

Charts: The economic gap between blacks and whites hasn't budged for 50 years

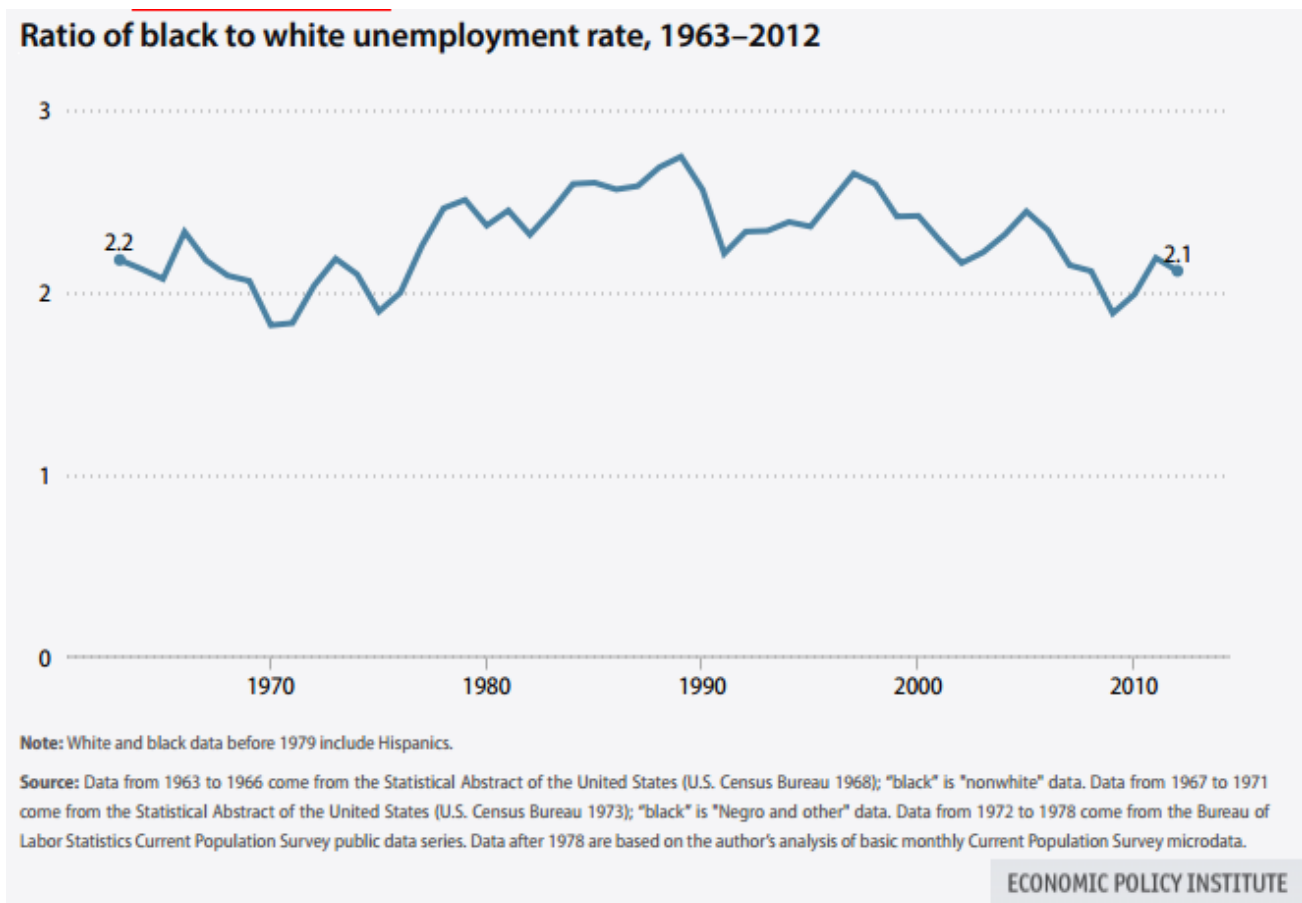
By [Brad Plumer](#), Published: August 19 at 4:10 pm – Washington Post

Our colleague Zachary Goldfarb [published a big piece](#) over the weekend noting that the United States hasn't made much progress in closing the economic chasm between blacks and whites over the past 50 years.

