



Press Release - Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

America's Racial & Cultural Digital Divide

New Report Finds Growing Disparity Between Online Americans & Those Falling Through the Net

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The inability of emergency workers to effectively communicate in the wake of Hurricane Katrina put the health of our nation's communications infrastructure under the microscope. This afternoon, as Congress prepares to examine the transition to digital television and other aspects of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, civil rights advocates and one of the nation's leading digital divide experts, Dr. Robert Fairlie, released a new Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund (LCCREF) report that shows that the digital divide is large and continues to grow.

"When it comes to home computers and Internet access, there are two Americas: there's an America online and one that is falling through the net," said Wade Henderson, Counselor to LCCREF and Executive Director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. "In the 21st century it is unacceptable that such a large number of Americans are without computer and Internet access. The time has come for our elected officials to take responsibility for closing this gap."

The LCCREF report, authored by Dr. Fairlie, finds wide racial and cultural disparities in computer and Internet access that are not explained by income or education levels. Based on the most recent and comprehensive Census data, the report finds:

- African Americans and Latinos are significantly less likely to have a home computer than white Americans. More than seven in ten white Americans own a home computer compared to roughly five in ten African Americans and Latinos.
- Similarly, African American and Latino families are less likely to be online. Roughly four in ten black and Latino children have home Internet access compared to nearly eight in ten white children.
- Income is a factor in computer connectivity but does not account for racial and cultural disparities. Even among families with incomes of at least \$60,000 Black and Latino Americans are substantially less likely to have a home computer or be online.
- There is a cultural and language divide. Asian Americans have slightly higher home computer and Internet access rates than White Americans (78 percent compared to 70 percent). Whereas Spanish-speaking Latinos, especially Mexican Americans, have strikingly low access to a home computer or the internet.

The report also shows disparities in computer and Internet access among Americans with disabilities and subsets of ethnic groups. It also addresses access to broadband services versus dial up connects. The full report is available at:

Henderson and Dr. Fairlie were joined by civil rights leaders and policy experts who discussed the ramifications of the digital divide and what should be done to close it. The panel included legal advisor to the Communication Service for the Deaf and

former FCC Deputy Karen Peltz Strauss, Native Networking Policy Center president Marcia Warren Edelman, the NAACP's Washington Bureau director Hilary Shelton and Managing Director of the Office of Communications at the United Church of Christ Gloria Tristani.

In addition to new data and analysis, the LCCREF report includes a series of recommendations to help close the digital divide, such as increasing support for Community Technology Centers that provide computers and Internet connections for job seekers and valuable job training to underserved neighborhoods.

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