

# Education and the Economic Status of Blacks

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*The median earnings of both Blacks and Whites with less than 4 years of college declined from 1979 to 1989 in both urban and rural<sup>1</sup> areas. Although earnings remained virtually unchanged for young adults with a college degree, urban Whites were the only group to realize a slight increase in their median earnings. Unemployment rates were higher in 1990 than in 1980 for all Blacks, but especially for those with lower levels of education. Partly due to limited job opportunities, young adult Blacks who did not graduate from high school had the highest unemployment rates in both urban and rural areas.*

Over the past 50 years, the social and economic status of Blacks has changed significantly. Blacks achieved their greatest economic gains in the 1940's and 1960's. Black gains in earnings and occupation from 1939 to 1969 resulted from South-to-North migration and concurrent movement from agricultural to nonagricultural employment, job creation, and economic growth (Jaynes and Williams, 1989).

The civil rights movement, the proximity of Blacks to industrial centers, and rapid economic growth in the 1960's enabled many Blacks to enter mainstream America. However, some Blacks lived in areas relatively untouched by national changes, some lacked the family support networks to provide assistance, and some were not presented with better job opportunities (Jaynes and Williams, 1989).

The problems faced today by Blacks who are isolated from social and economic progress are complex (Wilson, 1987). Persistent racial discrimination and the economy's stagnation during the 1970's and 1980's has impeded the economic progress of Blacks. Opportunities for upward mobility have been reduced for all Americans in the lower economic strata, but especially for those who are Black. Some Blacks have attained higher status occupations, but many

remain disadvantaged (see Gibbs' chapter on occupational change among Blacks).

In this chapter, I look at national changes in the educational attainment of Blacks and Whites between 1970 and 1990. Using the 1980 and 1990 Census Public Use Microdata Samples, I also analyze the effects of education on economic status, especially of Blacks age 25 to 34. This group, in both 1980 and 1990, came of age after the civil rights movement and the establishment of affirmative action programs and should have visibly benefited from the lowering of barriers. Their levels of educational attainment should have improved the overall educational attainment for Blacks. As McGranahan and Kassel state in an earlier chapter, "it is primarily through the education of people beginning their careers that the skill levels of the work force are improved."

## Changes in Educational Attainment, 1970 to 1990

Despite historical barriers, Blacks have continued to cling to their belief in education as a means of changing the condition of their lives and the lives of their children (Billingsly, 1993). Blacks have made steady, but sometimes slow, gains in educational attainment. Although the Black-White gap in the percentage of high school graduates is closing at the national level, the rate at which Whites complete college is about twice that of Blacks. In 1970, only 31 percent of all Blacks age 25 and older had completed high school and only 4 percent had completed 4 or more years of college; the comparable rates for Whites were 55 percent and 11 percent (Commerce, 1983). By 1990, 63 percent of Blacks had a high school diploma (78 percent of Whites) and 11 percent (22 percent of Whites) had graduated from college with a 4-year degree or more, more than doubling the completion rates in 20 years (Commerce, 1993). If this pattern continues, the Black-White gap in the proportion of college graduates will not close until the year 2030.

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<sup>1</sup> Rural people are defined here to be those who live in counties outside the boundaries of metropolitan areas, as defined by the Office of Management and Budget at the time of the census. See appendix for a complete definition.

