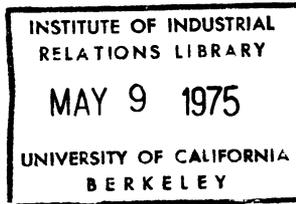


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# THE STATUS OF BLACK EMPLOYMENT:

*A POSITION PAPER BY THE  
NATIONAL MANPOWER POLICY TASK FORCE.*



JANUARY 1975

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The National Manpower Policy Task Force is a private nonprofit organization of academic manpower experts. It is devoted to the promotion of research in manpower policy. This statement represents the combined judgment of the Task Force members. Despite divergence of opinion on details, the members agreed to a unanimous statement without indicating individual exceptions.

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## THE MIXED PICTURE

The National Manpower Policy Task Force has examined changes in black employment since 1960 and concludes that racial inequality remains a serious national problem. The source of the changing economic status of blacks is the subject of abundant misinterpretations. One position asserts that economic discrimination collapsed during the last half of the 1960's, primarily due to the effects of anti-discrimination legislation, particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This position emphasizes the accelerated rate of change during this period, but neglects the unevenness of change and the remaining sizeable gaps between blacks and whites.

An opposite view alleges that blacks made little or no economic progress during the 1960's. Proponents of this position emphasize the continuation of serious economic problems, particularly among blacks in big city slums, and the persistence and pervasiveness of racism. These observers stress the continuing existence of large gaps between white and black employment and income.

We consider these extreme positions detrimental to black progress because they tend to neutralize pressures for change. Indeed, those who argue that the problem has been solved and those who contend that little or no progress has been made, are natural, if unwitting, allies; the former neutralize pressures for improvements in the anti-discrimination programs on the grounds that they are unnecessary, and the latter neutralize pressures for change by generating pessimism that racial equality can be achieved in a democratic society.

The evidence reveals perceptible economic progress by blacks during the 1960's, but it also exposes the uneven progress and the continuation of wide economic gaps between blacks and whites. We therefore think that discrimination and racial inequality remain very serious problems requiring the full implementation of anti-discrimination laws and the strengthening of human resource development activities.

### NATURE AND MEANING OF DISCRIMINATION<sup>1</sup>

It is important to be explicit about the various meanings of "discrimination." Some interpret racial discrimination only as specific, overt acts against

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Marshall, "The Economics of Racial Discrimination: A Survey," Journal of Economic Literature, September 1974, pp. 849-871.

people because of their race. In a broader and more important sense, however, discrimination designates racism or institutionalized discrimination which permeates social and economic institutions and therefore does not require conscious or overt acts or decisions. Institutionalized discrimination leads to segregated housing, schools, jobs, training, and health care. These disadvantages produce unequal job opportunities and income whether or not specific individuals are prejudiced against blacks or make specific decisions adversely affecting them.

These forms of discrimination are not as pervasive, because specific discriminatory decisions by employers, unions, and workers are frequently selective, affecting some groups more than others. Discrimination apparently is based to a significant degree on status considerations; people regarded as "inferior" are the object of discrimination because the "status" of the discriminators is damaged by the hiring or upgrading of those discriminated against.

Employers discriminate partly because of racial prejudices and partly for economic reasons. Although employers ordinarily make employment decisions aimed at maximizing profits, management employment decisions often reflect fears of adverse reactions from biased employees, supervisors, or customers. Managers also have biases, largely based on status considerations, which modify their economic motives. While management apparently will accept minorities or women in blue-collar occupations, the main biases affecting those occupations are probably those of employees. However, management's status biases will have stronger direct influences on the hiring of women or minorities into managerial positions.

White workers may resist the entry of blacks into jobs because of emotional bias and bigotry as well as the more rational quest for job control. White incumbents in particular jobs will try to monopolize those jobs for themselves and will attempt to resist the hiring of people regarded to be of lower status. Of course, the extent to which prejudiced white workers are able to resist the hiring or upgrading of minorities or women will depend on their power relative to management, and pressures from minorities, women, or government agencies attempting to combat discrimination.

## **CHANGING EMPLOYMENT<sup>2</sup>**

For the nation as a whole, there were substantial changes in black em-

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<sup>2</sup> Data in this section from Sar Levitan, William Johnston and Robert Taggart, Still a Dream: Changing Status of Blacks in the Last Decade (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

ployment patterns during the 1960's. Nonwhites (of whom over 90 percent are black) increased their proportions of higher status and better paying white-collar jobs while they reduced their proportion in the service and laborer categories. Blacks in the 25-44 age group improved their employment patterns relative to whites and relative to blacks in other age groups.

