

Unequal: Well-being Gap

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Did you know that children born in affluent white Washington suburbs of Northern Virginia live an average of 11 years longer than those born in low-income Southern West Virginia coal counties?

Disturbing data like this are contained in a report -- "The Measure of America 2010-2011" -- by the American Human Development Project. Although the report focuses on many health, education and income trends, it's most riveting information spotlights sad well-being gaps between lucky and unlucky Americans, as well as gaps with other nations.

Some examples:

| "In the country as a whole, Asian-Americans live, on average, 13 years longer than African-Americans, more than 12 years longer than Native Americans, more than eight years longer than whites, and nearly four years longer than Latinos."

| "Wealth of the top 1 percent of households rose, on average, 103 percent -- to \$18.5 million per household -- from 1983 to 2007. The poorest 40 percent of households experienced a 63 percent decline in wealth during the same period, to \$2,200 per household."

| "Life expectancy in the United States is 78.6 years, on par with Chile -- although Chile spends one-tenth what the United States spends on health care. Residents of 29 countries live longer than Americans do, while spending as little as one-eighth as much per person on their health."

| "Young African-American men in Philadelphia and Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, face a higher chance of death than do military personnel in Iraq."

| "Fewer than one in five adults in West Virginia, Mississippi and Arkansas have college degrees, compared to one in four nationally. . . . In Texas' Houston area, only 54 percent of adults over 25 have completed high school, whereas in Colorado's southern suburbs of Denver, 97 percent of adults hold at least a high school diploma."

| "The typical Asian-American in New Jersey lives a quarter-century longer, is 11 times more likely to have a graduate degree, and earns \$33,000 more a year than the typical Native American in South Dakota."

| "More than one-quarter of high school freshmen in America today do not graduate in four years. On the international scale, U.S. students performed below average, ranking 21st out of 30 affluent democracies in average science score, and 25th in average math score. Canada, meanwhile, ranked second in science and fifth in math."

| "American women today have higher levels of educational attainment than men and live, on average, five years longer. Yet men earn an average of \$11,000 more."

This welter of troubling facts shows that America -- supposedly the land of equality -- is sadly unequal. Privileged families not only get more money, but also enjoy better health, education and other rewards.

The Republican Party favors the economic elite, while Democrats generally stand for average folks. We wish the latter party could make headway in reducing the unfair gaps in U.S. society.