“Many of the most overt forms of racial discrimination and bias have faded,” Goldfarb writes, “but yawning economic gaps have persisted since 1963” — that’s the year, note, that Martin Luther King Jr. led the [The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#).

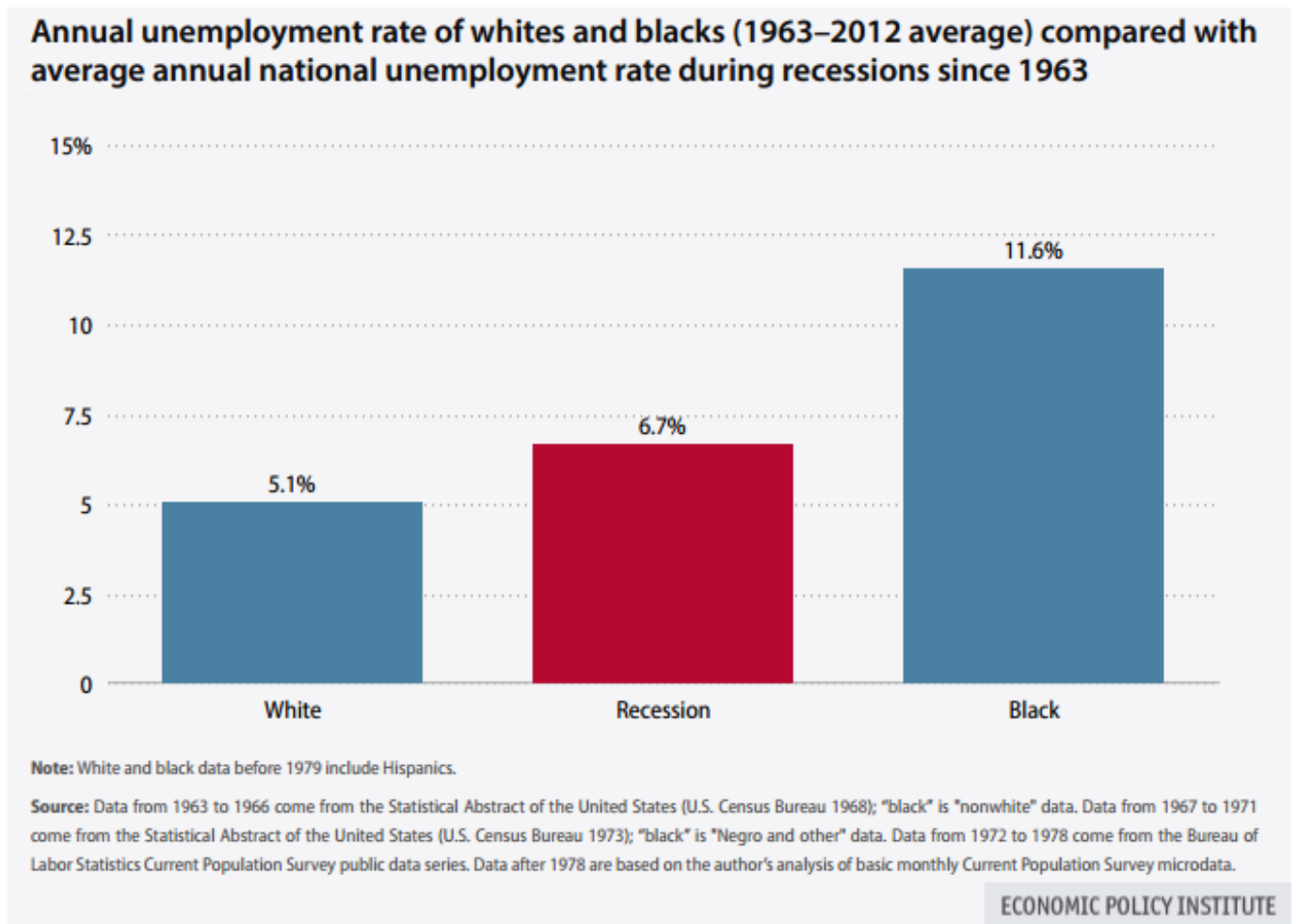
It’s an excellent story, worth reading in full. But we’ve also pulled out some of the key points from the article and put them in chart form.

