



### SUMMARY

The Urban League of Portland published the State of Black Oregon report just over a year ago. It reported on the status of African Americans in Oregon across key social and economic indicators, citing profound disparities in unemployment rates, access to adequate healthcare, quality education, as well as overrepresentation of the African American population in the child welfare, juvenile justice and adult prison systems.

In the time since the report was published, new data reveals that many disparities persist or have worsened. The recession has boosted unemployment rates, hitting low-wage jobs the hardest—where African Americans remain overrepresented. Overall, responses and solutions from Oregon’s government and business sectors remain insufficient. Tracking Oregon’s progress in reducing disparities is dependent on setting specific disparity-reduction targets, collecting adequate local racial and other demographic data and holding decision-makers accountable.

### JOBS, HOUSING AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

**UNEMPLOYMENT** Oregon’s unemployment rate has risen to one of the highest in the nation. The State of Black Oregon report revealed that African American unemployment has hovered around 11% since the late 70s. Since the report’s release, the numbers have increased.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics only reports racial data on states annually. However, rising monthly national unemployment figures for African American men nationwide suggest that the Oregon rate is also rising.

Businesses need to develop equity plans that set hard diversity targets and help to reduce the disparity gap in unemployment. At the same time, emergency fund money must complement extended unemployment benefits with long-term planning, including the allocation of significant funds to “green jobs” training and engaging community colleges in longer-term curriculum development for job trainings tailored to the chronically un/under employed.

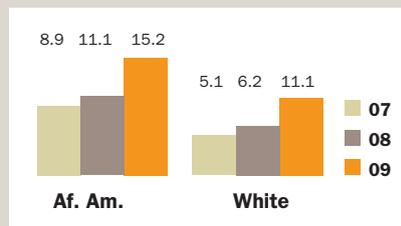


Figure 1: 2007-2009 Oregon Unemployment Rates (%)

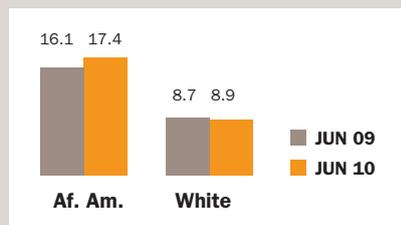


Figure 2: JUN 2009- JUN 2010 National Unemployment Rates (%) For Men

**Ask:** We urge the City of Portland, Metro, Oregon Dept. of Transportation and other related agencies who oversee new development, including Recovery Act projects, to devote a percentage of each project’s workforce to those who are disproportionately affected by un/underemployment.

**Ask:** We urge Congress to extend the Emergency Fund, and direct specific dollars toward green jobs trainings as well as subsidizing longer-term, transitional jobs for the chronically unemployed. Green jobs training should be extended to include trade and craft industries.

**Ask:** We urge the City of Portland to authorize a city-wide task force to conduct a baseline equity assessment, propose recruitment and retention strategies and monitor the progress of Oregon business and government’s hiring and retention equity practices.

### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The State of Black Oregon noted that the median income of Black-headed households was less than two thirds that of white households—essentially unchanged since 1990. Recent data shows that this gap has grown.

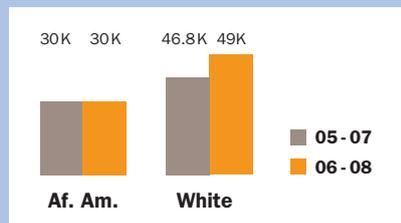


Figure 3: Oregon Median Household Income

**Ask:** We also urge our state legislature to preserve and expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and TANF to slow the economic spiral threatening families struggling to find work and meet their daily needs.

