

# Trends in Occupational Status Among Rural Southern Blacks

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*Neither Black men nor Black women in the rural<sup>1</sup> South enjoyed significant improvement in occupational status during the 1980's, in marked contrast to earlier periods. Blacks were half as likely to work in white-collar jobs as Whites and twice as likely to work in service occupations. Differences between rural and urban Blacks became nearly as great as those between rural southern Blacks and Whites. Racial differences in educational attainment and industry mix explain only part of the occupational structure. Young Black and White workers are no more alike in their occupations than are older Black and White workers.*

The occupational status of Black men and women in the United States has improved dramatically since the end of World War II. Much of the credit goes to the Great Migration of rural southern Blacks to nonsouthern cities, where better public school systems and expanding white-collar employment pushed Black workers up the job ladder. Yet even Blacks who stayed in rural areas moved into occupations with higher earnings or social prestige. The emergence of a new industrial order coupled with Federal antidiscriminatory policies opened up more and more jobs requiring high skill and education levels, while educational attainment for rural southern Blacks was rising (Jaynes and Williams, 1989).

Although rural Blacks moved rapidly into higher status jobs between 1950 and 1980, convergence in Black and White occupational distributions was much slower. This slow convergence is unsurprising, since Whites were moving up the job ladder as well, and with an enormous headstart. Federal and State civilian antidiscrimination policies, where they existed, were relatively weak until the mid-1960's (Leonard, 1990).

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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.

This chapter examines recent conditions and trends in the occupational status of Black men and women in the rural South, home to over 90 percent of all rural Blacks. Historically, occupational dissimilarity between Black and White workers has reflected Black people's lack of access to the economic and social mainstream. Today, as racial wage discrimination has diminished, occupational segregation has emerged as a key source of racial and gender disparity in the workplace. This segregation not only contributes to current economic differences, but also directs Blacks and Whites toward very different futures as technological innovation leads to ever-changing skill requirements on the job.

What was particularly troubling in the 1980's was that occupational convergence continued to lag convergence in measures of human capital, such as high school completion and college enrollment rates. The slowdown in rural employment and earnings growth during the 1980's raises concern that the postwar improvement in minority status may have ended. Industrial restructuring in the Nation as a whole left the rural South with an even greater share of low-skill routine jobs than it possessed in the 1970's, a burden borne disproportionately by Blacks. King (1992) reports a sizable drop in occupational convergence nationally between 1980 and 1988. There has been no previous attempt to examine recent trends in rural areas.

Analysis of the rural South reveals a marked slowdown in Blacks' occupational movement during the 1980's. Neither Black men nor Black women gained significant ground relative to Whites, in contrast to the rapid upward mobility of the 1960's and 1970's. The proportion of Black workers employed in managerial and professional occupations, a touchstone of progress, remained unchanged. Blacks in the rural South were doubly disadvantaged, by location as well as by race; in general, urban Black workers improved their occupational status faster, both in absolute terms and relative to Whites.

Occupational change continued, of course, even if upward mobility did not. An examination of detailed occupational changes finds dramatic shifts out of private household services and into sales for rural Black women, and considerable reshuffling among various service occupations for men. Black workers' lack of movement into managerial and professional occupations overall masked changes in specific occupational groups, such as a sharp drop in the percentage of Blacks in teaching and a rise in the percentage who were managers.

The second half of the chapter examines the roles of education and industry mix in the level of regional occupational inequality. Only a portion of racial occupational inequality was explained by differences in educational attainment. Black and White college graduates were quite similar, but high school dropouts were not. Moreover, occupational differences within industries varied significantly, but generally resembled differences overall, indicating that sectoral inequality was not a primary source of racial occupational differences. Finally, comparisons of younger Black and White workers with the total labor force suggest that the former were not "closing the gap," but rather were just as dissimilar as older cohorts.

### **Measuring Occupational Status**

Commonly used measures of occupational segregation give different results depending upon how finely disaggregated the categories are. I therefore analyzed occupational inequality and change using three alternate schemes, although the story that emerges from them is consistent. The broadest scheme aggregates categories into "blue-collar," "white-collar," "service," and "resource" categories to examine large-scale occupational changes. These categories are further divided into major occupational groups, which correspond roughly to the 1-digit level of the Standard Occupational Classification system. The third scheme comprises combinations of 2-digit-level occupations below the major groups. Combinations are selected to isolate job groups with historically large concentrations of Black workers. A complete list of occupations by scheme is located in the appendix to this chapter.

Occupational inequality and change are measured with the index of dissimilarity, which measures the proportion of one group that would need to switch occupation to match the distribution of a second group. While easily calculated and interpreted, the

index is sensitive to the relative sizes of race or sex groups in the population as well as to the level of occupational aggregation used (Fossett, Galle, and Kelly, 1986). The index of dissimilarity also makes no allowance for occupational status. A lower value (greater similarity) need not mean higher status for the disadvantaged group, although this distinction is rarely important for racial occupational differences.

