The Quality of Life for Black Americans Twenty Years after the Civil Rights Revolution

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A RECENT RAND CORPORATION REPORT CONCERNING racial differences generated a new controversy about the status of blacks. The authors, James Smith and Finis Welch, focused on men who worked at least one-half time during the year before the censuses of 1940 to 1980, and concluded that the economic position of blacks improved greatly because racial differences in earnings declined drastically. Indeed, black wages as a percentage of white increased from 44 percent in 1940 to 73 percent in 1980 (Smith and Welch 1986).

Arguing that the report gave an erroneously optimistic picture of progress, civil rights organizations and other analysts noted that for more than a decade there has been little reduction in the poverty rate among blacks, that the ratio of black to white median family income has stagnated, and that, since the mid-1950s, the unemployment rate of blacks has been double that of whites (Jacob 1986; Swinton 1986). Despite substantial increases in federal funding, the infant death rate of blacks remains double that of whites, and the life span of blacks in the 1980s is about seven years shorter than that of whites. In the words of Senator Moynihan, "The decade of the 1970s was the first in which, as a group, black Americans, with respect to white Americans, were better off at the beginning than at the end" (Moynihan 1986).

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This controversy reflects the problems that arise when analysts measure racial progress. We have an extensive statistical system that generates hundreds of indicators of the health and economic status of blacks. Improved statistical models help us assess the net effects of race on vital rates, earnings, occupational achievement, and poverty. In addition to indexes from the federal agencies, there are measures of the attitudes of blacks such as their beliefs about racial change, their feelings of alienation, and their perceptions of white support for or opposition to equal opportunity programs (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985).

There is, however, no consensus about which are the most important measures or how different indicators should be weighted to reach a judgment about whether racial gaps are narrowing or growing larger. This dilemma comes about because there are two fundamentally different models of this nation's social structure.

America as a Melting Pot

Many social science theories and empirical investigations stress the assimilation process that incorporated Europeans, Asians, and Latin-American immigrants. Presumably these groups entered the United States in an impoverished status, were concentrated in urban slums, and were the targets of discrimination. In the course of several generations, they took advantage of opportunities—especially educational opportunities—and prospered.

An elaboration of this model stresses that blacks were once singled out for unusually harsh treatment but places greater weight upon the removal of those barriers that formerly excluded them from white society. Court decisions in the post-World War II era, encompassing civil rights laws, and the sustained growth of the economy permitted blacks to compete equitably. Advocates of this model will point to those many measures that show rapid declines in black-white differences.

America as a Polarized Society

A different model sees this country as riven by racial, ethnic, and economic class issues. Gains for any one group are made at the expense of another. Powerful groups seek to retain their economic advantage and pass it on to their offspring. Hostility and discrimination have

been useful for this purpose and the nation has a history both of legislation which favors one group over another and of conflicts over who controls jobs and neighborhoods.

From the earliest days of the colonial era, common customs and laws mandated special treatment for blacks because of their supposed racial inferiority and their unique economic niche. Advocates of this model doubt that great change occurred after World War II and are skeptical about the removal of those barriers that kept blacks out of the economic mainstream. They emphasize indicators which show little racial change.

Under either or both models, blacks have clearly not fared as well as other ethnic groups. The controversy over the degree of black progress is largely due to the fact that it is impossible to gauge the status of blacks by examining just one indicator, even such an important measure as the life span or the earnings of men. To understand the extent of racial change, it is necessary to analyze the aims, accomplishments, and failures of the civil rights movement. Its aims include equity in health care, housing, educational opportunities, employment, and citizenship rights.

Voting Rights and Equal Access to Public Places

Racial barriers have been effectively removed in two important areas by civil rights legislation of the 1960s: voting rights and equal access to public accommodations. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments seemingly guaranteed blacks their voting privileges, but for a seven-decade span these rights were denied in southern states. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 as designed to ensure blacks the opportunity to influence the electoral process in the same manner as whites. Since the early 1960s, the proportion of southern blacks casting ballots has increased sharply (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1985a, table A). Differences in voting remain large, even after the effects of factors influencing turnout such as education and place of residence are taken into account (Abramson and Claggett 1986, 418), but no one contends that this results primarily from the systematic abridgements of voting rights.

Although outlawed by the Civil Rights Act of 1875, racial segregation in public transportation, parks, and most other public places was called for by Jim Crow laws in southern states, and in the North by

common customs and policies of local governments. Sit-ins, protests, marches, and strikes designed to end this segregation led to enactment of Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which proscribed such racial practices (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984). Although a few cases arise each year where a black is denied service in a restaurant, a hotel, or a barber shop, the blatantly discriminatory policies of the Jim Crow era have ended. By the late 1960s, blacks in all regions could use the same public accommodations as whites.

Residential Segregation and the Quality of Housing for Blacks

In most metropolitan areas, de facto racial segregation persisted long after the laws were changed. As a result, shopping areas, parks, hospitals, restaurants, and transit lines are thoroughly coded by color. This racial residential segregation is a development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Taeuber and Taeuber 1965, chap. 3; Spear 1967, chaps. 1 and 2). When blacks first came to live in cities in large numbers, municipal authorities passed laws to guarantee that whites would not live next to blacks. Courts overturned such ordinances on the grounds that they infringed upon property rights, but private practices, such as restrictive covenants and government policies, segregated blacks from whites (Vose 1967, chap. 1). Supreme Court decisions and local open-housing ordinances supported the right of blacks to live where they could afford, but the major change was the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which outlawed racial discrimination in the sale or rental of most housing units.

