects on the mental development of low-income black and Latino children even if there are no physically discernable signs. For example, even after taking into account a child's low birthweight and current weight, C-SNAP analyses show that *young black and Latino children from low-income, food-insecure households face greater developmental risk* than their food-secure peers.

What These Results Mean for Young Children of Color

Five key conclusions may be drawn from C-SNAP's research on the effects of food insecurity on young children of color and the impact of federal programs on their health and well-being.

- By virtue of their families' disproportionate burden of poverty, young black and Latino children living in low-income households are especially vulnerable to food insecurity, ill health, and associated developmental risk.
- Safety net programs are a wise social investment. In particular, these cost-effective social policies help mitigate the negative effects of food insecurity on the health and growth of young children of color.
- In contrast, terminating and denying benefits to eligible families seriously compromises young black and Latino children's health and well-being during a critical period of body and brain growth, potentially perpetuating lifelong economic disadvantage.
- Food insecurity can be linked to early childhood developmental impairments that may significantly jeopardize black and Latino children's future readiness for school and academic success, which, in turn, may restrict their adult employment opportunities.
- Although more research is needed to establish a link, it is plausible to suggest that if safety net programs can protect children's health and growth from the ill effects of food insecurity, then these same programs can also help to buffer children from developmental risk.

What Action Is Needed?

Policymakers have a unique opportunity to prevent and/or reduce the harm associated with food insecurity. The most critical policy actions include fully funding and expanding federal family support programs that buffer young children from food insecurity. Such action would encompass the following:

- Expanding Food Stamp Program eligibility and increasing benefits in the 2007 Farm Bill;
- Ensuring that WIC is adequately funded during the FY 2007 Appropriation by rejecting the proposed 20 percent state match and 25 percent cap on Nutrition Services and Administration funding;
- Implementing work requirements in the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 in a way that supports TANF families who face significant barriers to employment;
- Improving allocation of funds to state and local housing agencies to ensure that all eligible families receive vouchers; and
- Investing more in fuel assistance to help protect against food insecurity and impaired growth among young children as energy costs rise.

In addition, it is necessary to implement DRA Medicaid changes with great care to ensure that children do not lose any portion of the Early Periodic Screening Diagnostic and Treatment benefit. Lastly, policymakers must consider how risk factors associated with food insecurity and access to programs vary by racial and ethnic group, and address each group's specific needs by implementing well-researched and nuanced policies. □

Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba (sedc@bu.edu) is the Multi-site Project Manager for C-SNAP. Madina Agénor (magenor@hungercenter.org) is a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow currently working at the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). This article is based on two companion reports prepared by C-SNAP and published by the Joint Center (available at www.jointcenter.org). C-SNAP's national network of researchers conduct original, clinical research on children 0-3 years old, connect food insecure children to care, and provide evidence to policymakers and advocates in support of public policies that protect children's health and development. For more information about C-SNAP go to www.c-snap.org; PEDS, www.pedstest.com.

EVERY CHILD A GRADUATE

— By Bob Wise (continued from front cover)

According to *Diplomas Count*, a special report from the national publication *Education Week*, only 55.6 percent of Hispanic students and 51.6 percent of African American students graduate from high school with a regular diploma, compared to 76.2 percent of white students and 77 percent of Asian students. Among African American males, the situation is extremely dire, with only 44.3 percent receiving their high school diploma.

When 90 percent of the fastest-growing jobs require some form of education after high school, failing to graduate over one million students every year is nothing short of a crisis, for the individuals, their families, communities, and states, and for the U.S.

Reading Woes Are a Main Reason that Students Drop Out

In today's job market, where a high school diploma is the required ticket into college and the workforce, why would so many students decide to drop out? Students leave schools without diplomas for a variety of reasons, but low reading scores are perhaps the greatest predictor. This correlation makes sense. After all, how can high school students expect to master content courses such as history, science, or even math if they are struggling to read and comprehend the material in their textbooks?

According to the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading, also called the "Nation's Report Card," *nearly 70 percent of all eighth-grade students cannot read at grade level.* Of that total, nearly one in three students scores in the lowest quartile of performance, "below basic," which indicates that they read several years below grade level and are most likely to drop out. More disturbing, the average African American and Hispanic 12th-grader reads at the same level as the average white 8th-grader.

For many African American students, poor reading skills often mean that they are incorrectly placed in special education classes or misdiagnosed as dyslexic. In reality, these students have likely been denied the early reading skills that every student

needs to succeed. Once in middle or high school, the odds are slim that they will get the help they need—except through special education services, but these provide them with little chance to catch up to their classmates and graduate on time.

The good news is that research has shown that older students who receive intensive, focused literacy instruction and tutoring graduate from high school and attend college in significantly greater numbers than those who do not. Unfor-

More than 1.2 million students—more than half of whom are kids of color—fail to graduate from high school every year. That is approximately 7,000 students who drop out of school every school day.

tunately, few middle or high schools have a comprehensive approach to teaching literacy across the curriculum. In high-poverty and high-minority schools, these programs are almost nonexistent.

