

Blacks in the 1970's: Did they scale the job ladder?

*More blacks obtained white-collar jobs
but fewer penetrated higher-salaried positions;
mobility in higher-paid blue-collar jobs
was somewhat more impressive*

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The proportion of workers holding white-collar jobs has increased steadily over the past few decades as employment grew quite rapidly in the professional and clerical fields. Accompanying this movement were substantial declines among private household workers and farmworkers. Each of these trends has had an impact on the employment patterns of black workers.¹ Blacks made some advances in the more highly skilled occupational groups. For example, in 1960, 11 percent of black workers were in professional and technical and craft worker positions; by 1980, their proportion had almost doubled to 21 percent.

Throughout the 1960's, blacks advanced both socially and economically, making notable strides in a number of areas including educational attainment, voting rights, equal housing opportunities, and earnings, as well as in employment.² These advancements came about during a period of favorable economic conditions; however, it was also a time of social change which saw the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. During the 1970-80 period, however, job opportunities and occupational mobility slowed considerably as the Nation underwent three recessions. With each contraction came periods of sustained and progressively higher levels of unemployment, accompanied by

severe inflationary pressures which failed to subside over the course of the decade. Movement up the occupational scale for blacks progressed more slowly during the 1970's, as the number of black professional and craft workers increased only about half as fast as during the 1960's. Clearly, economic disruptions affected the occupational advancement not only of blacks, but of all workers as well.

Between 1972³ and 1980, the number of employed blacks increased by 1.3 million, or 17 percent. Their proportion of the Nation's employed work force—9.4 percent—did not change, as the white employment level rose by 18 percent. The largest employment gains for blacks occurred in the white-collar occupations, where the four major subcategories—professional and technical, managerial and administrative, sales, and clerical—increased very sharply. (See table 1.) While their advancement in these occupational categories was proportionately greater than for whites, it was not sufficient to alter materially the overall black-white proportions of the previous decade, and blacks continued to represent a disproportionately small number of white-collar workers.

This article examines the occupational shifts of black workers between 1972 and 1980, using Current Population Survey data on employment by detailed occupation, race, and sex. To further assess the extent of occupational mobility among blacks during this period, occupational data by area of residence and usual weekly earnings are also analyzed.

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Table 1. Employment change by occupation and race, 1972 and 1980, annual averages

[Numbers in thousands]

Occupation	Black employment change, 1972-1980		White employment change, 1972-1980	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total employment	1,344	17.3	13,306	18.2
White-collar workers	1,185	55.3	10,022	27.4
Professional and technical	354	55.4	3,592	33.8
Managers and administrators	168	69.1	2,639	34.2
Sales	88	51.9	698	13.5
Clerical	580	52.7	3,094	23.8
Blue-collar workers	215	6.8	1,760	7.0
Craft and kindred workers	217	32.3	1,427	14.2
Operatives, except transport	73	5.8	-209	-2.3
Transport equipment operatives	41	9.0	204	7.5
Nonfarm laborers	-116	-14.7	337	10.0
Service workers	21	1.0	1,826	21.2
Private household workers	-238	-41.8	-159	-18.6
Other service workers	259	15.9	1,985	25.6
Farmworkers	-74	-31.9	-302	-10.8
Farm managers	-23	-51.1	-187	-11.4
Farm laborers	-51	-27.3	-116	-9.9

Black-white employment changes

Between 1972 and 1980, employment in the professional and technical occupations expanded rapidly, and both blacks and whites increased their participation in these fields accordingly. The number of black men in professional positions grew at a slightly faster pace than that of white males during the decade. Still, in 1980, 16 percent of all white men were employed as professional workers, twice the black male proportion. This 2-to-1 ratio is only slightly lower than that which prevailed in 1972. (See table 2.)

Relative to their white counterparts, black women strengthened their foothold as professional workers.⁴ Black women professionals, who had accounted for nearly 11 percent of all employed black women in 1972, made up 14 percent of the total in 1980, a proportion approaching that for white women.

Jobs for managers and administrators also increased during the decade. Black men and women shared more than proportionately in the gains but were still much less likely to be employed in these fields than their white counterparts. For example, in 1980, 15 percent of all white men were engaged as managers or administrators, compared with fewer than 6 percent of black men.

Employment in clerical occupations rose rapidly between 1972 and 1980. Among women—who make up four-fifths of all clerical workers—the increase was proportionately much greater for blacks than for whites. Black men also increased their participation in this field, while white men experienced a decline. There was a similar occurrence in sales, where both black men and

women increased their representation, while white participation declined.

Blue-collar jobs grew at a relatively slow pace during the 1970's. Overall, the proportion of black men who were blue-collar workers was down somewhat from 1972. This stemmed from reduced participation in the relatively undesirable operative and nonfarm laborer jobs, as their representation in the skilled craft and kindred trades actually rose. By 1980, the largest proportion of black men in any single occupational group was in skilled craftwork; this has long been true for white men. Despite this improvement, there were still relatively high concentrations of black men in the less skilled job categories. For example, they were still twice as likely to be in laborer jobs as their white counterparts.

After the craft trades, service work employed more black men than any other occupation. One-sixth of all employed black men were engaged in service work (excluding private household) in 1980—not much different than in 1972. Blacks continued to be more than twice as likely to have service jobs as white men.