Its proponents believed that this law would reduce the traditional geographic isolation of blacks in American metropolises. Although there were some declines in residential isolation, the separation of blacks from whites did not end in the 1970s (Taeuber 1983; Logan and Schneider 1984). In areas that have large black populations, there are many central city neighborhoods and a few suburban neighborhoods that are either all-black or well along to becoming exclusively black enclaves; most other neighborhoods have no more than token black populations. Studies of residential patterns in 1980 reveal that blacks are very different from other minority or ethnic groups in this respect. In particular, they are much more residentially segregated from whites

than are two more newly arrived groups: Asians and Hispanics (Langberg and Farley 1985, 75).

Other studies demonstrate that not only poor blacks but blacks at *all* economic statuses are highly segregated from whites of the identical economic level (Taeuber 1968; Massey 1979, 1015; Farley and Allen 1987, table 5.10). It is apparent that the Fair Housing Act of 1968 produced much less change in the status of black Americans than did the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In the nation's large metropolitan areas, blacks are still as residentially segregated from whites as they were four decades ago.

A major effort of civil rights organizations has been the upgrading of housing quality for blacks. In the recent past, many blacks lived in dilapidated rural housing or in urban slums, often units that lacked the basic plumbing and kitchen facilities we take for granted; for example, almost one-half of the housing units occupied by blacks in 1950 lacked an indoor flush toilet (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1950a, table 8). The movement of blacks to cities, urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s, new federal housing programs, and improvements in the economic status of blacks led to great changes in the quality of housing. By 1980, only 6 percent of the homes and apartments occupied by blacks lacked complete plumbing facilities (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1980, table 84). Unlike the modest changes in residential segregation, racial differences in housing quality have been greatly reduced.

Educational Attainment

Throughout this century, civil rights leaders have continued their efforts to bring about equal educational opportunities (Kluger 1976). One set of efforts sought equal facilities for black students and equal pay for black teachers. Another sought racial parity in amounts of education. Finally, a major aim of the civil rights movement was the actual integration of public schools, an achievement which would seem to guarantee that black and white children receive identical educations. In terms of measurable aspects of school facilities such as age of the building, presence of libraries or laboratories, extracurricular activities, degrees of teachers and their salaries, changes occurred in the post-World War II era and black students approached parity with whites in the 1960s (Coleman, Kelly, and Moore 1966, section 2.0).

There is no evidence that black children now attend public schools that are less-well-equipped or have less-well-paid teachers than white children in the same area.

In addition, we are nearing a time when the years of schooling completed by blacks and whites will be the same. Figure 1 shows the average years completed by black and white men and women when they reached ages 25 to 29. In 1940, young blacks averaged about three fewer years of attainment than whites. By the 1970s, racial differences in enrollment rates through the teen years were eliminated and, despite claims to the contrary, the long-term trends suggest a racial convergence in college enrollment (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1981a, table A-1). We have not yet reached educational parity but, unless there is a reversal of established trends, young blacks and whites will differ little in the number of years they attend school.

Racial differences in scores on tests of intellectual skills and learning, however, have been large. For twenty years, innovative programs such as Head Start sought to improve the educational achievements of children and reduce racial differences. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, which measures the skills of national samples of students, found that there were modest declines in black-white differences on tests of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies (Burton and Jones 1982; Grant and Snyder 1983, tables 15–19). Although differences remain large, the 1970s were years in which there was some convergence, not only of the enrollment rates of blacks and whites, but also of their test scores.

The goal of racial integration in the schools, which many think is essential if we are to achieve equal educational outcomes, is not being reached. In small and medium-sized cities throughout the country, public schools are generally integrated. The gains in the South have been impressive largely because federal courts in that region ordered a thorough mixing of students and teachers (Orfield 1983, chap. 1). The situation in the largest metropolitan areas is very different. Thirty years ago schools in southern cities were segregated because of state laws and in the North, because of residential segregation. School districts, however, enrolled both blacks and whites so integration could be accomplished by transferring students within the districts. Today, public schools are segregated primarily because blacks and whites live in separate districts; in most large central cities, the public