While there is no single best definition of status, most observers agree that the average education and earnings levels associated with an occupation reflect its prestige. Based on these criteria, major occupation groups are ranked in the following order, with their abbreviations as used in this text: (1) administrative, managerial, and professional occupations (managerial and professional); (2) technical, sales, and administrative support occupations (technical and support); (3) craft, repair, and precision occupations (craft); (4) transportation and moving occupations (transport); (5) machine operator, assembling, and inspection occupations (operator); (6) service occupations (service); (7) farming, forestry, and fishing (resource); (8) helper, handler, and laborer occupations (laborer).

### **The Occupational Status of Rural Blacks: A Basic Assessment**

In recent years, some characteristics associated with higher occupational status have improved markedly among rural southern Blacks. Average educational attainment, for instance, has risen more rapidly since 1970 for this group than for Whites or for Blacks living in cities. Unlike their urban (or at least, suburban) counterparts, however, rural southern Blacks work in a relatively low-skill economy with a particularly strong legacy of racial segregation. Industry groups such as nondurable manufacturing, mining, agriculture, and forestry, which depend disproportionately on workers with low education levels, employ a larger proportion of the labor force in the rural South than in any other region in the Nation.

A comparison of White and Black rural southern occupational distributions in 1990 confirms that Blacks remain disproportionately in mid- and low-skill jobs within a relatively low-skill region (table 1). Nearly half of employed Whites work in white-collar occupations, alongside one-fourth of employed Blacks. Half of the Black workforce is engaged in blue-collar occupations, and Blacks are twice as likely as Whites to work in service jobs.

**Table 1—Distribution of employed persons by race and occupation, rural<sup>1</sup> South, 1990**

Occupation	Black	White
<i>Percent</i>		
White-collar	<u>24.2</u>	<u>48.1</u>
Managerial and professional	9.8	20.5
Technical and support	14.4	27.6
Blue-collar	<u>48.3</u>	<u>35.8</u>
Craft	10.2	15.0
Operator	22.3	10.5
Transport	7.1	5.7
Laborer	8.7	4.6
Service	22.7	11.2
Resource	4.9	4.8
Index of dissimilarity, 1990 <sup>2</sup>	28.8	
Index of dissimilarity, 1980	29.4	

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

<sup>2</sup> The index of dissimilarity indicates the percentage of Blacks that would need to switch occupations to match the distribution of Whites.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

Only in resource occupations do Blacks and Whites work in similar proportions. A comparison of occupational distributions in 1980 and 1990 using the index of dissimilarity confirms unusually slow racial convergence compared with national trends between 1960 and 1980.

These earlier trends seem especially dramatic in retrospect. Albelda (1986), for example, reports an 11-point drop in the index of dissimilarity comparing Whites and non-Whites during 1960-70 and a 10-point drop during 1970-80. King (1992), using a more disaggregated occupation scheme, finds smaller but still substantial change; the index fell 10 points for Black and White men, 26 points for Black and White women in 1960-80.<sup>2</sup> Her calculations for 1980-88, however, show an index change of less than 2 points. A comparison of the index of dissimilarity for 1980 (29.4) and that for 1990 (28.8) confirms that the rural South has shared in the slowdown in Blacks' relative improvement in status (table 1).

<sup>2</sup> Index values in Albelda's studies fell from 41.2 in 1960 to 21.0 in 1980. King's index values are higher due to greater occupational disaggregation: men's values dropped from 43.8 to 33.6, while women's values dropped from 55.6 to 29.9 over the period.

As King's numbers suggest, historically strong gender segregation, combined with a rapid influx of women into the labor force, engendered faster convergence for women in earlier periods. Yet in the 1980's, rural southern women of both races moved into white-collar jobs at about the same rate as did rural southern men. Furthermore, for the first time since 1960, racial differences among women increased slightly according to the dissimilarity index (from 30.4 in 1980 to 31.9 in 1990). Black men's relative status improved during the 1980's, but more slowly than before, with the index decreasing less than 1 point (29.1 to 28.4).