Despite these gains, however, blacks have a long way to go to gain equality with whites. The steady progress made by blacks during the 1960's has been seriously interrupted during the 1970's. Blacks still account for over half of all private household workers and over a fifth of all laundry and dry-cleaning operatives, laborers, hospital attendants, janitors, maids and cleaners. At the other end of the employment scale, blacks represent only 2.8 percent of managers, administrators, and proprietors; 3.0 percent of sales workers; and very low proportions of many professional and technical workers. Entry into these occupations remains difficult.

Indeed, blacks experienced dramatic percentage increases in some professional-technical jobs, but within these occupations they continue to be heavily concentrated among the lower-paid classifications, including social and recreation workers, registered nurses, medical and dental technicians, and elementary and high school teachers. Similarly, in the craft occupations, blacks are underrepresented in the electrical, plumbing, and printing crafts, and overrepresented among brick masons, cement and concrete finishers, craneman derrick operators, painters, and roofers and slaters.

Black males earn less than whites even after adjusting for years of schooling, regularity of work, and occupational differentials. After adjusting their incomes for education, intermittent work, and occupation, black males in the 25-34 age group still earn only 82 percent as much as whites. On the other hand, adjusting relative female incomes for education, regularity of work, and occupation brings black females to parity with whites in the 25-34 age group. The dramatic shift in the relative economic status of black women (as measured by ratios of black/white median incomes) is due partly to the restrictions placed on the upward mobility of white women. Black women, particularly heads of families, however, remained at the bottom of the income pyramid.

### **UNEMPLOYMENT**

Blacks also suffer more from unemployment than whites. During the third quarter of 1974 the unemployment rates for blacks rose from 9.0 to 10.5 percent compared with an increase from 4.7 to 5.0 percent for white workers.

The unemployment rate for black teenagers was 33.5 percent, more than twice the rate (14.1 percent) for white teenagers. Black veterans in the 20-34 age group experienced an unemployment rate of 10.8 percent as compared to the 4.0 percent for white veterans. In November 1974, when the white unemployment rate was 5.8 percent, the comparable rate for blacks was 11.7 percent, and 37.5 percent for black teenagers.

The incidence of unemployment is only one measure of the problem of joblessness. Blacks not only have a higher rate of unemployment than their white counterparts, but the mean duration of their unemployment is longer. In addition, the number of spells of unemployment during the year is greater for blacks than for whites. All three factors taken together make the burden of unemployment among blacks substantially greater than among whites.

Because of these work interruptions and the fact that they have more recently entered many nonagricultural jobs, blacks tend to have less tenure on the job than whites. Since seniority is an important determinant of job security, occupational upgrading, and other benefits, work interruptions and relatively short job tenure have long-run consequences beyond the immediate problems they cause.

An important factor in explaining the higher unemployment rates of blacks is that they are concentrated in occupations where unemployment tends to be high such as non-farm laborers, operatives, and service workers. Blacks also suffer relatively high unemployment rates because they are more likely than whites to be concentrated in "secondary labor markets," where seniority means very little, and where wages and working conditions are barely preferable to street life and welfare. On the average, in 1972, non-white workers were two-thirds more likely than whites to have lost and quit their jobs and 2.2 times more likely to be experiencing re-entry or first-entry problems.

Unemployment rates are imperfect indicators of nonwhite labor market disadvantages, however, because these rates reflect only those who are willing and able to work and actively seeking jobs. The unemployment data exclude those working part-time who would like full-time jobs, those working but not earning enough to raise them above the poverty level, or those who have become discouraged and ceased looking for jobs. Consequently, there is reason to be concerned about the fact that relative to whites, the labor force participation rates for nonwhite males over 16 years of age declined from 83 percent in 1960 to 74 percent in 1973 (when the white rate

was 80 percent). Although rising school attendance may have accounted for some of the decline in young nonwhite male participation, the decline in the labor force participation of black males in the prime working age group, 25 to 54 years, has been sharp. Among nonwhite females, there was a slight increase in participation from 48 percent in 1960 to 49 percent in 1973, but over the same period, the white female rate rose substantially, from 37 percent to 44 percent.