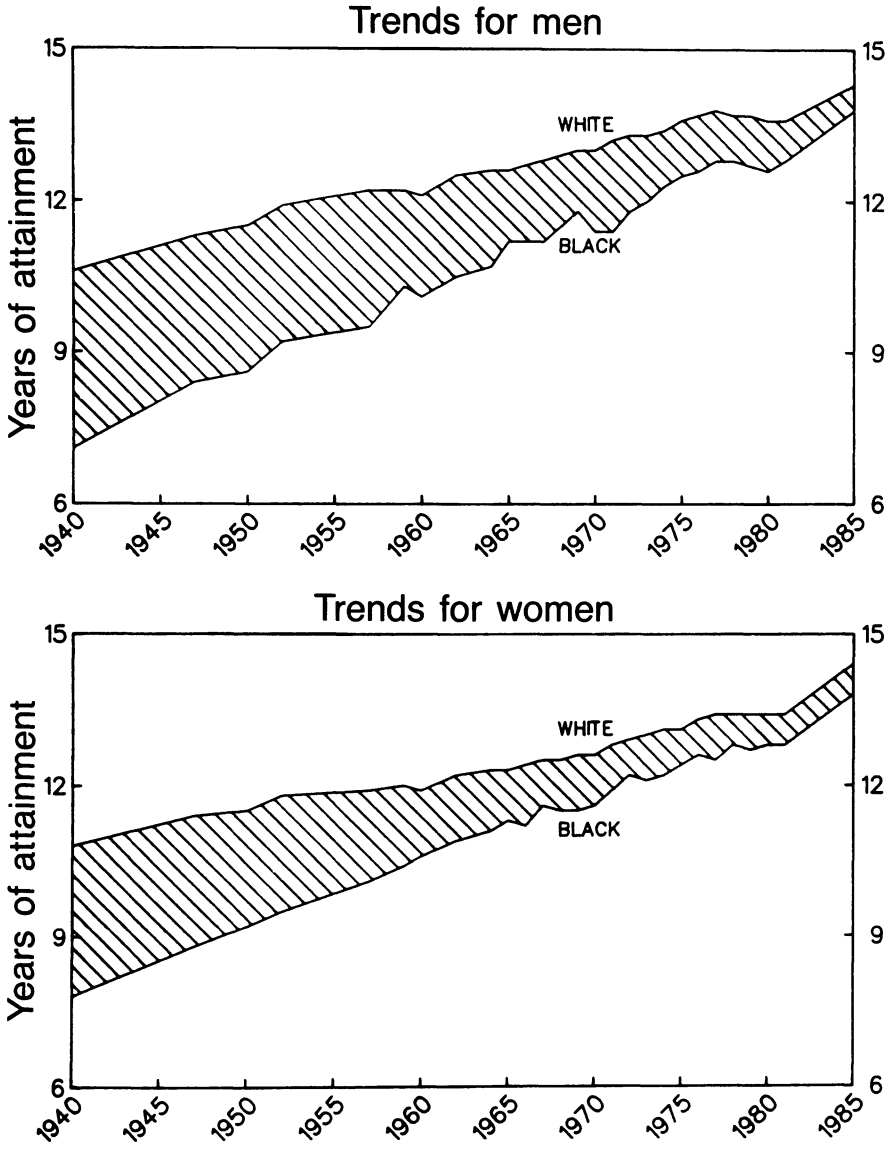

FIG. 1. Average educational attainment of persons aged 25 to 29 by race and sex, 1940 to 1985.

schools enroll few whites but many blacks and Hispanics. In 1980, three-quarters of the nation's public school students were non-Hispanic whites (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1981b, table 6), but in Washington, D.C., only 4 percent were non-Hispanic whites; in Atlanta, 8 percent; in New Orleans, Detroit, and San Antonio, 12 percent (Orfield 1983, chap. 1). Only 3 of the 25 largest central city school districts had a majority white enrollment in 1980. Within these metropolises, white students are in the suburban ring or attend private or parochial schools. Unless policies that separate city and suburban students into different school districts are altered, the persistence of residential segregation will combine with demographic trends to produce public schools that are almost as segregated as those permitted before 1954.

Trends in Employment, Occupations, and Earnings

We would expect that racial differences on economic indicators would contract in the post-World War II years. First, blacks moved to the North where wage rates were higher and where, perhaps, they faced less prejudice. Second, the educational attainment of blacks increased, presumably allowing more blacks to compete for good jobs. Third, the activities of civil rights groups and changing employer attitudes opened opportunities for blacks. Finally, the 1965 law banned discrimination in all aspects of employment. The actual trends are mixed, with clear gains on some indicators but no improvements on others.

Unemployment and Labor Force Participation. The monthly unemployment rate—that is, the percentage of labor force participants who look for work but cannot find it—is the most widely cited gauge of economic status (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1976, chap. 1). This rate, of course, varies inversely with the rate of economic growth. Among adult black men, it fell to a low of 3 percent during the late 1960s and reached a post-Depression high of 13 percent at the start of the 1980s. Thirty years ago, the unemployment rate of black men first attained a level twice that of white men and there has been little change in that ratio since then (Killingsworth 1968, table 1; Levitan, Johnson, and Taggart 1975, fig. 3–3; Farley 1984, fig. 2.4). The upper panel of figure 2 shows the proportion of male labor force participants aged 25 to 54 who were unemployed. We see that the unemployment rates of blacks and whites have moved in a parallel manner, implying that the racial difference has not diminished.

