

Chapter Four

Desegregating Southern Labor Markets

By the 1930s, labor markets in the South had come to display a distinct “racial wage gap,” supported by systems of *vertical* workplace segregation. Not only were job categories classified by race, but black wage rates typically peaked about where white pay grades began. These structures persisted through World War II and the 1950s, showing few signs of softening even in the presence of rapid urbanization and industrial employment growth. During this period, federal efforts to mitigate labor market discrimination were largely ineffective in the South, fostering the widespread impression that substantive changes in this area were virtually impossible.

Nonetheless, access to well-paying “responsible jobs” was a core part of the Civil Rights agenda all along – contrary to the belief that the movement’s focus shifted from “rights” to “economics” only after the legislative successes of the mid-1960s. In response to these demands, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act had a dramatic effect on regional labor markets, breaking down segregation barriers and opening a wide range of job opportunities to blacks for the first time. The most extreme case of segregation and the most discontinuous break with historical practice was the textiles industry. Opening southern textiles to black workers was a genuine accomplishment of the Civil Rights campaign, though it is missing from most historical narratives of the movement.

Integrating Southern Textiles

The operative labor force of the Southern textiles industry was virtually all-white for more than a century, a pattern dating back to antebellum times. Slaves were successfully used in textile mills during the depressed 1840s, but they were pulled out in favor of agriculture during the booming 1850s, and when the regional industry began its postbellum resurgence, it drew first upon whites for reasons of both experience and racial favoritism. Although the ascendancy of the southern branch relative to New England was based on the cheapness of its labor, southern blacks were not utilized, and this exclusion was persistent in the face of advocacy and experimentation with alternatives. Economists have referred to this as an “ideal textbook example of Kenneth Arrow’s model of discrimination,” in which an initial racial exclusion became perpetuated by fixed costs of employment policies coupled with racial hostility on the part of white employees.

Economists often distinguish models of discrimination based on “employer prejudice” from those driven by “worker prejudice.” But both mechanisms are needed to comprehend the exclusionary segregation that came to prevail in southern textiles. If employers could have quietly added a few black workers to an all-white mill, the extreme contrast in racial experience profiles might gradually have faded. But such efforts in the 1890s met with violent rebellion by white workers. A series of experiments with all-black cotton mills between 1895 and 1905 were watched with genuine curiosity within the industry, but all of them failed. With hindsight these failures may be attributed to a lack of worker experience and impatience on the part of capital; but the perverse effect was to confirm the prevailing belief that blacks could not handle factory work. The family-based character of the mill village added a social dimension to racial exclusion.¹

This long-entrenched industry tradition changed abruptly following enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Figure 1 displays the share of black workers in the textile mills of South Carolina from 1918 to 1981. As of 1964, the black female share was virtually zero, while the black male share was barely five percent – almost entirely “outside” laboring jobs such as carrying and opening cotton crates or janitorial work. The black share jumped to more than 20 percent in 1970 and to more than one-third by 1980. The South Carolina figures are displayed because of that state’s unique annual labor reports, but the trends in all the southern textile states were similar: A century of rigidity followed by rapid change beginning in 1965. In oral histories collected in the early 1980s, black workers in textile areas referred to integration as “the change,” and associated it with the reversal of black regional migration between the 1970s and 1980s.²

How should we understand this historic transformation? From the 1960s to the present, observers have dismissed the significance of “the change,” on the grounds that textile employers turned to blacks only because of the pressures of the labor market during the boom years of the 1960s, offering them low-status, low-paying positions that whites would no longer accept. Thus Richard Rowan wrote in 1970 that “Negroes would have been hired in textile mills without government pressure in the 1960s. The labor

¹ This paragraph draws upon Arrow, “Models of Job Discrimination”; Wright, *Old South, New South*, pp. 187-192; Whatley and Wright, “Race, Human Capital, and Labour Markets,” pp. 273-281. The reference to southern textiles and the Arrow model is in Butler, Heckman, and Payner, “The Impact of the Economy and of the State,” p. 240.

² Fredrickson, “Four Decades of Change,” 71, 75.

market brought the major change.” Mary Fredrickson maintained in 1983 that “when ‘the change’ occurred it was both carefully planned and swiftly implemented...The relative ease with which Southern employers, generally a group intransigent in the face of federal mandates, responded to the regulations of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance reflected the industry’s need for new workers and a growing reliance on black labor.”³

Every careful empirical study, however, rejects the proposition that the racial revolution in southern textiles can be “explained away” as a self-interested employer response to labor market conditions. Earlier episodes of labor market tightness, including both world wars, brought no such lasting changes. On the basis of EEOC reports filed by employers in North and South Carolina, Alice Kidder and colleagues found that measures of county-level labor market pressures (unemployment and the ratio of employment to population) were not correlated with increases in black textile employment. This finding was replicated in later research by Nobel laureate James J. Heckman and co-authors, who found that the break in demand for black labor occurred almost simultaneously in the textile counties of South Carolina, regardless of local demographic or economic conditions. It is true that wages and turnover rates for white workers increased during the 1960s, but few mill workers were actually transferring to newer, higher-skill industries, and many textile firms reported far more applicants than positions throughout the period. The evidence thus confirms Kidder’s summary statement that “it is clear that the textile industry could have found white workers to take the 20,000 jobs added in the mid-sixties in textiles had it been determined to do so.”⁴

These findings do not refute the idea that employers did indeed have an economic interest in expanding the pool of available labor. Echoing a common refrain, one textile executive wrote that the Civil Rights Act was a “blessing in disguise” for us, because it facilitated their efforts to overcome white resistance to “the changing social mores of our times.” In the same year the *Winston-Salem Journal* reported: “If anyone complains, management can blame the government.” Some years later, the personnel manager of Burlington Mills recalled: “The government gave us a nice way to facilitate it and if

³ Rowan, “The Negro in the Textile Industry,” p. 135; Fredrickson, “Four Decades of Change,” p. 73.

⁴ Kidder, “Federal Compliance Efforts,” pp. 354-56; Butler, Heckman, Payner, “The Impact of the Economy,” pp. 243, 309-14; Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, pp. 52-3.

anybody wanted to complain about it, white people who would say ‘hey why are you hiring all of these black people,’ you’d say ‘because the government forces us to do this,’ you could place the blame on the government.”⁵

But these recollections were after the fact. Southern employers did not speak out in favor of Title VII during the debate over the Civil Rights Act, and the voting on this section was as regional as on other parts of the bill. When the EEOC held hearings in Charlotte NC on employment discrimination in southern textiles in 1967, employers declined to participate, and several were bitterly critical of the proceedings. The pioneering black workers hired in the first wave after 1965 certainly had no doubt that federal legislation was critical in changing company policies. Corine Lytle Cannon, one of the first black employees hired at Cannon Mills in Kannapolis NC, told an interviewer: “That was the whole thing. It would never have been if it had not been for the Civil Rights Act. It would still be like it were.” Interestingly, most white workers interviewed shared this view, though not necessarily with the same positive sentiments.⁶

The mobilization of black job applicants asserting their rights helps to explain a challenge that has puzzled researchers in this area, namely how could small, underfunded enforcement agencies such as the EEOC and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance have had such a dramatic impact on the industry? Observers often cite President Johnson’s Executive Order 11246 of 1965, which prohibited discrimination in firms with federal contracts, and some studies do find a positive correlation between such contracts and expanded black employment. But such effects explain only a small part of the overall shift. EEOC procedures were complex and time-consuming, so that the share of complaints leading to court action was minuscule. Yet the effect of the law was large and immediate! The direct reason was that many potential black applicants were following the legislation closely and acted accordingly. Floyd Harris, one of the first black textile workers in West Point, Georgia, recalled: “I was active in the social revolution that went on from the fifties through the sixties and early seventies, so I was aware of what the black leaders were talking about. We wrote the laws and they passed the Civil Rights

⁵ Quoted in Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, p. 51; “Federal Policy and the Racial Integration of Southern Industry,” pp. 157-58.

⁶ Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, pp. 53-55. On the legislative history, see Paul Burstein, *Discrimination, Jobs and Politics*, pp. 9, 53. For adverse industry reaction to the Charlotte forum, see “Negro Gains Found in Textile Industry,” *NYT* January 12, 1967.

bill, and I knew that if the federal government made it a law it'd have to be followed. Our management here is smart and they knew it too.”⁷

Such assertiveness was actively fostered by the EEOC. Figure 2 displays a flyer issued in 1967 shortly after the Charlotte hearings, calling attention to the change in the industry's racial climate and virtually urging blacks to apply for textile jobs. One could easily have mistaken the flyer for an industry recruitment ad, but in fact it was a government document, complete with information on whom to contact if you were turned away or mistreated. Confronted with such raised expectations on the part of applicants, it is little wonder that management felt it had little choice but to comply.