The most substantial movement among black women during the 1970's occurred in private household work, as their proportion fell from 16 to 7 percent. One-fourth of employed black women had jobs in other service occupations in 1980—a small decline from 1972. Only clerical work was more prevalent among black women, accounting for 29 percent of those employed. Like private household workers, farmworkers registered an employment drop between 1972 and 1980; black men left this occupation more quickly than white men.

Clearly, the movement out of the lower paying non-farm-labor, service, and farm jobs and into mid- and

Table 2. Percent distribution of employed persons by occupation, race, and sex, 1972 and 1980

Occupation	Black men		White men		Black Women		White Women	
	1972	1980	1972	1980	1972	1980	1972	1980
Total employed	4,347	4,704	45,769	5,033	3,406	4,394	27,305	36,043
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Professional and technical	6.4	8.2	14.3	16.1	10.6	13.8	14.9	17.0
Managers and administrators	4.0	5.6	14.0	15.3	2.1	3.4	4.8	7.4
Sales	1.7	2.5	6.6	6.4	2.5	2.8	7.8	7.3
Clerical	7.6	8.4	6.8	6.2	22.7	29.3	36.2	36.0
Craft and kindred workers	14.8	17.6	21.2	21.5	.9	1.4	1.3	1.9
Operatives, except transport	17.4	15.5	12.1	10.7	14.8	13.8	12.5	9.4
Transport equipment operatives	10.3	9.9	5.7	5.4	.4	.7	.4	.7
Nonfarm laborers	17.4	13.0	6.8	6.5	.9	1.4	.9	1.2
Farm and farm managers	1.0	.4	3.4	2.6	—	—	.4	.4
Farm laborers and foremen	3.5	2.4	1.7	1.5	1.1	.5	1.5	1.3
Private household workers3	.1	—	—	16.4	7.4	3.0	1.9
Other service workers	15.8	16.4	7.3	7.9	27.6	25.4	16.2	16.0

upper-level jobs in the white-collar occupations and craft trades was sustained during the 1970's, although the changes were not as dramatic as those which occurred in the previous decade. But while blacks moved into higher skilled (and more highly paying) occupations in greater numbers and, correspondingly, diminished their proportions in the less desirable job groups, they still accounted for a disproportionately large share of private household workers, nonfarm laborers, and transport equipment operatives, while constituting a disproportionately small share among most white-collar jobs—clerical workers being the exception.

Specific job changes

It is important to know the specific job markets in which blacks have actually made headway relative to their white counterparts. Are blacks increasingly more likely to become physicians or accountants or are they still, as in the past, finding teaching and technicians jobs their primary source of entry into the professional occupations? If the jobs blacks hold are found in the lesser skilled and lower paying professional positions, then the conclusion that there has been significant occupational upgrading may not be justified. Detailed occupational data permit a finer analysis of the areas of the job market in which blacks are overrepresented and those in which their entry seems to have been restricted. An examination of occupational participation rates⁵ during the 1970's is a useful yardstick of progress in this area.

Overall, black occupational advancement in the 1970's is not particularly impressive when the detailed occupational data are examined. In most cases, black workers were concentrated in the same jobs in which they were employed in 1972. In other words, although a higher proportion of blacks could be found among the professional and technical occupations in 1980 than in 1972, they were concentrated in jobs at the lower end of the professional pay scale, such as nursing, technical trades, and vocational and educational counseling. And even though their numbers have expanded in some of the more desirable and better paid jobs, there are few examples where black men and women have been able to significantly increase their representation in a particular job.

Black men. Despite a substantial increase in the proportion of black men in the professional and technical occupations, their proportion of all employed men in this category rose only slightly over the 1972–80 period, from 4.0 to 4.4 percent. By way of comparison, black men accounted for 8.4 percent of employed men in 1980, a small drop from the 8.6 percent in 1972. The 1980 recession undoubtedly had an impact on the em-

ployment of black men. In the previous year, 1979, black men had accounted for 8.6 percent of employment, the same as in 1972. (See table 3.)

In 1980, black males in the professional and technical occupations accounted for 8 percent or more of all men employed as health technicians, nurses, social and recreational workers, vocational and educational counselors, and personnel and labor relations workers. In every case, these were the same professions in which they were concentrated in 1972.

The proportions of black men in certain higher-status professional occupations—such as accountants, computer specialists, engineers, and lawyers—showed some increases over the period, but were still disproportionately low. The proportion employed as physicians, at 2.1 percent, did not increase at all between 1972 and 1980.

The overall black occupational participation rates for managers and administrators rose slightly—but to only 3.2 percent—with bank officials and financial managers showing a healthy increase. Nevertheless, blacks in 1980, as well as 1972, were most likely to be employed as managers of restaurants, cafeterias, and bars, and as school administrators. Black employment in school administration actually declined during the 1972–80 period, while those working as food establishment managers showed a rise.

Overall, employment growth in sales was rather sluggish during the 1970's, yet black men were able to increase their proportion of those employed from 2.4 to 3.5 percent. However, gains occurred in occupations in which blacks have traditionally been concentrated—retail salesclerks and insurance agents.

Some of the largest occupational gains among black men during the decade occurred in the clerical occupations, in particular as banktellers, bookkeepers, estimators and investigators, office machine operators, statistical clerks, and secretaries—jobs that had shown substantial growth during the 1970's. For example, the participation rate of black men who were estimators and investigators rose from 3 to 6 percent and the rate for office machine operators increased from 10 to 14 percent. Areas in which black men had been highly concentrated in 1972 (15 percent or more)—file clerks, mailhandlers, messengers and office boys, and postal clerks—showed little growth or declined by 1980, although they still accounted for a significant proportion of black male employment.

