ECONOMY
Traditional measures may misunderstand inflation, hurting the poor

EDUCATION
College faculty becoming more diverse, but still lags far behind student rate
Charter school segregation impact is modest—and depends on setting

EMPLOYMENT
The servant economy: U.S. urban areas see rise in 'wealth work'

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT
The pros, cons of ‘overdeveloping’ CA’s solar farms

GENERAL GOVERNMENT
Audit: Rush to launch DMV Motor Voter program led to 84,000 duplicate voters

HEALTH
Increased consumption in red meat linked to premature death

HUMAN SERVICES
Study finds an increase of kids entering foster care due to parents’ drug use

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
‘Incognito’ data sets surprisingly easy to de-anonymize

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE
In urban areas, public transit plays a vital role in social connectedness

ECONOMY

https://www.nber.org/papers/w25987.pdf (Available to .gov accounts or from the California Research Bureau)

"[The authors] found prices accounting for nearly half of the Fed's preferred inflation gauge, the personal-consumption-expenditures price index, don't respond to changes in economic activity. In 2017 economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco found such 'acyclical' goods and services made up a
whopping 58% of that index…. The cyclically sensitive components of core inflation, which excludes food and energy, have accelerated to 2.33% in the 12 months through May from 0.41% in mid-2010, according to the San Francisco Fed, just as falling unemployment would predict. But that has been offset by falling inflation in acyclical categories—such as health care, financial services and most goods—which has slowed to 1.04% from 2.26% in the same period…. [H]ousing and groceries, two categories that Messrs. Stock and Watson found most responsive to slack, make up 50% of the poorest 20% of households’ spending, compared with 36% for the richest 20%.’’ (Wall Street Journal, July 28, 2019).

EDUCATION


“In fall 2017, about three-quarters of postsecondary faculty members in the U.S. were white (76%), compared with 55% of undergraduates, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In contrast, around a quarter of postsecondary faculty were nonwhite (24%), versus 45% of students. (Postsecondary faculty includes all faculty across institutions that grant associate degrees and higher.) This imbalance extends to specific racial and ethnic groups. For example, in fall 2017, only 5% of faculty members were Hispanic, compared with 20% of undergraduates. Black faculty were also underrepresented compared with the black undergraduate population (6% vs. 14%). Conversely, Asian faculty made up a slightly higher portion of their peers compared with Asian students (11% vs. 7%).”


“[W]e find compelling evidence that the rise of charter schools over the last 20 years has led to slightly higher levels of racial and ethnic segregation, on average. However, these results need to be interpreted in the context of the purpose of charter schools. A large number of charter schools were founded and specifically tailored to serve students from vulnerable backgrounds, out of which a good number have been successful at improving student outcomes. Patterns resulting from black and Hispanic families choosing schools that they feel meet their children’s needs should not be interpreted with the same lens as the government-mandated segregation that was outlawed by the U.S. Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education.”

EMPLOYMENT


 “[M]any American cities are brimming with an explosion of low-end employment that has brought some three million workers into mostly low-paid, often-precarious service arrangements helping the well-off walk the dog, clean the house, cook dinner, manage money, and stay fit…. As a swath of the urban economy … wealth work is growing rapidly (sometimes spectacularly), doesn’t pay very well, and is mostly a full-time job for workers lacking a college degree…. [T]he largest concentrations of wealth workers toil in a combination of the nation’s biggest coastal ‘superstar’ cities such as Bridgeport, Conn. and New York and San Francisco…. On the upside, the growth of wealth work underscores that the current age of
automation has not been jobless…. The problem, on the downside, is … [the growth of wealth work … looks mostly to mean more job growth at the lower end of the pay spectrum."

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT


“New research published in the peer-reviewed journal Solar Energy suggests California should embrace the idea of building more solar panels than it can consistently use, rather than treating oversupply as a problem to be solved. It sounds counterintuitive, but intentionally overbuilding solar facilities—and accepting they'll often need to be dialed down in the absence of sufficient demand—may be the best way to keep electricity prices low on a power grid dominated by renewable energy, the research found.” However, other analysts maintain this study “didn’t take into account the costly transmission lines that may be needed to accommodate an overbuild of solar, or the landowner opposition that has frustrated solar farm developers in California and elsewhere.” (Los Angeles Times, June 5, 2019).

GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Independent Assessment of the Department of Motor Vehicles’ New Motor Voter Application. California Department of Finance and Ernst & Young. Aug. 9, 2019. 113 p.

“California’s ambitious effort to automate voter registration at Department of Motor Vehicle offices produced almost 84,000 duplicate records and more than twice that number with political party mistakes…. [There was] a wide array of problems with the rollout of the DMV system, including a limited amount of testing as well as inconsistent and confusing lines of communication between the state agencies involved in its creation. [The duplicates were] attributed to inconsistencies in what was listed for voters' political party preferences…. Local elections officials have said that the errors were caught and corrected, and that those voters were not allowed to cast more than one ballot…. The decision to launch the voter registration system three months ahead of schedule—done so that it would be operational for the June 2018 statewide primary—left little time to work out the kinks.” (Los Angeles Times, Aug. 9, 2019).

HEALTH

https://www.bmj.com/content/365/bmj.l2110

Tracking eating habits of 80,000 men and women over several decades, a study conducted at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found diet with limited red and processed meats decreased the likelihood of premature death. “Overall, those who increased their intake of processed red meat by about 3.5 servings a week had about a 13% higher risk of death during the study's eight-year follow-up period.” According to one of the study's authors, “when people replaced red and processed meat with nuts, seeds, fish [and other alternatives sources of protein, as well as vegetables and whole grains], they experienced more than a 10% reduction in their risk of mortality during the follow-up period.” The authors note this is an observational study that does not prove cause and effect, but the results are consistent with a larger body of evidence. (NPR, June 12, 2019).
HUMAN SERVICES


“The number of cases of children entering the foster care system due to parental drug use has more than doubled since 2000.... Of all the entries logged during the time period, nearly 1.2 million had parental drug use as the primary cause. And over this period, the researchers saw a steady rise in the number and proportion of removals [from their homes] attributable to parental drug use, from around 15% in 2000 to 36% in 2017. During this period, other reasons for removal, such as neglect and abuse, mostly declined. Children being removed for parental drug use were more likely to be 5 years old or younger than children removed for other reasons.” (NPR, July 15, 2019).

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY


How anonymous are you? Digital tool: https://cpg.doc.ic.ac.uk/individual-risk/

This study calculated the risk that anonymized data sold to a third party can be connected back to one’s true identity. “How much of a risk does this pose to your personal data? For the new study, the research team created a digital tool that allows individual Internet users to see how likely they are to be reidentified from an anonymous info dump. According to this tool, its average user has an 83% risk of reidentification. And one has little recourse when it comes to opting out of information collection.... Because individuals have such scant recourse, some believe holding data brokers to a higher standard may require new legislation.” (Scientific American, July 23, 2019).

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE


Social connectedness is an important aspect of the social capital that provides important emotional and health benefits as well as economic resiliency. In this study of the spatial structure of social networks in the New York metro area, the available evidence indicates that access to public transit is a significant factor in the strength and diversity of an individual’s social connectedness. In fact, the ease of access to public transit was a “substantially stronger predictor of social connectedness between zip codes than geographic distance.”

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