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KING COMMUNITY BUILD FOR 2010–2011 IN ITHACA, NEW YORK**

**ML KING IN 2010, OR
WHERE DID WE GO FROM THERE?**

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2 December 2009: revised and corrected; net worth data updated 7 September 2010;
unemployment data updated 13 October 2010

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In his final book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967: pages 6-7; Chapter 1, part I), Dr. Martin Luther King notes of African Americans that they have

“...of the good things in life...approximately one-half those of whites; of the bad...twice those of whites.”

King goes on to contrast the races on income, unemployment, infant mortality, education, and several other indicators of American society that demonstrate striking racial differences. Today we would call these patterns “institutional racism,” that is, racism that is deeply embedded in society and is not necessarily the result of intentional practices but that continues because no adequate efforts are made to overcome these practices. In fact, much of King’s book focuses on the failures of American society to undo the consequences of centuries of racial discrimination. He lays the major blame squarely on white society since, he argues, whites hold greater power. After describing how African Americans are “working vigorously to overcome” their deficiencies, he argues that

“Whites, it must frankly be said, are not putting in a similar mass effort to re-educate themselves out of their racial ignorance.” (page 10)

Throughout the book King calls on whites to join in alliance with the civil rights movement to make breakthroughs in racial justice that go beyond desegregating restaurants and expanding voting rights and to create a truly just society in terms of employment, income, access to medical and health services and the like.

To what extent are King’s observations true today, 42 years later? Let’s consider some of the same or similar statistics to those King used. These numbers are available to the public in *The Statistical Abstract of the United States*, published annually by the Census

Bureau and in a few academic and policy-oriented studies. Data are usually a couple of years behind the times. We can compare the year 2005 with the year 1967 (or a nearby year). This is a time span of 38 years. In some cases, we have to use alternate years because of the way government statistical tables are compiled and made available.

1. We begin with life expectancy. The data are shown on Table 1.

**Table 1. Life Expectancy for African Americans and Whites
1967 and 2005**

	1967	African American as % of White	2005	African American as % of White	Change in Black/White Ratio
White men	67.8		75.7		
African American men	61.4	91%	69.5	92%	+1 percentage point
White women	75.2		80.8		
African American women	68.5	91%	76.5	95%	+4 percentage points

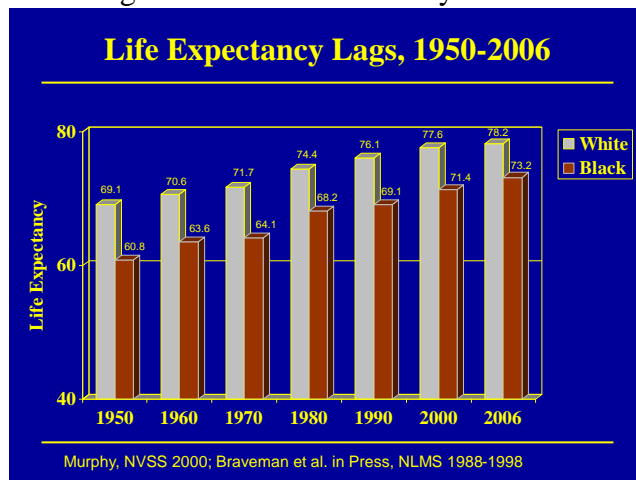
2005 data source: U. S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2009 Table 100, p. 74 and <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/09s0103.pdf>

1967 data source: National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 52 No. 14 February 2003, page 33, Table 12. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/nvsr52_14t12.pdf

Source for the Life Expectancy Lags 1950-2006 bar graph just below:

<http://unnaturalcauses.org/assets/uploads/file/David%20Williams%20Keynote%2010%2023%2009.pdf>

Life Expectancy Comparisons (data are for 1967 and 2005): The average white male can expect to live 75.7 years, while the average black male lives 69.5 years. For white women it is 80.8; for African-American women it is 76.5. In 1967, the male racial difference was 67.8 for whites to 61.4 for African Americans; for females it was 75.2 to 68.5. In 1967 African-American men lived 91% as long as white men and African-American women lived 91% as long as their white counterparts. In 2005 the difference was 92% for males and 95% for females. In other words, African-American men made a 1 percent gain while African-American women improved by 4 percentage



points compared with white women. African-American women improved their position compared to white women by a little less than one percentage point per decade.

What It Means: At their rate of improvement since King’s book, African-American men will live as long as white men in about 304 years, or in the year 2313. African-American women will gain life expectancy equality with white women in about 46 years or in the year 2055.

2. Infant Mortality. The infant mortality rate is the number of children per 1,000 who are born alive but die before reaching the age of one year. Many scholars consider the infant mortality rate the best overall indicator of prenatal health and care, nutrition and post-natal care. The data appear on Table 2.