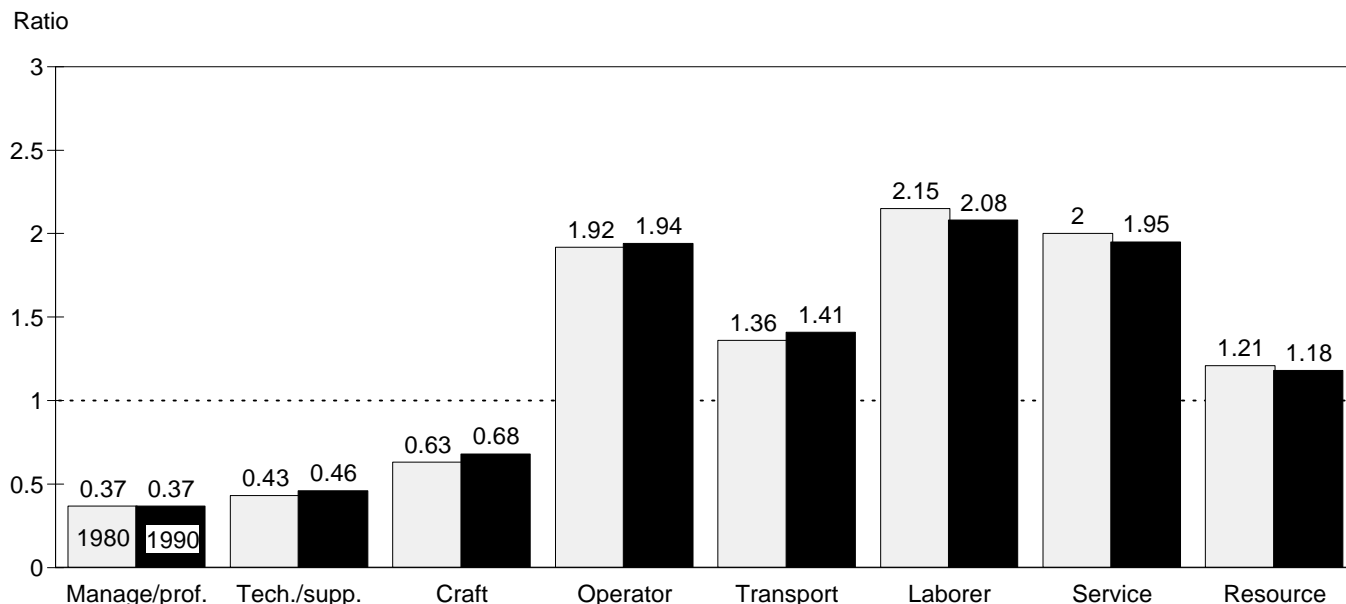
While Black men and women in the rural South experienced similarly small changes in relative status, their occupational patterns remained highly distinct. In 1990, Black women were roughly twice as likely to work in white-collar and service jobs as Black men, who were about twice as likely to work in blue-collar jobs and several times more likely to be resource workers than were Black women. Within these broad groupings, gender differences were even sharper. For example, 25 percent of all employed Black women (71 percent of all blue-collar Black women) were operators, but Black blue-collar men were evenly distributed across major categories. Gender difference was much greater for Blacks than for Whites (41.1 compared with 29.9).<sup>3</sup>

The index of dissimilarity describes only overall differences and can conceal underlying occupational differentiation. Racial differences in particular occupations over the decade are summarized by occupational employment probabilities (figs. 1 and 2). The relative probability for each major occupational group is the ratio of the proportion of all Black men/women to the proportion of all White men/women employed in that group. A value of one, for example, indicates that Blacks and Whites are equally likely to work in that occupational group. Values less than one mean that the average Black male/female worker is less likely to be employed in that occupation than the average White male/female worker, and vice versa. When comparing the relative probabilities over time, movement toward racial convergence is shown by a smaller absolute difference between one and the employment probability ratio in 1990 than in 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Although racial segregation is the focus of this chapter, the numbers presented here indicate that the gender gap in occupational attainment historically has been just as important (and obstinate). Furthermore, note that gender, not race, accounts for most of the occupational differentiation between White men and Black women.

Figure 1

### Employment probability ratios among men in rural South, 1980-90



Numbers represent the ratio of the proportion of all Black men to the proportion of all White men employed in that group.

Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

Black and White men in the rural South were least alike in white-collar occupations, where Blacks were less than half as likely to be employed, and in laborer occupations, where Blacks were exactly twice as likely to be employed (fig. 1). Only in resource and craft occupations did men approach comparable probabilities. The relative employment probabilities for men show no significant change, either toward or away from convergence, in any of the eight analyzed groups during the 1980's. Black and White workers as a whole, however, redistributed themselves slightly into technical/support and service occupations and out of resource occupations.

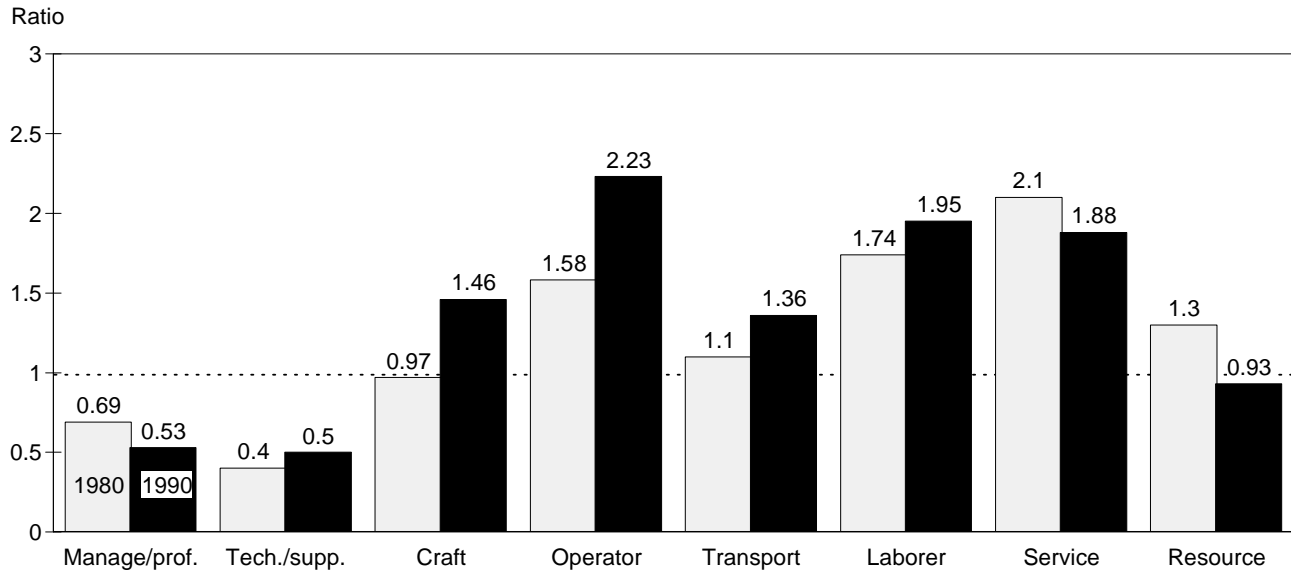
Over three-fourths of all employed rural southern Black women held jobs in three major occupational groups: technical and support, service, and operators. The first two groups have witnessed significant movement toward Black-White parity (fig. 2). Inequality has risen in all other groups except resource occupations, however, and has led to significant racial divergence in managerial-professional and craft occupations. Black women are the single demographic group not leaving traditional blue-collar jobs, despite previously rapid gains in earnings, education, and labor force participation (Farley, 1984). The primary source of growing blue-collar disparity between Black and White women is the declining significance of operator jobs for