To capsize, black men were able to realize greater participation in a substantial number of white-collar occupations over the decade. One significant exception was the better paying professional and technical jobs, in which they advanced, but not significantly. Despite some progress in the professional ranks, they were con-

centrated in the same occupations as they were almost a decade earlier.

Blue-collar occupations expanded much less rapidly than white-collar jobs over the decade. The occupational participation rate of black men held steady for both transport equipment and other operatives, declined among laborers, but rose in the craft trades. However, even with the rise from 6 to 7 percent, the craft trades remained the only major blue-collar category in which black men accounted for less than their proportion of overall employment.

Black men increased their share in a number of the more highly skilled job categories including electricians,

painters, plumbers, metal and printing craftsmen, and excavating and grading road machine operators. However, the two largest job concentrations of black men continued to be as cement and concrete finishers and crane operators.

The overall participation of black men in operative and transport equipment operative positions held steady between 1972 and 1980, with blacks continuing to represent a disproportionately large number of employed persons in these occupations. They made up about 20 percent or more of all men employed as clothing ironers and pressers, furnacemen, laundry and drycleaning operatives, sawyers, textile operatives, busdrivers, forklift

Table 3. Employed blacks as a percent of all employed men and women in selected detailed occupations, 1972 and 1980, annual averages

Occupation	Black men		Black women		Occupation	Black men		Black women	
	1972	1980	1972	1980		1972	1980	1972	1980
Total	8.6	8.4	11.0	10.6	Plumbers and pipe fitters	5.1	8.5	(¹)	(¹)
Professional and technical	4.0	4.4	8.0	8.8	Machinists and jobsetters	5.6	6.3	(¹)	(¹)
Accountants	2.1	3.6	5.2	7.4	Metal craftsmen, except mechanical, machinery, and jobsetters	4.9	6.2	(¹)	(¹)
Computer specialists	3.5	4.1	6.5	9.3	Mechanics, automotive	7.4	7.7	(¹)	(¹)
Engineers	1.4	2.2	(¹)	(¹)	Mechanics, except automotive	4.5	6.1	(¹)	8.9
Personnel and labor relations	6.1	7.9	12.5	10.8	Printing craftsmen	4.5	7.3	8.5	8.6
Physicians, dentists, and related practitioners	2.1	2.1	(¹)	5.0	Cranesmen, derrickmen, hoistmen	15.5	16.3	(¹)	(¹)
Nurses, dietitians, therapists	8.6	13.2	6.1	8.2	Operatives, except transport	11.9	11.7	12.7	14.6
Health technologists and technicians	12.4	8.4	7.8	9.2	Assemblers	13.3	11.2	11.8	11.9
Lawyers and judges	1.3	3.1	(¹)	7.1	Checkers, examiners, and inspectors (manufacturing)	7.6	9.6	9.3	10.8
Religious workers	10.0	5.7	(¹)	(¹)	Clothing ironers and pressers	28.9	(¹)	38.4	40.4
Social and recreation workers	13.8	16.4	17.4	17.4	Furnacemen, smeltermen, and pourers	23.9	25.4	(¹)	(¹)
Teachers, college and university	3.6	3.3	5.4	5.3	Garage workers and gas station attendants	7.3	7.9	(¹)	(¹)
Teachers, except college and university	7.0	5.5	9.0	10.2	Laundry and drycleaning operators	24.0	21.9	28.7	23.3
Engineering and science technicians	3.5	5.6	(¹)	6.7	Meatcutters and butchers	9.4	8.5	19.4	18.6
Vocational and educational counselors	9.0	15.2	13.4	17.8	Packers and wrappers	12.6	20.4	13.4	15.4
Writers, artists, and entertainers	4.2	4.1	2.8	3.6	Painters, manufacturing articles	14.5	10.7	(¹)	(¹)
Managers and administrators	2.6	3.2	5.0	5.2	Precision machine operators	6.9	6.7	10.3	18.2
Bank officials and financial managers	(¹)	2.6	(¹)	4.6	Punch and stamping press	10.5	11.0	11.6	9.1
Restaurant, cafeteria, and bar managers	4.8	5.7	10.6	7.9	Sawyers	19.1	17.4	(¹)	(¹)
School administrators, elementary and secondary	6.7	6.0	6.9	12.2	Sewers and stitchers	(¹)	14.3	11.3	13.8
Sales	2.4	3.5	3.8	4.4	Textile operatives	18.9	22.1	12.4	20.7
Insurance agents, brokers, and underwriters	2.3	4.3	7.8	8.2	Welders and flamecutters	9.4	9.8	(¹)	(¹)
Sales clerks, retail trade	4.2	7.0	4.1	5.0	Transport equipment operatives	14.5	14.7	9.0	11.2
Clerical	9.5	10.9	7.2	8.9	Busdrivers	21.7	24.0	7.0	13.1
Bank tellers	(¹)	10.3	4.0	5.9	Deliverypersons and routepersons	10.0	9.2	(¹)	5.1
Bookkeepers	3.7	6.7	2.4	3.4	Forklift and tow motor operators	21.7	18.8	(¹)	(¹)
Cashiers	7.5	8.7	6.5	8.6	Taxicab drivers and chauffeurs	22.5	24.0	(¹)	(¹)
Counter clerks, except food	4.7	5.4	6.2	8.6	Truck drivers	13.9	13.5	(¹)	7.3
Estimators and investigators	2.5	6.0	7.3	11.7	Laborers, except farm	19.2	15.5	12.0	12.2
File clerks	22.0	25.6	16.0	18.2	Construction laborers	24.7	15.4	(¹)	(¹)
Library attendants and assistants	(¹)	(¹)	8.7	8.5	Freight and material handlers	21.7	17.5	17.8	19.7
Mail carriers, post office	13.1	11.6	(¹)	(¹)	Garbage collectors	33.3	32.8	(¹)	(¹)
Mail handlers, except post office	25.0	22.1	12.5	17.9	Gardeners and groundskeepers	16.5	14.1	(¹)	(¹)
Messengers and office helpers	16.4	16.9	(¹)	(¹)	Stockhandlers	8.8	10.4	10.7	10.0
Office machine operators	9.8	14.0	11.9	15.1	Vehicle washers and equipment cleaners	21.9	18.4	(¹)	(¹)
Postal clerks	16.0	14.8	26.7	32.7	Farm and farm managers	2.6	1.6	3.0	(¹)
Receptionists	(¹)	(¹)	6.4	6.4	Farmers (owners and tenants)	2.6	1.6	3.0	(¹)
Secretaries	(¹)	12.1	4.4	5.5	Farm laborers and foremen	16.1	12.7	8.1	7.0
Shipping and receiving clerks	13.0	13.1	13.4	8.3	Farm laborers, wage workers	19.3	14.3	23.5	15.7
Statistical clerks	8.0	11.8	7.1	11.3	Service workers, except private household	16.8	15.7	17.3	15.9
Stock clerks and storekeepers	12.2	10.5	10.3	11.0	Cleaning service workers	25.4	22.8	35.3	30.2
Teachers aides	(¹)	(¹)	21.2	17.3	Food service workers	12.8	11.5	11.2	10.1
Telephone operators	(¹)	(¹)	(¹)	14.8	Health service workers	24.5	32.1	23.7	21.0
Typists	(¹)	(¹)	10.9	13.2	Personal service workers	13.9	15.0	11.2	12.6
Craft and kindred workers	6.2	7.0	8.0	8.1	Protective service workers	9.2	9.8	16.9	17.4
Carpenters	5.1	4.4	(¹)	(¹)	Private household workers	(¹)	(¹)	39.8	31.9
Brickmasons and stonemasons	13.6	14.6	(¹)	(¹)	Child care	(¹)	(¹)	8.0	7.0
Bulldozer operators	13.6	11.7	(¹)	(¹)	Maids and servants	(¹)	(¹)	71.1	52.5
Cement and concrete finishers	33.3	31.0	(¹)	(¹)					
Electricians	2.8	4.1	(¹)	(¹)					
Excavating, grading, and road machinery operators	6.6	8.2	(¹)	(¹)					
Painters, construction and maintenance	9.3	10.5	(¹)	(¹)					