Thus we have another example, with some parallels to public accommodations, where southern business was compelled or at least impelled by outside authority to take actions serving its own best economic interest, as became clear shortly after the event. Management shared many of the same racial prejudices that were held by white workers, and their “enlightened” views on integration emerged only after a learning process based on experience and observation at their own firms. The first black hires were approached with extreme caution in an effort to identify “safe Negroes,” through detailed screening and perhaps the personal recommendation of someone at the firm. New black workers were often placed in the most menial and undesirable positions, reflecting management's perception of their limited capacities. In these circumstances, evaluation of a worker's performance could easily be contaminated by hostility and doubts about their competence on the part of supervisors. Relatively soon, however, management learned that the first black workers were actually better qualified and motivated than the average for whites. In many cases, race relations on the shop floor improved over time, as stereotypes on both sides were undermined by experience.

Timothy Minchin recounts a particularly striking example of managerial opinions changing on the basis of evidence. Robert Gardiner, personnel manager at Dan River Mills, was genuinely astonished in 1969 to read a newspaper article in which a textile executive claimed that blacks had proven themselves to be good textile workers. Gardiner wrote to a colleague: “When I read this comment....I was curious because, from

⁷ Quoted in Fredrickson, “Four Decades of Change,” p. 73. Statistical results on federal contracts are in Kidder, “Federal Compliance Efforts,” pp. 356-60, and Butler, Heckman, Payner, “The Impact of the Economy and the State,” pp. 321-25.

all I have heard, the Negroes we are employing are shiftless, lazy, don't want to work and leave as soon as they are hired." So a Dan River team undertook a systematic study of comparative worker performance in their own company, the results of which showed conclusively that blacks had lower rates of absenteeism and turnover than whites, and "no discernible difference in productivity," except that black workers scored marginally higher than whites in some job classifications. The same absence of difference was reported by the manager of Erwin Mills, a division of Burlington Industries: "On turnover, absenteeism, and job performance, we can't tell the difference, really. Their work record and performance are comparable with those of any other group." In light of these assessments, perhaps we should not be surprised that according to a 1969 *New York Times* report: "Virtually all of the large companies have begun to preach a doctrine of equal, color-blind employment."⁸

Was the Textiles Industry a "Hollow Prize"?

A common response to this account of breaking an industrial color line is to say that the gains were hardly worth the effort, because the American textiles industry was in decline. On this view, the textiles jobs opened to black workers were only a fleeting mirage, as these jobs were soon eliminated by labor-saving technologies and foreign competition. Thus, famed Civil Rights attorney Jack Greenberg writes: "Textiles turned out to be a mistake, because the industry was declining and technology was replacing a growing share of labor."⁹

This dismissive assessment is itself both anachronistic and shortsighted. The first generation of black textile workers had no doubt that their new employment opportunities constituted a major step forward economically. EEOC records show that mill jobs paid around \$90 per week, compared to \$25 per week for domestic work. For struggling semi-subsistence farmers, the desegregated industry offered the same escape route from poverty for many blacks that it had for earlier generations of white hill people. Speaking to an interviewer years later, retired mill worker William "Sport" Suggs was emphatic:

⁸ Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, pp. 265-6. See also the table of turnover rates on p. 183. Roy Reed, "Industry in South Woos Negro Labor," *NYT* May 19, 1969, p. 42; Reese Cleghorn, "The Mill: A Giant Step for the Southern Negro," *NYT* November 9, 1969, p. 34.

⁹ Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, p. 446. Similarly, Minchin writes that "the desegregation of textiles and paper occurred at a time of declining employment opportunities" (*From Rights to Economics*, p. 43).

“The mill job was definitely something that made my living better. The wages were much higher...I was glad, and a whole lot of black people were pulled up, made their living a whole lot better. I bought this old house here...I sent three of my children to college.”¹⁰

Because textiles was the South’s largest industry, its desegregation was the single largest contributor to the sharp increase in relative black incomes between 1965 and 1975. According to economists John Donohue and James Heckman, this jump was an exclusively southern regional phenomenon. Thus the textiles example stands in sharp contrast to the much stouter resistance to black entry mounted by white construction workers in the northern states.¹¹

Nor is it true to say that textiles was in decline at the time of the Civil Rights revolution. Employment grew rapidly throughout the 1960s, both in textiles and the closely related apparel industries. It is true that total national employment in these industries peaked in the mid-1970s, but the pace of decline was moderate until the 1990s. Total black employment in southern textiles increased from less than 100,000 in 1970 to more than 220,000 in the early 1990s, so that the industry continued to provide an escape route from poverty for a full generation of African-Americans. A notable feature of this experience is that the gains were realized by a generation whose educational opportunities had been severely restricted. These economic advances cannot be seen as a return to *Brown vs. Board of Education*, because progress in school desegregation was quantitatively insignificant before 1968 – though they might be considered a delayed return to the longer-term improvement in the quality of segregated black schools. A second important feature is that these relative gains were sustained over time, even after the industry began to decline and the political climate had changed. Perhaps one channel for this persistence was that mill workers like Sport Suggs were able to transmit some of their own economic gains to the next generation, in the form of better opportunities for education and access to new, growing sectors of the economy.

¹⁰ Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, p. 32; Reed, “Industry in South,” p. 42. For additional references to black mill workers sending their children to college, see Cleghorn, “The Mill,” p. 156; Byerly, *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls*, pp. 138, 154.

¹¹ Donohue and Heckman, “Continuous versus Episodic Change,” pp. 1608-1610. The contrast between southern textiles and northern construction is emphasized by Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough*, pp. 78-103.

If textiles employment declined over time mainly because younger, better-educated workers were pulled out of the industry in favor of higher-skill, better-paying positions in other sectors, as the nation's comparative advantage shifted, this would not be considered a major economic or social concern. This is not quite what we see from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, however, when economic gains largely came to an end for both black and white workers, in textiles and elsewhere. In light of this transition to slower growth, it is understandable that some observers became disillusioned about the economic benefits of the Civil Rights revolution. But this shift reflected broader changes in national labor markets and labor market policies, rather than inherent weaknesses or strategic mistakes by the Civil Rights generation.

Beyond Textiles

In other southern industries, the impact of the Civil Rights Act on racial employment patterns was not as dramatic as in textiles. Figure 3 displays the South Carolina data for all manufacturing other than textiles. The immediate effect of the act itself is barely visible, but black employment doubled between 1966 and 1972, and then continued to rise across the 1970s. Notably, fluctuations in black employment paralleled those for whites. Although the black share was rising, there was no span of years where blacks were hired at the direct expense of white jobs.

There were two main reasons for this gradualism. Textiles was extreme in its policy of virtually complete exclusion of blacks from operative positions. Other industries employed at least a moderate number of black workers, but only in jobs governed by segregated "lines of progression". In terms of pay, the white trajectory typically began at about the point where black wages peaked. In these industries, the progress of desegregation was not well measured by black employment *per se*, but by access to the higher-paying job classifications. The second reason for the slower pace is that these issues played out through an accelerating blizzard of complaints and litigation made possible by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

Within the first five years of the Act and for some time after that, it was by no means obvious to observers that a revolution had occurred in southern labor markets. Studies conducted in the late 1960s or early 1970s emphasized instead the stubborn

persistence of barriers to progress: recalcitrant employers skeptical about the aptitude and qualifications of black workers; hostility on the part of white co-workers, who also shared these beliefs about low black ability; ignorance of job opportunities on the part of blacks, or an unwillingness to apply for jobs because they anticipated rejection; and the relatively limited work experience and educational background that most southern blacks actually had at that point, providing an aura of credence to white prejudicial beliefs. Writing in 1968, Louis Ferman reported “no large-scale movement of Negroes into jobs from which they had been traditionally barred.” A study directed by labor economist Ray Marshall using EEOC data for 1966 and 1969 stressed the large North-South gap in black employment and occupational status and the very limited progress in closing the gap to that point. Reports from southern cities informed and confirmed this sense of pessimism, especially for black men. For example, the director of a new Apprenticeship Information Center in Houston reported that young black men refused to believe counselors who tried to recruit them into the program by claiming that “times have changed”. When the study was published in 1978 (though still based mainly on 1960s data), editors Marshall and Christian wrote that racial exclusions and educational deficiencies were generating “a widening of the gap between black and white incomes in the South.”¹²

With the aid of hindsight, we can say with confidence that these assessments were mistaken, and that this was in fact a uniquely favorable period for black progress in southern labor markets. But the pace was highly uneven. It seems accurate to associate the historical break with passage of the Civil Rights Act, because in the cases that have been closely studied, no significant change was underway prior to that point. But utilization of Title VII often required years of litigation. The enforcement powers of the EEOC had been severely weakened during the legislative process, as the political price for Republican support. It was not until the 1972 that the EEOC gained authority to seek judicial enforcement, and that the provisions of Title VII were extended to federal, state and local governments.¹³ Perhaps most important were court decisions confirming that the act would indeed require major changes in southern employer behavior.