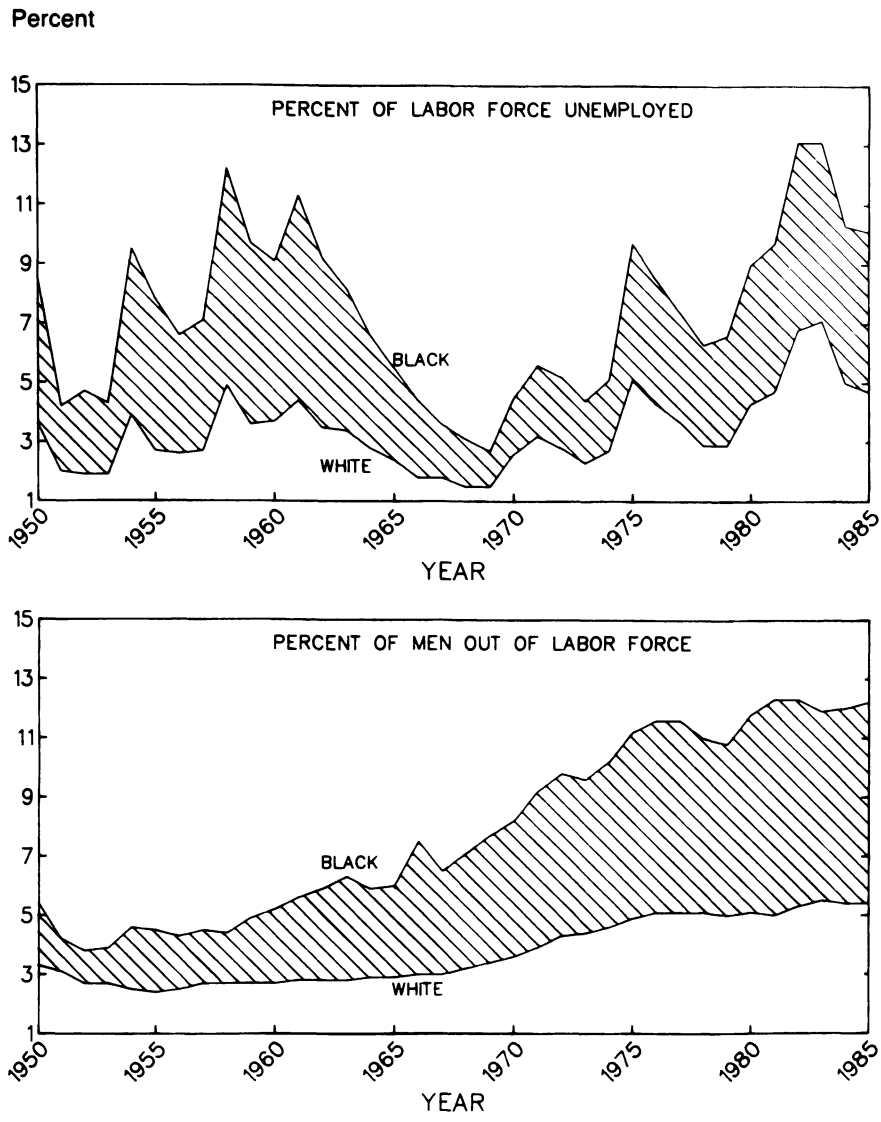

FIG. 2. Percentage of labor force unemployed and percentage of total population out of labor force for men 25 to 54, 1950 to 1985.*

*These data are the annual averages which are developed from the monthly estimates. They have been standardized for age to remove the confounding effects of changes in age structure. Data refer to whites and nonwhites in all years.
Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of Labor Statistics: 1978,* Bulletin 2000 (January, 1979), table 4; *Handbook of Labor Statistics,* Bulletin 2217 (June, 1985), table 5; *Labor Force Statistics Derived from the Current Population Survey: A Databook* (September, 1982), Vol. 2, table B-8; *Employment and Earnings,* Vol. 32, No. 1 (January, 1985), tables 3 and 4; Vol. 33, No. 1 (January, 1986), tables 3 and 4.

The lower panel of figure 2 reports the proportion of adult black and white men, aged 25 to 54, who were neither at work nor looking for a job—that is, they were not participating in the labor force. At these ages, only a small fraction are out of the labor force because they are full-time students or retirees. Among black men, there has been a persistent rise in nonparticipation since 1960, a trend that was hardly influenced by year-to-year changes in economic conditions. By the early 1980s, 1 black man out of 8 had dropped out of the labor force; among whites, about 1 in 20.

Some explanations for this phenomenon contend that many black men lack the skills to be employed or have personal habits and criminal records which make them unacceptable to employers (Anderson 1979, 1985). Others believe that the expansion of federal welfare programs offers attractive alternatives to men who have limited earnings potential (Anderson 1978, p. 47; Gilder 1981, chap. 11; Murray 1984, chap. 5). Another view stresses that blacks are concentrated within cities while the growth of employment is occurring in suburbs, often in areas far from central city ghettoes (Kain 1968). There is no single convincing explanation for the sharp increase in the proportion of black men who are neither working nor looking for employment. High unemployment rates and low rates of labor force participation are not restricted to young black men, to those in central cities, or to those who dropped out of school. Table 1, based upon data from the Census Bureau's (March 1985) *Current Population Survey*, classifies men by age, residence, and attainment, and it indicates the unemployment rate, the proportion out of the labor force, and the proportion of men who did not work at all in 1984. For almost all groups—including those in the suburbs and those with five years of college—the unemployment rate for blacks was double that of comparable white men, and the proportion who were out of the labor force or who did not work during 1984 was much higher.

When age groups other than 25 to 54 are considered, we find some trends that are similar and others that are different. Among those aged over 54, labor force participation has declined because of improved Social Security benefits, better private pensions, and the greater availability of Supplemental Security Income. At the other end of the age scale, there has been an increase in the employment of white youths but not of black. Indeed, all indicators report that the employment situation of young blacks vis-à-vis that of whites has deteriorated since

1960 (Mare and Winship 1984, 49; Levitan, Johnson, and Taggart 1975, fig. 3.3; Murray 1984, fig. 5.4; Cave 1985). Whites are now much more likely than blacks to hold jobs while they attend school or when they move from the completion of high school into their twenties.

Among both races, there has been a steady rise in the employment of women. The recent increases, however, have been greater for whites. Traditionally, a higher proportion of black than white women held jobs but, by the early 1980s, white women caught up with and then surpassed black women in terms of employment (Bianchi and Spain 1986, chap. 5; U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1985, table 8).

Occupational Achievement. Unlike the indicators of employment itself, there is unambiguous evidence that the occupational distribution of employed blacks has been upgraded and is gradually becoming similar to that of whites. At the end of World War II, blacks were concentrated in a narrow range of unskilled occupations: 69 percent of the black men in 1950 worked on farms or as laborers or machine operators; 50 percent of black women were domestic servants or farm laborers (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1950b, table 9). As blacks moved into cities and their educational attainments rose, they obtained better jobs.

