

Executive Summary

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merica is at a juncture. We are a nation confronting issues that go to the core of our values: What do we do about the growing inequality in the United

States today? How do we maintain and grow a sustainable middle class while creating pathways to the middle class for those living in poverty? How do we ensure that we take care of our elders with dignity and respect? And how do we provide a clear and timely pathway to citizenship for immigrants that is both fair and just?

The backdrop to these policy concerns is the inexorable demographic shift that is taking place in the United States. Today the majority of our children under the age of 1 are of color, and before we reach the end of this decade, more than half of all youth will be of color. Yet communities of color continue to face longstanding barriers on the economic, educational, and social fronts. Consider this statistic: By 2018, 45 percent of all jobs will require an associate's degree or higher. Yet today, only 27 percent of African Americans, 26 percent of U.S.-born Latinos, and 14 percent of Latino immigrants have that level of education.

The challenge in front of us is clear: How do we maintain our standing as a country of opportunity and upward mobility, ensuring that today's and future generations of Americans have the tools and skills to succeed?

Yet with every challenge, there is also an opportunity. Our growing diverse population offers us

advantages that other nations don't have—specifically human capital, which is the greatest asset of any economy. And unlike other countries such as Russia, Germany, and Japan, our population is growing thanks almost entirely to communities of color. Diversity drives innovation, encourages entrepreneurship, and creates new markets. What's more, our growing diverse communities can provide us an unparalleled advantage in an increasingly global economy. Thus, underlying the story of racial inequity, there is a greater story that has as its protagonist a young and vibrant population—youth of color—that is ready to maximize opportunities, provided they have the tools to succeed.

All-In Nation highlights the economic benefits of ensuring the success of communities of color. Groundbreaking analysis presented here estimates gains on a set of five economic indicators if Americans were able to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities that perpetuate inequality in our nation today. If racial and ethnic differences were eliminated, the average total personal income in 2011 would have been 8.1 percent higher; our gross domestic product would have been at least \$1.2 trillion higher; 13 million people would have been lifted out of poverty; federal, state, and local tax revenue would have increased by \$192 billion; and the long-run deficit in Social Security would be reduced by more than 10 percent.

This is what compels the Center for American Progress and PolicyLink to present *All-In Nation: An America that Works for All*—the need to implement

an equity policy agenda that reduces inequality and manifests the potential of our diverse population.

The need is urgent: If we do not change course and invest in strengthening communities of color and other communities that have been left behind, our middle class will continue to erode and our nation will be unprepared to successfully compete in the global economy. We must intentionally create an All-In Nation—ensuring opportunity for everyone and securing America’s economic future.

This book lays the groundwork for federal policies that would create a more equitable economy and a more equitable nation. The chapters herein all make the fundamental argument that such policies are an economic imperative for our nation. Spanning multiple policy arenas, from education and workforce development to democratic participation, the policy recommendations are all made with the goal of ensuring that all Americans, regardless of their racial or ethnic background and circumstance, class standing, or neighborhood of residence, can have a fair and unfettered chance to succeed and contribute to the well-being of our economy and our democracy.

The opening chapter, “**Creating an All-In Nation**,” introduces the foundational premise of this book by explaining how our nation has historically worked toward including those who were previously marginalized, and why increasing diversity should be understood as an economic opportunity to be fully embraced. While inequity poses economic risks to our future prosperity, diversity produces innovation,

creates new businesses that perform better, and generates new markets and consumer bases. This chapter presents a guiding vision, a new narrative, and a framework for directing the development of an All-In Nation.

The discussion turns next to the economic imperative of reducing racial and ethnic gaps. The “**America’s Future Workforce**” chapter argues that better preparing our diverse population with education and training opportunities is critical for our nation’s economic competitiveness. Without all hands on deck, our nation will not be able to count on future economic prosperity.

The ensuing chapters lay out a progressive policy agenda in key areas: infrastructure; jobs and the economy; health care and healthy communities; education and workforce development; immigration; criminal justice; and democratic participation.

Each policy chapter is introduced with a personal essay written by a public figure, explaining how he or she came to understand the urgency of taking bold action—from renowned educator **Geoffrey Canada**’s moving account of why every child deserves to succeed, to jurist and activist **Michelle Alexander**’s description of how her own treatment of a young black man changed the way she thought about criminal justice and race, to actress and community organizer **America Ferrera** explaining the importance of voting, and many others. Each essayist shares deeply personal convictions about why they believe our nation needs to change course.