1) The black unemployment rate has consistently been twice as high as the white unemployment rate for 50 years:



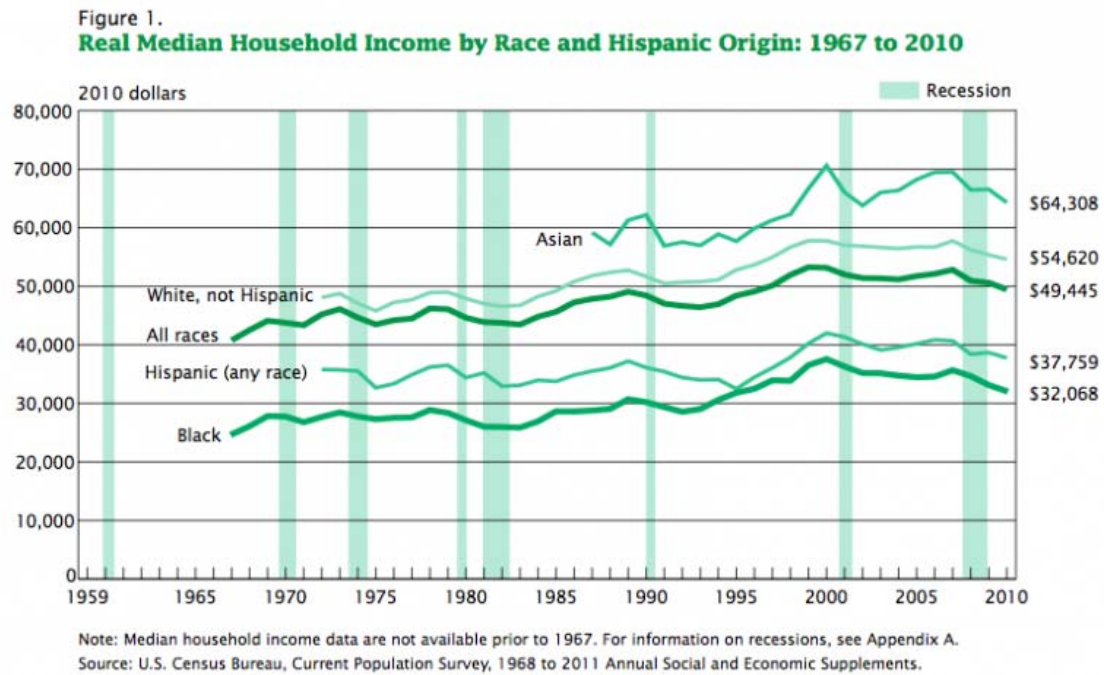
A [recent report](#) from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) notes that this gap hasn’t closed at all since 1963. Back then, the unemployment rate was 5 percent for whites and 10.9 percent for blacks. Today, it’s 6.6 percent for whites and 12.6 percent for blacks.

2) For the past 50 years, black unemployment has almost always been at recession levels:



“Indeed,” notes EPI, “black America is nearly *always* facing an employment situation that would be labeled a particularly severe recession if it characterized the entire labor force. From 1963 to 2012, the ... annual black unemployment rate averaged 11.6 percent. This was... higher than the average annual national unemployment rate during the recessions in this period — 6.7 percent.”