White women (11 percent of the workforce in 1990, compared with 25 percent of Black women). Likewise, the drop in the relative employment probability for Black women in managerial and professional occupations (from 0.69 to 0.53) is due less to a small decline for Blacks than to a 5-percentage-point increase for Whites.

Rural southern Black men and women, then, saw little change in their overall occupational status during the 1980's—a slight improvement at best for Black men relative to White men, and an equally small deterioration for Black women relative to White women. For men, the lack of change reflects little movement across major occupational groups. For women, however, the index of dissimilarity masks significant changes in relative employment probabilities that tend to cancel one another. Black women's shift into technical and support occupations and out of service occupations may reflect higher educational attainment, the movement to larger towns and small cities within rural areas, and the continued declining significance of domestic employment. These factors failed to increase Black women's representation in managerial and professional occupations, or to pull them out of operator occupations.

Figure 2

**Employment probability ratios among women in rural South, 1980-90**



Numbers represent the ratio of the proportion of all Black men to the proportion of all White men employed in that group. Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan. Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

**Comparison of Rural and Urban Black Workers**

Over the past 40 years, national attention focused increasingly (and now predominately) on the economic prospects of urban Blacks, particularly those in large central cities. Yet with the rural economic slowdown of the 1980's, the question arises whether rural Blacks suffer a renewed "double jeopardy" of race and rural status. This question is approached two ways. First, given the differences in rural and urban industry mix, are rural Blacks worse off than urban? Second, given the historical differences in race relations between rural and urban areas, is the occupational status of rural Blacks relative to Whites better or worse than that of urban Blacks?

As expected, urban Blacks are more likely than rural Blacks to be employed in white-collar jobs (tables 2 and 3)—urban Blacks are as likely as rural southern Whites to be white-collar workers. In fact, urban Black women are even less likely to be blue-collar workers than are rural southern White women, partly a result of the decentralization of manufacturing in urban areas. Differences between urban and rural service employment depend on gender. Urban (rather than rural) Black men, but rural (rather than urban) Black women, are more likely to be found in service occupations.

Not only did urban Black workers enjoy a more favorable occupational distribution in 1990, but their status improved more rapidly both in absolute terms and relative to Whites. Urban workers became more likely to work in white-collar jobs, generally at the expense of both blue-collar and service jobs. (The share of urban Black men's jobs in services rose, however.) Black men in cities were becoming managers and professionals more rapidly than were rural Black men.

Rural Blacks did not keep up either with rural Whites or urban Blacks, whether compared by a "snapshot" or by changes over time. In both 1980 and 1990, urban Blacks and Whites were more alike than their rural counterparts, at least at the level of major occupational groups. The index of dissimilarity fell for men and women in urban areas during the 1980's, in contrast with no change or small increases for rural workers. Urban and rural indexes for women exhibit particularly striking contrasts; by 1990, the index comparing rural Black and White women was more than twice the magnitude of the index comparing urban Black and White women.

The regional disadvantage of rural southern Blacks is also apparent when comparing urban and rural occupational distributions by race and gender. Rural-urban differences in 1990 were greater for Blacks, especially Black women, while White women