**Table 1—Educational attainment of adults age 25-64, 1980-90**

Age/level of education	1980				1990			
	Black		White		Black		White	
	Urban <sup>1</sup>	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Age:	<i>Thousand</i>							
25 to 34	3,414	657	22,989	7,436	4,152	672	25,721	6,780
35 to 44	2,245	417	16,025	5,488	3,337	548	22,996	6,653
45 to 54	1,844	379	14,506	4,951	2,144	350	15,867	4,919
55 to 64	1,498	364	14,010	5,113	1,633	293	13,307	4,494
	<i>Percent</i>							
Age 25-34	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not high school graduate	22.7	36.2	11.7	16.9	20.6	29.4	11.2	16.2
High school graduate	40.7	42.5	36.7	44.8	30.7	42.3	28.7	40.9
Some college	24.0	13.4	24.1	20.4	34.2	22.1	32.0	28.6
College, 4 years or more	12.7	7.9	27.5	17.9	14.5	6.1	28.0	14.4
Age 35-44	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not high school graduate	34.8	57.2	18.2	26.1	21.6	36.7	9.8	14.4
High school graduate	38.6	29.8	39.9	45.9	29.3	36.3	26.2	36.0
Some college	16.3	7.2	18.7	14.1	32.0	18.8	32.0	29.3
College, 4 years or more	10.4	5.8	23.2	13.9	17.1	8.2	31.9	20.2
Age 45-54	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not high school graduate	52.1	72.9	27.8	38.3	33.5	55.7	16.3	24.2
High school graduate	28.5	16.6	39.4	40.7	30.6	26.9	31.3	39.3
Some college	11.6	4.7	15.1	10.8	23.1	11.1	26.7	21.9
College, 4 years or more	7.9	5.8	17.7	10.2	12.8	6.3	25.7	14.7
Age 55-64	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not high school graduate	66.0	83.2	36.6	48.6	50.7	71.8	26.2	35.8
High school graduate	20.9	9.1	37.5	33.5	24.5	17.0	33.8	37.0
Some college	7.5	3.0	13.2	10.1	15.1	6.5	21.2	16.1
College, 4 years or more	5.6	4.7	12.7	7.8	9.7	4.8	18.8	11.1

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990.

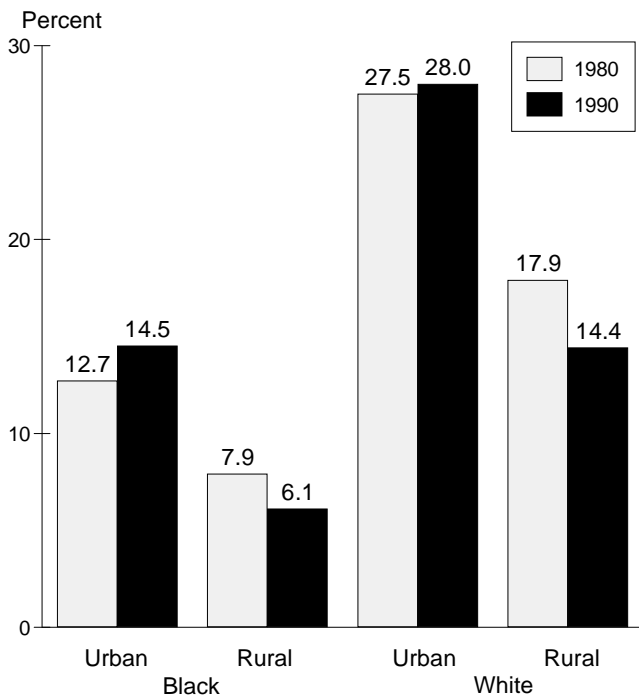
### Effects of Residence and Race on Educational Attainment

Rural Blacks age 25 to 34 had the least educational attainment in both 1980 and 1990 when compared with urban Blacks and both urban and rural Whites (table 1). They had the lowest proportion of college graduates (6.1 percent, down nearly 2 percentage points from 1980), and the highest proportion of young adults who had not completed high school (figs. 1, 2). Both urban and rural Blacks were more likely to have completed high school in 1990 than in

1980, although the gains were greater for rural than urban Blacks.

