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of education affects children's academic performance: as educational attainment for black parents increased in the 1970s and 1980s, the gap in children's test scores narrowed. Sean P. Corcoran and William N. Evans present evidence that teachers of black students have less experience and are less satisfied in their careers than teachers of white students. This gap in teacher quality widened for elementary school teachers during the period of stalled progress. David Grissmer and Elizabeth Eiseman find that the effects of economic deprivation on cognitive and emotional development in early childhood lead to a racial divide in school readiness on the very first day of kindergarten. Looking ahead, Helen F. Ladd suggests that the most promising policies are those that reduce class sizes in the early grades and even out the quality of teachers across schools serving different racial groups. Ladd stresses that the task of narrowing the divide is not one that can or should be left to schools alone. Progress will resume only when policymakers address the larger social and economic forces behind the problem. Ronald Ferguson masterfully interweaves the volume's chief findings to highlight the fact that the achievement gap is the cumulative effect of many different processes operating in different contexts.

The gap in black and white test scores is one of the most salient features of racial inequality today. *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress* provides the detailed information and powerful insight we need to understand a complicated past and design a better future.

**KATHERINE MAGNUSON** is assistant professor of social work and a faculty affiliate at the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

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COVER PHOTO: DOUG CORRANCE.  
COVER DESIGN: LILLI SCHWARTZ

# STEADY GAINS AND STALLED PROGRESS

*"Steady Gains and Stalled Progress is an important collection and a worthy successor to Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips' classic The Black-White Test-Score Gap. It offers new evidence that highlights the complexities of racial inequality and provides a basis for cautious optimism for the future."*

—ADAM GAMORAN, professor of sociology and educational policy studies and director, Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin, Madison

"The black-white gap in test scores is one of the most stubborn and mystifying challenges facing the United States. And while it is hard to separate fact from statistical artifact and personal belief, Katherine Magnuson and Jane Waldfogel have produced a thorough and insightful volume that accomplishes just that. Even experts in education policy will come away having learned something new."

—CECILIA E. ROUSE, Theodore A. Wells '29 Professor of Economics and Public Affairs, Princeton University

"Few trends have tested the optimism of the Civil Rights era more than the stubborn persistence of the black-white achievement gap. *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress* assembles a major league team of social scientists to examine possible explanations for the puzzling career of this gap. Their penetrating analysis will be essential reading for anyone interested in education, social equity, or the future of the American workforce."

—CHARLES T. CLOTFELTER, professor of public policy studies, economics, and law, Duke University

## CONTRIBUTORS

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STEADY GAINS AND  
STALLED PROGRESS

MAGNUSON and WALDFOGEL

# STEADY GAINS AND STALLED PROGRESS

*Inequality and the Black-White Test Score Gap*

KATHERINE MAGNUSON and JANE WALDFOGEL, Editors

## STEADY GAINS AND STALLED PROGRESS

Addressing the disparity in test scores between black and white children remains one of the greatest social challenges of our time. Between the 1960s and 1980s, tremendous strides were made in closing the achievement gap, but that remarkable progress halted abruptly in the mid 1980s, and stagnated throughout the 1990s. On the brighter side, recent evidence suggests that we may be entering another era of convergence. How can we understand these shifting trends and their relation to escalating economic inequality? In *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress*, interdisciplinary experts present a groundbreaking analysis of the multifaceted reasons behind the test score gap—and the policies that hold the greatest promise for renewed progress in the future.

*Steady Gains and Stalled Progress* is one of the first books to look at the relationship between trends in economic inequality and the racial achievement gap. The contributors show that while income inequality does not directly lead to racial differences in test scores, it creates and exacerbates disparities in schools, families, and communities—which do affect test scores. Jens Ludwig and Jacob L. Vidor demonstrate that the period of greatest progress in closing the gap coincided with the historic push for school desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s. Stagnation came after efforts to integrate schools had slowed down or ceased all together. Today, the test score gap is nearly 50 percent larger in states with the highest levels of school segregation. Katherine Magnuson, Dan T. Rosenbaum, and Jane Waldfogel show how parents' level

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