¹ Data not shown where numerator is less than 4,000 or denominator is less than 35,000

operatives, and taxicab drivers. For the most part, participation of black men in these occupations increased or was about the same between 1972 and 1980, because white men were moving out of these jobs.

In the nonfarm laborer and service worker occupations—which also have relatively large numbers of black men—there were declines in the proportion engaged in these jobs. The number of laborers dropped substantially during the 1970's, but the employment of black men in these occupations fell even more rapidly.

Black women. Despite the fact that they made up a smaller percentage of employed women in 1980 than in 1972—because of the huge influx of white women into the labor force—black women were able to increase their proportions in most of the professional and technical job categories. (See table 3.) And a definite occupational shift occurred over the period. In 1972, black women had participation rates of 12 percent or more in three occupations—social and recreation work, vocational and educational counseling, and personnel and labor relations work. By 1980, although they were still highly visible in these three areas, their concentration in other professional occupations had broadened considerably. The most notable change occurred in the fast-growing computer field, where black women increased their participation by 2.8 percentage points to 9.3 percent. Other noteworthy gains were among accountants, nurses, dieticians and therapists, engineering and science technicians, and vocational and educational counselors. Still, in contrast to developments in the 1960's, growth in the professional and technical occupations among black women continued to be relatively slow.

Limited gains among black women were realized in most managerial and administrative positions and sales occupations. The rate of employment participation among school administrators, insurance agents, and bank officials increased, while there was a declining rate among restaurant managers.

Black women made some progress moving out of salesclerk positions, although their participation rate actually increased during the 1970's as white women left this occupation in even greater numbers. In 1972, 75 percent of all black women in sales were retail clerks, but by 1980, this proportion had fallen to 68 percent. Black women accounted for about 5 percent of employed women in this field.

Employment gains of black women in the fast growing clerical field were widespread as their overall participation rate moved from 7 to 9 percent over the 8-year period—still somewhat below the percentage of all employed women who were black. Gains were strong for black women as estimators and investigators, mailhandlers, postal clerks, statistical clerks, and telephone operators. The largest numbers of black women

were employed as cashiers, typists, and secretaries.

Although blue-collar occupations are generally male dominated, black women made a number of inroads into some job fields. It should be noted that the occupational participation rates of black women in the better paying craft trades are difficult to measure, as the actual numbers engaged in these jobs were very low. While some increases in specific crafts were registered, the overall proportion of black women in the craft trades remained about the same over the period, at 8.1 percent.