¹² Ferman, *The Negro and Equal Employment Opportunities*, p. 65; Marshall, *Negro Employment in the South*, Volume II; Marshall and Christian, *Employment of Blacks in the South*, p. 182.

¹³ Chen, *The Fifth Freedom*, pp. 182-196.

The paper industry paid substantially higher wages than textiles, a consideration that may help to explain why it soon became “perhaps the most litigated industry in the south,” according to a Civil Rights lawyer speaking in 1977. As industry executives later acknowledged, they had no plans to employ blacks in any but menial positions before the Civil Rights Act.¹⁴ But as in textiles, black paper workers were keenly aware of the passage of the Act, and filed for job transfers almost immediately after it came into effect on July 2, 1965. When the transfers were not approved, workers filed suit under Title VII, often with the support of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. In a landmark 1968 case, the Justice Department sued Crown-Zellerbach, a major paper employer based in Bogalusa, Louisiana, along with its leading union. The outcome was a court determination that even a superficially neutral seniority system could be illegal if it hindered rectification of longstanding restrictions on the advancement opportunities of black workers. This decision led in turn to the Jackson Memorandum of 1968, negotiated by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, in which International Paper and its southern unions accepted the principle that blacks could advance to their “rightful place” on the company-wide seniority ladder. This agreement certainly did not end litigation, and many black workers (as well as the EEOC) were deeply dissatisfied with the resulting system. But black representation in industry blue-collar jobs gradually increased from 15 to nearly 30 percent by the 1990s, including many of the higher-paying, machine-tending jobs they had previously been denied.¹⁵

Another landmark Supreme Court decision was *Griggs vs. Duke Power* (1971), which established the “disparate impact” test for discrimination in promotion criteria. The case itself nicely illustrates the wide range of uncertainty about the meaning and significance of Title VII, and why it ultimately had a major impact as interpreted by the courts. At its Dan River plant in North Carolina (opened in the 1950s), Duke Power followed a standard practice of hiring blacks only into a segregated Labor Department, in which the highest wage was lower than the lowest wage paid in the all-white departments. When the Civil Rights Act was passed, the company instituted a number of changes that to its black employees seemed merely cosmetic. Explicit racial job

¹⁴ Minchin, *Color of Work*, p. 65, citing a 1967 interview by Herbert Northrup, and his own interview of the manager of industrial relations at the Union Camp Company in Savannah, Georgia.

¹⁵ Minchin, *Color of Work*, pp. 49, 62-64, 149-162, 213-214; *From Rights to Economics*, pp. 38-39.

categories were eliminated (though facilities were not desegregated), but in their place, minimum scores on IQ-type tests were imposed for transfers into all jobs other than the Labor Department. This was in addition to the requirement of a high-school diploma, which had been added – again excepting the Labor Department – in 1955. Workers already in these positions (exclusively white) were exempt from these requirements. The company clearly felt that it could achieve compliance by phasing in merit criteria in place of race, and that consequent changes would be gradual and modest.¹⁶

On March 1, 1966, 14 Duke Power janitors signed a letter of complaint, placing it on the plant manager's desk. This was a worker-initiated action. The instigator, a former tobacco sharecropper named Willie Boyd, had been active in the NAACP for many years and closely followed the passage of the Civil Rights Act. The company responded by informing the men that standards were being raised, and that they were welcome to take the test.¹⁷ Four days later, the group forwarded their complaint to the EEOC, which tried to resolve the matter through conciliation. The company did indeed promote the first black worker (a high school graduate) to the Coal Department in August of that year, but it refused all other changes in job practices, essentially snubbing the EEOC. Only then did the workers turn to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, which assisted them in filing suit on September 9, 1966. Duke's resistance was initially rewarded when the district court judge refused to allow testimony on the company's explicitly racial pre-Title VII system, and rejected the case on the basis of the Tower Amendment allowing the use of professionally-developed tests in employment decisions. The Court of Appeals reversed this decision in part in 1970, rejecting the argument that prior practices were insulated from remedial action, but agreeing that there was no showing of discriminatory intent in the diploma and test requirements. Ultimately, however, Supreme Court ruled unanimously – five years after the initial complaint – that tests having a “disparate impact” on minorities could be invalid regardless of intent, unless shown to be demonstrably a reasonable measure of job performance. As a result of the decision, the high school graduates in Duke's Labor Department were promoted, and the education

¹⁶ This account draws upon Smith, *Race, Labor and Civil Rights*, especially chapters 2-6.

¹⁷ Boyd and another janitor did take the test, which consisted of fifty relatively complex questions to be answered in twelve minutes, though the job they were applying for was hauling coal. Neither man passed.

and testing requirements were waived for the others. Willie Boyd ultimately became the first black supervisor over white men at the Dan River plant.¹⁸

More fundamentally, *Griggs* and related rulings gave new credibility to EEOC guidelines and impelled a much more thoroughgoing change than firms had anticipated. One legal scholar writes: “*Griggs* infused Title VII with extraordinary power... Without *Griggs*, the statute might have warranted little more than a text note in law case courts.” Citations to the case in federal courts rose steadily through the 1970s, reaching a peak in 1980 before declining in the next decade.¹⁹

The Regional Character of Labor Market Change

Numerous studies have identified a positive statistical effect of federal enforcement on black employment during this era, either by comparing covered and uncovered firms, or by finding evidence of discontinuity when the law changed.²⁰ These estimated effects are typically small and account for only a fraction of the overall change in black employment. An additional channel was private litigation, as in *Griggs*. Between 1964 and 1981, more than 5000 Title VII were decided in federal courts, many of them private. More than 1700 were class action suits. Impressive as they are, these numbers do not include cases settled out of court or decided in state courts. Sometimes merely initiating litigation could generate a desired response. Even in textiles, an industry that seemed to have quickly learned the advantages of desegregation, positions were often opened to blacks only after legal action was taken or threatened. Thus, at the J.P. Stevens plant in Abbeville, South Carolina, the share of blacks assigned to the position of utility man jumped from 10.3 percent to 20.5 percent, immediately after the filing of a lawsuit on March 16, 1972. At the same juncture, the share of doffers who were black jumped from 3.8 percent to 28.6 percent, and spinners from 9.6 percent to

¹⁸ This promotion was not altogether smooth. After first trying to persuade Boyd not to apply for the supervisory job, plant managers then promoted a white man along with Boyd to the same position, making it a two-man job! (Smith, *Race, Labor and Civil Rights*, pp. 178-179.)

¹⁹ Blumrosen, “The Legacy of *Griggs*,” pp. 1, 3, 10.

²⁰ Ashenfelter and Heckman, “Measuring the Effect of an Antidiscrimination Program”; Freeman, “The Changing Labor Market for Black Americans”; Chay, “The Impact of Federal Civil Rights Policy”; Chay and Honore, “Estimation of Semiparametric Censored Regression Models”; Leonard, “The Impact of Affirmative Action on Employment”; Leonard, “The Impact of Affirmative Action Regulation and Equal Employment Law on Black Employment”; Carrington, McCue and Pierce, “Using Establishment Size to Measure the Impact of Title VII”.

24.5 percent, and blacks were assigned for the first time to the position of warper and creel tender.²¹ Further – and this may have been the most important long-term channel -- in the wake of *Griggs*, many large corporations hired EEO specialists and implemented equal-employment policies without direct government intervention.²²

Although precise figures are lacking, the great majority of early Title VII cases were from the South, and the employment and income effects were greatest in that region. The longstanding explicitly racial structures in southern firms provided an inviting target for litigation, in contrast to the northern states, the majority of which had enacted fair-employment legislation in the decades prior to the Civil Rights Act.²³ Desegregating bathroom facilities and cafeterias was especially difficult, resisted by many southern employers until compelled by federal agencies. Even after compliance, firms often had to deal with objections and threats from disgruntled white workers.²⁴

From a quantitative standpoint, the reason that Title VII had its greatest impact in the South is that discrimination in that region took the form of vertical segregation, the virtual exclusion of blacks from whole job categories above the lowest. Thus employment policy could have rapid effects on relative black occupational status and earnings, simply by removing these barriers. Butler, Heckman, and Payner find that most relative wage growth for blacks between 1960 and 1970 was due to the shift from “laborer” positions into higher-paying “production” operative and craftsman jobs, plus relative wage increases within these categories.²⁵ This conclusion is consistent with that of sociologists Mark Fossett, Omer Galle, and William Kelly. Using an ordinal measure of occupational segregation with decennial census data, the authors find that changes in occupational inequality during the 1950s favored whites in the South, but blacks in the non-South; in contrast, shifts in southern occupational inequality during the 1960s and 1970s favored blacks.²⁶

²¹ Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, p. 59.