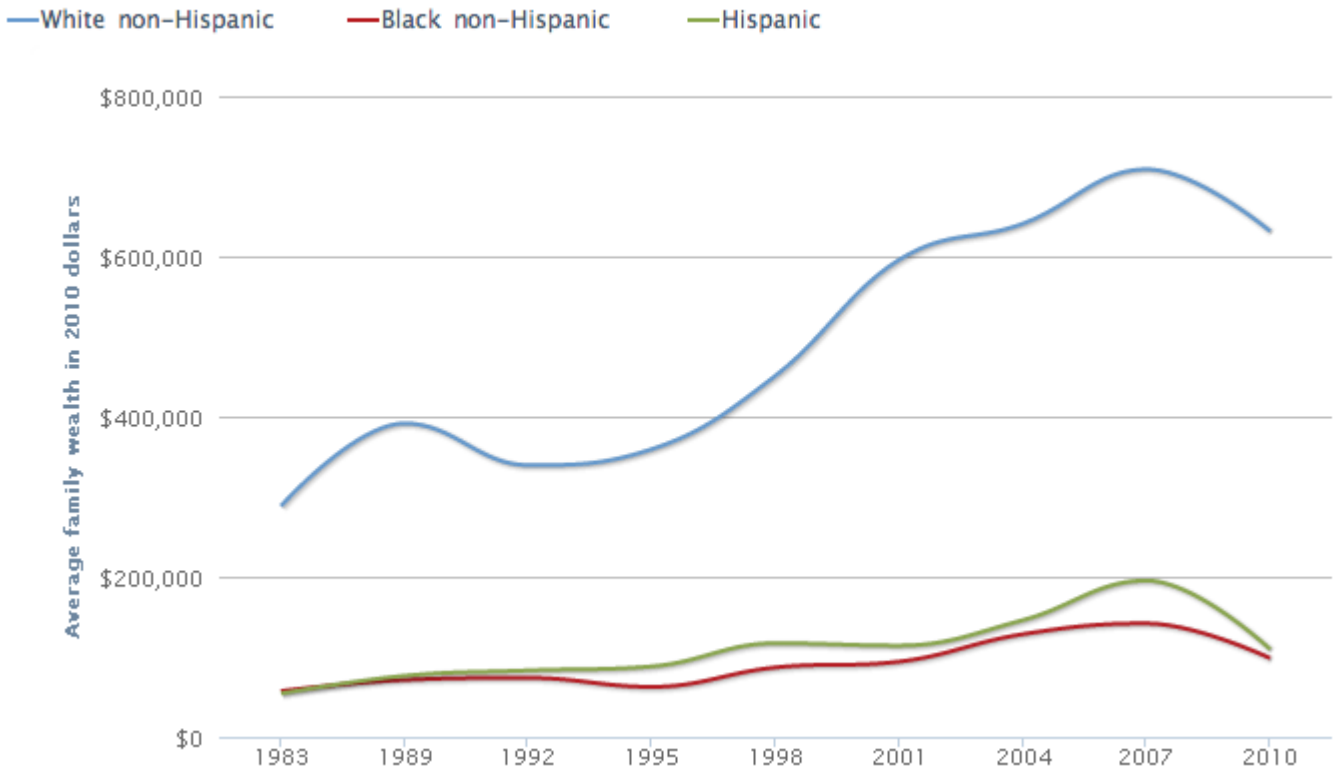
3) The gap in household income hasn't really narrowed at all in the last 50 years:



This chart comes from a recent Census [report](#) on income and poverty. Note that just about everyone's seen a decline in real household income since 1999.

4) In fact, the wealth disparity between whites and blacks grew even wider during the Great Recession.