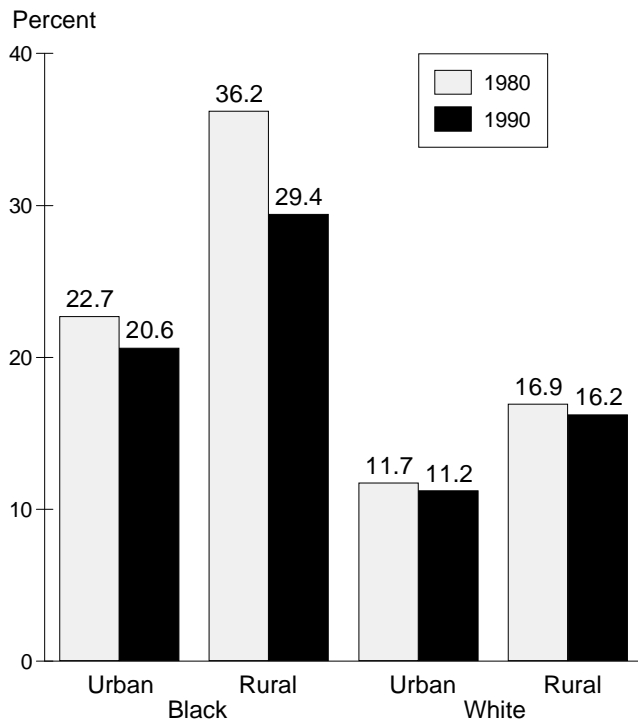
By comparison, 28 percent of urban Whites age 25 to 34 had completed college and only 11.2 percent lacked a high school diploma in 1990. Among rural Whites, 14.4 percent had completed college and 16.2 percent were without a high school diploma in 1990. For urban Whites, educational attainment at the high school and college levels showed very little change from 1980. The percentage of rural Whites who did not complete high school in 1990 decreased slightly

Figure 1  
**Adults age 25-34 who completed 4 or more years of college, 1980-90**



Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from 1980 and 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample.

Figure 2  
**Adults age 25-34 who did not graduate from high school, 1980-90**



Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from 1980 and 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample.

from the 1980 rate. But like rural Blacks, rural Whites had a lower proportion of young adults completing college in 1990 than in 1980.

Thus, in 1990, regardless of race, living in a rural area depressed educational attainment beyond high school. But rural Whites still had college completion rates double those of rural Blacks. For Blacks and Whites alike, the lower levels of education in rural areas are a result of both lower educational attainment among rural "natives" and the net outmigration of rural college graduates seeking better opportunities in urban areas (Fratoe, 1980; Swanson and McGranahan, 1989).

### Black and White Young Adults in 1990 Break Better Education Pattern

Age is an important factor in evaluating rates of educational attainment. Older adults tend to be less educated while younger adults, particularly those age 25 to 34, have become better educated with each successive cohort over the last three decades. However in 1990, both Blacks and Whites age 25 to 34 ("young adults") had lower levels of college attainment than those age 35 to 44, regardless of

residence. Among Black young adults, high school graduation rates were greater but college completion rates were lower than the rates for the cohort age 35 to 44. Both high school graduation and college completion rates for White young adults were lower than the rates for the older cohort (table 1). Young adults today may be taking longer to finish college, partially as a result of the need to be employed full time, which leads to part-time college attendance.

The two events that influenced educational attainment for the cohort age 35 to 44 in 1990 affected racial/gender groups differently. As a result of the Vietnam War, many in this cohort stayed in college to avoid the draft and those who were veterans went to college under the GI Bill. Although Black education benefited from the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement also led to higher educational attainment. The educational improvement attributable to Vietnam War veterans was stronger for men, and the civil rights movement benefited all Blacks and White women.

The higher rate of college attainment for the cohort age 35 to 44 in 1990 may not have been achieved had

circumstances been different, and the decline in college attainment for young adults may be less than appears by comparison with the 35-44 cohort. The decline is partly attributable to a recent shift from grants to college loans. Grants as a percentage of all financial aid declined from 80 percent in 1975/76 to 46 percent in 1985/86, while loans increased from 17 percent to 50 percent, making college more expensive for students (Jaynes and Williams, 1989). The skyrocketing costs of college tuition along with the sluggish economy during the 1970's and 1980's reduced opportunities for upward mobility. Finally, minority students are less likely to borrow money to pay for their education (Jaynes and Williams, 1989).

Young adults in urban areas completed college at higher rates than their parents (using those age 45 to 54 as a parental cohort); those (who remained) in rural areas did not. Both Black and White men drove college completion rates higher during the 1980's. By 1990, this trend had reversed itself for Blacks in both urban and rural areas. White men in urban areas still had college completion rates higher than white women in urban areas.

White women age 35 and older in both urban and rural areas had college completion rates that were lower than or equal to the rates of White men. Black rural women, except for those age 55 to 64, were more likely to have completed college than Black rural men.

