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America Is #... 15?

by DALTON CONLEY

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The president's proposed budget will do much to bring progressivity back to the tax code. Upper-income households--which have gained the most over the past three decades--will contribute around 80 percent of federal revenues, and more modest incomes will finally catch some real tax relief. Meanwhile, the vast majority of Americans have applauded the administration's move to impose limits on executive compensation by attaching strings to bailout money. The reason is one of basic fairness, of course. But it turns out that limiting the windfalls of the few may actually be good for us all. That's because there appears to be a relationship in the United States between inequality--which is largely driven by an explosive rise in incomes at the top--and overall levels of human development.



JANNA BROWER

In the ticker tape of economic bad news, there is perhaps one dire statistic that has not gotten as much attention as it deserves: the American Human Development Index (HDI), released for the first time last year. The American HDI is especially troubling because it puts all this economic gloom and doom in stark human terms. And the results are somewhat surprising: in good times as well as bad, in terms of aggregate health, education, purchasing power, security and general well-being, we have been in decline.

The HDI has long been used by experts and officials concerned with advancement in poor countries. In 1990 Mahbub ul Haq--a former World Bank official who had also served as Pakistani finance minister--created the indicator to capture the actual experiences of people in a given country or region in a way that GDP and other indicators of economically measurable output could not.


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About Dalton Conley

Dalton Conley, Acting Dean of the Social Sciences at New York University, is the author of *Elsewhere, U.S.A.: How We Got From the Company Man, Family Dinners, and the Age of Affluence to the Home Office, BlackBerry Moms, and Economic Anxiety*. He served on the advisory board for the American Human Development Report. [more...](#)

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