Figure 3 indicates this by showing the proportion of employed workers who held professional or managerial jobs from 1950 to 1982. The occupational distribution of whites improved as the focus of the economy shifted from blue collar jobs to white collar and service jobs. The changes, however, were greater among blacks. The percentage of white men, for example, with these jobs at the top of the occupational ladder went up from 20 to 32 percent; for black men, from 6 to 20 percent.

Numerous investigators analyzed racial differences across the entire occupational distribution, and their findings demonstrate that employed blacks moved into better jobs more rapidly than whites and that upgrading continued throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s (Beller 1984; Freeman 1976). Studies of occupational mobility also report a declining net effect of race, suggesting that the process is becoming more egalitarian (Hout 1984; Featherman and Hauser 1976, 1978, chap. 6). Nevertheless, large occupational differences remain. In 1982 the proportion of black men with professional or managerial jobs was equal to what it was among white men three decades earlier. Among

TABLE 1

Percentage Unemployed in 1985, Percentage Who Did Not Work in 1984, and Percentage out of Labor Force in 1985, for Black and White Men Classified by Age, Place of Residence, and Educational Attainment.

Classification	Percentage unemployed in March 1985		Percentage out of labor force in 1985		Percentage who did not work in 1984	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Age						
15–24	32%	13%	47%	33%	49%	24%
25–34	15	6	14	5	18	6
35–44	13	5	13	5	17	6
45–54	10	5	16	8	17	9
55–64	10	4	46	31	41	25
65+	9	4	85	83	81	78
Place of residence (men 15 and older)						
*North and West**						
City of large SMSA	21	8	40	31	40	29
Suburbs of large SMSA	15	6	36	23	33	19
Other SMSA	20	8	38	25	39	21
Non-metropolitan	19	9	38	28	45	22
*South**						
City of large SMSA	8	6	33	23	35	21
Suburbs of large SMSA	14	3	20	22	19	18
Other SMSA	14	5	32	26	32	23
Non-metropolitan	16	6	38	30	33	26

Educational attainment (men 25 and older)						
Elementary	14	10	59	55	58	53
High School, 1–3	16	10	30	32	31	31
High School, 4	14	6	18	19	20	18
College, 1–3	11	4	13	15	17	14
College, 4	8	3	10	11	13	11
College, 5+	5	2	18	11	13	10

* These data pertain to the ten largest metropolises in each region. Central cities are distinguished from suburban rings.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey*, March, 1985 (Tape File).

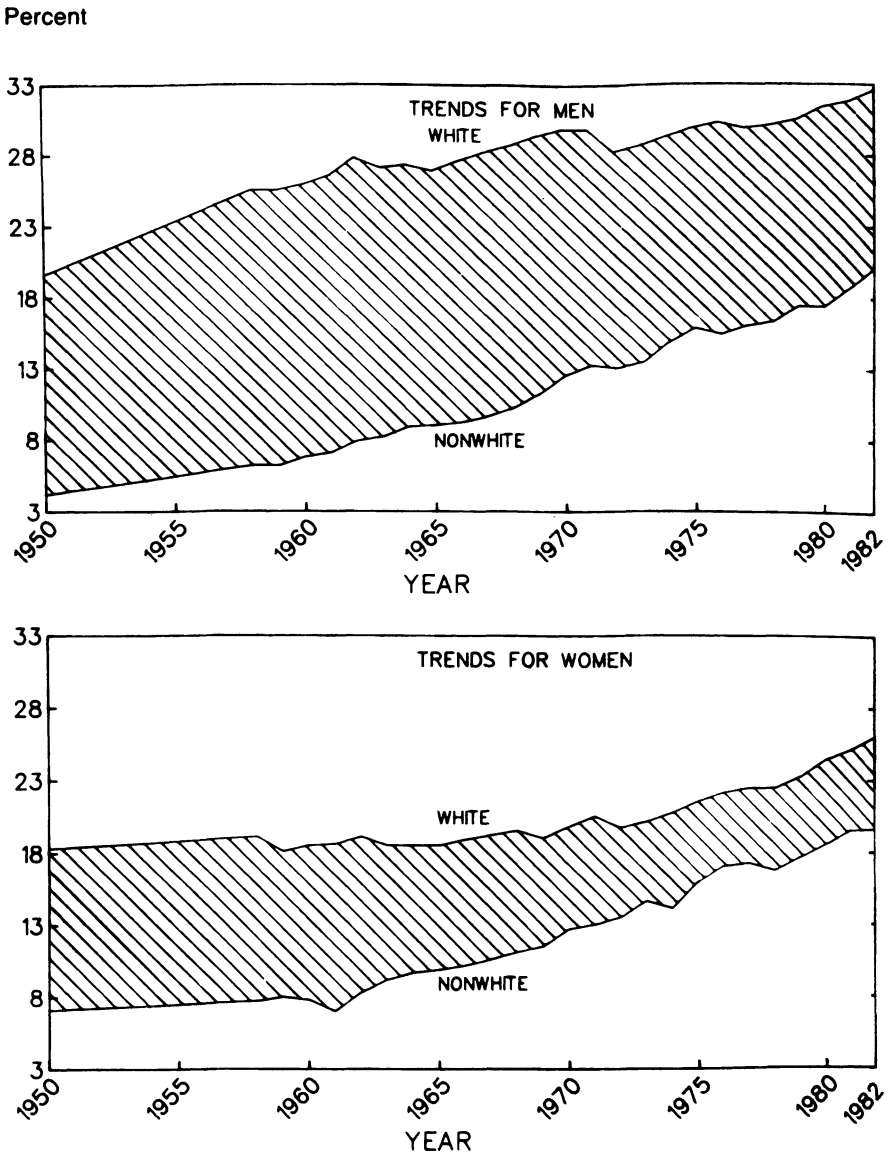

FIG. 3. Percentage of employed workers holding professional or managerial jobs by race and sex, 1950 to 1982.*

