



Toward 2050 in North Carolina

A Roundtable Report on the Changing Face of the Tar Heel State

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Introduction and summary

The United States is rapidly approaching the point where there will no longer be any clear racial or ethnic majority—as soon as the year 2042. At the same time, the fastest-growing racial and ethnic groups were hit first and worst by the recent economic downturn and face persistent barriers to achieving the levels of education, health, and employment that our nation needs to succeed in the global economy. As the entire country undergoes this dramatic demographic transformation, leaders in government, business, philanthropy, and the civic sector must take steps now to prepare for our more diverse future.

In many communities, these demographic shifts are well underway: People of color are already the majority in four states and in more than 300 counties across the country. Community leaders working in these places may well have wisdom and relevant strategies to share with other communities as they prepare for similar population shifts.

It is in this spirit that Progress 2050—a project of the Center for American Progress—and PolicyLink—a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity—partnered to hold a series of 2050 roundtables in communities that have already experienced aspects of this demographic shift. The roundtables are meant to help us learn from the experiences of these bellwether communities about what the rest of the country may have in store and what policy shifts are needed to ensure that our nation embraces its diverse future. This is the fourth report in a series documenting these roundtable discussions and describes a conversation that took place in Raleigh, North Carolina, in December 2011. The first of our roundtables was hosted in Arlington, Virginia (July 2011), the second in Los Angeles, California (October 2011), and the third in the San Joaquin Valley, California (October 2011).

The broader goal of the Progress 2050/PolicyLink partnership is to initiate a national conversation to explore a new vision of what America can and should be in 2050, when there won't be an ethnic majority in our nation. We intend for these

conversations to inform our policy agenda and ultimately lead to the crafting of policy that lifts communities of color and creates a future in which all can prosper.

At the Raleigh roundtable, as was the case at the preceding roundtables, the participants included community activists, policy researchers, business leaders, academics, and staff from elected offices. (See the attached list of convening participants on page 20 of this report.) The range of their expertise was diverse, spanning issues including—but not limited—to economic development, fair lending, financial security, education, incarceration, and civil rights.

We chose North Carolina as the site for this discussion because it is undergoing a massive population shift. Over the past 10 years, the state’s white population has increased by 12.5 percent, while the state’s African American population has increased by 17.9 percent, and the state’s Hispanic population has increased by a substantial 111 percent.¹ During this same time the state’s population has aged at a rapid pace, resulting in significant changes to both household and workforce composition. Additionally, North Carolina’s young population—which will increasingly determine the state’s housing markets and development patterns, as well as the strength of the workforce—now predominantly comprises youth of color.

These changes, particularly the youth dynamic, are projected to have significant implications on public policy matters in the state. Consequently, the number one question that roundtable participants discussed concerned what investments and strategies must be immediately put in place to ensure that this growing youth population is prepared to become the state’s future leaders, workers, voters, and homebuyers.

North Carolina was also selected because of its distinctive experience with the civil rights history of this country, which makes the fact that communities of color continue to face persistent inequalities and disparities all the more disconcerting. Most notably, the iconic Greensboro sit-ins of 1960 started by African American college students quickly spread to other cities across the state and placed enormous economic and political pressure on local businesses, eventually leading them to begin serving blacks. Several prominent African American North Carolinians also became national leaders in the civil rights movement, including Ella Baker of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Floyd B. McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality, and Reginald Hawkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Mecklenburg Organization for Political Affairs. The state’s civil rights history and

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experience with youth activism in particular made an interesting backdrop for the roundtable discussion about increasing levels of diversity.

We begin our account with some demographic context about the state of North Carolina and the Raleigh region in particular. We then move on to discuss the three prominent themes that roundtable participants raised from the region's experience in turning challenges into opportunities generated by the state's increasing levels of diversity:

- Addressing the intertwined challenges of employment and education, or what we term edunomics
- Fighting intercommunal division through coalitions
- Preparing for the state's future by investing in intergenerational leadership

Lastly, we recount and make the case that demographic change is coming, and it is in everyone's best interests to fully embrace this change, understanding why it is indeed a true opportunity for the entire country.

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