At the federal level, efforts are underway to improve students' reading abilities. The Reading First program, which was created to help students become effective readers by third grade, is funded at a little over \$1 billion. However, the Striving Readers program, designed to help older students who struggle to read at grade level, is funded at just under \$30 million. At this funding level, the program can only support eight to ten school districts nationwide. With *eight million students nationwide in grades four through twelve who read significantly below grade level*, the need is clearly greater. The Alliance for Excellent Education advocates for a greater investment in the Striving Readers program to help provide every high-need middle and high school with a literacy specialist who can train teachers across subject areas to improve the reading and writing skills of all students.

What Else Could Help Students Graduate from High School?

Researchers agree that the best way to prepare a student for future success in college or the workplace is a rigorous course schedule in high school. Not only do students taking challenging classes do better after high school, they also succeed at higher levels while in high school. Studies have shown that students from every background and every income level benefit when placed in higher-level classes. However, low-income and minority students are often not enrolled in these upper-level classes, such as Algebra II, at nearly the rate of their white classmates.

Other advanced courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB), have shown similar improvements in student achievement, but are not available in high-minority and high-poverty schools at the same rate as they are in other schools around the country. According to the College Board, the organization that administers the SAT and AP program, African American students remain significantly underrepresented in AP classrooms. Nationwide, African American students make up 13.4 percent of the student population, but only 6.4 percent of AP exam takers.

Even if low-income and minority students had greater access to advanced courses, their schools often do not have the high-quality teachers necessary to teach them. In addition, when districts do hire high-quality teachers, they often struggle to keep them. Nationally, classes in high-poverty secondary schools are 77 percent more likely to be assigned an "out-of-field" teacher—teachers without experience in the subject they will teach—than classes in low-poverty schools (where 15 percent or fewer qualify for free and reduced-price lunch).

There is growing consensus that the single most important factor in determining student performance is the quality of the teacher. Even low-performing students facing barriers to learning can achieve to high standards if they are taught by high-quality, professional teachers. On the other hand, a student who has two ineffective teachers in a row rarely recovers from the academic blow.

Unfortunately, the rate of attrition among beginning teachers is astronomi-

cal. Nationwide, 14 percent of all first-time teachers quit in the first year. After five years—the average time that it takes for teachers to maximize their students’ learning—half of all new teachers will have exited the profession.

A major result of this teacher attrition is that poor, urban, and minority children are taught by less experienced, less qualified teachers who do not stay long enough to become the expert, high-quality teachers that their students desperately need. According to noted education researcher Richard Ingersoll, urban and poor children in the United States have only a 50 percent likelihood of being taught math and science by a teacher with a college major in those subjects.

A Lifetime of “Catch-Up”

Poor reading skills, little or no access to rigorous curriculum, teachers who lack the expertise in the subjects they teach—they all add up. Facing even one of these barriers to learning would be a challenge for any student. In our nation’s lowest-performing schools, however, we ask students to overcome all of these barriers and more. Not surprisingly, many fail.

Once they drop out of school, students will have to spend the rest of their lives playing “catch up” with those who have obtained their high school diplomas and moved on to college or the workforce. According to a report issued by the Census Bureau, a male high school graduate who works until age 65 will earn, on average, nearly \$366,000 more than a dropout; a worker with some college will earn \$660,000 more. A male with a college degree will earn over one million (\$1,368,670) more than the high school dropout over the course of his work life. Based on data from the report on black men and women together, the Joint Center estimates that the corresponding differences are a little smaller among black men, with a high school graduate earning about \$325,000 more than the dropout, a black male with some college earning \$600,000 more, and a college graduate earning about \$1.1 million more.

While a few dropouts may eventually find good jobs and earn decent livings, most will spend their life in a state of uncertainty—periodically unemployed or on government assistance. Many will cycle

in and out of prison. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice has found that approximately 75 percent of state prison inmates did not complete high school.

The cost is not only to the individual. High school dropouts are a tremendous financial burden to society. Extrapolating from research by Cecilia E. Rouse, a professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University, the Alliance for Excellent Education has calculated that the more than 1.2 million students who failed to graduate with their class this year will cost the United States more than \$312 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over their lifetimes. And this figure represents only the losses attributable to this year’s dropouts—imagine how much money the nation has lost over the last 20 years and how much it could lose in the next 20 if the status quo persists.

Poor reading skills, little or no access to rigorous curriculum, teachers who lack the expertise in the subjects they teach—they all add up.

Solving the High School Crisis is Possible

In an effort to create a truly informed multicultural agenda related to secondary school redesign, the Alliance for Excellent Education is actively working with organizations representing communities of color to bring their perspectives about how to best solve the nation’s high school crisis and move the discussion about it to the forefront of the national debate.