*The time series reported in this figure cannot be extended to more recent dates because a new system for classifying occupations was introduced in the Census of 1980 and Current Population Survey in 1983 and the new occupational categories are not comparable to the old.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1950*, P-C1, table 128; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of Labor Statistics: 1978* (June, 1979), table 18; *Employment and Earnings*, Vol. 26, No. 1; Vol. 27, No. 1; Vol. 28, No. 1; Vol. 29, No. 1; Vol. 30, No. 1, table 22 in each publication.

women, the corresponding lag was two decades. Several more decades will be required before the occupational distributions of employed blacks and whites are similar.

Earnings of Employed Workers. Findings from many studies show that blacks once earned much less than similar whites, but this racial difference has declined among men and has just about disappeared among women (Smith and Welch 1977, 1986; Hirschman and Wong 1984, 584; Datcher 1980). This is often accepted as evidence that racial discrimination in pay rates has been substantially reduced, and perhaps even eliminated among women.

The decennial enumerations and the Census Bureau's March surveys ask national samples about their earnings, hours of employment, and educational attainment. These data may be used to fit models that relate the wages of workers to those factors that influence earnings. The analysis reported here is based upon data from the census of 1960 and surveys conducted in March of 1970, 1980, and 1985. All non-institutionalized persons aged 25 to 64 who reported cash earnings during the previous year were included.

Trends in the relative earnings of blacks are described in table 2 which shows the average *hourly* and *annual earnings* of blacks as a percentage of those of whites. Then, using a model which sees hourly earnings as a function of education, place of residence, and years elapsed since completion of school—i.e., years of potential labor market experience—estimates were derived for blacks and whites with specific characteristics such as college education or southern residence.

In 1960 black men had 61 percent of the hourly earnings of white men, and in the next two decades this increased to 74 percent. Black men—on an annual basis—do less well because they experience much more unemployment. Nevertheless, the annual earnings of black men, as a percentage of those of whites, increased from 52 percent in 1960 to 66 percent in 1980.

When men are classified by region, education, and years of experience, we find that racial differences in relative earnings were much smaller in the North than in the South. Racial differences, however, varied little by educational level or by years of experience. Regardless of how long they spent in school, black men earned about 60 percent as much as white men in 1960; 75 percent as much in 1980.

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of improvements in the relative earnings of black men, but there has been stagnation in the 1980s.

TABLE 2
Earnings of Employed Blacks as a Percentage of Those of Whites, Persons 25 to 64, 1960 to 1985 (amounts shown in 1984 dollars)*

Earnings and Classification	1960	1970	1980	1985
Hourly earnings of men	61%	68%	74%	74%
Annual earnings of men	52	59	66	65
Annual earnings for men with specific characteristics				
Place of residence				
North and West	67	68	71	66
South	48	56	64	65
Educational attainment				
9 Years	60	68	73	69
12 Years	57	63	74	70
16 Years	60	60	78	76
Years of labor force experience				
5 Years	54	61	73	68
15 Years	53	59	65	66
25 Years	53	58	62	62
35 Years	53	57	64	66
Hourly earnings of women	61%	75%	98%	101%
Annual earnings of women	55	74	103	107
Annual earnings for women with specific characteristics				
Place of residence				
North and West	72	88	113	117
South	59	67	98	103
Educational attainment				
9 Years	74	76	106	111
12 Years	74	98	107	111
16 Years	97	103	117	118
Years of labor force experience				
5 Years	54	87	101	98
15 Years	56	91	104	106
25 Years	56	71	104	111
35 Years	54	69	102	113

* Based on data for persons who reported that their race was black or white and that they worked in the year prior to the census or survey and had wage, salary, or self-employment earnings of $1 or more. This model uses the log of the hourly wage rate as its dependent variable, regressed upon years of elementary and secondary education, years of college education, years elapsed since estimated completion of schooling, the square of that variable, and a dichotomous variable indicating southern residence.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1960*, Public Use Sample (Tape File); *Current Population Survey*, March 1970, March 1980, and March 1985, Public Use Samples (Tape Files).

An examination of annual data shows that the earnings of blacks rose more rapidly than those of whites until the recession of 1973-1975. Following that, the earnings of men—in constant dollars—generally fell, with the rates of decline being similar for both races. That recession marked a turning point, since there has been no racial convergence of the earnings of black and white men in the last decade.

The racial gap in earnings closed much more rapidly among women. In 1960 black women had 61 percent of the hourly earnings of white women but this increased to 98 percent by 1980 and in 1985 the hourly earnings of black women exceeded those of whites. In the past, employed black women worked fewer hours than white women. Black women now report greater hours of employment and, as a result, the average annual earnings of black women are in excess of those of white women.