²² Leonard, “The Impact of Affirmative Action Regulation,” pp. 60-61; Blumrosen, “The Legacy of *Griggs*,” p. 10.

²³ Stainback et al, “Race and Workplace Integration,” pp. 1205-1207. The effectiveness of fair-employment laws outside the South is demonstrated by Collins, “The Labor-Market Impact of State-Level Anti-discrimination Laws, 1940-1960.”

²⁴ Minchin, *From Rights to Economics*, pp. 34-36.

²⁵ “The Impact of the Economy and the State,” pp. 233-234.

²⁶ Fossett et al, “Racial Occupational Inequality, 1940-1980”.

Was It Management or Labor Unions?

In trying to explain persistent resistance to workplace desegregation and black occupational advancement, economists find it far easier to understand the perspective of labor than management. The overlap between emotional motives for racial separation and economic interests in exclusion is an old story in the history of labor unions.²⁷ Indeed most southern craft unions, like their counterparts elsewhere in the country, were strictly segregated, severely limiting the opportunities for black workers. Even when national industrial unions emerged from the 1930s with a racially inclusive organizing message, they typically found that their southern branches were stoutly opposed to integration. When CIO President Philip Murray ordered in 1950 that all forms of segregation be ended in Steelworkers meeting halls, he was firmly rebuffed in Birmingham. Into the 1960s, the overwhelming majority of southern steel workers were in “racially identifiable departments” governed by segregated (and highly unequal) seniority lists. And this was the prevailing pattern throughout the South.²⁸

This channel is analytically straightforward: For a combination of racial and economic motives, white workers objected to the presence of blacks on equal terms; employers acquiesced in this prejudice for fear of alienating or losing experienced incumbent workers, especially if these workers were represented by a union. The problem with this simple narrative is that in case and after case, unionized or not, southern management showed no interest in resisting or undermining segregation. Southern textile firms were unconstrained by unions yet virtually all-white prior to the Civil Rights Act. Where labor and management jointly agreed on a plan of racial separation, as in steel, paper, and rubber, it is often difficult to discern which side was the initiator and which the protector of the resulting system. In Alabama, with one of the longest industrial histories in the region, a survey of firms in all major branches of the economy found not a single case before the 1960s where management

...drawing on cost calculations, business norms, or some abstract concept of justice, chose to desegregate the work place or break down job discrimination...

²⁷ A recent restatement is Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor*.

²⁸ Norrell, “Caste in Steel,” p. 685; Nelson, “CIO Meant One Thing for the Whites,” pp. 116-117. Among many accounts of race and unionism in the South, see Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*. An economic analysis of segregation in southern railroads is Sundstrom, “Half a Career”.

Even in retrospect, off the record, within the confines of their own offices, businessmen did not recall that the racial order created any “impediments” or “difficulties” for their enterprises.²⁹

The conclusion is inescapable that, with rare exceptions, southern management shared the perception that blacks were inferior candidates for advanced positions and found it all but impossible to contemplate a genuinely desegregated future for their firms.

Thus southern management did not jump for the opportunity to use Title VII as a means of escape from the constraints of white prejudice or unions. Instead, they found ways to rationalize their racially exclusive choices. A producer of fabricated metals told an interviewer in 1966: “Negroes don’t want to be promoted.”³⁰ Citing blacks’ poor educational backgrounds, a paper executive asserted in 1971 that they were “not good prospects for skilled jobs.”³¹ Faced with pressure from federal agencies to abolish explicitly racial criteria for hiring and promotion, the employer’s first reaction in numerous cases was to institute formal test-taking as an alternative.³² Exactly what management’s thinking was is difficult to determine. No doubt they were genuinely concerned about the dilution of quality in skilled positions. But the fact remains that the tests were imposed only after Title VII was enacted, and there was little doubt about their implications for the race issue. In the circumstances, the Supreme Court had reason to view testing requirements as a vehicle for preserving de facto segregation, and therefore to insist that tests for promotion had to be specifically related to the jobs in question.

The overall record of organized labor in the Civil Rights revolution is decidedly mixed. As segregated organizations whose members had a vested interest in privileged positions in the labor market, unions were clearly part of the problem. Despite the liberal position of the national United Auto Workers on the race issue, a survey in the mid-1950s showed that over 80 percent of the members of the UAW local in Memphis (representing workers at an International Harvester plant) belonged to white Citizens’ Councils; in

²⁹ Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development*, pp. 231-33.

³⁰ Habbe, *Company Experience with Negro Employment*, p. 145.

³¹ Quoted in Minchin, *From Rights to Economics*, p. 32.

³² In addition to Duke Power, another example is provided by Nelson for the Atlantic Steel Company. After making concessions on the issue of transfer rights, the company unilaterally imposed a test-taking criterion as a condition for such transfers (“CIO Meant One Thing for the Whites,” p. 135).

Alabama, 83 percent of white union members voted for George Wallace in 1968.³³ Yet as Alan Draper points out, the labor movement did at least offer an alternative vision of shared interests that was helpful in facilitating change in the 1960s, albeit under heavy federal pressure. The national labor federations and many southern state labor councils maintained steady pressure towards racial liberalization on their reluctant white southern members. The Virginia AFL-CIO supported black voter registration as early as 1959, while the 1960 North Carolina AFL-CIO convention passed a resolution applauding the student sit-ins at lunch counters. In Mississippi, the AFL-CIO Industrial Unions Department contributed \$5,000 to CORE to help defray expenses incurred by the Freedom Rides. Clause Ramsey, 26-year president of the Mississippi AFL-CIO, received Civil Rights awards from the NAACP and the A. Philip Randolph Institute in the 1980s.³⁴

To be sure, many of these gestures of support for Civil Rights were vehemently protested by white union members. But in the post-Civil Rights era, organized labor has been a leading force in efforts to build biracial political coalitions in the South. For labor as well as management, desegregation was a learning experience.

Complementarity Between Education and Occupational Advance

The entry of southern black workers into previously-closed blue collar occupations constituted a significant step forward for a generation whose educational opportunities were severely limited. But it would have been a one-time breakthrough rather than an enduring revolution, if these gains could not be transmitted to the next generation, through access to education that opened the door to skilled and white-collar jobs. We do observe long-term progress in black schooling in the South, but the historical link between education and the labor market is complex.

The trend towards better-quality black schools pre-dates the Civil Rights Act and even the *Brown* decision. From the disastrous setback associated with disfranchisement at the turn of the twentieth century, there was a long, slow improvement in the relative quality of black schools, propelled by agitation, litigation, and private philanthropy – in

³³ Draper, *Conflict of Interests*, pp. 29, 121.

³⁴ Draper, *Conflicts of Interest*, pp. 37, 104-05, 158.

short, by the forerunners of the modern Civil Rights movement.³⁵ For the era in which we can clearly assign resources to students by race – the era of segregated schools -- by such indicators as pupil-teacher ratios, term length, and teacher salaries, black schools had progressed to near equality with white schools by the late 1950s.³⁶ The black high school graduation rate in the South increased from 18 percent (of twenty to twenty-four year-olds) in 1950 to 35 percent in 1960. Some economists attribute virtually the entire gain in relative black incomes to this long-term increase in black human capital.³⁷

The problem with this reductionist perspective is that it neglects the feedback from the labor market to the value of black schooling. Prior to mechanization, planters had a clear economic incentive to discourage black education. Why educate the black, they asked, “when as soon as one of the younger class gets so he can read and write and cipher, he wants to go to town. It is rare to find one who can read and write and cipher in the field at work.”³⁸ Ostensibly sympathetic whites, even philanthropic northerners, believed “that it is a crime for any teacher, white or black, to educate the negro for positions that are not open to him,” and that the purpose of black schools should be to “educate [blacks] for their environment and not out of it.”³⁹ When the Rosenwald Fund sought to sponsor black high schools in the South during the 1920s and early 1930s, they assured local officials that the training would not increase competition with whites for higher-skilled jobs. Thus black schools typically did not offer training in such subjects as stenography, accounting, bookkeeping, printing, or typing. The fund’s curriculum, expert acknowledged: “If commercial courses were offered in the negro school there would no doubt be tremendous pressure to get into them and the only result would be keen disappointment for almost everyone.” The black high school in the textile center of Greenville, South Carolina, excluded textiles entirely.⁴⁰

In the face of such disincentives, it is remarkable how much progress was achieved in black schools through sheer effort and willpower on the part of the NAACP. But persistent black students who overcame discouragements to complete high school

³⁵ Donohue, Heckman, and Todd, “The Schooling of Southern Blacks”.