**Table 2. Infant Mortality Rates of African Americans and Whites
1970 and 2005**

	1970	African-American Ratio to Whites	2005	African-American Ratio to Whites	Change in Black/White Ratio
Whites	17.8		5.7		
African Americans	32.6		13.7		
		1.8		2.4	Minus 0.6 percentage points

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2009*, Table 110, p. 81
 The 1964-66 infant mortality, education and income study:
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_22/sr22_015.pdf

Infant mortality comparisons (data are for 1970 and 2005): In 1970 white infant deaths were 17.8 per thousand while African-American babies had 32.6 deaths per thousand, 1.8 times the rate for whites. In 2005 the numbers for both races had declined to 5.7 and 13.7, however the ratio for African Americans was actually higher than in 1970. The racial gap actually increased by 6/10s of a percentage point.

In 1964–1966 the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare carried out a detailed study of infant mortality by race. This study showed significant Black-White differences

even when income, education, birth order and other variables were controlled for. In other words, a race factor was always present.

What It Means: At current rates of change, African Americans will never close the gap with whites on infant mortality; in fact, the gap will grow wider unless some measures are taken.

3. Maternal Mortality: maternal mortality means the number of women who die in child birth out of every 100,000 women giving birth. Like infant mortality, this statistic tells us much about access to and quality of medical services. We see the data on Table 3.

**Table 3. Maternal Mortality of Blacks and Whites
1970 and 2005**

	1970	African-American Ratio to Whites		2005	African-American Ratio to Whites	Change in Black/White Ratio
Whites	14.4			11.1		
African Americans	59.8			36.5		
Ratio and rate of change		4.2			3.3	Plus 0.9 percentage points

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2009*, Table 110, p. 81

Maternal mortality comparisons (data are for 1970 and 2005): Over 35 years African-American women improved their ratio with white women by about 0.3 percentage points per decade.

What It Means: At their present rate of improvement, African-American women will achieve maternal mortality equality with white women in about 128 years, or in the year 2137.

4. Income and Education. It is widely believed that African Americans should improve their educational achievement if they want higher incomes. Table 4 shows the figures for these factors for the year 2006.

Table 4. Education, Race, Gender and Average Income: 2006

	Not a High School Grad	High School Grad	Some College	Associate Degree	Bachelors Degree	Master's Degree	Ph.D.
White Males	24,579	38,833	39,924	49,061	71,735	89,837	118,003
Black Males	21,294	30,122	34,043	36,534	52,569	62,396	*
White Females	15,843	23,334	25,595	32,889	43,142	53,062	78,389
Black Females	14,277	22,643	25,832	35,328	44,326	50,916	*

*numbers too small for reliability

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2009*, Table 224, p. 146

Income and Education (2006 data): Table 4 clearly shows that education benefits both whites and African Americans. At each higher level of education, both groups earn more money. We can say, therefore, that income has an “education effect.” However, as Table 4 also shows, at any given level of education, we see substantial differences in income between the races. We therefore have to acknowledge that even in 2006 – 39 years after the publication of King’s book, income continues to show a powerful “race effect.” You can also see a “gender effect.”

5. Black and White Income over Time (early 1970s to 2004): Comparing the masses of data on this would be tedious. Fortunately a Brookings Institution scholar named Julia Isaacs has undertaken this job and summarizes the main points – they are quite disturbing. We summarize or quote the main points from the executive summary of her report that is available online (as is the complete detailed report itself – see the links below):

- Isaacs tracked the incomes of 2,300 families for more than 30 years.
- Incomes of both races increased in the past three decades, however...in 1974, African Americans had 63% of the income of whites and in the last 30 years...
- “There was no progress in reducing the gap in family income between blacks and whites. In 2004, median family income of blacks ages 30 to 39 was only 58 percent that of white families in the same age group (\$35,000 for blacks compared to \$60,000 for whites).” [Note from Franke and Chasin: Median is similar to the average – the median is the number that 50% of households are above and 50% are below. Statisticians prefer the median because it filters out the effects of extremely high incomes that can distort the average figure.]
- Incomes among African-American men actually declined over this period when adjusted for inflation.

- “Overall, approximately two out of three blacks (63 percent) exceed their parents’ income after the data are adjusted for inflation, similar to the percentage for whites.
- However, a majority of blacks born to middle-income parents grow up to have less income than their parents. Only 31 percent of black children born to parents in the middle of the income distribution have family income greater than their parents, compared to 68 percent of white children from the same income bracket. Odds of exceeding parental incomes are better for black children from other income groups, but are still substantially lower than those of white children in the same circumstances.”
- “Startlingly, almost half (45 percent) of black children whose parents were solidly middle class end up falling to the bottom of the income distribution, compared to only 16 percent of white children. Achieving middle-income status does not appear to protect black children from future economic adversity the same way it protects white children.”
- “Black children from poor families have poorer prospects than white children from such families. More than half (54 percent) of black children born to parents in the bottom quintile [poorest 20%, FC] stay in the bottom, compared to 31 percent of white children.”
- Black children grow up in families with much lower income than white children.

The bottom line: “Black children grow up in families with much lower income than white children,” and her study seems to show that things are not changing for the better.