### **Increasing Economic Status of Blacks Over Time**

The sustained and rapid growth of the Nation's economy during World War II and for 25 years thereafter was extremely important to gains in the economic status of Blacks. This growth provided employment options, upgraded occupations, and improved earnings.

Blacks had historically been confined to the least desirable jobs because of poor education and job market discrimination. Fifty years ago, Black men worked on farms as laborers or in factories as machine operators, and Black women were domestic servants or farm laborers. The combination of wartime industrial jobs and the mechanization of cotton production helped Black men move from farm labor to blue-collar jobs and a few white-collar positions (Jaynes and Williams, 1989). At the same time, Black women moved from domestic service and farm labor into factories, offices, and some

professional and managerial positions. Highly educated Blacks were confined to teaching positions or employed in segregated professional services.

In the 1960's, Blacks moved up the occupational hierarchy rapidly, with the highly educated breaking into previously "closed" managerial and professional occupations (Freeman, 1976). After 1973, the economy slowed, as did the economic advancement of Blacks (Jaynes and Williams, 1989).

Recent changes in the economy have not favored Blacks. Foreign competition has eliminated jobs in industries and regions where many Blacks had found jobs at good wages. The movement of higher paying industrial jobs from the areas that once attracted Blacks has left them stranded. Since 1980, the relative economic position of Blacks has deteriorated. Blacks lacking skills, experience, and seniority saw their economic position decline the most.

### **Lack of Education Decreases Labor Force Participation and Increases Unemployment**

Historically, labor force participation rates have been higher for Whites than Blacks, men than women, Black women than White women, and urban residents than rural residents. Some of these differences no longer exist.

A generation ago, a low-skilled person had ample opportunity to obtain a blue-collar job with a wage adequate to support a family (Levy and Michel, 1991). For young adults trying to enter the labor market today, education is more of a necessity than ever. Labor force participation is positively related to levels of educational attainment, and unemployment is usually lower in higher education groups.

Only 69 percent of rural and 62 percent of urban Black young adults without a high school diploma were in the labor force in 1990 (table 2). The comparable rates for White young adults were 72 percent and 73 percent.

Labor force participation rates among Black women did not change between 1980 and 1990 partly because Black women have always had to work. Both urban and rural White women, on the other hand, had higher labor force participation rates in 1990 than in 1980, partly due to the fact that within the past two decades there has been a continuous increase in the number of White women entering or re-entering the work force. As labor force participation rates were increasing among White women, rates for White men in both urban and rural areas declined between 1980 and

**Table 2—Labor force status of adults age 25-34 without a high school education, 1980-90**

Labor force status	1980				1990			
	Black		White		Black		White	
	Urban <sup>1</sup>	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Total persons, 25-34 (1,000)	773	236	2,694	1,255	854	198	2,885	1,097
Share in the labor force (percent)	64.7	70.3	68.9	67.2	62.1	68.7	73.1	71.5
Unemployment rate (percent)	19.4	13.3	11.0	12.6	24.9	19.9	11.5	12.0
Men, 25-34 (1,000)	339	119	1,290	616	391	93	1,567	600
Share in the labor force (percent)	80.2	83.2	90.9	89.0	74.4	80.6	88.5	87.2
Unemployment rate (percent)	18.4	12.1	11.1	11.7	22.7	17.3	10.5	11.5
Women, 25-34 (1,000)	434	117	1,404	639	463	105	1,318	497
Share in the labor force (percent)	52.5	57.3	48.6	46.2	51.6	58.1	54.8	52.5
Unemployment rate (percent)	20.6	14.9	11.0	14.2	27.6	23.0	13.4	13.0

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990.

1990. As they did for Black women, labor force participation rates for rural Black men remained the same between 1980 and 1990. The largest decrease in labor force participation between 1980 and 1990 was among Black men in urban areas. Three out of four Black men in urban areas participated in the labor force in 1990 compared with four out of five in 1980.

Low labor force participation and high unemployment among young adults who did not complete high school was partially a result of the decline in blue-collar employment. Both Whites and Blacks in rural areas had similar unemployment rates in 1980 (table 2). Urban Blacks' unemployment rates were roughly one and a half times greater than urban Whites'. Since the early 1970's, unemployment rates for Blacks have remained at double-digit levels and during the 1980's the unemployment gap between Blacks and Whites grew. By 1990, urban Blacks (25-34 without a high school education) had unemployment rates that were twice those of their urban White counterparts; unemployment rates for Blacks in rural areas were roughly one and a half times greater.