³⁶ Card and Krueger, “School Quality and Relative Black/White Earnings,” pp. 167-68.

³⁷ Smith, “Race and Human Capital”; Smith and Welch, “Black Economic Progress Since Myrdal”.

³⁸ United States Industrial Commission, *Final Report*, p. 497.

³⁹ William H. Baldwin, Jr., quoted in Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, pp. 84, 91.

⁴⁰ Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, pp. 222-28.

sometimes found that they had to conceal this fact to gain employment. James Field was hired as a laborer at Union Bag in Savannah in the 1940s and was told “they didn’t want no smart black man.” As Field recounts: “When I filled my application out...I put ninth grade instead of twelfth, because I figured they didn’t want...no smart black man, in order to get hired. I was hired.”⁴¹

Despite the apparent improvement in quality, glaring gaps in curricula between black and white schools were still present in the 1960s. In Houston, the all-white vocational school offered training in air conditioning and refrigerator mechanics, drafting, machine shop, photography, printing, radio, television and welding – none of which were taught at any of the five Negro high schools. By that time training in auto mechanics was one of the more popular options in vocational education, but with a few exceptions, these courses were offered only at white high schools. Negroes were excluded from modeling schools and hospitals with nurses’ training. Similar differences were found in Chattanooga and Atlanta. In every case, high school officials defended their programs by saying that their curriculum was a rational response to job availability.⁴² After telling of a Negro supermarket checker with a college degree, the SRC report concluded: “Education may get you nowhere.”⁴³

Economists David Card and Alan Krueger show that the rate of return to black education increased sharply for the cohort born between 1940 and 1949 (i.e., those coming into the labor force in the late 1960s and 1970s). Because the return for southern-born blacks increased relative to whites and northern-born blacks, Card and Krueger argue that the rise was driven by prior improvements in the quality of black schools, and not simply by “economywide” reduction in discrimination. But if structural change in the labor market was highly region-specific, as argued here, then a simple identification of labor market returns and school quality does not hold. Indeed, the highest rate of return estimated by Card and Krueger is for northern-born blacks residing in the South in 1980, strongly suggesting that by that date, regional changes in the labor

⁴¹ Minchin, *Color of Work*, pp. 37-38.

⁴² Southern Regional Council, *The Negro and Employment Opportunities in the South*, reports on Houston, Chattanooga, Atlanta.

⁴³ Southern Regional Council, *Houston*, pp. 791-93.

market were more important than prior gains in southern black schools.⁴⁴ Expanding black job opportunities, in turn, fostered rising (derived) demand for education.

Thus we find that the labor market breakthroughs of the mid-1960s coincided with an accelerated increase in the black high school graduation rate in the South, from 35 percent in 1960 to 57 percent in 1970 – a period prior to any major progress in school desegregation – and a further increase to 71 percent by 1977. Black enrollment in higher education grew even more dramatically, from 84,000 in 1960 (overwhelmingly in historically black institutions) to 426,000 in 1976 (the majority at predominantly white institutions).⁴⁵ Complementarity between higher education and labor market desegregation is suggested by the simultaneous upsurge in recruitment visits by corporate representatives to historically black colleges, from an average of just four per school in 1960 to nearly three hundred per school in 1970.⁴⁶

Occupational Status: Moving Up in the Labor Market

This complementary progress in education and desegregation was reflected in advances in black occupational status throughout the urban South. Tables 1-5 display census figures for “middle-class” occupational categories in five geographically and economically diverse southern cities. The patterns are similar in virtually every case: little to no progress in the 1950s, in either shares or numbers; positive trends beginning in the 1960s, both in absolute numbers and the black share of the total, especially in clerical and skilled labor positions; strong positive growth by the end of the century in all cases. The 1950 starting point for the “professional” category may be somewhat misleading, in that it includes both ministers and schoolteachers. But in every other case, the advances reflect the desegregation of occupations and accelerated progress in black education, both consequences of the Civil Rights revolution of the 1960s.

Comparisons with Northern cities are difficult, because the census did not report occupational totals for nonwhites outside the South in 1950. But Table 6 draws on

⁴⁴ Card and Krueger, “School Quality and Black-White Relative Earnings,” pp. 153, 164-65. For the black cohort born between 1940 and 1949 and residing in the South in 1980, Card and Krueger estimate the rate of return to schooling as 7.69 percent for the southern-born and 9.49 percent for the northern-born (p. 164). Card and Krueger are unable to identify a statistically significant effect of black school quality on returns prior to the Civil Right Act (p. 183).

⁴⁵ Mingle, *Black Enrollment in Higher Education*.

⁴⁶ Freeman, *Black Elite*, pp. 34-36.

IPUMS data to compare the black occupational distribution for the entire South with that of the rest of the country, dividing the share in each category by the corresponding black share of the population. Aggregation on this scale is risky, but the exercise shows that in 1950, blacks were severely underrepresented in all of these occupations throughout the country, but even more so in the South than elsewhere. Neither region advanced by this measure during the 1950s, though black employment in clerical and sales jobs kept pace with the rising black population outside the South. The regional underrepresentation differential in skilled labor had disappeared by 1970, while in managerial, clerical, and sales jobs, the gap closed only over several decades. The table confirms that the potential for black progress was greater in the South in large part because their pre-Civil Rights occupational starting point was so low. But contrary to what a pure convergence model would predict, regional progress once underway seemed to gain momentum over time.

Compulsion versus Voluntarism

In seeking to understand the persistence of change, it helps to go back to an early 1960s debate about the best way to foster black employment gains. When President Kennedy issued his executive order in 1961, requiring firms with federal contracts to take “affirmative action” to end discrimination, he also created the President’s Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, headed by Vice President Lyndon Johnson, to oversee compliance. Great hopes were placed on a PCEEO subcommittee called Plans for Progress, created to promote voluntary fair employment practices among federal contractors. The initiator and first head of Plans for Progress was Atlanta lawyer and businessmen Robert Troutman, who also happened to have been a classmate of Robert Kennedy’s at Harvard. Within a year, 85 firms had signed on to the program, often with great fanfare and a White House ceremony. Troutman argued forcefully for the virtues of this approach in promoting lasting change: “Compulsion is not the thing. I’m a lawyer. I can show you how to get around the executive order. It’s got to be voluntary.”⁴⁷

Troutman and Plans for Progress came under intensive criticism. Herbert Hill, Jr., labor secretary of the NAACP, charged that the plans resulted in “more publicity than progress” and that firms had signed on “as a way of securing immunity from real

⁴⁷ Braestrup, “U.S. Panel Split Over Negro Jobs,” p. 17.

compliance with the anti-discrimination provision of their government contract.” As moderate a figure as Whitney M. Young, Jr., new executive director of the National Urban League, commented: “We’ve tried the voluntary approach for years, and nothing’s happened.” A report by former Urban League President Theodore W. Kheel, prepared at the request of Vice President Johnson urged the administration to give priority to compulsory approaches by using the leverage inherent in its power to cancel contracts with private companies. “Purely voluntary approaches,” he wrote, “are not likely to produce lasting results.” Under heavy pressure, Troutman resigned in August 1962.⁴⁸

Perhaps most devastating of all, a survey completed in January 1963 by the Southern Regional Council of 24 Atlanta employers, all of whom had approved Plans for Progress more than a year before, found that except for a handful, the plans were “largely meaningless.” Many regional managers were unaware of the Plan, or believed that it did not apply to “regional divisions like us.” Others knew of the Plan and the Executive Order, but “said their work was extremely technical, implying it was too technical for a Negro. Few appeared to have considered the hiring of Negroes as secretaries and clerical workers.” The SRC interviewers reported that many companies reflected the statement of one regional manager of a national firm: “We signed it because practically all of our major manufacturing is in the northern part of the country. When [we] signed this Plans for Progress thing we signed it as a corporation as a whole. It doesn’t mean that down here in Atlanta we have to hire them. This is a sales office.” Although some firms later disputed the SRC characterization, the undeniable quantitative truth was conveyed in a March 2, 1963, memo from Burke Marshall to Robert Kennedy: Despite reports of progress, “the numerical gains are slight.”⁴⁹

The verdict of history has clearly come down on the compulsory side. As recounted above, throughout the South it is difficult to find moves toward serious workplace desegregation prior to passage of the Civil Rights Act; even then, most employers resisted, delayed, and tried to minimize change, abandoning this position only as a kind of capitulation to the looming enforcement Title VII by the courts. Despite the decisiveness of this historical assessment, one may still ask whether the voluntarist side

⁴⁸ Braestrup, “U.S. Panel Split Over Negro Jobs,” p. 17; “White House Urged to Use Compulsion,” p. 1.