Of course, these organizations were already well aware of the implications of the graduation rate crisis and the particularly severe impact that it has on the communities they represent. For example, the NAACP has launched a national “Call for Action in Education” to its local branches that includes a focus on improving teacher quality, increasing access to college-bound curriculum, reducing the dropout rate, and creating smaller class sizes.

As part of its *State of Black America 2006*, the National Urban League has drawn attention to low high school and

college graduation rates among African Americans. Earlier this summer, Marc H. Morial, president of the National Urban League and former mayor of New Orleans, called the plight of the black male a “state of emergency” and faulted the federal government for failing to act on the issue during the 1980s, when it became clear that African American men were losing ground.

In July 2006, as part of its continuing work as a sponsor of the Civil Rights Roundtable, the Alliance for Excellent Education partnered with the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the NAACP, the National Council of La Raza, and the National Urban League to host a breakfast conversation with Paul Vallas, Chief Executive Officer for Philadelphia schools, about effective solutions for urban high schools. The event attracted almost 200 attendees, including U.S. Representatives Chaka Fattah, Donald Payne, and Elijah Cummings, congressional staff, the media, and representatives of civil rights and education organizations working on issues related to policy and practice.

The Alliance hopes that its joint efforts can bring a higher visibility to the high school crisis and involve individuals from every community in the movement to improve high schools. With this united front, we can voice a call for reform in the nation’s high schools that will echo throughout the venues in which decisions are made: in the halls of Congress and the White House, in state legislatures and governors’ mansions, in city halls and county councils, and in school board meeting rooms.

That clarion call—and the public and political will necessary to drive reform—are essential to a goal we all share: having every child graduate from high school with a diploma that prepares him or her for college, work, and citizenship. □

Bob Wise is president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia. A video and a summary from the July breakfast event are available at <http://www.all4ed.org/events/WorksUrban/works.html>. For more information on the Alliance for Excellent Education, go to <http://www.all4ed.org/>.

JOINT CENTER UPDATES

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



September 19, Time: 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Faith-Based Initiatives and Black Churches Forum

Location: Washington, D.C.

Details: A forum to discuss and debate findings from the Joint Center's recent Faith-Based Community Initiative Survey.

September 27, Time: 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Consumer Health Annual Conference

Location: George Washington University Marvin Center

Details: A Joint Center-sponsored event exploring ways to create health equality through social justice. Joint Center Health Policy Institute (HPI) director Dr. Gail Christopher will be a panelist at the event.

September 27 4-6:30 p.m.

Reproductive Health and Behavior of Young Men of Color

Location: Atlanta, GA.

Details: One of a series of three community forums that will be convened to discuss issues related to the reproductive health and behavior of young men of color, examine promising practice interventions and public policies, and develop intervention and public policy recommendations that will expand life options for young men of color.

October 6, Time: 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

National Academy for Social Insurance (NASI) Seminar, "Beyond the New Drug Benefit: How Can We All Improve Medicare?"

Location: Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA

Details: With funding from the Joint Center, the seminar will feature the latest information on the Medicare Part D drug benefit and new findings from NASI's studies on the Medicare savings programs and of Medicare as a tool in reducing ethnic and racial health disparities.

October 26

The Urban Institute Roundtable

Location: Barbara Jordan Conference Center, Washington, D.C.

Details: Sponsored by the Joint Center Health Policy Institute, this event will be a day-long roundtable on the nexus between health, housing, and neighborhoods.

November 4

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) National Student Conference

Location: Boston, MA

Details: HPI director Dr. Gail Christopher will be serving as a workshop leader for "U.S. Policy and Disparities in Health Care: Lessons Learned and Future Opportunities." This workshop focuses on eliminating disparities in health care through comprehensive effort from all sectors, legislation to bring change to these sectors, and the role of health professional advocates. HPI provided support for PHR's activities.

GIVE US YOUR PERSPECTIVE

From both an economic and a political perspective, do you believe that people of color should welcome or oppose the large inflow of immigrants entering the United States? Why? What policies do you think lawmakers should implement in order to address immigration? Please email your responses to sdilliplane@jointcenter.org with "Immigration Reader Response" in the subject heading, and we will publish a selection of the responses in the November/December 2006 issue of Focus.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS



Research Findings from the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP)

- *The Impact of Food Insecurity on the Development of Young Low-Income Black and Latino Children*
- *Protecting the Health and Nutrition of Young Children of Color: The Impact of Nutrition Assistance and Income Support Programs*

Social Security & Wealth: Joint Center Survey Fact Sheets, by Wilhelmina A. Leigh and Danielle Huff

- *Fact Sheet About African American Women*
- *Fact Sheet About 18- to 25-Year-Old African Americans*
- *Fact Sheet About 51- to 64-Year-Old African Americans*
- *Fact Sheet About African Americans by Income Group*

The Dellums Commission

- *Public Policies and Practices in Child Welfare Systems that Affect Life Options for Children of Color, by Ernestine F. Jones*

For an updated list of Joint Center events and publications, as well as ordering information for Joint Center products, please go to www.jointcenter.org or call 202-789-3500.



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