Firms opening facilities in rural areas seem to favor sites with minimal Black populations (Hacker, 1992). This is especially true of foreign-owned corporations, which have become an increasing source of American employment. Toyota, for example, located an

assembly plant in Harlan, Kentucky, in which 95 percent of the residents are White and Honda settled in rural Ohio, where the White population exceeded 97 percent (Hacker, 1992).

Young Blacks and Whites who continued their education beyond high school were less likely to be unemployed. But at all levels of educational attainment, unemployment rates for Blacks are still higher than those of Whites, particularly in urban areas. Most construction work, an important source of work for urban Blacks, now takes place in the suburbs or beyond. One of the obstacles to workforce equity stems from the difficulties Blacks have in finding housing or being able to afford housing in areas where jobs open up.

### More Education Leads to Upgraded Occupations

Blacks have made occupational progress, but the extent is hard to measure because there is not a consensus as to which jobs are the better ones. The greatest shift of Blacks into more desirable jobs took place before 1980 (O'Hare, 1991). Blacks are still more likely than Whites to be in the least desirable or lowest paying occupations.

Regardless of residence, even after completing 4 or more years of college, employed Blacks are still less likely than Whites to be in managerial positions. Among Blacks, women were more likely than men to

**Table 3—Occupation of employed adults age 25-34 without a high school education, 1980-90**

Occupation	1980				1990			
	Black		White		Black		White	
	Urban <sup>1</sup>	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
	<i>Thousand</i>							
Total employed	402	145	1,653	739	398	111	1,868	693
Men	221	87	1,044	485	224	63	1,242	465
Women	181	57	609	254	174	48	626	228
	<i>Percent</i>							
Men:								
Managerial and professional	3.9	1.7	5.1	3.5	4.9	1.6	4.4	2.8
Technical, sales, and support	9.2	3.6	9.1	5.8	12.5	4.8	10.7	6.9
Services	15.6	6.6	8.5	5.4	23.2	11.1	11.3	5.2
Precision production	18.8	15.5	31.3	30.7	16.5	15.9	32.4	31.2
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	49.4	56.4	43.0	45.4	39.3	57.1	35.8	42.4
Farming, forestry, and fishing	3.2	16.3	3.0	9.3	3.6	9.5	5.4	10.5
Women:								
Managerial and professional	5.3	3.3	6.6	4.7	5.7	2.1	7.5	4.8
Technical, sales, and support	23.6	7.6	28.9	19.7	28.7	10.4	32.4	24.1
Services	39.3	33.0	26.8	26.8	43.7	39.6	31.6	31.6
Precision production	3.8	3.0	4.3	4.3	2.9	4.2	4.3	5.3
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	27.4	49.7	32.0	42.1	18.4	41.7	22.0	31.1
Farming, forestry, and fishing	0.6	3.3	1.0	2.4	0.6	2.1	2.1	3.1

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990.

hold managerial jobs both in 1980 and 1990. During the 1980's, when the economy shifted to services, middle-income manufacturing jobs were replaced by a few high-paying jobs and many low-paying jobs in the service sector (Levy and Michel, 1991).

Although Blacks apparently do not reap the same occupational rewards from education as Whites, Blacks who lacked higher education were at the greatest occupational disadvantage in 1990. Over half of employed rural Black men who lacked a high school education worked as operators, fabricators, and laborers (table 3). This was also the largest job category for urban Black men, at 39 percent. Nearly half of all employed Black men who were age 25 to 34 in 1980 worked as operators, fabricators, and laborers (table 3). Jobs in this category were more prevalent in rural than urban areas for both races in both 1980 and 1990, although urban blacks in 1980 were much more likely than those in 1990 to hold jobs in this category. However, such a preponderance of operator/laborer jobs among rural Blacks, both men and women, shows that Blacks are much more likely

than Whites to hold blue-collar, manual jobs in rural areas.