⁴⁹ Southern Research Council, “Plans for Progress: Atlanta Survey,” January 1963; Marshall Papers, Box 33, BM to RFK (March 2, 1963); Pomfret, “Negro-Job Pledge Is Found Flouted,” p. 1.

may have had something to contribute after all. If employers had persisted in doing only the bare minimum required by law, would the progress of desegregation have been anywhere near as far-reaching and persistent as in fact it was?

Virtually all of the early surveys of firms' experience with desegregation reported that the key to success was concerted determination by management to accomplish its goal, combined with explicit, no-nonsense communication of the goal to all employees. When management was half-hearted and reluctant, white workers often compounded the problem by complaining loudly and making life miserable for new black hires. But where company leadership made it clear that desegregation would happen and had their support, the widely-predicted departures of white workers almost never occurred.⁵⁰ Sometimes this new initiative entailed real soul-searching by executives, especially at companies that had regarded themselves as progressive on racial matters. At a 1965 conference, the manager of Employee Relations at International Harvester asserted that his firm was an early leader in race relations but acknowledged that segregated facilities had not been removed "until a few years ago." He went on to observe that "there are a few operations where, while Negroes are employed in substantial numbers, yet, somewhat inexplicably, they are not employed in certain work areas or departments. More importantly, their absence cannot be easily explained away solely by such as the obvious lack of qualified candidates." He attributed these patterns to the background of the decision-makers and the absence of concerted momentum from the top.⁵¹

No doubt most personnel managers were not this introspective. But sociologist Frank Dobbin argues that once the determination of the federal government and the courts became clear, laggard employers began a desperate search for practical desegregation policies that they could adopt and for metrics to use in their legal defense. The most readily available models were none other than the Plans for Progress, beginning with the celebrated Plan adopted in 1961 by Lockheed Aircraft for its plant in Marietta, Georgia. Drawing upon an infrastructure they already possessed, large national companies turned to their human relations personnel to formalize hiring criteria and

⁵⁰ Gourlay, *The Negro Salaried Worker*, pp. 14, 77-78; Habbe, *Company Experience with Negro Employment*, pp. 6-8, 110-118, 124-127, 128-131.

⁵¹ Henry C. Baker, "A Voluntary Approach," in Northrup and Rowan (eds.), *The Negro and Employment Opportunities*, pp. 111-121.

promotion procedures, with the explicit objective of taking these decisions out of the hands of foremen and lower-level managers who were likely to discriminate. When the courts adopted similar metrics for compliance in the wake of the *Griggs* decision, in effect the Plans for Progress were enacted into law in the 1970s.⁵²

From this perspective, the Civil Rights Act and Title VII enforcement initiated a process of institutional adaptation within American corporations, which subsequently developed a life of its own. Its momentum and survival power were enhanced when Title VII cases were extended to women in the 1970s. By the end of that decade, the majority of U.S. firms had adopted explicit antidiscrimination policies, personnel offices, job postings, and centralized hiring, promotion and discharge practices. “By the early 1980s,” according to Dobbin, “leading firms had troops on hand who were fighting for equal opportunity programs. They had internalized the civil rights movement.”⁵³

So entrenched had these programs become, that when the Reagan administration proposed to abolish the OFCCP and dismantle affirmative action in the 1980s, business groups successfully opposed these measures, reversing their position of two decades earlier. Surveys of major employers found that the great majority planned to maintain or extend their affirmative action programs, despite cutbacks in government enforcement.⁵⁴

Mainly in the South?

Accounts of the bureaucratization of equal employment pay almost no attention to its regional dimension. This is understandable, since the firms involved were national, and standardizing their personnel practices on a national basis was part of the process. Yet there is every reason to believe that these programs had their greatest impact in the South. Until the late 1960s, it was both government and management believed that employment discrimination was primarily a regional problem. One northern personnel manager later remarked: “We were the good guys. We never dreamed they meant us. The major thrust of the law seemed to be aimed at ‘the other fellow’ – at smaller, or less

⁵² Dobbin, *Inventing Equal Opportunity*, chapters 1-5. A similar thesis is presented in Delton, *Racial Integration in Corporate America*.

⁵³ Dobbin, *Inventing Equal Opportunity*, p. 158. For evidence on the spread of personnel offices and affirmative action policies, see the graphs on pp. 54, 87, 115, 117, 123. See also Bureau of National Affairs, *Equal Employment Opportunity*.

⁵⁴ Fisher, “Businessmen Like to Hire by the Numbers”; “Rethinking Weber”.

enlightened, or regional employers and at certain obviously discriminatory unions – but only occasionally or very indirectly at important national employers like us.” Of course this complacency proved to be mistaken. But in their formative phase, Plans for Progress and their affirmative action descendants did indeed have a regional focus.

The prototype Plan for Progress, at Lockheed-Marietta, was very much a southern phenomenon. The Director of Personnel and architect of the plan, Hugh Gordon, was a southerner, born in Norfolk, Virginia, and educated at Virginia Tech and Georgia Tech. When the California-based company first came to Georgia in 1951, its adoption of a segregated job system may have been somewhat reluctant, but it was nonetheless relatively firm throughout the 1950s. But Lockheed came in for heavy criticism when it was awarded a contract worth more than \$1 billion to build the C-141 Starlifter in March 1961, just one week after President Kennedy’s Executive Order banning discrimination in contractor firms. In response, Lockheed drew up and adopted the first Plan for Progress, announced at a White House ceremony on May 25th. The plan committed Lockheed not just to nondiscrimination, but to “aggressively seek out more qualified minority group candidates in order to increase the number of employees in many job categories.” Unlike many early signers, Lockheed was serious. Gordon well understood the need for outreach in order to achieve these goals, and so he launched an unprecedented series of recruiting visits to black high schools and colleges. The ready availability of these institutions and networks was distinctive to the South. Realizing that many potential black applicants were poorly prepared – more so in the South than elsewhere -- Gordon took pains to assure that black hires were included in training classes offered to employees on company time. Later he extended the outreach beyond Lockheed, organizing the Merit Employment Association for the Atlanta region and enlisting other leading firms in the effort. According to Dobbin, Lockheed’s plan embodied all of the core principles that became standard in affirmative action plans during the 1970s.⁵⁵

Many observers believe that progress toward racial equality in the labor market largely came to an end during the 1980s, when “the contract compliance program

⁵⁵ Dobbin, *Inventing Equal Opportunity*, pp. 14-15, 45-49, 56-61. Interview with Hugh L. Gordon, Kennesaw State University Oral History Project, July 18, 2000.

virtually ceased to exist in all but name” under the Reagan administration.⁵⁶ Resources available to the EEOC were drastically cut, and the Supreme Court moved to restrict race-conscious affirmative action measures. Dobbin writes: “In the 1980s, change slowed to a standstill. Blacks no longer gained more ground in industries subject to affirmative action. Their gains slowed in other industries as well.”⁵⁷ To this, one may only respond: “Perhaps so, but not in the South.” Tables 1-6 show that the numbers of southern black managers, clerical and sales personnel continued to rise. Given the low starting point, some slackening was inevitable. Yet in most southern cities, both numbers and black occupational shares grew impressively throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

There are many possible reasons for the divergence in regional trends. No doubt it was easier to maintain black occupational gains where economic growth was still strong, in contrast to the industrial decline that enveloped the Midwest during the 1980s.⁵⁸ Perhaps too there was an element of “regional convergence” at work, in that black representation in key occupations in the South was still well below the rest of the nation. But in light of the foregoing discussion, a likely contributor to ongoing southern progress was the fact that in that region, black shares in these occupations were substantially higher than elsewhere: 11.6 percent of professionals (compared to 5.7 percent in the North and West), 7.0 percent of managers (compared to 4.1 percent), and 12.6 percent of clerical employees (compared to 8.1 percent).⁵⁹ The greater black presence in management helped to maintain awareness of the race issue, while more black clerical employees facilitated recruitment through word-of-mouth channels. Studies consistently find that the variable most strongly related to new black employment is the percentage of job applicants who are African-American. Additional contributors are the black share of the city population and customer base, the hiring officer’s race, and the presence of blacks already employed at the occupational level.⁶⁰ All of these factors favored the South throughout the historical period under study.

