

The Demographic Tsunami and the Consequences for the Nation

By Stephen Reichard

Extraordinary disparities exist in socio-economic conditions between distinct racial and ethnic populations in the United States.

While it has been pointed out that the majority of poor people are white, far less well known and understood is that of children who grow up in long-term poverty - meaning kids who were poor for at least nine years of their childhoods - 80 percent are black. These disparities are made manifest upon society in a variety of ways including but certainly not limited to:

Poorer academic performance including lower high school graduation rates and lower college participation rates

Higher incarceration rates

Poorer health status

Higher health care costs

Higher public health care costs including both Medicaid and Medicare

Lower per capita income and therefore, lower per capita tax revenue

We are currently undergoing a demographic tsunami in this country most recently evidenced by the re-election of Barack Obama whose initial ascendancy, and his more recent victory, were made possible by the emergence of the new majority, comprised of progressive whites and people of color. To get some sense of why the term tsunami is not mere hyperbole, let's look at the numbers:

Between 2000 and 2010, the white population in the United States grew from 194.5 million to 196.8 million, an annualized growth rate of roughly 1/10th of 1 percent per year. At that rate of growth, it will take the white population 608 years to double. The balance of the population, 86.9 million in 2000 and 111.9 million in 2010, grew at an annual rate of approximately 2.9 percent at which rate it

will double in just 41 years. It is this math that leads demographers to conclude that populations of color will exceed the white population by the year 2040. [Unless otherwise noted, all data used throughout this document are from the US 2000 and US 2010 Census]

If serious steps are not taken to address inequities in socio-economic status, the implications for the nation are profound. It is no longer a moral equation; it is a question of our national economic wellbeing and the wellbeing of each and every individual in the United States with the possible exception of those who may be able to insulate themselves from the impact of these changes by reason of

Between 2003 and 2006, racial and ethnic disparities in health status cost the nation \$1.24 trillion, \$229 billion in direct health outlays. This translates roughly into \$625 per Hispanic and/or African American per year for direct health costs alone.

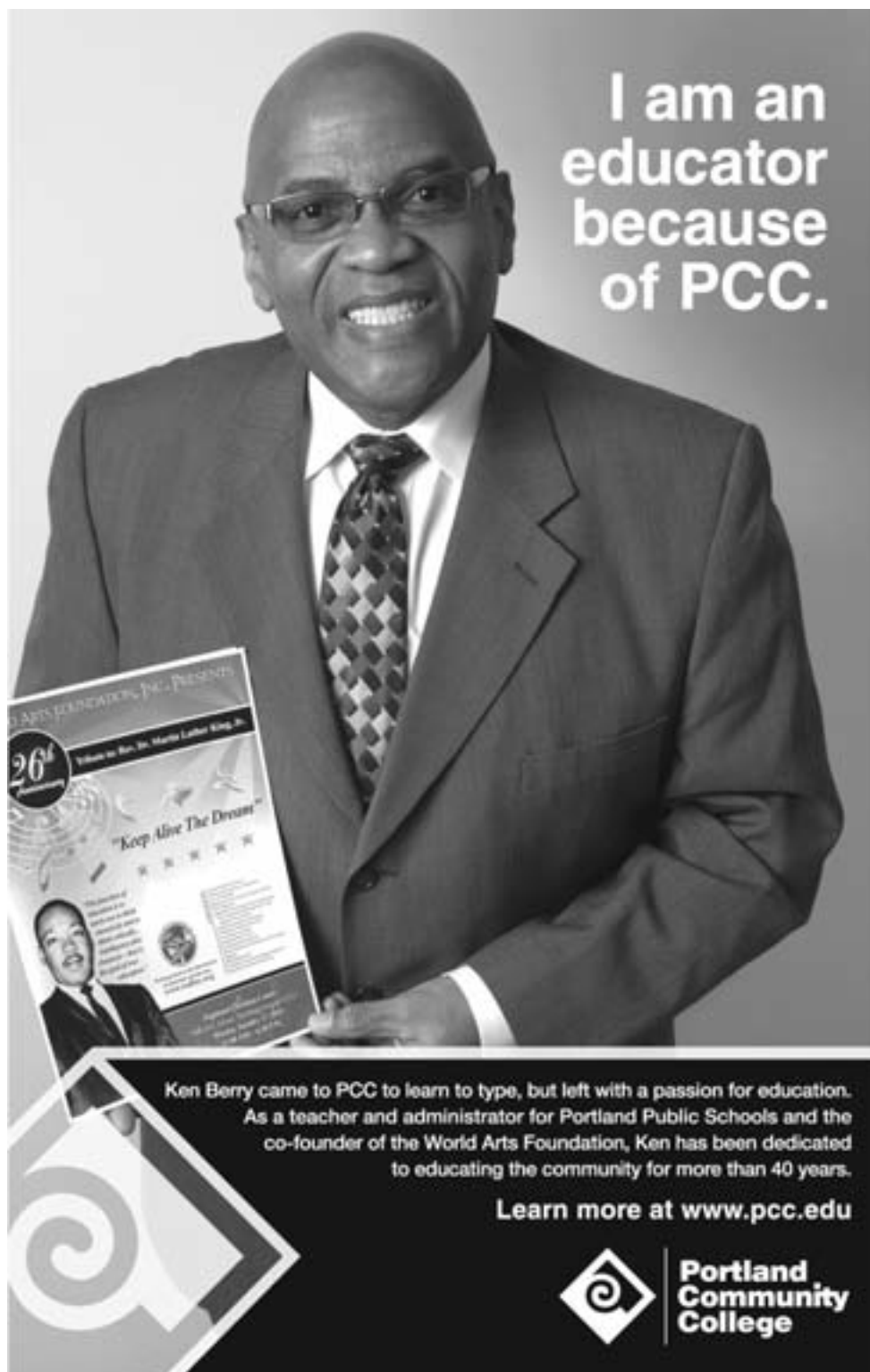
very high income. Between 2000 and 2010, the black or African American population, grew by 12.3 percent, or 1.23 percent per year. Using the law of 70, by which one can determine the rate of doubling by dividing 70 by the annual rate of change, at 1.23 percent per year, we can expect the black population to double in 57 years. It is currently about 18 percent the size of the white population; by the year 2040, it will constitute roughly 27 percent of the white population. Why is that important? In 2004, white income was 38 percent higher than black income per capita. All things being equal, this demographic change alone implies a 2.6 percent drop in national income.

The United States has a higher incarceration rate than any other nation on earth at 753 per 100,000 in 2008. While constituting only 18 percent of the white population, in 2009, blacks in prison outnumbered whites by almost 18 percent, 841,000 to 694,000. Thus, blacks were incarcerated



All too many of those who live in affluent America ignore those who exist in poor America; in doing so, the affluent Americans will eventually have to face themselves with the question that (Adolph) Eichman chose to ignore: How responsible am I for the well-being of my fellows?

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