Changes in the occupational distribution between 1980 and 1990 for uneducated men also affected women. Both Black and White women age 25 to 34 in 1990 were more likely than those in 1980 to be in sales and service occupations and less likely to be operators/fabricators. Half of both rural Black and White women, nearly three-fourths of urban Black women, and nearly two-thirds of urban White women were employed in sales and services in 1990 (table 3). These are the types of low-skilled, low-paying jobs that are increasingly available to persons lacking skills in both urban and rural areas.

### **Equal Education Does Not Guarantee Equal Earnings**

The earnings of Blacks have always lagged behind those of Whites. Blacks had less favorable labor market characteristics as a result of fewer years of schooling; they were more likely than Whites to live in the South, where wages have historically been

**Table 4—Median earnings of full-time, full-year workers, 1979-89<sup>1</sup>**

Level of education	1979				1989			
	Black		White		Black		White	
	Urban <sup>2</sup>	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
<i>Thousand dollars</i>								
Age 25-34:								
Not high school graduate	16	12	19	17	14	12	17	15
High school graduate	18	15	22	20	17	13	20	18
Some college	20	17	25	22	19	15	23	19
College, 4 years or more	25	20	30	25	25	18	31	25
Age 35-44:								
Not high school graduate	17	13	23	19	17	12	20	17
High school graduate	20	16	27	23	20	15	24	20
Some college	24	19	32	25	24	18	29	23
College, 4 years or more	33	23	43	34	32	25	40	30
Age 45-54:								
Not high school graduate	17	13	24	20	18	13	21	18
High school graduate	20	15	27	23	22	15	25	20
Some college	25	20	32	25	26	19	30	24
College, 4 years or more	33	26	47	36	35	25	47	35
Age 55-64:								
Not high school graduate	18	12	23	18	18	12	21	17
High school graduate	21	15	25	22	21	15	24	20
Some college	24	14	30	24	25	21	30	23
College, 4 years or more	32	27	43	35	34	24	46	35

<sup>1</sup> 1979 earnings converted to 1989 dollars using the Personal Consumption Expenditure Index.

<sup>2</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from Public Use Microdata Samples, 1980 and 1990.

much lower than in all other regions; and their rates of return for labor market characteristics have generally been inferior to those of Whites (Farley and Allen, 1989).

Despite improvements in Blacks' labor market characteristics, they still do not reap the same financial rewards from education as Whites (Swinton, 1992). At each level of educational attainment in 1990, 1989 median earnings for year-round, full-time workers age 25 to 64 were higher for Whites than for Blacks (table 4). Earnings, which are reported for the previous year, include wage and salary income and self-employment income. Among college graduates, both rural and urban Blacks age 25-34 had median earnings of \$6,000 less than their White counterparts. This disparity in earnings among college graduates

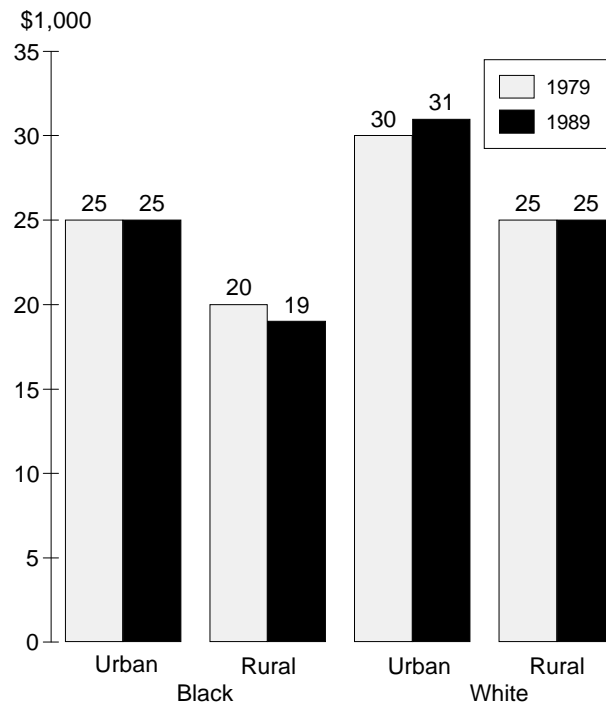
was narrower in 1979. This inequality in 1979 and 1989 earnings among young adults also existed for all other age groups (table 4).

