



The State of Opportunity in America

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Opportunity

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders face many barriers to opportunity, as the State of Opportunity in America report documents. Some of these barriers are noted below. But a full assessment of opportunity among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders is lacking because federal data are often missing or inadequately capture the diversity within these population groups. The Office of Management and Budget's decision in the late 1990s to begin disaggregating data for Pacific Islander Americans from that of Asian Americans was an important first step toward providing a fuller picture of opportunity for these groups, but much more remains to be done. We urge government leaders to take up the challenge, begun by this report, of measuring our progress in providing opportunity to all Americans. This includes gathering the demographic data and other information necessary to determine how different groups of Americans are faring.

Mobility

Everyone who works hard should be able to advance and participate fully in the economic, political, and cultural life of the nation—that is, any child in America should be able to fulfill his or her full potential, and economic status at birth (or gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality) should not predetermine ultimate achievements. But in recent years, opportunities for high-quality education and homeownership for many have declined:

- *Racial/Ethnic Segregation in Schools.* Highly-segregated, predominantly minority schools are often characterized by fewer educational resources and poorer student outcomes. In 2002 and 2003, **56% of Asian-American children - a disproportionately large share relative to their proportion in the population - were in schools that enrolled over 50% children of color.**¹
- *Subprime Home Purchase Lending.* Subprime home purchase loans feature higher interest than prevailing rates, and are often the only lending option available to those with credit blemishes. But subprime lending can also crowd out prime lending in traditionally underserved communities, restricting the kinds

of loan options available in these communities and increasing the likelihood that some individuals will fall victim to predatory and deceptive lending practices. Pacific Islander Americans are 1.5 times more likely than low and moderate-income whites to have subprime home loans, and moderate and upper-income Pacific Islander Americans are 2.0 times more likely than their white counterparts.²

Equality

True opportunity requires that we all have equal access to the benefits, burdens, and responsibilities of our society regardless of race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, or other aspects of what we look like or where we come from. Ensuring equal opportunity means not only ending overt and intentional discrimination, but also rooting out subconscious bias and reforming systems that unintentionally perpetuate exclusion. It requires proactive efforts to remake our institutions in ways that ensure fairness and inclusion.

- *Housing Discrimination.* A 2000 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development study assessed discrimination

www.opportunityagenda.org

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America.*

THE OPPORTUNITY AGENDA IS A PROJECT OF THE TIDES CENTER. All content Copyright 2005 The Opportunity Agenda.

New York
568 Broadway
Suite 302
New York, NY 10012
Tel: 212.334.4202
Fax: 212.334.2656

Washington, DC
2000 Florida Avenue NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: 202.387.2829 ext. 101
Fax: 301.576.5780



faced by Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and American Indians, finding that these groups faced significant discrimination at levels comparable to African Americans and Hispanics. Asian Americans, for example, received poorer treatment relative to white testers in 22% of tests of rental markets and in 20% of housing sales markets.³

- *Employment Discrimination Complaints.* Over the last several years, Asian and Pacific Islander American women have filed an increasing number of employment discrimination complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. **The number of sex discrimination complaints filed by Asian-American and Pacific Islander-American women, for example, increased by 83% between 1992 and 2003.** The number of sexual harassment complaints filed by Hispanic, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native women more than doubled in 2003. **And the number of race discrimination complaints filed by Asian-American and Pacific Islander women increased by 77% between 1992 and 2003.**⁴

Voice

Americans embrace democracy as a system that depends on the ability of all of us to participate in the public dialogue. This democratic system provides the right to vote and freedom from censorship, as well as affirmative opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect us and to be part of the nation's social and cultural life.

- *Electoral Participation.* Fewer than three in ten Asian Americans voted in 2004, a rate half that of white non-Hispanics. Differences in citizenship rates account for some, but not all, of this disparity.⁵
- *Representation in the Media.* Asian American representation in the television broadcast news workforce has declined from 4.1% in 2001 to

1.9% in 2005, while **the percentage of Asian Americans in the broadcast radio news workforce has not exceeded 1% since 1995.**⁶

Community

Americans have long adhered to a strong belief in individualism and self-reliance. But this ethic is accompanied by a conviction that we share responsibility for each other and our communities, just as we are responsible for ourselves. We recognize that the strength of our people and our nation depends on the vibrancy and cohesiveness of our diverse communities. But in some measures of community, many Americans remain segregated and divided from the mainstream.