The largest concentration of black women in blue-collar jobs was in the operative category, a group in which black women have been traditionally overrepresented relative to their employment total. In 1980, black women had participation rates of 18 percent or more in six occupational categories; this compares with three such categories in 1972. Among transport equipment operatives, black women advanced rather strongly as busdrivers, reaching 13 percent in 1980. They also registered strong growth in two occupations in which they had shown little representation in the past—delivery persons and truckdrivers.

The participation rate of black women in occupations at the lower end of the earnings ladder was unchanged for laborers and declined among household workers during the 1970's. Furthermore, the drop in the rate among black women engaged in private household services, from 40 to 32 percent, is particularly important, given the large concentration of women in this occupation and the fact that black women are moving out at a faster rate than white women.

Residential location

To better understand the growth of blacks in certain occupations and their decline in others, it is helpful to examine their residential location. In 1980, approximately 55 percent of all blacks lived in central cities, with the other 45 percent divided almost equally between suburban and nonmetropolitan areas. In contrast, only 24 percent of all whites lived in central cities, with the bulk residing in suburban rings (42 percent). This concentration of blacks in the central city becomes particularly important when one realizes that it is the suburban rather than city blacks who were the recipients of most of the occupational upgrading during the 1970's.

Overall, the occupational distribution of black men and women residing in the suburbs was similar to that of their counterparts living in central cities in 1973.⁶ However, by 1980, this was no longer the case. (See table 4.) While virtually all occupational changes among residents of both cities and suburbs were in the same direction, blacks in the suburbs fared better than those in the central cities or nonmetropolitan areas during the 1970's. This is evident from the rather impressive in-

Table 4. Occupational distribution of employed blacks, by sex and area of residence, 1973 and 1980

[In percent]

Occupation	Central cities				Suburbs				Nonmetropolitan areas			
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	
	1973	1980	1973	1980	1973	1980	1973	1980	1973	1980	1973	1980
Total employed (in thousands)	2,899	2,915	2,373	2,835	1,061	1,499	801	1,366	1,176	1,236	831	1,037
White-collar workers	26.2	30.2	46.2	54.5	27.9	36.2	46.6	58.1	10.5	14.7	23.0	31.4
Professional and technical	8.5	9.8	12.2	15.0	12.0	16.2	14.7	17.6	4.2	6.3	8.8	10.8
Managers and administrators	5.6	6.7	2.7	3.6	6.8	8.7	3.0	4.5	2.8	4.1	2.7	2.7
Sales	2.5	3.1	2.5	3.0	2.2	3.1	2.7	4.0	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.1
Clerical	9.6	10.7	28.8	32.8	7.2	8.1	26.1	32.1	2.5	3.1	9.4	15.9
Blue-collar workers	56.6	51.3	16.6	15.1	53.4	47.3	17.0	15.0	64.0	62.5	28.1	28.7
Craft and kindred	15.5	16.9	1.1	1.5	15.1	17.2	1.2	1.2	13.5	17.5	1.1	1.5
Operatives, except transport	17.3	14.3	13.9	11.6	15.8	12.6	14.2	11.7	19.4	18.5	25.3	24.9
Transport equipment operatives	9.7	9.3	.4	.6	8.5	7.7	.7	.7	8.5	9.1	.4	.7
Nonfarm laborers	14.1	10.8	1.1	1.3	14.0	9.9	1.0	1.4	17.6	17.4	1.3	1.6
Service workers	17.0	18.5	37.2	30.4	16.3	13.7	24.2	26.3	10.9	12.9	44.0	37.9
Private household2	—	11.0	5.1	—	.1	11.2	5.2	.1	.2	20.1	11.6
Farm workers	—	—	—	—	2.5	2.8	1.1	.7	14.4	10.0	4.9	2.1
Farmers and managers	—	—	—	—	.8	.3	.2	—	4.2	2.5	.4	.3
Farm laborers	—	—	—	—	1.7	2.5	.9	.7	10.2	7.6	4.5	1.7

NOTE: Data include persons of black and other minority races.

creases in the proportion holding white-collar jobs, particularly professional and technical and managerial positions. For example, black suburban men had a 91-percent rise in employment in the professional fields, compared with a 16-percent increase among city residents. Likewise, black suburban women had a 158-percent increase in the managerial ranks, compared with 63 percent among their city counterparts. (These increases may be partially explained by the migration of successful white-collar blacks from the cities to the suburbs.)

In 1973, black workers in blue-collar occupations were predominant in central cities and suburban areas. However, by 1980, while both areas had made the shift to a predominance of white-collar jobs, the changes were more pervasive in the suburbs. Cities and suburbs alike experienced a drop in the percentage of men holding semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar jobs. Metropolitan women also contributed to this growth in white-collar jobs, as they left the service occupations in great numbers.

Nonmetropolitan area blacks also moved into white-collar jobs during this period, though not to as great an extent as blacks living in the cities and suburbs. The proportion of blacks in blue-collar jobs remained unchanged between 1973 and 1980, while blacks moved out of service and farm jobs. In general, the occupational distribution of nonmetropolitan workers is very much different from that of their metropolitan counterparts in that a much larger proportion are engaged in blue-collar work and comparatively few are in white-collar occupations.