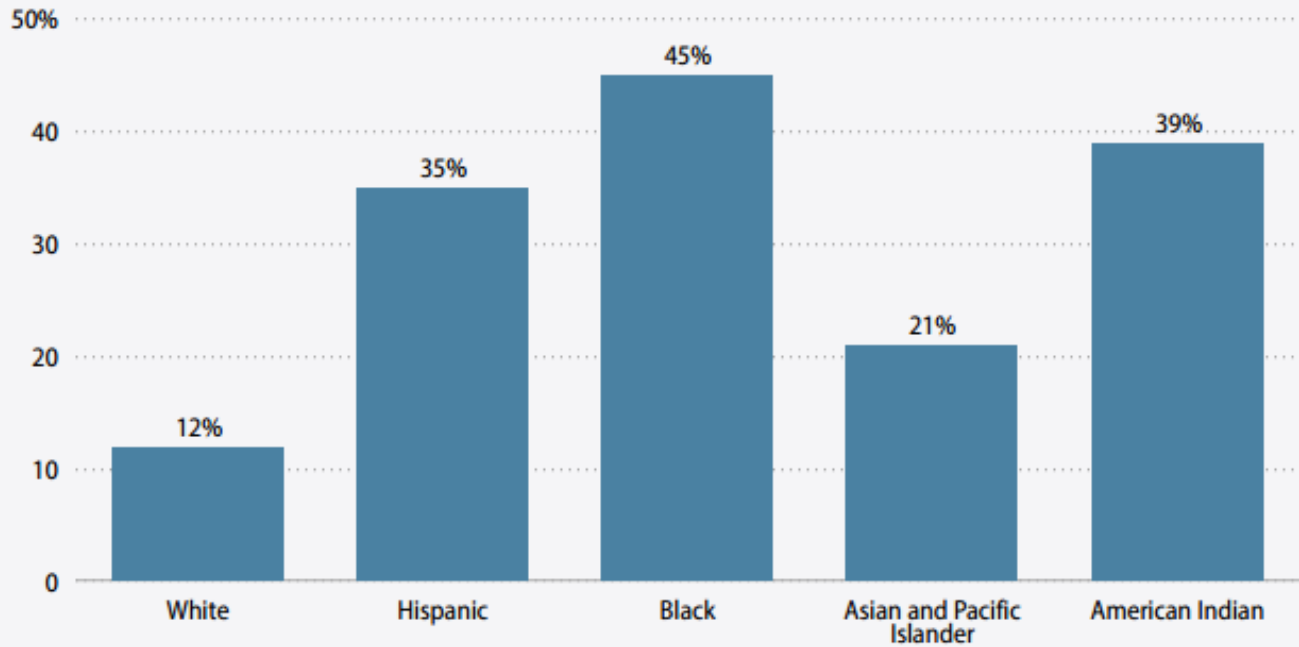
AVERAGE FAMILY WEALTH BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 1983–2010



“The wealth gap between minorities and whites has not improved over the past three decades,” [reports](#) the Urban Institute. “From 1983 to 2010, average family wealth for whites has been about six times that of blacks and Hispanics — the gap in actual dollars growing as average wealth increased for both groups.” And the Great Recession exacerbated that gap, as blacks and Hispanics were hit especially hard.

5) Black children are far more likely than whites to live in areas of concentrated poverty:

Percent of poor children living in areas of concentrated poverty, by race/ethnicity, 2006–2010 average



Note: "Concentrated poverty" is defined as a census tract with a poverty rate of 30 percent or higher.