**Table 2—Distribution of employed persons by race, gender, and occupation, rural<sup>1</sup> South**

Occupation	Men		Women	
	Black	White	Black	White
	<i>Percent</i>			
<b>1990:</b>				
White-collar	<u>14.7</u>	<u>35.2</u>	<u>33.2</u>	<u>64.9</u>
Managerial and professional	6.7	17.9	12.7	23.9
Technical and support	8.0	19.3	20.5	41.0
Blue-collar	<u>62.6</u>	<u>50.3</u>	<u>34.7</u>	<u>17.2</u>
Craft	16.6	24.5	4.1	2.8
Operator	19.2	9.9	25.2	11.3
Transport	13.1	9.3	1.5	1.1
Laborer	13.7	6.6	3.9	2.0
Service	14.2	7.3	30.7	16.3
Resource	8.7	7.4	1.4	1.5
Index of dissimilarity	28.4		31.9	
<b>1980:</b>				
White-collar	<u>12.9</u>	<u>32.4</u>	<u>29.6</u>	<u>59.9</u>
Managerial and professional	6.5	17.4	13.2	19.0
Technical and support	6.4	15.0	16.4	40.9
Blue-collar	<u>64.1</u>	<u>52.5</u>	<u>33.8</u>	<u>22.6</u>
Craft	16.1	25.6	2.9	3.0
Operator	20.0	10.4	25.1	15.9
Transport	12.9	9.5	1.1	1.0
Laborer	15.1	7.0	4.7	2.7
Service	12.4	6.2	34.6	16.0
Resource	10.8	8.9	2.0	1.5
Index of dissimilarity	29.1		30.4	

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.  
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

showed the greatest rural-urban similarities (table 3). Moreover, the gap between urban and rural Blacks widened in the 1980's, so that by the end of the decade, the occupational distribution of rural southern Black women was as unlike that of urban Black women as that of rural southern White women (30.8 and 31.9), the result mainly of urban white-collar employment growth. In summary, the racial gap for rural southern Black workers was larger than for urban Blacks. The regional gap for them was larger than for rural Whites. And by both measures, rural Blacks lost ground.

**Table 3—Distribution of employed Blacks by gender and occupation, urban<sup>1</sup> United States**

Occupation	Black men		Black women	
	1990	1980	1990	1980
	<i>Percent</i>			
White-collar	36.9	29.6	64.0	56.1
Managerial and professional	16.0	13.0	22.4	17.4
Technical and support	20.9	16.6	41.6	38.7
Blue-collar	41.9	50.8	11.6	15.3
Craft	14.2	15.6	2.1	2.2
Operator	8.9	13.5	6.5	9.7
Transport	10.1	11.1	1.1	.8
Laborer	8.7	10.6	1.9	2.6
Service	19.4	17.8	24.2	28.4
Resource	1.8	1.8	.2	.3
Index of dissimilarity, urban Blacks and Whites	22.2	24.9	14.3	17.9
Index of dissimilarity, urban and rural Blacks	27.5	22.2	30.8	26.5
Index of dissimilarity, urban and rural Whites	20.1	19.0	12.9	13.7

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.  
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

### Detailed Occupational Trends for Black Women

Both White and Black women continued a general movement into white-collar occupations during the 1980's. Service jobs employed a declining share of Black women workers and blue-collar jobs employed an increasing share. Because Black women were already "overrepresented" in these groups, Black and White women became more alike with respect to service occupations, less alike with respect to blue-collar occupations. But this description applies only to differences across, not within, broad categories. In some cases, racial clustering within detailed occupational categories persisted in the face of general convergence. In others, the trend toward greater racial similarity in a major occupational group is largely explained by changes in one subgroup.

In 1980, 47 percent of Black women service workers in the rural South were employed as household and commercial cleaners; by 1990, that proportion had dropped to 35 percent (table 4). The share of White women service workers in cleaning jobs remained stable at about 17 percent. If cleaning occupations

**Table 4—Distribution of employed women in selected occupations, rural<sup>1</sup> South**

Occupation	1990		1980	
	Black	White	Black	White
	<i>Percent</i>			
Managerial and professional	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Managers	24.6	35.0	14.8	32.4
Teachers	47.0	34.1	64.0	39.8
Other	28.4	30.9	21.2	27.8
Technical and support	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Technicians	13.0	8.2	12.3	6.7
Cashiers	24.8	11.7	15.7	9.9
Administrative support	49.4	59.6	60.3	64.4
Other	12.8	20.5	11.7	19.0
Service	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Household services	12.9	4.3	24.3	5.8
Commercial cleaners	22.5	12.7	22.6	10.2
Cooks	19.4	14.7	18.1	14.9
Nurses' aides	22.2	17.8	15.3	17.4
Other	23.0	50.5	19.7	51.7
Operator	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Textile/apparel/furniture	51.4	48.8	68.3	71.4
Other	48.6	51.2	31.7	28.6

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.  
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

are excluded from the services group, relative employment probabilities look quite different. Black and White women were equally likely to work in noncleaning services in 1980. Furthermore, the share of women in noncleaning service jobs increased at about the same rate for both races, so that parity was maintained in 1990. Thus, the historical concentration of Black women in cleaning occupations explains most of the difference in service employment.

Just as Black women's movement from service jobs is a movement from cleaning occupations, their movement into the technical and support group is largely concentrated in sales jobs, particularly in cashiering. Black women's growing employment in sales accounts for 75 percent of their total share change in technical and support jobs (White women's share in this group was unchanged). Of this growth,

**Table 5—Changes in share and share ratio of selected occupation groups for Black women in rural<sup>1</sup> South, 1980-90**

Occupation	1	2	3	4
Managerial and professional	---	---	---	X
Managers	X	---	---	---
Teachers	---	X	---	---
Technical and support	X	---	---	---
Cashiers	---	---	X	---
Administrative support	---	---	---	X
Operator	---	---	X	---
Textile/apparel/furniture	---	---	---	X
Craft	---	---	X	---
Laborer	---	---	---	X
Service	---	X	---	---
Cleaners	---	X	---	---
Nurses	---	---	X	---
Resource	---	X	---	---

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.  
Group 1: increasing employment share and increasing racial similarity.  
Group 2: decreasing employment share and increasing racial similarity.  
Group 3: increasing employment share and decreasing racial similarity.  
Group 4: decreasing employment share and decreasing racial similarity.  
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

about half can be traced to the large share increase in cashiering, from 16 percent of all technical and support jobs in 1980 to 25 percent in 1990. Excluding cashiers, the relative employment probability for Black women in technical and support occupations would have fallen from 43 percent in 1980 to 38 percent in 1990.