⁵⁶ Leonard, “The Impact of Affirmative Action,” p. 58.

⁵⁷ Dobbin, *Inventing Equal Opportunity*, p. 135.

⁵⁸ On industrial decline and midwestern black workers, see Bound and Freeman, “What Went Wrong?”

⁵⁹ These shares are virtually the same as those found in the corporations surveyed by the Bureau of National Affairs in 1975. See *Equal Employment Opportunity: Programs and Results*, Figure 4 on p. 13.

⁶⁰ Button and Rienzo, “The Impact of Affirmative Action,” p. 5; Stoll, Raphael, Holzer, “Black Job Applicants and the Hiring Officer’s Race.”

Reversing Regional Migration

Perhaps the most decisive evidence of desegregation's profound effect on regional labor markets is the reversal of migration patterns that had prevailed for more than half a century. The timing was directly related to new job opportunities. Blacks began to move into textile areas almost immediately after passage of the Civil Rights Act. On the basis of her interviews with textile workers, Mary Fredrickson attributed the shift to "the fact that black children have to leave the region to become successful, that a decent education in an integrated public school is attainable for both black and white, and that black workers are not denied jobs on the basis of their race." She quotes a black employment manager: "There is a marked difference now, and people who couldn't get away from here fast enough are coming back comfortably."⁶¹ During 1965-70, these inflows were outweighed by ongoing outmigration from other parts of the South. But since 1970, net black migration has been persistently southward, increasingly so over time. Between 1985 and 2010, more than 1.5 million African-Americans moved south, from all other regions of the country (Table 7).

This "reverse" black migration is remarkable not just for its direction, but for the reversal in educational selectivity. During most of the pre-Civil Rights era, additional years of schooling greatly increased the probability of black outmigration from the South.⁶² Some of this differential reflected the effect of literacy on awareness of and ability to take advantage of job opportunities in distant cities. But especially in later years, outmigration primarily reflected the bleakness of job prospects for educated black southerners in their native region. Thus the SRC employment report for Chattanooga found an outmigration rate of 65 percent among local black high school graduates.⁶³

A paper by Jacob Vigdor demonstrates that while black income gains in the 1960s and 1970s reflected both labor market breakthroughs and educational advances, the

⁶¹ Fredrickson, "Four Decades of Change," p. 75. For evidence on black migration into textile states during 1965-70, see McHugh, "Black Migration Reversal," p. 179.

⁶² Margo, *Race and Schooling in the South*; Tolnay, "Educational Selection in the Migration of Southern Blacks"; Vigdor, "The Pursuit of Opportunity". Tolnay and Vigdor report that the degree of educational selectivity in black outmigration declined over time. But comparisons over time are complicated by the general extension of black schooling in the South and by the mechanization of agriculture, which added a "push" factor at the low end of the educational distribution. Vigdor's data show that the median black interstate migrant aged 18-27 in 1970 was a high school graduate ("Pursuit of Opportunity," p. 416).

⁶³ Southern Regional Council, *The Negro and Employment Opportunities: Chattanooga*.

southern rise of black relative income after 1980 was largely attributable to the selective in-migration of highly-educated individuals.⁶⁴ By the 1990s, the typical black migrant was a young, educated person pursuing opportunity in the booming metropolitan areas of the New South. Table 8 lists the metropolitan areas with the largest black gains for 1985-1990 and 1995-2000. Atlanta tops both lists. For 1995-2000, nine of the top ten areas are southern. Demographer William Frey shows that although the South attracted white as well as black migrants, blacks were more likely than whites to choose the South as their destination. The highest black migration rate was among the college-educated.⁶⁵

To be sure, decisions to migrate and the choice of destination have many bases besides economics. In interviews with reporters, many black migrants emphasized their desire to return to family and cultural roots in the South. Others mentioned climate and cities friendly to families, especially black families. But in nearly all cases, at least for working-age migrants, a precondition for enjoying any of these amenities was a well-paying job. Elizabeth Little, a middle-aged woman from Peoria, Illinois, was initially apprehensive about moving to Memphis, where her husband enjoyed playing winter golf, to take a job as an administrative assistant in an architectural firm. Mrs. Little told a reporter in 1998: “Now I am truly glad I came. The southern hospitality is incredible, and I really feel as an African-American that I have a chance to make a better life here. In fact, I can see owning my own business someday.”⁶⁶ Jacqueline Dowdell explained that her choice to move from New York to North Carolina in 2005 (to work as communications coordinator for a health care company) was definitely a financial decision, while adding that “the move also gave her time to research her family’s roots in Virginia.”⁶⁷ Sometimes new employment opportunities enabled native southerners to stay in the region rather than migrate out like previous generations. A story about the spread of affluent suburbanites into rural areas such as Newton County, Georgia, reported: “Many well-educated natives of the county who once assumed they would have to leave to find a good job, like Michael Davis, the plant scheduler at SKC, now say they are

⁶⁴ Vigdor, “The New Promised Land,” Tables 3, 5, 6. Vigdor notes: “The fact that the time series cross, rather than converge, indicates that economic processes more complex than mere regional convergence are at play” (p. 27).

⁶⁵ Frey, “The New Great Migration,” pp. 95-100.

⁶⁶ Parker, “Defying Past, Blacks Head South,”

⁶⁷ Sam Roberts, “New York City Losing Blacks, Census Shows,” p. B5.

thrilled to be able work where they grew up.”⁶⁸ Typically reverse migrants to the South were not choosing cultural identity over real income; they were attracted by an appealing combination of both, and the emerging middle-class black communities generated additional economic opportunities in turn. When Black Enterprise magazine named its best cities for African-Americans in 2004, the top eight spots were all in the South.⁶⁹

Confirming the complementarities among income, employment and community, Figure 4 shows that median male black income grew faster in the South than in any other region during the 1990s. By the end of the decade, the southern median virtually equaled that in the Northeast and Midwest, eliminating a regional income gap as old as the nation itself.⁷⁰ Racial equality was still a remote prospect, but black incomes relative to whites in 2000 were as high or higher in the South than anywhere else in the country.

Were Southern Whites Hurt by Black Gains?

Having shown the reality and persistence of black economic progress in the South dating from the Civil Rights revolution of the 1960s, it is fair to ask whether these gains were won at the expense of southern whites, or instead were part of an economic restructuring in which all, or at least most, parties shared the gains. In posing this question, it must be acknowledged at the outset that it is not possible to compare the true historical record with all possible counterfactual alternatives. One can easily construct hypothetical scenarios in which maintaining white exclusivity over major occupations and job progressions might have raised the incomes of white incumbents compared to what they actually earned. For those who had already invested the fixed costs of committing to a career path, it may well be that merging racial seniority ladders meant that some white promotions were delayed compared to what they otherwise would have done. It would be pointless to deny that some southern whites experienced some (presumably short-term) setbacks in this opportunity-cost sense of the concept.

⁶⁸ Firestone, “As a Region’s Economy Booms”.

⁶⁹ Bain, “New ‘migration’ sends black Americans back to their roots in the South,” p. 8.

⁷⁰ Black median income in the West (not shown in the figure) was reported as somewhat higher than the South in 2000, though fluctuating erratically year-to-year, presumably because of small sample sizes. Whether black incomes were higher or not, the West also experiences net black outmigration between 1995 and 2000, in favor of the South. See Frey, “The New Great Migration,” p. 105.

But if we ask the question in more straightforward historical rather than hypothetical terms, the broad answer is clear: Southern black employment gains did not come at the expense of white employment, and southern black income gains did not cause southern white incomes fall. Figure 5 displays median male income by race from 1953 to 2000. The black relative gains are dramatic – from less than 40 percent of the white median in 1960 to nearly 60 percent between 1960 and 1972, and from 60 to 75 percent between 1990 and 2000 – but at no time did white incomes fall as black incomes rose. When southern incomes stagnated between 1973 and 1990, reflecting broad trends in national labor market conditions, they did so for both races. When the white median ticked downward because of cyclical fluctuations in the economy, the same was true for the black median. What we see, in other words, is not a redistribution of income in the name of historical justice, but an integration of black workers into the regional economy. When we add the consideration (as argued elsewhere) that the Civil Rights revolution invigorated the regional economy by opening it to inflows of capital, creativity, and new enterprises from around the world, it becomes clear that most southern whites were long-term beneficiaries of this historical change.