### **DISCOURAGED WORKERS**

Many blacks not counted in the labor force are "discouraged" workers who would like to work but have given up looking for jobs. Among blacks not in the labor force during the third quarter of 1974, 16 percent said they wanted to work but were not looking because they were discouraged. These 150,000 discouraged blacks accounted for a fourth of all discouraged workers. It is sometimes argued that blacks have withdrawn from the work force despite the availability of jobs because of their high wage expectations or because of a preference for higher incomes obtainable through illegal activities. While these considerations may be partly responsible for some labor force withdrawal, the existence of some unknown number of blacks who do not want regular work should not obscure the fact that many are seeking, but cannot find, acceptable jobs.

### **EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS INADEQUACY INDEX**

Another indication of black economic disadvantage is the employment and earnings inadequacy index (which counts persons aged 16-64, except students aged 16-21, who are unemployed, discouraged, involuntarily employed part-time for economic reasons, household heads working full-time at poverty-level wages, and heads working intermittently and earning too little to raise their families above the poverty threshold), which was 25 percent for blacks and 10 percent for whites in March 1972. Since students are excluded from the employment and earnings index, the results understate the employment disadvantage of many black young people who must have jobs in order to remain in school. Blacks in non-metropolitan areas were particularly disadvantaged--nearly a third of them having inadequate employment and earnings, compared with 24 percent of those in central cities and 20 percent in suburbs.

### **AGRICULTURE**

Blacks continued to be displaced from southern agriculture and rural areas at a very rapid rate during the 1960's. Many of those displaced were unre-

pared by background and experience for nonfarm employment. Indeed, the black population of the rural South declined by 5 percent during the 1960's, while the white population of those areas grew by 9 percent. The net out-movement of blacks and other races from the nonmetropolitan South was 1,346,000 during the 1960s.

To a very large extent, the continued outmigration of blacks from the rural South is due to inadequate employment opportunities for blacks in those areas. U.S. agricultural policy and discrimination in U.S. agricultural programs have long been major problems facing blacks in the South,<sup>3</sup> but there is also evidence that blacks have not shared proportionately in the rapid growth of nonfarm jobs in the rural South during the 1960's. As a consequence, there continues to be heavy white migration into many counties from which blacks are forced to move because of inadequate employment opportunities.

### PROBLEMS OF THE CENTRAL CITIES

Outside the rural South, blacks are increasingly locating in large metropolitan areas, especially in the North and West. In 1970, slightly over half of the nation's blacks lived outside the South. In the South, the black population was about evenly divided between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas, but almost all blacks outside the South lived in urban areas, especially in the central cities of several large metropolitan areas. Thus, although black poverty is evident in many Southern cities, both black and white poverty in the South tend to be concentrated in rural areas, while outside the South it is mainly urban. Moreover, in 1970 blacks were more metropolitan (71 percent) than whites (64 percent).

The concentration of blacks in central cities creates a number of serious social and economic problems. For one thing, the flight of whites from central cities as blacks move in leads to increasing racial segregation in housing and schools. Moreover, the flight of higher income whites and the movement of industry to suburban rings create serious financial problems for cities, making it difficult for them to render much-needed social services to their populations.

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<sup>3</sup> See discussion of these issues in Ray Marshall and Virgil Christian, The Employment of Southern Blacks (Salt Lake City, Utah: Olympus Publishing Company, 1975).

Studies in major southern cities show transportation to be a particularly important determinant of employment for black females probably because they are more heavily concentrated in low-wage service occupations. Discrimination in housing and employment contributes to the inability of many blacks to leave the ghetto, restricting them to employment within these areas, to "hustling" and other forms of illicit activity, or to dependence upon welfare. Discrimination in employment, together with inadequate education and development, combine to trap many ghetto residents in lives of poverty and low income. The slum areas of many central cities are characterized by poor housing, crowding, high incidence of crime, poverty, and inadequate public services.

Many central city jobs are characterized by low incomes, limited upward occupational mobility, and high turnover rates. Unions in these occupations tend to be very weak, so workers have relatively limited job protection. Many employers and workers apparently adapt to these conditions, causing black concentration in these jobs to become self-perpetuating. Marginal jobs require limited skills or education, so employers make only limited investments in training, and therefore are not overly concerned about turnover.

## **CAUSES OF BLACK EMPLOYMENT DISADVANTAGES**

Black income and employment problems are caused by a deeply entrenched constellation of forces which are difficult to overcome and which will require intensified and concerted remedies on a variety of fronts. Because these causal forces are so interrelated, it is difficult to assign weights to each of them.

### **1. Discrimination**

While overt discrimination has declined, there is little doubt that "institutional" discrimination continues to be a major problem. The claim that enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 caused overt discrimination to collapse is vastly overstated. For one thing, until 1972, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the agency charged with administering the Civil Rights Act, had very limited enforcement powers.