Within the blue-collar group, most rural southern women of both races are operators, assemblers, and inspectors. And within that category, the largest share work in textile, apparel, and furniture-manufacturing jobs. Slightly more than two-thirds of all women in operator occupations (1 in 6 employed Black women) worked in this group in 1980, although the share fell precipitously to one-half in 1990. The drop in textile, apparel, and furniture jobs explains most of White women's declining share as operators and, therefore, as blue-collar workers. A nearly identical drop among Black women, however, did not lead to a decrease in the percentage working as operators, but rather was matched by an increasing share in other operator occupations. In this case, Whites and Blacks shifted out of the same occupation, at the same rate, but into different

occupations. As a result, relative employment probabilities in operator occupations jumped significantly.

Changes in occupational similarity between Black and White women reflect complex underlying patterns of employment share growth and decline. The specific employment share pattern may lead us to view convergence or divergence quite differently, depending upon the occupation's status. We may look more favorably, for example, upon diverging trends in a low-status occupation in which both races are losing employment share than in one in which the share of employed Black women is rising. Table 5 summarizes underlying patterns of change for detailed occupational categories. Occupations are classified according to whether their share of Black women's employment rose between 1980 and 1990 and whether the share change made Black and White women's employment more similar.

Occupations in which employment shares are converging due to increasing Black employment shares (group 1) include technical/support and managerial occupations. Service and resource occupations (in group 2) show convergence through decreasing shares, reflecting the continuation of Black women's longstanding withdrawal from domestic and farm employment. Groups 3 and 4, indicating racial divergence, include many blue-collar occupations. Nurses' aides, cashiering, craft occupations, and operator occupations, all in group 3, are increasingly becoming jobs for Black women. Unlike previous trends, rural Black women lost ground in the 1980's in managerial and professional occupations overall (group 4), as the proportion of Black women in teaching jobs fell sharply. Their share in other managerial and professional jobs did not rise enough to balance out the loss.

### Detailed Occupational Trends for Black Men

An analysis of change for Black men reveals few of the large shifts evident for women (table 6). Yet the picture of stagnant male occupational status that emerges when major occupational groups are considered is only partially correct. For example, while Black men were no more likely to be in the managerial and professional category in 1990 than in 1980, the share of Black men employed as managers rose sharply, mirroring a drop in teaching. Since median earnings are higher in these jobs, the shift

from professional to managerial occupations should improve Black men's economic well-being.

Like Black women, Black men dropped rapidly out of cleaning occupations, from 56 to 40 percent of all service jobs, although the share employed as cooks and in protective services rose sharply. White men experienced similar, but less pronounced, shifts within service occupations, indicating that many of the employment patterns engendered by the new service economy are not race-specific.

The underlying patterns of change for Black men (table 7) resemble those of Black women in managerial and professional jobs. The share of Black men as managers increased, and approached the share of White men (group 1); at the same time, the share in teaching jobs fell as racial convergence occurred (group 2). Although technical and support occupations also fall into group 1, increasing racial similarity is driven largely by share growth in noncashiering sales work.

**Table 6—Distribution of employed men in selected occupations, rural<sup>1</sup> South**

Occupation	1990		1980	
	Black	White	Black	White
	<i>Percent</i>			
Managerial and professional	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Managers	48.4	55.1	41.1	56.6
Teachers	21.3	9.9	29.8	9.7
Other	30.3	35.0	29.1	33.7
Technical and support	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Technicians	17.0	15.5	12.9	13.7
Administrative support	52.3	27.2	57.8	32.3
Other	30.7	57.3	29.3	54.0
Service	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Cleaners	39.6	31.2	56.1	36.8
Cooks	17.5	11.3	9.8	8.8
Protective services	20.0	36.9	12.2	33.5
Other	22.9	20.6	21.9	20.9
Transport	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Truck drivers	55.4	58.8	54.6	51.4
Heavy equipment operators	22.2	9.5	18.9	7.1
Other	22.4	31.7	26.5	41.5

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

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.



Until the 1960's, most rural southern Black men were employed in group 2 occupations, especially in resource and laborer jobs. Although these occupations are considered low-status, their passing is not entirely beneficial. For young Black workers with limited skills, resource and laborer jobs often represented the only alternative to unemployment in rural areas.

Other job groups exhibit gradual racial divergence through employment share gains (group 3). Share gains in transport occupations may dampen the economic outlook for Black men because they pay lower wages and offer fewer opportunities for advancement. However, they may also be welcomed by workers who need entry-level jobs and face limited alternatives.