When the earnings of women with specific characteristics are compared, we see that black women in 1960—with the exception of college graduates—were far behind white women. By 1980 there was racial parity and, unlike the situation among men, the earnings of black women, relative to those of whites, continued to rise in the 1980s.

Trends in the earnings of employed workers provide clear evidence of racial progress. The investigation of Smith and Welch (1986) also shows that differences among men also declined in the 1940 to 1960 era. By 1980, black men—on an annual basis—earned about two-thirds as much as white men. When differences in education, residence, experience, and hours of work were taken into account, they earned about 85 percent as much (Hirschman and Wong 1984, tables 2 and 3; Farley 1984, fig. 3.5). Black women showed even greater improvements and by 1980 they earned as much as comparable white women.

Family Income and Poverty. Two indicators that are frequently cited as more descriptive measures of economic welfare are the ratio of black to white family income and the percentage of blacks below the poverty line. Since the earnings of blacks have risen more rapidly than those of whites, we might expect an improvement for blacks on these indicators. The actual trends are mixed and have been confounded by changes in family structure (Bianchi 1981).

Figure 4 records the median income of black families as a percentage of that of whites and the proportion of blacks and whites below the

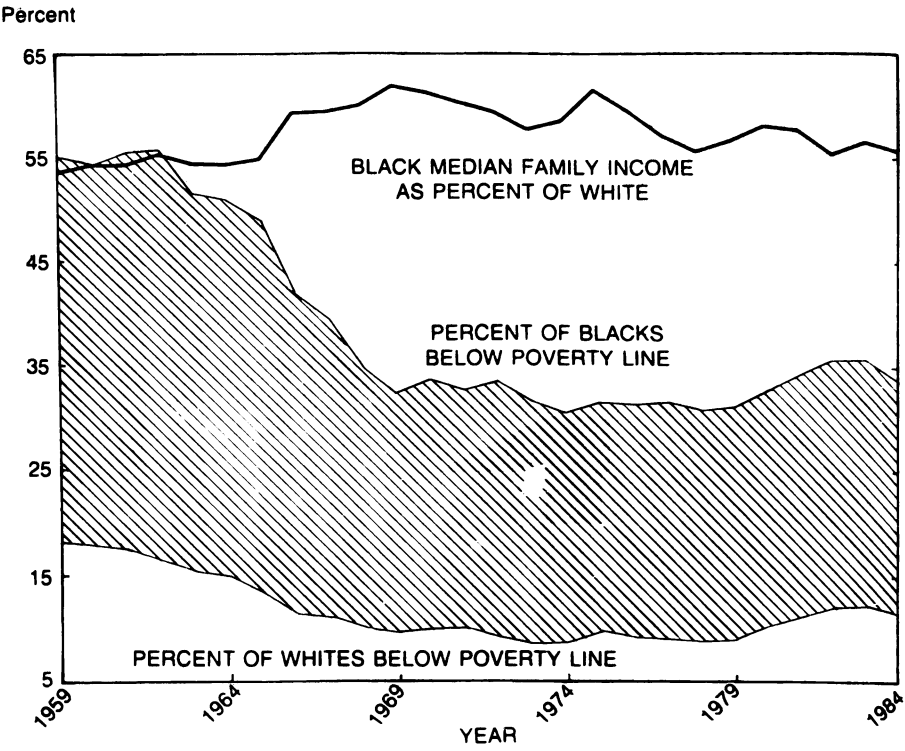

FIG. 4. Median income of black families as a percentage of that of whites and percentage of blacks and whites below the poverty line, 1959 to 1984.*

*Family income data for years prior to 1967 refer to whites and nonwhites. Poverty data for blacks for the years 1960 to 1966 are estimates.
Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, No. 146, table 15; No. 147, table 1; No. 149, tables 3 and 15.

poverty line since 1959, the first year for which the Census Bureau compiled such data. Throughout the 1960s, the incomes of black families rose more rapidly than those of whites so the black median as a percentage of white increased from 54 to 60 percent. The proportion of impoverished blacks fell sharply in the 1960s, reaching a minimum of 30 percent in the early 1970s. The continued urbanization of blacks and increases in earnings help account for the progress of that period.

Since the early 1970s, however, blacks have made no gains on these indicators. The proportion impoverished actually increased and the ratio of black to white family income declined. The fact that the

earnings of black males are no longer rising faster than those of whites and that there is no longer a migration from southern farms to cities plays a role, but changes in family structure are also important.

At all dates, poverty rates have been high and income levels low in families headed by women. In 1984, for example, 52 percent of the black families with a woman as head of household were below the poverty line, compared to 15 percent of the black married-couple families (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1985b, tables 1 and 15). While similar trends are occurring in white families, there has been a sharper increase in the proportion of blacks living in these female-maintained families which have high poverty rates.

Table 3 summarizes changes in family living arrangements. Because of delays in age at first marriage and the increasing frequency of marital disruption, the proportion of adult women who live with husbands has fallen and by 1984 fewer than 30 percent of black women aged 15 to 44 lived with a spouse (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1984a, table 1). Women have delayed their childbearing much less than the timing of their marriage so there has been a sharp increase in the percentage of births occurring to unmarried women. By 1983 about 6 in 10 black children and 1 in 8 white were delivered to unmarried women (U. S. National Center for Health Statistics 1985, table 17).

Delays in marriage, more frequent marital disruption, and more childbearing prior to marriage mean that a growing proportion of families with children are maintained by women who have no husband present (see table 3). As a corollary of these changes, the majority of black children under the age of 18 now live in families headed by a woman rather than by a married couple. Two-thirds of these children were in impoverished families (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1985b, tables 1 and 15).

