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## Editors' Note

**A mere 18 months ago**, the inaugural issue of *Pathways* was released with three presidential hopefuls on the cover, each contributing a piece detailing how a new war on poverty might be waged. In her evaluation of their respective platforms, Rebecca Blank (now the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs) pronounced Obama's the "most creative in putting new policy ideas on the table." As is frequently noted, election-year assessments of this sort saddled President Obama with unusually high expectations for change, perhaps most obviously in the poverty and inequality arena. Not surprisingly, there have been immediate pronouncements of failure, a sentiment most famously captured in Sarah Palin's rallying cry, "How's that hopey, changey stuff working out for ya?"

We've dedicated this issue of *Pathways* to a considered assessment of how President Obama is living up to his commitment to address issues of poverty and inequality in the United States. Has he indeed set the stage for fundamental change in the structure of poverty and inequality? Or have other priorities and events, such as the Great Recession, induced him to move this commitment to the background?

In taking on this question, it goes without saying that a Johnson-style "War on Poverty" is not underway, and accordingly any evaluation of the Obama agenda will hinge on whether one allows that a bureaucratic, submerged, even artful response can in the end make enough headway. Does a new official poverty statistic really matter all that much? Will female workers be assisted in any fundamental way by simply expanding the statute of limitations on employment discrimination claims? Can a new Middle Class Task Force really affect the lives of American families? Because poverty and inequality issues are now addressed on so many fronts, and because new policy may be rolled out in seemingly minor bureaucratic pronouncements, a credible evaluation can no longer be completed via some armchair analysis by a casually informed generalist. For better or worse, the experts have to be called in, and they have to be asked to drill deep into the details of the first term.

We have done just that. We've recruited some of the most distinguished experts in the country on income, race, gender, and LGBT inequality and asked them to take careful stock of President Obama's first year. The answers, as anticipated, often hinge on the importance accorded to the bold, sweeping, charismatic program as opposed to the more bureaucratic, legalistic, seemingly incrementalist maneuver. In the lead essay, Jennifer Hochschild concedes that Obama has been governing so far as a "cautious, somewhat-damped-down centrist" on inequality issues, but she allows that he might well reclaim the swagger of his campaign rhetoric and become the charismatic reformer, even in the face of the conventional wisdom that the recent Massachusetts election requires a tack to the center. Similarly, Joan Williams and Stephanie Bornstein lay out the incrementalist case for appreciating Obama's contributions to gender equality, and, like Hochschild, they can also see a pathway to more transformative change in coming years. In contrast, Lawrence Bobo suggests that Obama is *already* playing a grand reformer role on matters of racial and income inequality, at least more so than many progressive critics have appreciated. Lastly, Patrick Egan offers a frank assessment of the President's disappointing first year on LGBT issues, in this case an arena in which even an incrementalist story is evidently hard to muster.

How does it all add up? Don't look for any grand assessment here! We stand by our lead suggestion that the devil is very much in the details, that any global assessment will surely mislead, and that ours is a complicated President who defies, almost as a matter of principle, the glib summary.

—David Grusky & Christopher Wimer, Senior Editors