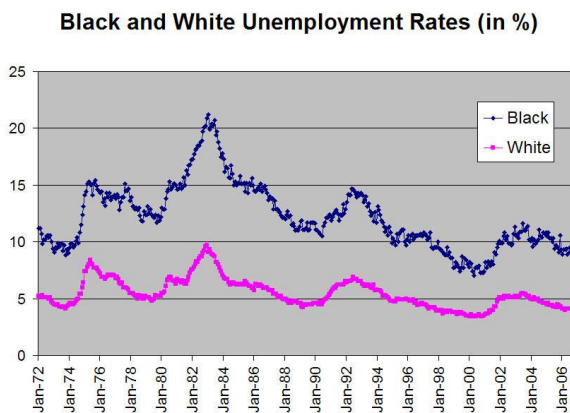
Sources: The news release from the Brookings Institution on the Julia Isaacs study:

http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/11_blackwhite_isaacs.aspx

The free downloadable entire 19 page report with graphs and documentation:

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2007/11_blackwhite_isaacs/11_blackwhite_isaacs.pdf

6. Unemployment. In 1967 unemployment for African-American males was 5.6% and for white males 2.6%. For African Americans, the rate was thus 2.15 times that of blacks,



almost exactly the “twice as much of the bad” as King wrote in his book. The rates for females were 4.3% for whites and 8.3% for African Americans, or 1.93 times the white rate. The African-American to white unemployment ratios have remained almost exactly as King reported them over the years as can be seen from the graph below, downloaded from

the Thora Institute website which shows the pattern from 1972 to 2006.

As the business cycle has gone up or down, African Americans from 1967 to today have experienced a nearly constant ratio of approximately twice as much unemployment as whites. Just prior to the financial meltdown of 2008, white unemployment was 4.0% with African American unemployment at 8.9%, a ratio of 2.2, almost identical to the figure for 1967.

Source for the unemployment graph: http://www.thorainstitute.com/uploaded_images/B-W-Unemployment-Rates-733612.jpg. The Thora Institute has a fairly up-to-date downloadable slideshow by Algernon Austin on Black unemployment at: http://epi.3cdn.net/a3caeb4c63b17b4b24_xhm6bx6p0.pdf This slideshow presents graphs illustrating how Black men suffer significantly higher unemployment rates than whites at all educational levels, information parallel to what we presented in section 4 of this document concerning the race effect on education and income.

Source: 1967 unemployment data:

http://books.google.com/books?id=KMDQJ19Z7vsC&pg=PA55&lpg=PA55&dq=black+unemployment+1967&source=bl&ots=kLuia5LNmU&sig=n4cSwIR3oU27lrL_FB9EsBObAmk&hl=en&ei=q8_6SoCIENLhlAftntC6Aw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBAQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=black%20unemployment%201967&f=false

2006 data: Burd-Sharps, Sarah, Kristen Lewis and Eduardo Borges Martins. 2008. *The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008-2009*. New York: The Social Science Research Council and Columbia University Press: page 183. See also *The New York Times* article of December 1, 2009, "In Job Hunt, College Degree Can't Close Racial Gap."

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/01/us/01race.html?_r=2&hp

Unemployment, Race and the Recession: the 2010 update. On October 9, 2010 *The New York Times* (p. 2) reported that the Labor Picture in September of 2010 included a figure of 8.7% unemployment for whites, 16.1% for African Americans, 12.4% for Hispanics and 6.4% for Asians. These figures indicate that African-American unemployment recently as a result of the recession has now doubled but the ratio to whites was 1.85, slightly lower than the historic trend observed by King. One explanation for the slightly improved ratio (though in the context of a worsening trend overall) might be that the recession has hit so hard and deeply that it has pushed beyond the boundaries of the historical white-black ratios and is causing slightly more privileged white workers to be laid off in unprecedented numbers.

7. Home Ownership and Wealth. The overwhelming majority of Americans have only one significant source of wealth: their homes. (Some individuals also had substantial personal money in pension accounts until recently.) In 2005 Black-occupied housing was 48% occupied by the owners; for whites the figure was 73%. Owning a house provides collateral for loans for higher education and many other benefits. It is therefore not surprising that "net worth" for whites would be greater than for African Americans. For white-non-Hispanics (the category as named in the Census publication), the 2007 average

net worth was \$692,200 (median=\$170,400) while for Non-Whites or Hispanics the average was \$228,500 (median=\$27,800). The average net worth of Non-White or Hispanic families was therefore 33% of that of white non-Hispanics. In 1995, the earliest year for which the 2009 *Statistical Abstract* provides data, Non-White or Hispanic families held wealth equal to 31% of that of white non-Hispanics.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2009*, Table 949 on page 603 and Table 699, p. 459; 2007 net worth figures from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/10s0705.pdf>.

8. Conclusions: What changes have or have not occurred since King wrote *Where Do We Go from Here* in 1967? How would you explain them? What do you think should or should not be done? What other kinds of information do think we need in order to fully understand racial disparities in the United States?