Regardless of residence, the value of a college education did not increase during the 1980's for Blacks or Whites. The median earnings of college-educated adults age 25 to 34 did not change significantly between 1979 and 1989 (fig. 3). Both the shift from manufacturing to services and the slow overall growth in the economy contributed to the stagnant earnings of young adults in the 1980's.

As the earnings of young adults with a college education remained constant during the 1980's, the median earnings of young adults who did not graduate from high school took a downward turn

Figure 3

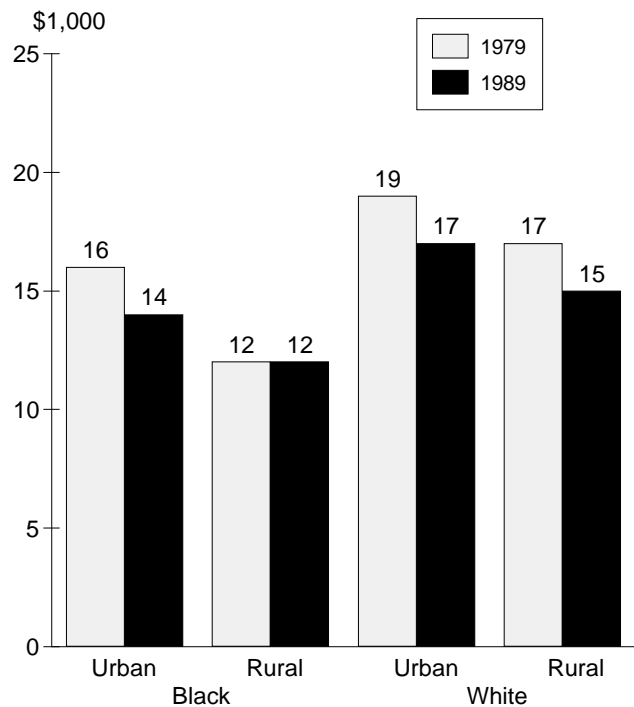
**Median earnings of adults ages 25-34 who completed 4 or more years of college**



Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from 1980 and 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample.

Figure 4

**Median earnings of adults age 25-34 who did not graduate from high school**



Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from 1980 and 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample.

between 1979 and 1989 (fig. 4). Only the median earnings of rural Blacks remained unchanged, at \$12,000.

College-educated adults age 25 to 34 in 1980 improved their earnings in the 1980's. Regardless of residence, the earnings of both Black and White young adults increased between 1979 and 1989 (fig. 5). The largest increase in earnings was among urban Whites. The earnings of urban Blacks increased by \$7,000, and rural Blacks saw their earnings increase by \$5,000. These amounts are small when averaged over the decade, but the increase is far better than what young adults would have received without a college education.

The earnings of young adults age 25 to 34 in 1980 who did not graduate from high school remained unchanged during the 1980's. Rural Blacks had annual earnings of only \$12,000 in both 1979 and 1989 (fig. 6). Although both urban and rural Whites earned significantly more than their Black counterparts, the greatest earnings inequality was among Blacks.

Regardless of education and age, rural Blacks earned less than urban Blacks. Rural young Blacks who were not high school graduates earned only 71 percent of what urban Blacks earned in 1989, down from 75 percent in 1979. The lower earnings of Blacks in rural areas reflect limited job opportunities and lower pay rates than in urban areas (Lyson, 1991).