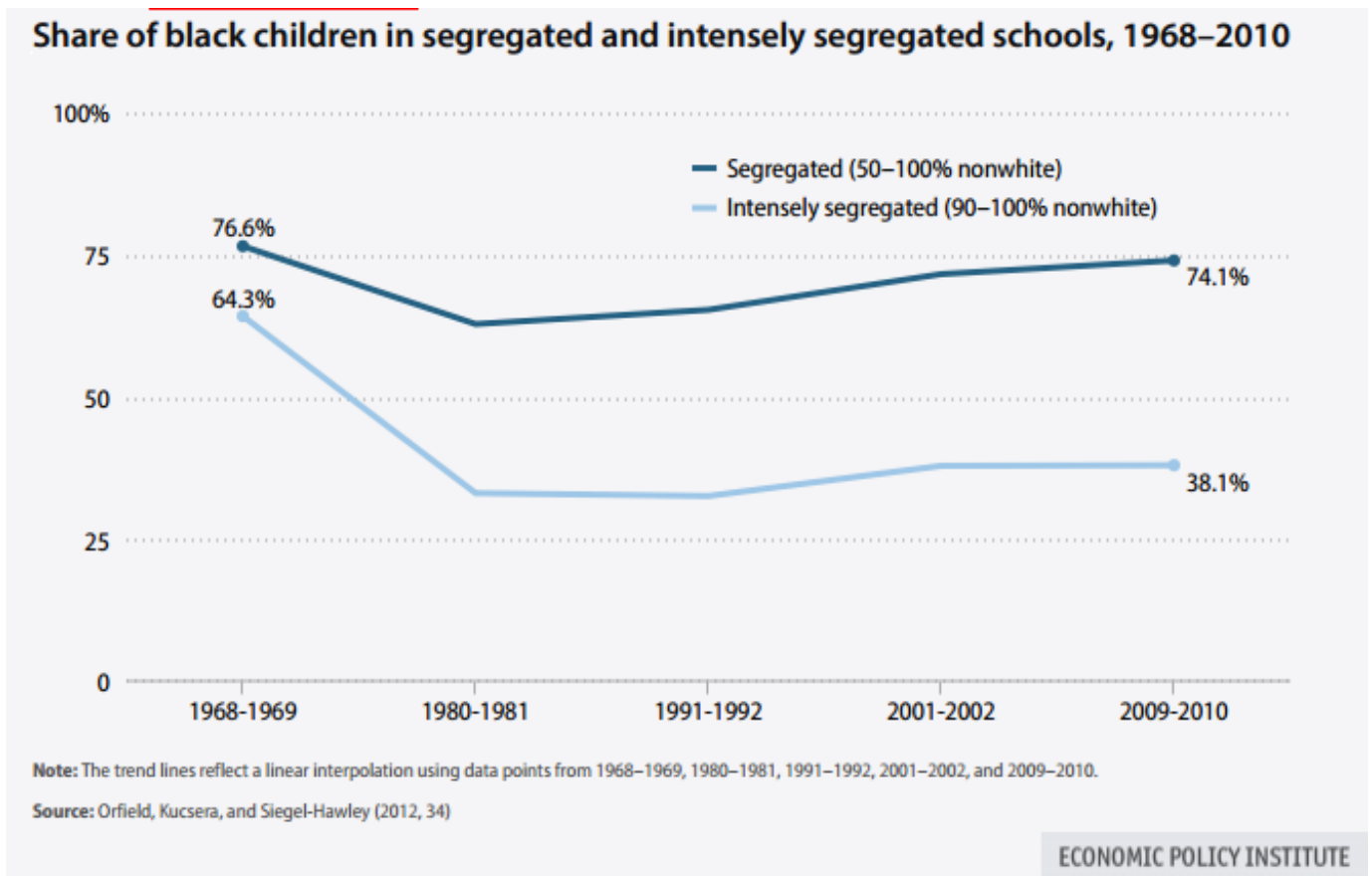
Source: Kids Count (2012)

ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE

Black poverty fell quickly between 1959 and 1969, from 55.1 percent to 32.2 percent. But after that, the drop was slower and more uneven. "Arrested progress in the fight against poverty and residential segregation has helped concentrate many African Americans in some of the least desirable housing in some of the lowest-resourced communities in America," the EPI report notes.

And those poorer neighborhoods have a way of perpetuating inequality, the report points out: "Poor black neighborhoods also have environmental hazards that impact health. A very serious one is higher exposure to lead, which impedes learning, lowers earnings, and heightens crime rates. While rates of lead exposure have been declining for all races, African American children continue to have the highest exposure rate."

6) The desegregation of public schools essentially halted in 1980.