### The Role of Education in Occupation Trends

Despite continued improvements in average educational attainment, Blacks in the rural South exhibit disproportionately high dropout rates and low college completion rates. The drop in college enrollment among Black men observed since the late 1970's has been associated with stagnant measures of well-being during the 1980's. The slowdown in occupational convergence, however, may result from changes in the returns to education as well as changes in attainment.

Racial differences in employment among college graduates are much smaller than among the entire labor force (table 8). Black male college graduates neared parity with White males in white-collar employment in 1990 and, unlike Black women, also exhibited increasing similarity in blue-collar jobs. The dissimilarity index declined more for women than for men, but the decline comes from a substantial drop in the percentage of Black women in managerial and professional jobs, in favor of technical and support jobs. Increasing similarity, then, does not always lead to higher status for the disadvantaged group.

When the index of dissimilarity values for all employed Blacks and Whites are compared with the index values for college graduates (28.4 and 8.5 for men, 31.9 and 6.4 for women), occupational difference appears to be explained largely by racial differences in educational attainment. Index comparisons of dropouts and the overall labor force, however, suggest a different conclusion. Black high

**Table 7—Changes in share and share ratio of selected occupational groups for Black men in rural<sup>1</sup> South, 1980-90**

Occupation	1	2	3	4
Managerial and professional <sup>2</sup>	---	---	---	---
Managers	X	---	---	---
Teachers	---	X	---	---
Technical and support	X	---	---	---
Craft	X	---	---	---
Transport	---	---	X	---
Laborer	---	X	---	---
Service	X	---	---	---
Cleaners	---	X	---	---
Cooks	---	---	X	---
Protective services	---	---	X	---
Resource	---	X	---	---

Group 1: increasing employment share and increasing racial similarity.

Group 2: decreasing employment share and increasing racial similarity.

Group 3: increasing employment share and decreasing racial similarity.

Group 4: decreasing employment share and decreasing racial similarity.

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

<sup>2</sup> No appreciable change in employment share.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

school dropouts in the rural South experienced greater occupational convergence than college graduates in the 1980's. Yet the level of difference for dropouts remained much more like that of all Blacks and Whites. When the Black labor force is adjusted to account for racial differences in college graduation and high school dropout rates, the index of dissimilarity falls to 21.7 for men, 24.6 for women. Thus, educational attainment is an important but not deciding factor in occupational difference between Black and White rural southerners.

### The Role of Industry Employment in Occupation Trends

Industry mix is a key determinant of occupational distribution. Regional demand for different kinds of labor, and therefore the availability of different kinds of jobs, is driven by the production technologies of the industries in that region. Historically, industries varied in the degree to which they practiced racial hiring discrimination and occupational segregation. Occupational inequality, then, may be largely a manifestation of industrial inequality. (In a region as

**Table 8—Distribution of college graduates and high school dropouts by occupation in rural<sup>1</sup> South, 1990 and 1980**

Occupation/education	Men				Women			
	1990		1980		1990		1980	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
<i>Percent</i>								
College graduates:								
White-collar	79.1	82.5	75.5	81.8	89.4	94.9	92.2	94.4
Managerial and professional	62.8	62.4	64.6	65.0	71.4	76.7	81.6	77.1
Technical and support	16.3	20.1	10.9	16.8	18.0	18.2	10.6	17.3
Blue-collar	14.4	10.2	17.6	10.9	4.2	1.4	3.2	2.5
Service	6.1	3.0	4.3	2.1	6.4	3.0	4.3	2.6
Resource	.5	4.4	2.5	5.3	0	.8	.3	.5
Index of dissimilarity	8.5		9.0		6.4		7.6	
High school dropouts:								
White-collar	6.0	13.4	5.7	14.6	12.6	33.8	10.7	31.5
Blue-collar	65.2	66.8	65.5	65.4	38.9	33.8	34.8	40.0
Service	14.5	8.4	13.3	7.8	46.4	30.0	51.0	26.0
Resource	14.4	11.5	15.7	12.3	2.2	2.5	3.5	2.4
Index of dissimilarity	20.4		22.9		21.7		27.0	

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural are equivalent to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan.  
Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

large as the rural South, some industrial inequality will occur because of the uneven distribution of racial groups and economic activities.) If so, then prospects for higher occupational status hinge on the growth of industries that offer a relatively high percentage of high-status jobs and maintain open employment policies.

Although the rural South lost a smaller proportion of its manufacturing jobs than other regions did in the 1980's, the service sector (not to be confused with service occupations) made significant employment inroads here as well. A comparison of dissimilarity in the service and manufacturing sectors shows that rural southern employment in services exhibits greater occupational inequality than employment in either durable or nondurable manufacturing (table 9).

Women in nonprotective services were especially dissimilar, largely because of Black women's continued concentration in cleaning occupations, coupled with White women's concentration in technical and support occupations. The largest

changes in dissimilarity for men during the 1980's occurred in nonprotective services. Women experienced a sharp drop in dissimilarity in retail trade, a change in keeping with the growing share of Black women employed in cashiering jobs.