That blacks are moving into the professional, clerical and craft occupations is readily apparent, but nowhere more so than for those who live in the suburbs.⁷ And

that blacks are still disproportionately concentrated in the less skilled and service jobs is also evident, particularly for those residing in the city and nonmetropolitan areas. In part, central city, suburban, and nonmetropolitan employment differences reflect the strong growth of white-collar occupations in the metropolitan areas and the predominance of blue-collar jobs available in the nonmetropolitan areas. Black occupational advancement is somewhat related to residential location, in that most workers have jobs in the geographic area in which they live.⁸ However, individual levels of educational attainment, skill, and ability are the predominant factors in determining one's occupational classification.

Earnings

Because the white-collar professions are considered among the most powerful and prestigious occupations in American society, it is easy to assume that the growing proportions of workers in these jobs are a sign of achievement. While white-collar jobs are often associated with higher pay status and most blue-collar and service jobs are equated with lower paying positions, movement of workers from blue-collar to white-collar jobs should not be construed as an improvement in one's relative economic position. Earnings differentials by occupation are more complex than the relationship noted above. There is a broad range of earnings within each major occupational category. (See chart 1.) In a number of instances, blue-collar trades have higher earnings than white-collar jobs, particularly those in the skilled craft occupations.

Median weekly earnings for all workers were \$265 in 1980. Managers and administrators had the highest weekly earnings, \$380, followed by professional

and technical workers, \$341; craft and kindred workers, \$328; transport equipment operatives, \$286; and sales workers, \$279. Those occupations with earnings below the overall median were farmers and farm managers, \$243; operatives, \$225; nonfarm laborers, \$220; clerical and kindred workers, \$215; service workers, except private household, \$184; farm laborers and foremen, \$167; and private household workers, \$94. Exhibit 1 shows specific occupations which are above or below the median level for four key occupational groups. The highest-paid professional and technical jobs—engineers, lawyers, physicians, and scientists—are all categories in which blacks were underrepresented in both 1972 and 1980. By contrast, health technologists, social and recreational workers, nurses, and teachers were among the lowest-paid professional positions and the ones in which blacks continued to be concentrated.

Black workers in management and sales professions were concentrated in jobs that paid below the median for the overall occupation. Only in the clerical field were black workers well dispersed and advancing in some of the better paying positions, such as postal clerks, stock clerks, and shipping and receiving clerks.

Blacks in the craft trades were able to advance in a number of the higher paid positions, including plumbers and electricians, though they were still underrepresented in the latter. In contrast to the professional and mana-

gerial fields, blacks in craft jobs were more widely dispersed and not relegated to the lower paid positions.

Between 1973⁹ and 1980, black full-time workers increased their earnings by 68 percent, compared with 65 percent for whites. Blacks posted larger gains than whites in the blue-collar occupations, while white workers outpaced blacks in white-collar jobs. Even though blacks were entering the white-collar professions in increasing numbers, they were generally concentrated in the lower paying jobs of those particular occupations. In addition, their pay increases were smaller relative to those of whites in the white-collar occupations. Consequently, the earnings of black workers relative to whites in white-collar jobs, which had averaged 91 percent in 1973, dropped to 86 percent in 1980. However, blacks were able to advance in occupational standing in the blue-collar professions, as they increased their earnings relative to whites in a number of the higher paying jobs. (See table 5.) For example, in 1973, black transport equipment operatives made 73 percent of the earnings of their white counterparts; by 1980, this percentage had risen to 85 percent—evidence of their penetration into some of the better paid positions.

Differences in earnings by race were more discernable among men than among women. In 1980, black males made about 80 percent of the earnings of white men in both the white-collar and blue-collar occupations. How-

Chart 1. Percent distribution of full-time weekly earnings by occupation, 1980, annual average