## HOUSING/ASSET PROTECTION

The State of Black Oregon reported that African American borrowers were twice as likely as white borrowers to receive high-cost, high-interest loans—and more likely to have faced foreclosure in the current economic climate. Currently, Oregon does not collect race data on foreclosures. However, a June 2010 report released by the Center for Responsible Lending confirmed our fears:

- **Of the mortgages originated between 2005-2008, African American households had the highest foreclosure rate.**

African Americans and other communities of color have experienced an unprecedented loss of wealth in recent years. High unemployment, debt and overall loss of assets are now leading causes of foreclosures.

Foreclosures should be a last resort. We encourage policy-makers to shift attention to lending institutions for creating mechanisms that keep families from being forced into foreclosure.

**Ask:** Preserve and expand stock of affordable housing as well as Individual Development Accounts. Ensure the development of opportunity-based housing, through policies that promote homeownership, and economically and socially viable communities.

**Ask:** We urge our state legislature to pass laws that protect assets and restrict predatory lending to shield low-income people from falling into further debt. This includes restrictions on refund anticipation loans, rent-to-own businesses and credit card companies.

**EDUCATION** The State of Black Oregon report highlighted many of the challenges facing Oregon's African American youth in schools. Only 68% of Black students graduate on time, compared to 85% of white students. During the 2007-08 school year, Black high school students were nearly twice as likely as white students to be expelled or suspended. 75% of Black 10th graders did not meet benchmark standards for math in 2007-08. Recent data shows that high

school dropout rates improved for students overall, while it remained virtually the same for Black students.

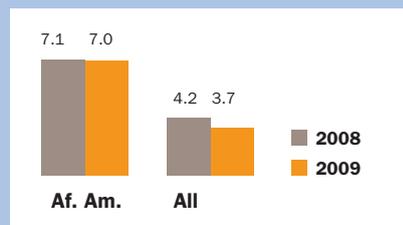


Figure 4: Oregon Drop-Out Rates

**Ask:** We urge Portland Public Schools to serve as a model for Oregon by approving and implementing a plan that allocates resources according to need. For i.e., the Portland high school redesign plan has the potential to address several equity issues.

**HEALTH EQUITY** The State of Black Oregon's review of African American health revealed stark disparities. Black children are 50% more likely to be born with a low birth weight; and infant mortality is 50% higher for children of Black mothers than for those of white mothers. Black death rates by diabetes (73:100,000) are considerably higher than for whites (29:100,000). Over the past year, there has been

significant movement around health care, specifically on a national level. In Oregon, the Oregon Health Plan was expanded to include all children living in households below 300% of the poverty level. In the time between releasing the report and these sweeping changes, our role has shifted to focus on culturally specific policies related to access and setting targeted disparity reduction goals.

**Ask:** We urge hospitals, county health dept. and the state to set targeted health disparity reduction goals. Culturally competent strategies must utilize equity tools in carrying out needs assessments and implementation.

## ADMINISTRATION JUSTICE

The State of Black Oregon reported that Black Oregonians are six times more likely to end up in jail than whites. This trend has persisted.

Additionally, the Department of Corrections budget has faced cuts, shifting the focus on safety and savings policies,

such as increasing Earned Time for nonviolent offenders. While these are good first steps towards reducing the disparities in the prison population, it is vital that we do not lose sight of critical education and vocational programs subject to budget cuts.

**Ask:** We urge requiring our state legislature to prepare a racial impact statement for any proposed laws that would affect the racial composition of Oregon's criminal offender population.

**OUR OPPORTUNITY** The Urban League of Portland defines equitable policy as targeted disparity-reduction. In order to reduce the social and economic disparities plaguing Oregon's African American population, racial equity and needs-based distribution of resources must play an integral role in shifting policy and operations. We cannot measure our success without specific goals, reliable racial data and a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of current strategies.

Many have questioned the legality of addressing disparities within a specific minority population. We welcome the opportunity to navigate these challenges and call on government, business councils and lending institutions to work with the Urban League of Portland. Year after year, unemployment, poverty, incarceration and health numbers speak to an inherent inequity in business and government; only bold changes will offer redress.