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# THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY NEWS UPDATES

July 16, 2008

## Report Compares Quality of Life in U.S. Cities

By Caroline Preston

The average American is living longer, earning more money, and receiving more education than a half-century ago, but that progress hasn't been shared equally among people of different races, geographic regions, and gender, according to a report released today aimed at informing future grant making and charity efforts.

The study was produced by the nonprofit [American Human Development Project](#), in Washington, and paid for by the Annenberg Foundation, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Oxfam America.

The health, education, and income levels of people in some parts of the United States aren't any better than those of the average American in 1960, according to the study. By contrast, Americans in other areas today have a quality of life that the rest of the country isn't expected to attain for another three decades, the report said.

It is the first study to measure human development which is based on people's health, income, and education in the United States. The United Nations has produced reports on human development in poor nations for nearly two decades, but no such tool has been used in wealthy countries until now.

Nonprofit leaders who announced the release of the report said it would shape their grant making, improve how they deliver services, and strengthen their advocacy work.

Edmund Cain, vice president of grants programs at the Hilton fund and a former U.N. official in Turkey, described how the release of the first U.N. Human Development Report in 1990 enabled him to persuade Turkish government officials of the need to invest in marginalized communities on the nation's border with Iraq.

"They were no longer able to come back to me and tell anecdotal stories of how people living in those communities weren't that bad off," said Mr. Cain.

His fund has used the U.N. reports to guide its grant making overseas, he said, and it plans to use this new report to inform how it fights homelessness and attempts to improve child-welfare in the United States.

"It's a compass or barometer to guiding help to countries," he said.

### Sharp Contrasts

The study found stark differences among people's quality of life based on geography, even between communities that were as little as a few miles apart.

The well being of people who live in Congressional District 14 in New York, which includes the East side of Manhattan, is roughly what the rest of the country is expected to achieve by 2040. Inhabitants in Congressional District 16, in the South Bronx, meanwhile, live at the level of the average American in 1985.

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Americans' well being also varied drastically by state and region.

People in Connecticut, the top-ranked state, live at a standard that the rest of the country won't catch up to until 2020, if current trends continue, the report said.

Residents of Mississippi, which ranked at the bottom of the index, have salaries, life expectancies, and levels of education that the average American achieved in the late 1980s.

People in the Northeast fared best based on the study's human-development measures, while residents of the South performed the worst.

What's more, the study showed deep inequities based on race and gender.

In terms of education, Asian Americans far outpaced people of different races and ethnicities. Half of Asian Americans have received a college degree, compared with 30 percent of whites, 17 percent of blacks, and 12 percent of Latinos.

Latino men are graduating from high school at the same rate as the average American in 1960.

Blacks fared the worst if all three measures of human development were taken into account, largely because their health was poorest. Black babies are 2.5 times more likely to die before their first birthday than other babies, while blacks have a shorter lifespan than the average American did in the 1970s.

Gender, too, played a role in people's well being. White men, for example, make \$14,000 more on average than white women, although they don't live as long or receive as much education.

The report also examined how the United States compared with other rich countries in terms of human development.

The United States ranked 12th in this year's U.N Human Development Report, compared with second in 1990.

"We're progressing but not as quickly as many of our peer countries," said Sarah Burd-Sharps, a co-author and co-director of the project.

Ms. Burd-Sharps said the report shows that policy makers rely too much on purely economic measures to track progress.

"We rely too heavily on economic indicators like the stock market, consumer spending, and inflation," said Sarah Burd-Sharps, a co-author and co-director of the project. "That only tells part of the story."

The study, *The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008-2009*, can be purchased from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and other retailers for \$75 for a hard copy and \$25 for a soft copy. It was published by Columbia University Press.

Wednesday July 16, 2008 | [Permalink](#)

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— doris scott Jul 17, 04:14 AM <#>

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