



Persistent Inequalities Continue to Minimize Citizenship for People of Color, According to Report by Harvard Law School's Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice

Coinciding with 150th anniversary of landmark Dred Scott decision, report cites significant gaps in voting, wealth, education and justice

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (April 5, 2007) –

One hundred and fifty years ago, the Supreme Court, in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, denied citizenship rights to blacks calling them “unfit to associate with the white race.” Although that decision is now universally repudiated, the quality of citizenship for African Americans, other people of color and economically contributing foreign-born residents is still not on par with that enjoyed by white, U.S.-born Americans. **In fact, the pattern of “giving and taking away” of rights and privileges that *Dred Scott* exemplifies continues unabated today. This is the finding of a new report, entitled “We the People,” issued by The Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at the Harvard Law School after surveying current data on four broad indicators--voting and political participation, the workplace, courts and criminal justice, and public schools.**

“We all shake our heads in disbelief and shock when we read the opinion of the Supreme Court in 1857,” says CHHIRJ founder and director Charles Ogletree, Jr. “Yet, today, we still allow ourselves to be blinded by cultural assumptions about who is and who isn’t worthy of certain rights. It’s not just blacks any longer, its Latinos, immigrants, and anyone else we decide we can exclude from the benefits and privileges most of us take for granted. We are not as far removed from *Dred Scott* as we would like to believe.”

The report finds significant gaps remain between whites and people of color in their ability to vote and participate in the political life of this country, in their representation on juries, in their treatment by the criminal justice system, in unemployment rates, wealth accumulation, access to quality education and to other public programs. For example:

- The wealth gap between whites and African Americans has expanded more than 35% in the last two decades. Blacks have about 10 cents in wealth for every dollar of wealth held by whites.
- State legislatures have stripped 5.3 million Americans, disproportionately African Americans, of their right to vote because of prior criminal convictions. Today, 1 in 12 African Americans cannot vote because of these laws.
- Blacks are vastly underrepresented on juries and overrepresented as prison inmates. The rate of incarceration for black males was more

than six times the rate for white males, and 2.5 times the Latino rate in 2005.

- In 2006, 3 in 5 black males, aged 20 to 24 (excluding prisoners and others who have been institutionalized) were employed. Forty years ago, 4 in 5 young black men were employed.
- Undocumented workers contribute \$7 billion each year to the Social Security fund, but will receive no benefits.
- A typical black or Latino student attends a school where nearly half of students are poor--more than twice the share of poverty found in the school of a typical white person. High poverty schools have higher rates of teacher turnover, dropouts, and suspensions than other schools.

During the next year, the Houston Institute will grapple with many of the questions raised in this initial report. In 2008, the Institute will convene a 2nd major international conference on the "State of Citizenship" in the U.S., where we will present new data on the rights, privileges, and participation afforded to people of color and foreign-born residents living here.

"We the People" is being released on the eve of a national conference examining the issues of race, ethnicity, and citizenship in the U.S, scheduled for April 6 and 7 at Harvard Law School. The conference will culminate in a re-argument of the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* trial by such legal luminaries as Kenneth W. Starr and John Payton. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer will serve as presiding judge for the court arguments.

About The Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School:

The Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice (CHHIRJ) was founded in 2005 by renowned scholar, educator and legal theorist, Charles Ogletree, Jr., The Institute honors the work of the late Charles Hamilton Houston, one of the great legal minds of the 20th century, who helped to lay the crucial groundwork for our most triumphant civil rights victories. In keeping with Houston's legacy, CHHIRJ produces research and holds conferences on a variety of topics related to race, ethnicity and social justice. CHHIRJ partners with community activists, elected officials, litigators, academics from a variety of disciplines, and leaders in the faith community to enhance the discourse, debate, policy and jurisprudence related to race, ethnicity and social justice in our increasingly diverse nation. To download the full report go to: <http://www.charleshamiltonhouston.org>

The conference webcast will be available at:
<http://www.law.harvard.edu/media/2007/04/06/chhidredscott.rm>

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For More Information Contact:

Jason Howarth
Conover Tuttle Pace
617-412-4000
508-353-0063 (Cell)
jhowarth@ctpboston.com

Brian Heffron
Conover Tuttle Pace
617-412-4000
781-799-9568 (Cell)
bheffron@ctpboston.com