

## P O P U L A T I O N

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF THE POPULATION 25 YEARS OLD AND  
OVER IN THE UNITED STATES: 1940

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(This release presents final figures on the highest grade of school completed by persons 25 years old and over for the United States by sex, by race-nativity, and by urban-rural residence and for each State, as of 1940. Similar data for individual States are being presented in the P-6 series of releases. Statistics on school attendance will be presented in a forthcoming release in this series.)

More than half of the persons 25 years old or over in the United States had completed at least eight years of school by April 1, 1940, according to final data from the 1940 Census released today by Director J. C. Capt of the Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce. The proportion who had never completed as much as one year of formal schooling was 3.7 percent, but, at the other extreme, 4.6 percent had finished college. Urban residents, with a median of 8.7 years of school completed, had a higher average formal educational attainment than inhabitants of rural-nonfarm areas (8.4 years), and these in turn had received somewhat more schooling than persons living on rural farms (7.7 years). Among race-nativity groups, native whites ranked first, with a median of 8.8 years, followed by foreign-born whites with 7.3 years. The Negro median, 5.7 years of school, was the lowest. The average educational level of women was slightly higher than that of men (a median of 8.5 years as compared with 8.3 years), but the proportion of college graduates was higher for men than for women, 5.4 percent against 3.7 percent.

The 1940 Census statistics on years of schooling completed represent the first complete inventory of the educational status of the entire population ever undertaken. The statistics made available today relate only to persons 25 years old and over, those who may generally be considered as having completed their formal education. Statistics on school attendance for the population under 25 years old will be presented in a later release in this series, and at a later date statistics on the educational attainments of persons of school age classified by whether or not attending school and by age will become available. The question on highest

grade of school completed was included in the 1940 Census in place of the less comprehensive questions on illiteracy asked in previous censuses.

United States summary statistics. The median number of years of school completed by persons 25 years old or over for whom reports were obtained was 8.4, the equivalent of more than 8 grades. (The median year of school completed is that year which divides the population into two equal groups--one-half having had more formal education, and the other half having had less, than the median.) Persons who had never completed as much as one full year of formal schooling numbered almost 2,800,000, or 3.7 percent of the total. Those completing fewer than 5 years amounted to approximately 10,105,000, or 13.5 percent of the total. Almost a quarter (24.1 percent) of the population aged 25 years or over in 1940 had finished at least high school, 10.0 percent had completed at least one year of college, and 4.6 percent were college graduates. The number of persons completing 4 or more years of college, 3,407,331, is somewhat less than the total number of college graduates in the country since it excludes some graduates under 25 years old. Education was not reported for 1.4 percent of those aged 25 years or over.

Urban-rural and race-nativity differences. The median number of school years completed was 8.7 for the urban population, 8.4 for the rural-nonfarm population, and 7.7 for the rural-farm population. These three residence groups ranked in this same order for each of the race-nativity groups, but differences were very small among the foreign-born whites.

If the educational level of the three residence groups is measured by computing for

each the proportion who have never completed as much as one full school year, the results are similar. For native whites, Negroes, and other nonwhite races, the percentage having no years of school completed is highest for the rural-farm population and lowest for urban residents. For foreign-born whites, however, the relationship is reversed, the urban areas having the highest proportion un-schooled in its population and the rural-farm areas the lowest. These distinctly different results for the foreign-born white population probably reflect differences in composition of the foreign-white stock in the three residence groups, the rural-farm and rural-nonfarm groups being predominantly from Northwestern Europe (Great Britain, Irish Free State, Scandinavian countries, and Germany), whereas the urban areas had much larger proportions of their immigrants from Southern and Eastern European countries (Italy, the Balkans, Poland, and Russia).

Urban residents rank highest in the proportion of college graduates in their population, 5.7 percent as compared with 4.2 percent for rural-nonfarm and 1.3 percent for rural-farm groups. The three residence groups ranked in this same order for each of the race-nativity groups.

The present statistics indicate only the relative educational attainments of persons residing in the various areas on the census date and do not necessarily reflect educational facilities and standards in these areas now or in the past. Many urban residents, for example, were educated in rural-farm areas before moving to their present homes.

The median number of years of school completed for each of the race-nativity groups was: native white 8.8, foreign-born white 7.3, Negro 5.7, and other races 6.8. It is probable that educational attainment varied widely among the different races making up the "other races" group, such as Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos.