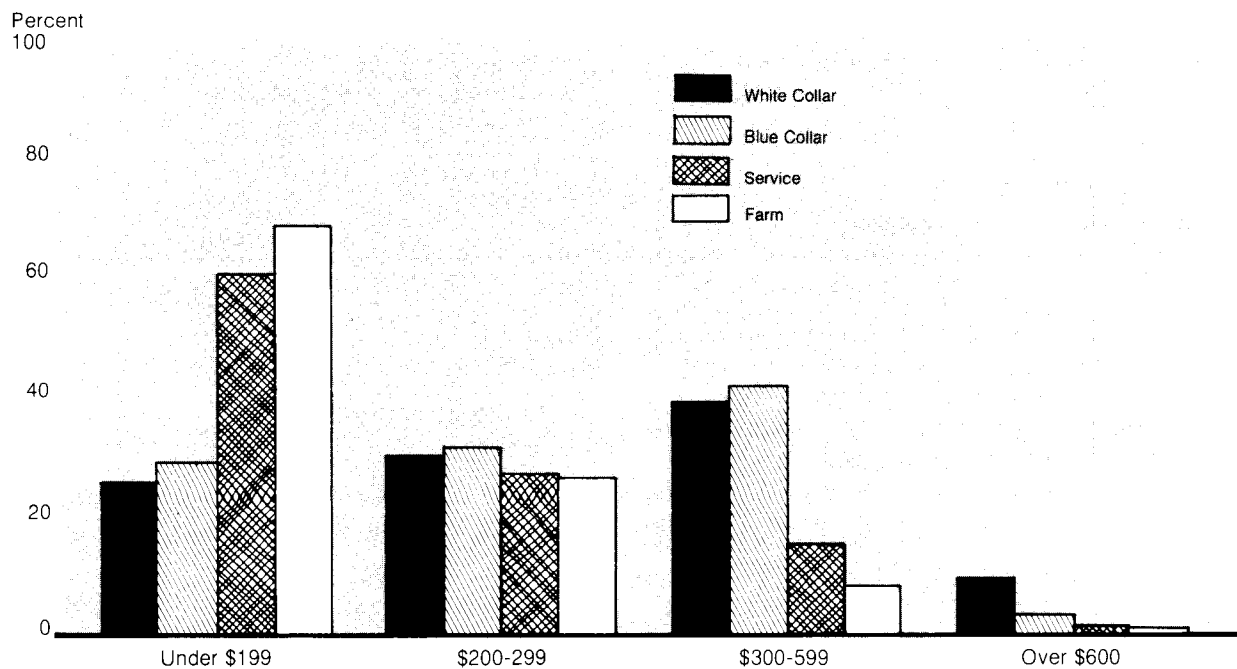


Exhibit 1. Occupations above and below the median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers in selected occupational groups, 1980

Professional and technical workers		Furnacemen, smeltermen, and pourers
<i>Above median</i>		Meatcutters and butchers
Accountants		Painters, manufactured articles
Computer specialists		Precision machine operators
Engineers		Punch and stamping press operators
Lawyers and judges		Welders and flamecutters
Life and physical scientists		<i>Below median</i>
Personnel and labor relations workers		Assemblers
Physicians, dentists, and related practitioners		Clothing ironers and pressers
Vocational and educational counselors		Garage workers and gas station attendants
<i>Below median</i>		Laundry and dry cleaning operators
Engineering and science technicians		Packers and wrappers
Health technologists and technicians		Sawyers
Nurses, dietitians, and therapists		Sewers and stitchers
Social and recreation workers		Textile operatives
Teachers, except college and university		
Craft and kindred workers		Clerical and kindred workers
<i>Above median</i>		<i>Above median</i>
Brickmasons and stonemasons		Mail carriers, post office
Cement and concrete finishers		Office machine operators
Cranemen, hoistmen, and derrickmen		Postal clerks
Electricians		Shipping and receiving clerks
Machinists and jobsetters		Statistical clerks
Plumbers and pipefitters		Stock clerks and storekeepers
<i>Below median</i>		Telephone operators
Bulldozer operators		<i>Below median</i>
Carpenters		Bank tellers
Excavating, grading, and road machine operators		Bookkeepers
Mechanics and repairers		Cashiers
Painters, construction and maintenance		Counter clerks
Printing craftsmen		Estimators and investigators
		File clerks
		Library attendants
		Mail handlers, except post office
		Receptionists
		Secretaries
		Teachers' aids
		Typists
Operatives		
<i>Above median</i>		
Checkers, examiners, and inspectors		

ever, black women made almost the same as their counterparts in white-collar jobs and over 90 percent of white women's earnings in the blue-collar trades. The following tabulation shows the 1980 black-to-white earnings differential by sex and occupation:

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Total	75.1	92.2
White-collar	79.2	98.7
Professional and technical	85.5	97.6
Managerial	76.7	105.9
Sales	69.2	99.4
Clerical	80.7	98.5

Blue-collar	81.4	93.9
Craft	86.9	99.5
Operatives, except transport	86.8	94.3
Transport equipment operatives	82.6	97.2
Laborers	86.2	100.6
Service	86.6	102.7
Private household workers	73.5	140.7
Other	86.6	103.9
Farm	78.3	81.4

Black women, while still at the bottom of the earnings hierarchy, have narrowed the earnings gap between themselves and white women in most occupational cate-

Table 5. Earnings data by race and occupation for May 1973 and second quarter 1980

Occupation	Percent increase in earnings, 1973-1980		Black/white earnings ratio	
	Black	White	1973	1980
Total	68.2	65.4	79.6	81.0
White-collar workers	53.2	63.6	91.3	85.5
Professional and technical	58.3	57.5	89.7	90.2
Managers and administrators	42.4	58.2	87.9	79.1
Sales	76.9	64.0	71.3	77.0
Clerical	47.5	63.6	107.8	97.2
Blue-collar workers	77.2	69.9	77.9	81.2
Craft and kindred workers	61.7	66.5	84.8	82.3
Operatives, except transport	77.4	70.4	85.2	88.7
Transport equipment operatives	89.9	63.6	73.3	85.1
Nonfarm laborers	58.0	56.6	83.2	83.9
Service workers	74.0	65.1	88.1	92.8
Private household workers	123.5	157.6	154.5	133.1
Other service workers	67.0	64.3	92.0	93.3
Farmworkers	73.7	67.3	75.2	78.1

NOTE: May 1973 data are for black and other races; second quarter 1980 data are for blacks only.

gories, much more so than black men have succeeded in doing with respect to white men. This is because women are more concentrated in lesser skilled, lower paying jobs which traditionally have been easier for blacks to enter.¹⁰

Overview

Black occupational status improved somewhat during the 1970's, as proportionately more blacks moved into white-collar jobs, although few penetrated the higher-salaried professional and managerial positions. In fact, the black-to-white earnings differential was unchanged for professional and technical workers between 1973 and 1980, and, even more importantly, black earnings relative to those of whites fell in the fast growing clerical field. Black mobility in the blue-collar, service, and farm occupations was more impressive, as blacks moved out of unskilled work—especially private household and laborer positions—and into the craft trades. The growth of black employment in the expanding skilled craft area was particularly important, in that blacks were able to move into some of the better-paid posi-

tions, and, for the most part, were able to increase their earnings relative to their white counterparts in the blue-collar occupations.

