

## **NEWS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release:

November 10, 2010

### **The Measure of America 2010–2011: Mapping Risks and Resilience Reveals Startling Gaps in Well-being and Opportunity by Place, Race, and Ethnicity**

The Report, the Latest Update to the American Human Development Index, Measures  
Health, Education, and Income, Tracks Progress over Time

New York, N.Y. and Washington, D.C. – The [American Human Development Project](#), a nonpartisan initiative that seeks to move beyond an overreliance in the U.S. on GDP as a measure of well-being, today released *The Measure of America 2010–2011: Mapping Risks and Resilience*. The report is published by NYU Press with a foreword by economist Jeffrey Sachs and is the latest update to the pioneering American Human Development (HD) Index, first introduced in *The Measure of America 2008–2009*.

The American HD Index is an alternative measure of well-being and opportunity, calculated from official government data; it measures the three basic building blocks of a good life—health, education, and income. Index scores enable a ranking of the 50 U.S. states, 435 congressional districts (CDs), major racial and ethnic groups, and men and women and allow for the tracking of progress over time. The American HD Index answers the question: how are ordinary Americans doing? The American Human Development Project calculates life expectancy by state and for the five major racial and ethnic groups in each state—the only life expectancy calculations at this level available today.

Topping the 2010–2011 American HD Index for states, CDs, racial and ethnic groups, and men and women are Connecticut, New York’s Fourteenth Congressional District CD on Manhattan’s East Side, Asian Americans, and women. Scoring lowest on the American HD Index are West Virginia, California’s Twentieth CD in the Central Valley around Fresno, Native Americans, and men.

The report presents strong evidence that the capabilities a person has going into a crisis—ranging from a financial downturn to a man-made or natural disaster—strongly determine how fast he or she can bounce back. It concludes with a set of recommendations to boost the American HD Index scores of all Americans and to enable those left behind to realize their full potential.

“As poverty is rising and high unemployment is causing searing pain across society, we need an accurate understanding of America’s diverse and complex conditions,” said Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. “No other publication comes close to this one in documenting and explaining America’s disparate socioeconomic realities, especially the vast differences across regions and social groups and the alarming shortfall of America’s performance compared with other high-income countries.”



“Economic indicators like GDP measure how the economy is doing. The American Human Development Index measures how ordinary Americans are doing in areas of vital importance to all of us: health, education, and income,” said Sarah Burd-Sharps, co-director of the American Human Development Project. “The American Human Development Index shows that some groups of Americans are surging ahead, enjoying the highest levels of well-being and widest range of opportunities in the world—but other groups have fallen badly behind. Leaving people behind hamstringing America’s competitiveness and is extremely costly for society as a whole,” added Kristen Lewis, co-director of the American Human Development Project.

“Catholic Charities recently initiated legislation, the “National Opportunity and Community Renewal Act,” that uses the American Human Development Index to help determine areas eligible for funding,” said Father Larry Snyder, President, Catholic Charities USA. “The American Human Development Index is a robust, easy-to-use tool for policymakers, philanthropists, and nongovernmental organizations to identify need and track progress toward longer, healthier lives of freedom and opportunity for all Americans.”

### **Among the key findings from The Measure of America 2010–2011: Mapping Risks and Resilience:**

#### Health

- African Americans today have a life expectancy comparable to that of the U.S. as a whole a quarter of a century ago.
- Whites in Washington, DC, live, on average, a dozen years longer than African Americans in the same city.
- A baby born today in Virginia’s CD 8, the suburbs of DC, can expect to live a decade longer than a baby born today in West Virginia’s CD 3, the southern, rural part of the state—83.7 years vs. 72.9 years.
- Asian Americans have the longest life span (87.3) of any racial or ethnic group today, followed by Latinos. Latinos live, on average, to 83.5 years, nearly 5 years longer than whites and over 8 years longer than African Americans and Native Americans.

#### Education

- In CD 29 in Texas (Houston area), only 54 percent of adults over 25 have completed high school, whereas in CD 6 in Colorado (southern suburbs of Denver), 97 percent of adults hold at least a high school diploma.
- In Nevada, fewer than three in ten 3- and 4-year olds are enrolled in preschool, whereas in New Jersey, nearly seven in ten are enrolled in preschool.

#### Income

- Although women have higher overall levels of educational attainment than men, their median earnings average \$11,000 less per year.
- Adding ethnicity to the mix makes the gap larger still; white men and Asian American men earn just shy of \$41,000, whereas Latina women earn about \$18,000.
- Looking at states and race together, the typical African American worker in Maryland earns \$16,000 per year more than the typical African American worker in Louisiana.

## **Among the Key Recommendations from The Measure of America 2010–2011: Mapping Risks and Resilience:**

### Health

Despite our overwhelming focus on medical treatment and care, the gravest risks to health today are four modifiable risk behaviors: smoking, poor diet, inactivity, and excessive drinking. Prioritizing prevention and addressing the social and economic conditions that breed ill health and fuel these “fatal four” risk behaviors offer the greatest promise for reducing chronic illness and premature death.

### Education

Universal, high-quality preschool must be a national priority. Research shows that a quality early education is the single most cost-effective educational investment not only for school readiness but also for boosting wages and homeownership and reducing some of America’s major social challenges today, including crime and incarceration.

### Income

We must provide incentives for middle class and low-income families to build assets commensurate with the tax incentives and benefits for asset-building among the wealthy. Families need assets to weather turbulent times, to enjoy a secure old age, and to invest in the next generation. The country must also address the stubborn wage gaps between women and men with modern, family-friendly policies that address the needs of working parents.

For a new interactive map program and more information on The Measure of America 2010–2011: Mapping Risks and Resilience, visit: [www.measureofamerica.org](http://www.measureofamerica.org).

### **About the American Human Development Project**

The American Human Development Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit initiative of the Social Science Research Council. Its mission is to provide easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding the distribution of well-being and opportunity in America and to stimulate fact-based dialogue about issues we all care about: health, education, and income. A hallmark of this work is the American Human Development Index, a measure that paints a portrait of Americans today and empowers communities with a tool to track progress tomorrow. This Index is based on the well-honed international Human Development Index, published annually by the United Nations. The Project is made possible through the generous support of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and The Lincy Foundation.

### **About the Authors**

Sarah Burd-Sharps and Kristen Lewis are co-directors of the American Human Development Project. Previously, Sarah worked with the United Nations for over two decades, most recently as Deputy Director of the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Prior to this, she worked in China and in a number of African countries on gender issues and economic empowerment. Sarah holds an M.I.A. from Columbia University. Kristen also comes from an international development policy background, having worked primarily in the areas of gender equality, governance, environment, and water and sanitation. Kristen is co-author, under the leadership of Jeffrey Sachs’ Millennium Project, of the 2005 book *Health, Dignity and Development: What Will It Take?* She worked at the United Nations for some ten years and has served as a consultant

for many international development organizations. Kristen also holds an M.I.A. from Columbia University.

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