- *Racial and Ethnic Residential Segregation.* A 2002 study by the U.S. Census Bureau found that while levels of African-American segregation declined across many dimensions between 1980 and 2000, Hispanics and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders still face high levels of residential segregation. On some measures of segregation, such as the degree of isolation from other groups, Hispanics and Asians and Pacific Islanders experienced *increases* in segregation from whites over the last two decades.⁷

Security

Americans believe that we are all entitled to a basic level of education, economic well-being, health care, and other protections necessary to human dignity. Without this security, it is impossible to access society's other rights and responsibilities or to enjoy full opportunity. Moreover, international human rights commitments—many of which were initiated by the United States—obligate our nation to ensure basic levels of health care, housing, and income security.

- *Access to Health Care.* Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders face greater barriers to accessing health care than white Americans.

www.opportunityagenda.org

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America.*



Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are less likely than whites to have job-based health insurance, and over one in five (21%) are uninsured.⁸ Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are also less likely than whites to have a regular source of health care.⁹ And language barriers limit access to many types of health services. Nearly one out of two Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders reports not being able to access mental health treatment because they do not speak English or cannot find services that meet their language needs.¹⁰

As a result of these barriers, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are less likely to access care; in 2000, 20% of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders reported not having seen a doctor in the past year.¹¹

- *Physical Safety.* Asian-American and Pacific Islander-American men have been consistently more likely than white men to die by homicide since 1990.¹²

Conclusions and Recommendations

Without a renewed national commitment and concrete policy changes to reverse these negative trends, the promise of opportunity for all is at great risk for this and future generations. Fulfilling the promise of opportunity for all will be one of the great challenges of the twenty-first century. It will require bold leadership from our government, civic, and business leaders, creative and effective solutions, and the sustained political will of the American people. Fortunately, however, a significant body of pragmatic policies has proven effective in expanding opportunity in concrete and measurable ways. The State of Opportunity report recommends six types of policy approaches:

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

¹ G. Orfield and C. Lee, "Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality," January 2005, www.civilrightsproject.org (23 August 2005).

² National Community Reinvestment Coalition, *Fair Lending Disparities by Race, Income, and Gender in All Metropolitan Areas in America*, March 2005, www.ncrc.org (15 October 2005).

³ M. Turner and S. Ross, *Discrimination in Metropolitan Housing Markets: Phase 2—Asians and Pacific Islanders* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2003).

⁴ National Partnership for Women and Families, *Women at Work: Looking Behind the Numbers, 40 Years After the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, July 2004, www.nationalpartnership.org (22 October 2005).

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Reported Voting and Registration, by Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age, for the United States" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, November 2004).

⁶ B. Papper, "Running in Place: Minorities and Women in Television See Little Change, While Minorities Fare Worse in Radio," *Communicator*, July/August 2005: 26-32; B. Papper, "Recovering Lost Ground: Minorities Gain Ground and Women Make Management Strides in Radio and TV Newsrooms in 2004," *Communicator*, July/August 2004: 24-28; B. Papper, "Women & Minorities: One Step Forward and Two Steps Back," *Communicator*, July/August 2003: 20-25; RTNDA, *2000 Women and Minorities Survey, 2000*, www.rtna.org (1 September 2005).

www.opportunityagenda.org

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America.*

New York

568 Broadway
Suite 302
New York, NY 10012
Tel: 212.334.4202
Fax: 212.334.2656

Washington, DC

2000 Florida Avenue NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: 202.387.2829 ext. 101
Fax: 301.576.5780



⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Racial and Ethnic Residential Segregation in the United States: 1980-2000* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, August 2002).

⁸ Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, "Health Insurance Coverage and Access to Care Among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," June 2000, www.kff.org (2 August, 2005).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Health Problems in Asian American/Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian Women," May 2003, http://www.4woman.gov/faq/Asian_Pacific.htm (13 August, 2005).

¹¹ The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *Key Facts: Race, Ethnicity and Health Care* (Menlo Park, CA: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003).

¹² J.A. Fox and M.W. Zawitz, *Homicide Trends in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004).

www.opportunityagenda.org

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America.*

THE OPPORTUNITY AGENDA IS A PROJECT OF THE TIDES CENTER. All content Copyright 2005 The Opportunity Agenda.

New York

568 Broadway
Suite 302
New York, NY 10012
Tel: 212.334.4202
Fax: 212.334.2656

Washington, DC

2000 Florida Avenue NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: 202.387.2829 ext. 101
Fax: 301.576.5780