Table 3 records that although family structure is changing among whites, blacks and whites have become increasingly different on all these indicators since 1960. These changes are certainly not the single cause and, perhaps, not the major cause of the persistently high poverty rate among blacks; they are, however, a significant factor. If all blacks and whites lived in husband-wife families, blacks would still have high poverty rates, but they would have twice, rather than three times the poverty rates of whites. The median income of black families would be about 80 percent that of white families rather than the

TABLE 3
Indicators of Racial Differences in Marital and Family Status, 1960 to Mid-1980s

Year	White	Black	Racial difference
Percentage of women 15 to 44 living with husband			
1960*	69%	52%	17%
1970	61	42	19
1980	55	30	25
1984	55	28	27
Percentage of births delivered to unmarried women			
1960*	2	22	20
1970	6	35	29
1980	11	55	44
1983	13	58	45
Percentage of families with children under 18 maintained by a woman			
1960*	6	24	18
1970	9	33	24
1980	14	48	34
1984	15	50	35
Percentage of children under age 18 in mother-only families			
1960*	6	20	14
1970	8	29	21
1980	14	44	30
1984	15	50	35

* Data for 1960 refer to whites and nonwhites.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1960*, PC(1)-1D, table 76; PC(2)-4A, table 2; *Census of Population: 1970*, PC(1)-D1, table 203; *Census of Population: 1980*, PB80-1-D1-A, table 264; *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 212, table 4; No. 218, table 1; No. 365, table 4; No. 366, table 1; No. 398, table 1; No. 399, table 4; U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States: 1970*, Vol. 1-Natality, table 1–29, *Monthly Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 31, No. 8 (Supplement), November 30, 1982, table 15; Vol. 34, No. 6 (Supplement), September 20, 1985, table 17.

actual value: 54 percent in 1984 (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1985b, tables 1 and 15). Indicators of the economic status of black families would not be so bleak had not the living arrangements of black adults and children changed so rapidly (Bianchi 1980; Green and Welniak 1983, 41).

The Nature of Black Progress

The conclusions that are drawn about the changing status of blacks depend upon which indicators are stressed. Those who believe that this nation is a melting pot will place great weight upon the narrowing of black-white gaps in educational attainment, in the earnings of employed workers, and in occupational prestige. They will point to the rapid growth of a prosperous black middle class and will note that, for the first time, blacks now have real political power. A large fraction of the black population took advantage of the opportunities which, they believe, were created when the United States faced its racial dilemma (Wattenberg 1984; Wattenberg and Scammon 1973, 35).

Those who defend this model of society also recognize, however, that many other blacks are not succeeding. Increasingly the term "urban underclass" describes those ghetto residents who seem unable or unwilling to move into the economic mainstream. According to the melting-pot view, European and Asian immigrants were once in a similar position, but they escaped poverty, not by depending upon welfare and affirmative action, but rather by taking menial jobs or starting small businesses. The fact that so many blacks prosper is proof, for them, that racial discrimination is no longer a major issue.

A variety of commentators argue that the availability of governmental payments lessens incentives for the poor and makes them even more dependent (Murray 1984; Williams 1982; Gilder 1981b; Sowell 1981). In particular, it undercuts the role of black men and leads to frequent marital disruption and high rates of childbearing outside marriage, which are assumed to be the unintended effect of governmental programs rather than the result of present or past white racism. The problems of blacks will be solved, not by new civil rights laws or more welfare, but rather when blacks capitalize on the opportunities now available. This means accepting those low-income jobs that have traditionally been filled by immigrants and which are now very attractive to hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans.

Contradictory conclusions and policy recommendations will be offered by those who see this nation as fundamentally polarized by race and economic issues (Hill 1978, 1981; Pinkney 1984). While recognizing that important changes occurred in voting rights, educational attainment, and earnings, they will stress that black-white differences remain large.

Despite decades of gains, black men in 1984 earned only 65 percent as much as white men, and blacks are still much more likely than whites to be doing manual labor or operating machines. They see claims about the black middle class as inflated, since blacks—even those with high incomes—have assets that are a small fraction of those of whites with similar incomes (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1986, table 3). Other indicators are even more disturbing. In terms of unemployment rates and labor force participation, black men made no gains in the 1950s and the number of black poor increased from 7.2 to 9.5 million in the decade following 1974 (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1985b).

Rather than stressing that blacks are failing to utilize available opportunities, defenders of this model contend that the nation has not altered those basic social and economic arrangements that keep blacks at a great disadvantage. Symbolic changes may be accepted but real changes are seldom made. The *Brown* decision[1] failed to integrate schools in the metropolitan areas where most blacks live. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 called for equal employment opportunities but the employment situation for black men has worsened since. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 was not followed by a breakdown of the "chocolate city-vanilla suburbs" pattern.

It is impossible to answer a question about black progress with a simple yes or no. It is clear that white Americans have made fundamental changes in our social institutions that extend the practices and principles of democracy to blacks, but it is also clear that neither the melting pot nor the polarization model adequately describe the racial situation in a nation of 230 million.

In his 1965 speech at Howard University's commencement, President Johnson asserted that you cannot take a man who has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, and expect him to compete fairly with all the others (Johnson 1965). Many programs of the "War on Poverty" attempted to compensate for some of the inequities in the status of blacks, but current support for such policies is lacking. Quite likely, racial differences will persist and some, such as those describing family income and poverty, will grow larger.

[1] *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*. 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

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