“Infrastructure: Supporting Communities So All Can Thrive” explains the importance of modernizing our public infrastructure system so that communities of color are not left lacking the basics that so many Americans take for granted and can take advantage of the jobs and economic opportunities associated with infrastructure maintenance and development. Infrastructure deficiencies in urban and rural communities of color often stem from years of inequitable and discriminatory land-use planning, yet sound investments have been shown to transform neglected and struggling communities into healthy, thriving neighborhoods by linking them more firmly to their regional economies.

“Jobs, Income and Assets: Economic Security for All,” argues that national economic growth relies on individual economic security—having enough money to cover a family’s basic needs and sufficient savings or assets to invest in its future. Yet economic security has become increasingly elusive for far too many Americans and for people of color in particular. In order to increase economic security, our national economic policies must focus on creating good, family-supporting jobs; building a strong workforce and a growing base of entrepreneurs; and strengthening the nation’s capacity to innovate and produce.

“Building Healthy Communities for a Healthy Nation” relays the tremendous influence a seemingly inconsequential ZIP code has in determining whether an individual will be healthy or sick, or even how long he or she will live. Due to historic patterns

of racism and disinvestment, the neighborhoods where people of color live tend to have fewer of the resources and opportunities that promote good health—including grocery stores, farmers’ markets, quality health care, and safe streets and parks—although these neighborhoods have more fast food outlets, liquor stores, and pollution sources, which lead to preventable health problems. The nation’s future depends on putting everyone on a path to good health by ensuring high-quality health care for all and by expanding “healthy communities” strategies that make neighborhoods healthier places to live, work, learn, play, and prevent people from getting sick in the first place.

“Education and Job Readiness for a Prosperous America” warns that the United States is losing its competitive edge globally because our education system is failing a sizable group of students, namely those of color. To have the world-class workforce we will need for future prosperity, we must arm schools with a steady pipeline of effective teachers, sufficient funding and learning time, and college-ready standards. We must also make sure that we expand workforce opportunities available to students while they are in school as well as hard-to-reach adult populations in order to ensure they are well positioned for gainful employment.

“Americans in Waiting: An Immigration System that Works” describes the central role that immigrants play in our economy. For those who are currently undocumented, the social and economic benefits that come with a road map to full citizenship



Jissela Centeno and her son Matthew Pineda of Arlington, Va., whose family is from Honduras, participates in a rally for immigration reform at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, April 10, 2013.

AP PHOTO/CHARLES DHARAPAK

are shown to go a long way toward fixing our nation's deeply flawed immigration system. And for those who are authorized to be here, it is still important to implement policies that lead to full integration and encourage participation—on the job, in schools, and at the voting booth. Immigrant incorporation and integration constantly test and ultimately strengthen our nation's commitment to its core values of equality, freedom, and opportunity.

“Locked-Up Potential” reminds the reader of the nation's badly broken criminal justice system. Despite the fact that violent crime rates are at historic lows, mass incarceration has spiraled out of control, leading to a system of racial disenfranchisement that perpetuates inequality as well as an unsustainable level of corrections spending that diverts money from important institutions such as hospitals, universities, and key national priorities. The federal government should learn from state innovations that have reduced corrections spending and establish a policy framework that encourages our criminal-justice system to promote rehabilitation instead of punishment, productivity instead of decline, and equity instead of the racial- and income-based disparities that now run rampant.

“Democratic Participation and Leadership in a Diverse Nation” describes the need to reinvigorate our democracy by encouraging the formation of institutions that are more inclusive of our increasingly diverse population's needs and interests. Communities of color continue to face barriers to democratic participation such as voter repression,

limited access to leadership positions, and naturalization obstacles for immigrants that have historically prevented them from helping to shape our institutions of governance and civic engagement. These communities are key to support an equitable policy agenda focused on investments that would strengthen the middle class, including a fair tax plan, affordable health coverage, and improved public education.

Each policy chapter concludes with specific policy recommendations that the federal government can take action on today to help reduce barriers that prevent all Americans from contributing fruitfully to our economy and democracy. Often inspired by innovations already occurring at the state and local level, these recommendations create a policy framework for Congress and the administration to build a fairer and more vital economy and nation.

The analysis and policy recommendations in this book create a framework for manifesting an All-In Nation. CAP and PolicyLink hope that this book compels immediate action by Congress and the administration and that it will jumpstart a local and national conversation about a new pathway to a strong and equitable future.

At this crossroads moment *All-In Nation* points the way to a future where individual freedom is enhanced, shared prosperity is ensured, and, in the words of famed American writer and historian James Truslow Adams, “a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone.” ■