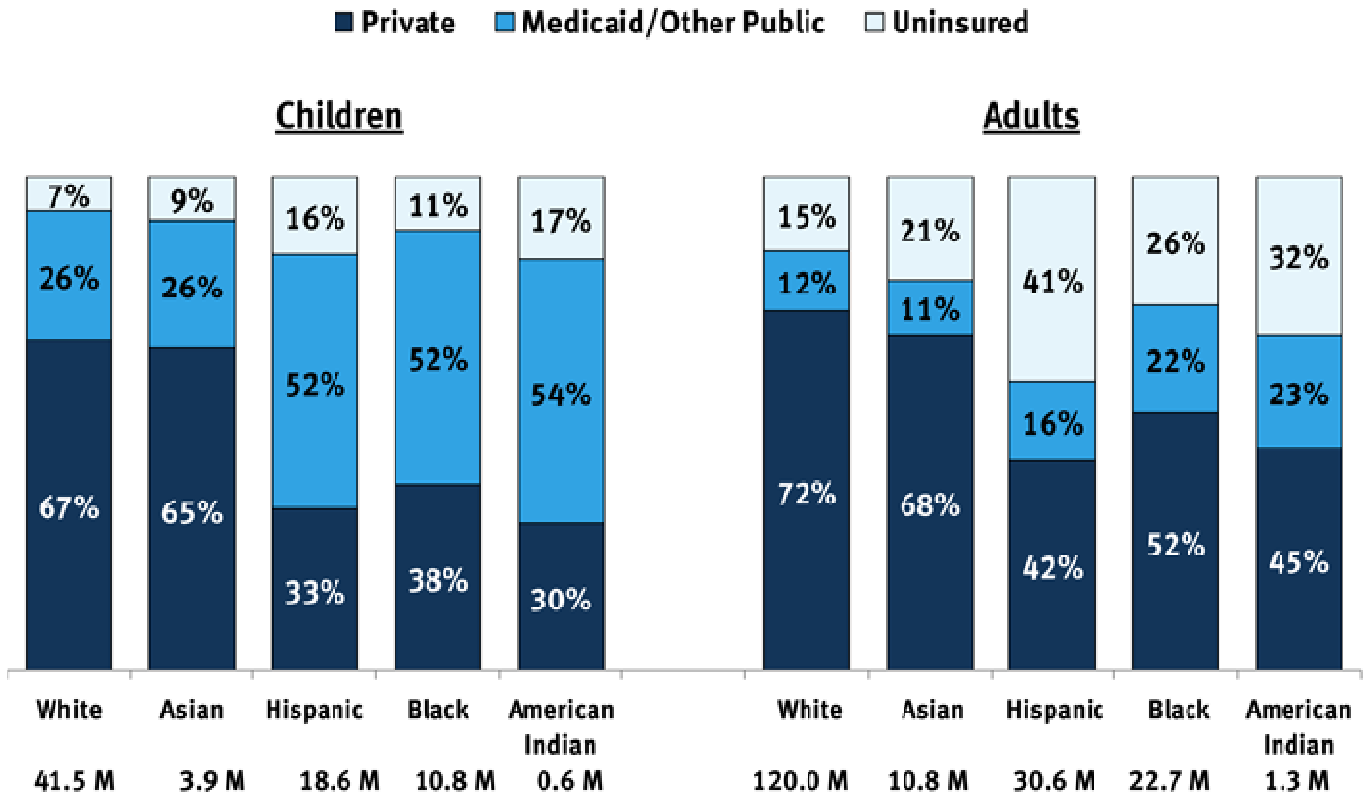


“Although the share of black children in segregated schools had dropped to 62.9 percent by the early 1980s, the subsequent lack of commitment by the federal government and multiple Supreme Court decisions antagonistic to school desegregation have led to a reversal,” notes EPI.

Why does that matter? “Promoting school integration is important because — now as a half century ago — segregated schools are unequal schools,” the report adds. “The more nonwhite students a school has, the fewer resources it has. A 10 percentage-point increase in the share of nonwhite students in a school is associated with a \$75 decrease in per student spending.”

7) Blacks are far more likely to be uninsured than whites. That’s true for both adults and children:

Health Insurance Coverage by Age and Race/Ethnicity, 2011



Asian group includes Pacific Islanders. American Indian group includes Aleutian Eskimos. Two or more races excluded. Data may not total 100% due to rounding.

SOURCE: KCMU/Urban Institute analysis of 2012 ASEC Supplement to the CPS.



The chart above comes from [a recent report](#) by the Kaiser Family Foundation, which notes that the Affordable Care Act could shrink the gap: “The large majority of uninsured people of color have incomes that would qualify for the ACA Medicaid expansion or premium tax credits for exchange coverage.” That said, a lot depends on how many states decide to expand Medicaid coverage under the new law.