

Children of Color in the United States

by Elizabeth Leung
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“Every parent wants good schools, safe communities and access to the services their children need ... [but] African-American, Latino, American Indian and subgroups of Asian and Pacific Islander kids face some of the biggest obstacles on the pathway to opportunity”... according to a 2014 “Race for Results” report on the state of children of color released in April by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

By 2018, children of color will be the majority, but they, their families and communities are disproportionately lacking in resources on their pathway to opportunity. By 2030, these children will become the majority of the workforce; and by 2050, they will be the majority of the population. Our future requires that we help all children and not let children of color be consigned to the sidelines.

The “Race for Results” report scores children’s progress -- across racial groups, among ethnic groups and by geographic locations -- in meeting critical milestones for their long-term success. Indicators include babies born at normal birth weight, fourth graders who scored at or above proficient levels in reading, children who live in low-poverty areas (poverty <20%), high school students graduating on time, etc.

African-American children are in a national crisis according to the “Race for Results” index score. They particularly fare poorly in Michigan, Wisconsin, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, and in South Carolina where they are least likely overall to become middle-class.

American Indian children face some of the steepest barriers to success, like African American children, especially in the upper Midwest, Southwest and mountain states. In South Dakota, they fare worst of any groups in any state. White children in the northeastern states of New Jersey, Massachusetts,

and Connecticut hold the top three scores for white children on the index. While in the South, especially the extreme poor regions of West Virginia (Appalachia) and Mississippi (the Delta), white children score the lowest two.

Children from immigrant families face greater obstacles than children in U.S. born families because of the household not being fluent in English, parents' lack of a high school degree, and legal status that can keep them from accessing public programs. Latino children from more than forty states scored in the lower half of the index. Families from Mexico, the Caribbean and Central America face bigger barriers in attaining economic security than those from Cuba, Spain or South America. Asian and Pacific Islander children of Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese descent are the least likely to score high on economic security compared to Japanese, Asian Indian and Filipino children.

Fair-minded persons who believe in equitable opportunity recognize that the above are examples of the continuing impact of structural racism. Though great progress has been made to roll back overt racist laws and customs, the cultural norms and bias in our foundational institutions that limit opportunity for children of color are legitimized over time through seemingly "colorblind" customs, practices and policies. This report helps us to see "a clear picture of yesterday's history, today's reality and tomorrow's hope for the nation's future."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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