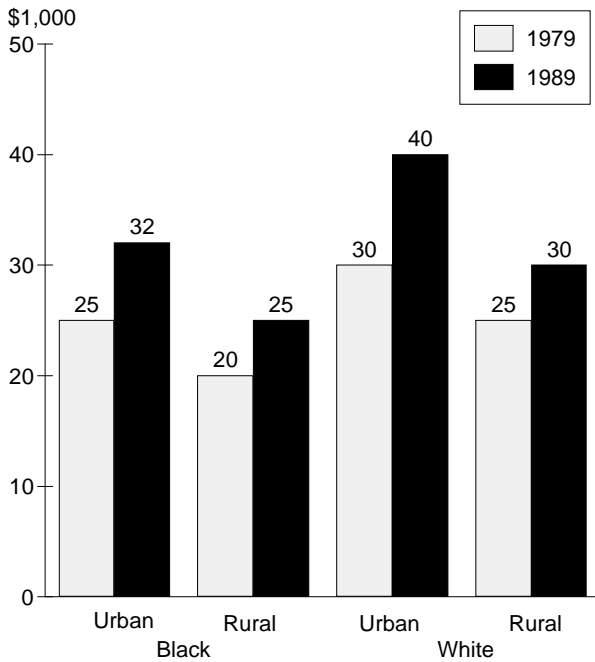
## Conclusion

The slow but steady gains that Blacks have made in educational attainment, along with the creation of jobs and the civil rights movement of the 1960's, increased opportunities for upward mobility. Education has always led to more desirable occupations and greater incomes, but before 1980, low-skilled workers could obtain manufacturing jobs that paid middle-class wages. When the economy shifted from manufacturing to services in the 1980's, Blacks, who are much more dependent on blue-collar jobs than Whites, were the hardest hit. Manufacturing jobs started going overseas, relocating, or disappearing altogether. As industries relocated to either the suburbs or predominantly rural White areas, both urban and rural Blacks lost out.



Figure 5

**Median earnings over time of the cohort who were age 25-34 in 1980, 4 or more years of college**



Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from 1980 and 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample.

Blacks age 25 to 34 are at a great disadvantage. At a time when education is essential to occupational improvement, young Blacks, both men and women, in 1990 had lower levels of college attainment than those age 35 to 44 in both urban and rural areas.

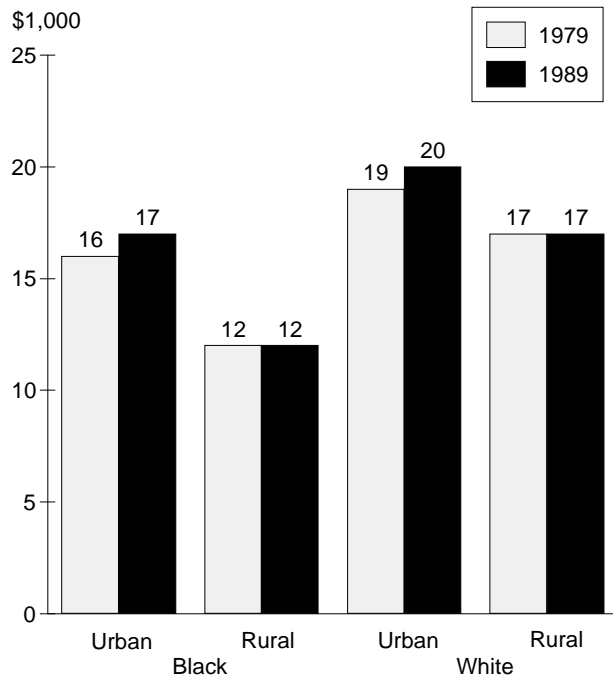
Those who have not completed high school are at an even greater disadvantage. Black unemployment rates have remained at double-digit levels for nearly two decades, peaking at 20 percent in 1974. For uneducated Blacks age 25-34, the unemployment rate was 30 percent or greater, partially a result of limited job opportunities in both urban and rural areas.

Blacks with low skills were consigned to the operators, fabricators and laborers category (men) and to services (women). As Blacks gained more education, they were more likely to have access to more desirable jobs and better pay.

Blacks earned less than Whites at all levels of educational attainment, implying that discrimination persists and that the quality of education afforded Blacks and Whites is not equal. Rural Blacks earned less than urban Blacks, though there is not an adequate measure of rural/urban difference in cost of

Figure 6

**Median earnings over time of the cohort who were age 25-34 in 1980, no high school diploma**



Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from 1980 and 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample.

living to assess relative standards of living those earnings afford.

The employment future for Blacks in both urban and rural areas does not look promising. In both urban and rural areas, the quality of education for Blacks needs to improve and their education levels need to increase. At the same time, no amount of education will improve the economic status of Blacks if jobs are few. Both urban and rural areas need to find better ways of attracting and retaining industries that will provide jobs that pay wages adequate for a decent standard of living.

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