In his analysis of efforts by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to broaden job opportunities for blacks and other minorities, Andrew F. Brimmer, former Governor of the Federal Reserve Board, indicates that "indirect evidence does suggest that the Commission's activities are having generally favorable results." On the basis of 1966 and 1973 EEO data by major occupational categories, Brimmer concludes "that the companies reporting under the EEOC requirements are opening jobs to blacks at a

rate much faster than is true for all employers in the country as a whole. At the same time, however, it appears that the expansion is much slower in the upper reaches of the occupational scale than it is among job categories at the lower end. The task of occupational upgrading for blacks remains considerable." <sup>4</sup>

Many of the changes in black employment patterns were apparently due more to the indirect effects of antidiscrimination laws than to their enforcement. As noted earlier, many employers were motivated by business reasons to hire blacks but were reluctant to do so for fear of adverse reactions from white employees or, probably, to a lesser degree, white customers. One of the most significant aspects of legislation is that it represents the attitudes of a majority of voters, and consequently carries considerable moral force. Many employers who faced limited opposition to change therefore probably responded to legislation by adopting anti-discrimination policies. Even those employers who faced opposition from white communities and employees used the law to "neutralize" this opposition where they were inclined for profit or moral reasons to hire or upgrade blacks.

We suspect, however, that the hiring or upgrading of blacks in many relatively low-wage industries in the South can be attributed to the fact that these employers were having trouble locating an adequate supply of whites who met their hiring standards. Qualified blacks, whose employment opportunities have been more restricted because of discrimination, formed more dependable supplies of labor for these jobs. The increase in employment of blacks in the textile industry of North Carolina is an example.

Thus, the indirect effects of anti-discrimination laws clearly have the most impact when they are compatible with employers' economic motives. Indirect effects will have less impact in higher level jobs, in part because of the limited supply of blacks who meet the skill, experience, or education standards for these jobs. Also, whites in these occupations have more power to resist change because of their higher level of skills, their organizations, and their control of supplies of skilled manpower. These workers have stronger status and job control motives for resisting the entry of blacks. Gaining greater entry for blacks into these occupations will therefore require more direct measures to overcome white resistance, increase the supplies of qualified blacks, and overcome institutionalized barriers to entry.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew r. Brimmer, "Widening Horizons: Prospects For Black Employment," Commencement Address delivered at Prairie View A & M University, May 5, 1974.

## **2. Labor Market Conditions**

There is almost universal agreement that tight labor markets--such as existed during World War II--generate powerful forces to improve black employment patterns. During such times, employers have stronger motives to hire, train, and upgrade black workers. At the same time, opposition by white employees to the hiring of blacks also diminishes.

Nevertheless, tight labor markets alone will not guarantee improvement in black economic conditions, as seen from the fact that many occupations and skills remained closed to blacks despite tight labor markets during World War II. Similarly, many southern cities have had very low levels of unemployment for years with no perceptible impact on black employment in particular trades or occupations. Clearly, therefore, tight labor markets must be supplemented by antidiscrimination, education, and manpower programs in order to produce changes in particular employment patterns. In the construction industry, outreach programs have proved particularly effective in recruiting, tutoring, and placing blacks in apprenticeship and journeyman programs. Current demonstrations to extend the outreach concept to other areas seem promising.

## **3. Education**

Rising education levels have important implications for black advancement. The proportions of blacks aged 25-29 who had completed high school rose from 39 percent in 1960 to 67 percent in 1972 or from three-fifths to four-fifths the rate for whites. The increases in the proportion of blacks in the 25-34 age group completing four or more years of college were even more striking, doubling from 4 to 8 percent between 1960 and 1972 or increasing from 34 to 42 percent of comparable proportions for whites.

The relationship between education and income has been controversial, because many observers have argued that the payoff to education is less for blacks than for whites. There is evidence that education is more efficacious, in terms of earnings and occupational position, for younger blacks than it was for their elders. This could be due to both a rising quality as well as quantity of education and the lowering of racial bars to employment that existed when older blacks entered the labor force.

Despite these favorable trends, however, blacks still lag behind whites in educational levels. This is an important disadvantage where blacks and whites compete in labor markets in which education is used by employers to screen workers for jobs. In addition, blacks still have lower incomes than whites at every level of education. Moreover, at every level of education, there has

been a tendency for black incomes to increase over their working lives at a much slower rate than is true of whites, suggesting that educated blacks have not been able to enter occupations with as much growth potential as their white counterparts. It could be, however, that better education and declining discrimination will cause black education-earnings curves to be steeper in the future. The conclusions for education are similar to those in other areas: the trends are favorable, but serious gaps remain.