Overall, shifts by blacks into the higher-salaried occupations were rather limited; this was most apparent for those who resided in the central city areas. The majority of blacks lived in central cities, which have high concentrations of office and other business district-type activities. Yet, by 1980, central city blacks had made little progress in increasing their proportion in white-collar occupations. Most of the occupational upgrading occurred among the smaller number of blacks who resided in suburban areas. Furthermore, the progress that did occur among blacks living in the city was mostly accounted for by women, whereas, in the suburbs, black men and women shared equally in the gains. This indicates that black women in both areas competed successfully for jobs in those occupations in which women are heavily recruited. Clearly, black workers, especially black men and city dwellers, need to gain more access to the higher-skilled, better-paying jobs in the rapidly growing white-collar fields, if their earnings are to increase. □

NOTE: The statistics are based on the 1970 Decennial Census population counts, adjusted for the aging of the population, deaths, and net migration. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has subsequently converted Current Population Survey estimates to reflect the 1980 census, which enumerated 4.7 million more people than had been estimated in updating the 1970 figure. Because this difference was so much larger than previous censuses, historical CPS data series are also being revised, including broad occupational employment categories. However, the full range of revised data for detailed occupational categories was not available at this writing; indeed, revisions of some of the detailed series may not be undertaken. Even if revised data were available, their validity might be questionable at the level of detail in this analysis. (The size and scope of the revisions of major labor force data as a result of the 1980 census will be discussed in an article in the *July Review*.)

FOOTNOTES

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the term "black" in this article refers exclusively to the "black only" population and not to the "black and other" category which is made up of blacks, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Asian and Pacific Islanders.

² See Sylvia Small, *Black Americans, A Decade of Occupational Change*, Bulletin 1760 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, revised 1972). For a short history of occupational change among blacks, see "The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the U.S.: An Historical View, 1790-1978," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-23, No. 80 (Bureau of the Census), pp. 61-63.

³ The year 1972 was chosen for comparison with 1980, rather than 1970, because occupational data before that time are not strictly comparable with data for later years due to classification changes.

⁴ For a recent analysis of the employment situation of black women, see Phyllis A. Wallace, *Black Women in the Labor Force* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1980).

⁵ For the purposes of this analysis, an occupational participation rate is defined as the ratio of black men employed in a given occupational group to all men in that occupation and black women to all women. It is appropriate to examine data for men and women separately, as occupational differences between the sexes are so pronounced. Though this statistic is not unique, the term "occupational participation rate" was made popular by Stuart Garfinckle back in 1974 in his article, "Occupations of women and black workers, 1962-1974," *Monthly Labor Review*, Nov. 1975, pp. 25-35.

⁶ Data by area of residence are not available for 1972. Also, the

term "blacks" in this section refers to persons classified as blacks and other minorities, as area of residence data by occupation are not presently available for the "black only" category.

⁷ For a detailed account on the growth of white-collar jobs by area and how it relates to black employment, see Brian J. O'Connell, *Blacks in White-Collar Jobs* (New Jersey, Allanheld, Osmum and Co., pub., 1979). Also see Thomas M. Stanback, Jr. and Richard Knight, *Suburbanization and the City* (Cambridge, Mass., Ballinger Publishing Co., 1974).

⁸ See Diane N. Westcott, "Employment and commuting patterns: a residential analysis," *Monthly Labor Review*, July 1979, pp. 3-9.

⁹ Earnings data used in this article are collected through the Current Population Survey. For purposes of comparability, it was neces-

sary to compare May 1973 data with that for the second quarter 1980, as earnings data were not available on an annual average basis prior to 1979. Also, data for black and other races were the only race data available in 1973; by 1980, however, earnings data were tabulated for blacks only, excluding other minorities. Hence, the data are not strictly comparable but do provide very close estimations of earnings changes during this period for blacks.

¹⁰ The earnings gains of black women have been attributed to a reduction in racial discrimination among the female sex. For an explanation of these and other findings on black male/female earnings, see Ronald N. Oaxaca, "The Persistence of Male-Female Earnings Differentials," and others in F. Thomas Juster, ed., *The Distribution of Economic Well-Being* (Cambridge, Mass., Ballinger Publishing Co., 1977).

Dividends for two

Under the social security system of Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance the two-worker family "receives more insurance protection for its 'investment' than does the one-worker family with an equal income. If one worker in such a family retires before the other, then benefits will be paid to that worker. On the other hand, in the one-worker family, no benefits are payable to the nonworker unless the worker retires. Also, child survivor benefits are payable in the event of the death of either spouse in a two-worker family, but only on the death of one spouse (the worker) in the one-worker family. Further, prior to retirement, both spouses in the two-worker family have disability insurance, whereas in the one-worker family only the working spouse does."

—ROBERT J. MYERS

"Incremental Change in Social Security Needed to Result in Equal and Fair Treatment of Men and Women,"
in Richard Burkhauser and Karen Holden, eds.,
The Changing Roles of Women and Men in American Society (Proceedings of
a conference sponsored by the Institute for Research on Poverty and the
Women's Studies Research Center, University of Wisconsin, held April 11-12,
1980) (New York, Academic Press, 1982), p. 239.