Sex differences, in the country as a whole, the median number of years of school completed by males was 8.3 and by females

8.5. The higher average educational attainment of females was particularly marked among Negroes. On the other hand, among the foreign-born whites the medians for males and females were identical, and for persons of "other races" males showed a higher educational attainment than females. Only 3.6 percent of all women 25 years and over had never completed one year of formal schooling; for men the percentage was slightly higher--3.9.

A larger proportion of men 25 years old or over than of women had completed 8 years of schooling or less (62.9 percent for males and 57.9 percent for females), indicating that men had dropped out of school before finishing the first year of high school in greater proportion than women. Conversely, a larger proportion of women (42.1 percent) than of men (37.1 percent) had entered high school and, although a greater proportion of women dropped out during high school, 26.3 percent of the women finished at least their high school training as compared with 22.7 percent of the men.

Of the 9.7 million women 25 years old or over who had completed at least 4 years of high school, 6 million, or 62.4 percent, had dropped out after high school or before completing the first year of college; of the 8.4 million men finishing high school, 4.5 million, or 54.0 percent, had dropped out of school without completing one year of college. Similarly, 2.3 million women, or 23.3 percent of all female high school graduates, had completed at least one year of college but had dropped out without graduating, whereas 1.8 million men, or only 21.8 percent of all male high school graduates, dropped out of college after completing their first year but before graduating. Of those who had completed 4 or more years of college 2 million were men, constituting 24.2 percent of all male high school graduates, whereas only 1.4 million women completed 4 or more years of college, or 14.3 percent of the female high school graduates.

On the basis of these data it would seem that although a larger proportion of men than of women drop out of school before completing high school, a greater proportion of men than

of women who graduate from high school go on to college, and a greater proportion of men than of women who enter college complete their college training.

Geographic divisions. The Pacific Division had the highest median number of school years completed (9.7 years) as well as the highest proportion of college graduates and the lowest proportion of persons who had completed less than five years of school. At the other extreme, the East South Central Division had the lowest median school attainment (7.5 years), the lowest percent of college graduates, and the highest percent of persons with less than five years of school completed. In order of median number of years completed, the Pacific Division was followed by the Mountain Division, with 8.9 years. These two divisions in the West were next followed by the four in the North: New England, with 8.8, the East and West North Central, each with 8.5, and the Middle Atlantic, with 8.4. Ranking lowest were the three divisions in the South, the West South Central, with 8.1, the South Atlantic, with 7.8, and the East South Central, with 7.5 years.

The race-nativity composition of the West is undoubtedly an important factor in the high educational attainment of its population. Native whites comprised 85.9 percent of the total population there, as compared with 83.9 percent for the North, and 74.5 percent for the South. On the other hand, the relatively low level of formal educational attainment in the South is partly attributable to its high proportion of Negroes and of rural residents. As noted above, educational levels for both these groups were relatively low.

States. The District of Columbia had a median of 10.3 school years completed (equivalent to more than 2 years of high school),

greater than that of any State; but the District of Columbia is entirely urban and is not strictly comparable with the States. Among the 48 States, Utah ranked highest with a median of 10.2 years, and Louisiana was lowest with 6.6.

A very large proportion of Utah's population, 92.8 percent, was native white; and higher education has been encouraged in the State for many years. Not all of the States in the Mountain Division, however, had a high educational level. New Mexico, for example, with its large population of Mexican stock, had a median number of school years completed of only 7.9; and 27.3 percent completed fewer than 5 grades of elementary school. Educational attainment in the Pacific States was uniformly high.

Among the States of the four Northern Divisions there was a variation in the median of less than a year of school, the range being from 8.2 in Pennsylvania to 9.0 in Massachusetts. Among Southern States there was somewhat more variability than among Northern. Delaware and Texas had medians above the national average. More informative comparisons of educational attainment in the different States may be made when data not only by race and nativity but also by age become available.

Table 1 shows the population 25 years old and over by years of school completed, by race-nativity, and by sex for urban, rural-nonfarm, and rural-farm areas in the United States. In table 2 the population 25 years old and over of each region, division, and State is shown by years of school completed. The accompanying charts illustrate some of the more significant differences in educational status described above.

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