Occupational inequality varies widely by industry, with very similar occupational structures for Black and White men in agriculture, forestry, and fishing, and for Black and White women in retail trade. The index of dissimilarity for most industries, however, falls within the same range as the overall index value. Occupational differences, then, do not appear to be significantly explained by differences in the distribution of employment across industries.

### Looking Ahead: Occupation Trends Among Younger Workers

Long-term changes in the occupational status of Black workers often manifest themselves first among the younger, but experienced, segment of the labor

**Table 9—Index of dissimilarity for Blacks and Whites by selected industry group, rural<sup>1</sup> South, 1980-90**

Industry group	1990		1980		Difference, 1980-90 <sup>2</sup>	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
	<i>Percentage points</i>					
Agriculture, fishing, forestry	6.5	--- <sup>3</sup>	7.4	---	-.9	---
Construction	22.0	---	22.4	---	-.4	---
Nondurable manufacturing	23.8	19.8	25.7	14.0	-1.9	5.8
Durable manufacturing	27.9	25.6	26.4	22.2	1.5	3.4
Retail trade	34.4	15.2	30.5	27.1	3.9	-11.9
Protective services	36.2	26.5	35.2	23.2	1.0	3.3
Other services	28.3	48.4	35.8	51.3	-7.5	-2.9

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

<sup>2</sup> 1990 index of dissimilarity minus 1980 index.

<sup>3</sup> Results are not reported where the employment share for the industry group is less than 5 percent of total employment for Black women.

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

force. Black workers less than 40 years old are more likely to have benefited from civil rights legislation and affirmative action and are better educated than the preceding generation. They also make up the great majority of new Black job entrants, so their distribution should reflect the general upscaling of occupations over time. Thus, the story goes that, as older workers retire, the advantages younger workers enjoy will act with increasing strength on the labor market as a whole.

Regardless of gender, however, Black workers under 40 are just as different from their White counterparts as are Black workers over 40 (table 10).

Furthermore, younger Blacks are distributed across occupations very much like Blacks overall. A smaller share of younger Black workers in services is balanced by slightly larger shares in white- and blue-collar employment. Finally, these patterns changed very little during the 1980's, suggesting that the slowdown in occupational convergence is unrelated to age.

## Conclusions

The overall progress in occupational status among rural southern Blacks during the 1980's fell far short of the gains of the 1960's and 1970's. Racial disparities, however, were not the only factor stalling economic progress. All rural workers, not just Blacks, were unable to keep up with the rising status of urban workers, although the urban-rural gap was more pronounced for Blacks. Black men in the rural South improved their occupational status as quickly

(or as slowly) as White men. Rural southern Black women's status slipped slightly during the 1980's, but largely as a result of White women's progress.

One in four employed rural southern Black women is a machine operator, assembler, or inspector, a cause for concern in a time when many semi-skilled manufacturing jobs are disappearing. Along with this, Black women's lack of movement into managerial and professional jobs, and the stagnation in real hourly compensation, indicates that they, as

**Table 10—Distribution of employed persons age 25-40, by occupation, rural<sup>1</sup> South, 1990**

Occupation	Men		Women	
	Black	White	Black	White
	<i>Percent</i>			
White-collar	15.2	33.3	35.6	67.2
Blue-collar	62.9	55.1	38.7	17.5
Service	11.5	6.0	24.6	14.0
Resource	6.5	5.7	1.3	1.3
Index of dissimilarity, Black-White 1990	31.3		30.6	
Index of dissimilarity, young Blacks-all Blacks, 1990	5.6		6.3	
Index of dissimilarity, Black-White 1980	29.5		30.2	

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

Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service from PUMS files, 1980 and 1990 Census.

well as Black men, will have difficulty maintaining their gains in both earnings and employment.

Other trends argue for a somewhat more optimistic view of rural Black workers' situation. First, many highly skilled rural Blacks moved to urban areas during the 1980's to take advantage of strong occupational upscaling there, just as they did earlier in the century. The differences this time may be that a larger share of rural outmigrants in the 1980's were well educated, and that the rural South enjoyed little concurrent upscaling. Thus, rural places suffered more than did rural people. Second, recent data point to renewed population and employment growth in rural areas, including the South, in the 1990's. Periods of widespread growth in the past were marked by an urban-to-rural diffusion of relatively high-skill jobs. The 1980's may have been an interlude in a long-term pattern of increasing occupational status for rural southern Blacks.

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## Appendix

### Major and Detailed Occupation Groups

#### **White-collar**

MANAGERIAL AND PROFESSIONAL (Managerial and professional specialty). Managers, schoolteachers, other professionals.

TECHNICAL AND SUPPORT (Technical, sales, and administrative support). Technicians, cashiers, other sales, administrative support.

#### **Blue-collar**

CRAFT (Precision production, craft, and repair). Precision food production, other crafts.

OPERATOR (Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors). Textile, apparel, and furnishings machine operators; other machine operators and tenders; fabricators and assemblers.

TRANSPORT (Transportation and material moving). Truck drivers, heavy equipment operators, other transport/material moving workers.

LABORER (Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, laborers). Freight, stock, and material handlers; other laborers.

#### **Service**

Cleaning services, protective service, cooks, nurses' aides, other services.

#### **Resource (Farm, forestry, and fishing)**

Farm operators, farm laborers, other resource workers.