#### **4. Labor Market Procedures**

Blacks have more limited access than whites to labor market information about higher paying jobs. Since blacks have tended to live in segregated housing, attend segregated schools, and work in segregated jobs, they are unable to acquire job information through informal means. Moreover, the widespread tendency for jobs to be filled by existing employees or relatives and friends perpetuates the exclusion of blacks from many jobs. Blacks tend to rely more heavily than whites on formal information sources like the Employment Service, although many employers do not use the Employment Service for skilled professional and technical jobs.

#### **5. Manpower Programs**

The participation of blacks in manpower programs has changed through time. Between 1963 and 1969, there was a steady increase in the proportion of nonwhites in these programs. After 1969, the relative participation of nonwhites declined, falling to two-thirds of all participants in 1973. Moreover, in 1970, blacks represented 92-94 percent of minority participants, but by 1974, the proportion of blacks within the minority group dropped to 83 percent. The impact of manpower programs on black employment opportunities and the implications of declining proportions of blacks in these programs should be given careful consideration. Perhaps more time is required for manpower programs to make significant changes in unemployment and income of workers.

The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973 (CETA) provides that the economically disadvantaged are to receive priority and that community based institutions are to participate in the planning process and are to be given due consideration as delivery agents. CETA has the potential to increase the impact of manpower services for blacks.

### **CONCLUSION**

We reiterate the basic point made at the outset of this discussion: A review of the facts concerning changes in black employment since 1960 justifies neither the extreme pessimism nor the extreme optimism that have

been expressed on this matter recently. There has been progress since 1960, and there is good cause to attribute a large share of this progress to the legislative initiatives that were undertaken during the 1960's--most notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the new programs in human resource development. The fact that substantial progress has been made must not be allowed to obscure the equally important fact that black-white differentials remain intolerably large even after account is taken of factors which might "explain" these differences. We could not reasonably have expected to obliterate all or even most of the effects of three centuries of racial discrimination in only a few years. Even though we have made significant progress, we should also have learned that there is no simple, all-encompassing solution for the inequalities that have resulted from past and present racial discrimination. The continuation of substantial efforts on many fronts is essential.

As this statement is written, there is general recognition that the nation is now in a serious recession. Past experience shows that blacks bear a disproportionate share of the adverse impacts of recession. When the national unemployment rate goes up, the black rate goes up faster. When the national income falls, black income falls more rapidly. When layoffs come, the last hired are usually the first fired; and blacks are represented among the last hired. Most of the gains that are outlined in this statement were effected during a period of great national prosperity, and the gains are imperiled by a recession of the depth and duration now foreseen by many analysts. The present recession is unique in our history in that it has arrived during a time of double-digit inflation. This conjunction of problems has produced demands to reduce government expenditures for the purpose of countering inflation. At the federal level the view has been expressed that the only categories of expenditure in which substantial reductions are possible are in the social programs which have been adopted in the past decade. We believe that this approach to the control of inflation would incur unacceptably long-run social costs; it would endanger a part--possibly a substantial part--of the progress towards the narrowing of racial inequalities by dismantling or crippling the human development programs of recent years. Such a course could intensify the adverse impact of recession on blacks. Public policy should be aimed at lessening, not increasing, those impacts.

We urge not merely the continuation but the strengthening of on-going efforts in many fields to overcome the economic effects of racial discrimination. We urge prompt consideration and enactment of a substantial public service employment program to help take up the recession-induced slack in

the job market. We believe that better ways to fight inflation can be found than drastically reducing our expenditures on human development programs. We recognize the needs for continuous monitoring and realistic evaluation of manpower and related programs to develop their maximum effectiveness. We urge continued efforts to improve the effectiveness of education at all levels for blacks as well as whites. We particularly urge less rhetoric and more action on the critical subject of welfare reform. Although there are about as many whites as blacks on welfare rolls there is evidence that the outcomes of the present system have had an especially adverse effect on black families. The effective enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in employment has really only begun, and we believe that increased effort in this area also is essential.

We believe that one of the substantial, though intangible, gains of the past decade has been that the white majority has grown accustomed to seeing black faces in places where they have rarely been seen in the past. We believe that more white Americans than ever before now accept the rightness of the goal of racial equality. Even though that goal may seem impossibly distant to some, we conclude that substantial progress has been made in the past decade and that the way has been opened for greater progress in the future.

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