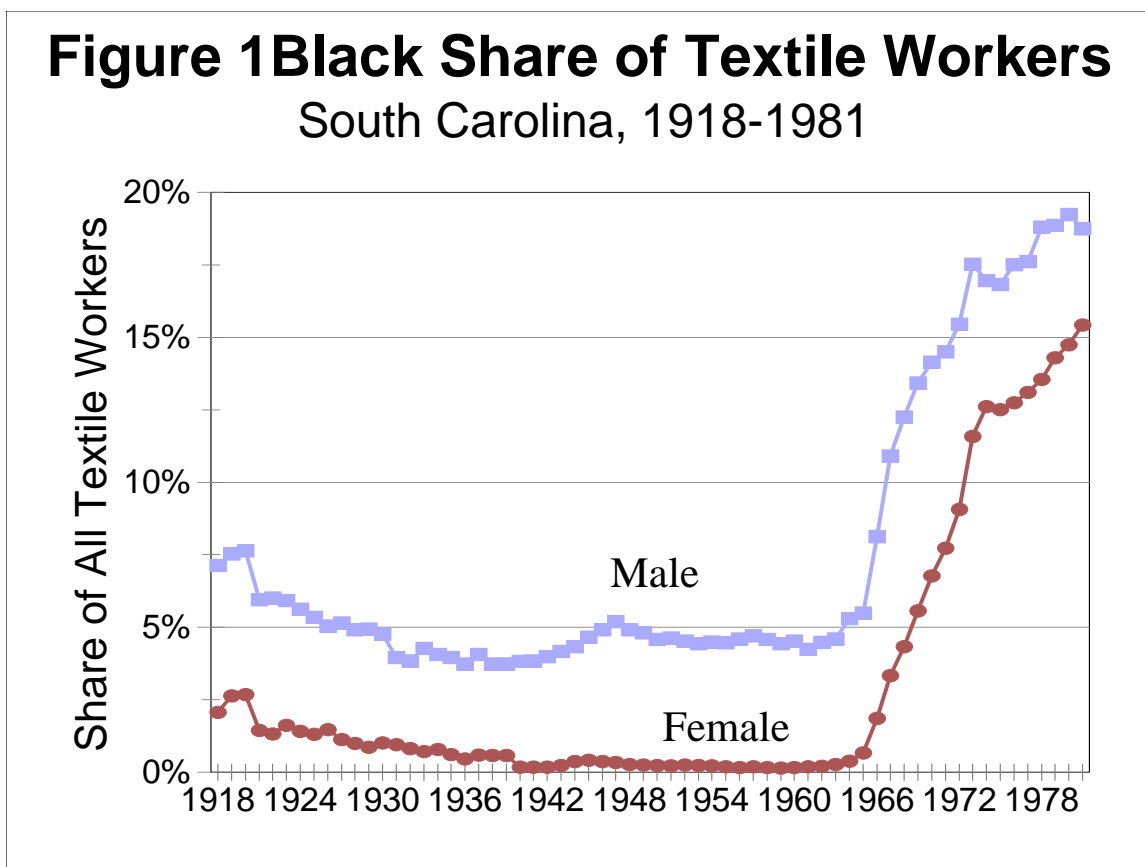
A related question, distinctive to economics, is whether desegregation was economically efficient. Jim Crow segregation was certainly discriminatory, and in the economic tradition descended from Gary Becker, discrimination based on employer or worker prejudice is inherently inefficient. So it might seem, *prima facie*, that government actions to eliminate or reduce discrimination would constitute a gain in efficiency. But many economists have great difficulty accepting this conclusion, even in the extreme case of the Jim Crow South because they start from a presumption that profit-seeking employers take full advantage of all available knowledge concerning the productive attributes and potential of their employees. In the context of “the market’s endless search for efficiency” (in the words of Senator Orrin Hatch), government actions to compel and constrain these employers can only reduce efficiency, unless the employers have been somehow constrained by legal barriers or discriminatory unions. No doubt it is this strong presumption that inclines so many economists to locate the problem not in the labor market but in “pre-market” discrimination, primarily in public schools shaped by political forces. The strongest counter-argument from an economic standpoint has been

that if the discriminatory setting constitutes a disequilibrium phenomenon, then government policies may improve efficiency by causing the elimination of discriminating firms more rapidly than would have happened through competitive market processes.⁷¹

But if instead aggressive desegregation of the southern workplace gave rise to a collective learning process on the part of employers, constituting a genuine improvement in their knowledge of the productive potential of black employees (as well as about the adaptive capacities of their white workers), then the premise of most efficiency discussions is mistaken. No such adaptation was underway prior to the Civil Rights Act, and for most southern employers, it did not begin until aggressive enforcement gave them little choice but to make the best of a fundamentally new situation. Changes in the demand for black labor in turn encouraged and facilitated investments in African-American human capital, pushing the system out of its longstanding low-level equilibrium. This is not to deny that the mechanisms for accomplishing these goals were often cumbersome and costly, and it is not to claim that the process was in any way optimal. But the change itself was an unambiguous improvement in economic efficiency as well as equity. The evidence of this chapter argues that this is indeed the correct reading of the historical record in the South.

⁷¹ This argument is advanced by John Donohue, "Is Title VII Efficient?" A rebuttal is presented by Epstein, *Forbidden Grounds*, pp. 77-78, 257-59. The quote from Hatch is from "Loading the Economy," p. 264, arguing that racial affirmative action imposed massive costs on the private sector.

Figure 1 Black Share of Textile Workers
South Carolina, 1918-1981



Source: South Carolina Department of Labor, *Annual Reports*

Figure 2. EEOC Flyer, 1967

**TEXTILES ARE GETTING
A NEW LOOK**

Equal Employment Opportunity Comm.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
SEP 1967
GOV'T DOCUMENTS

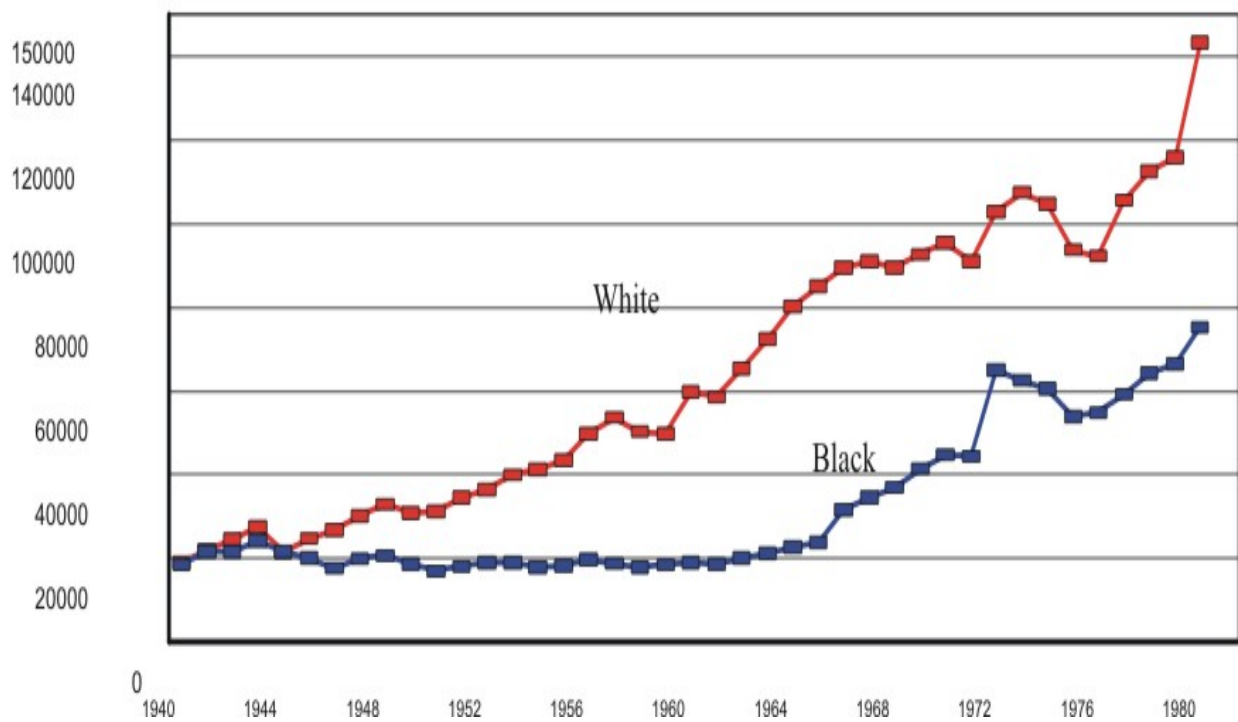
1960 **3.2%**
Negro Employees
in the Textile Mills
of North & South Carolina

1966 **8.6%**
The number of Negroes in
textile jobs has been
growing since 1960—and
especially since Congress
passed the Civil Rights
Act of 1964.

**HOW YOU FIT INTO THE
PICTURE**

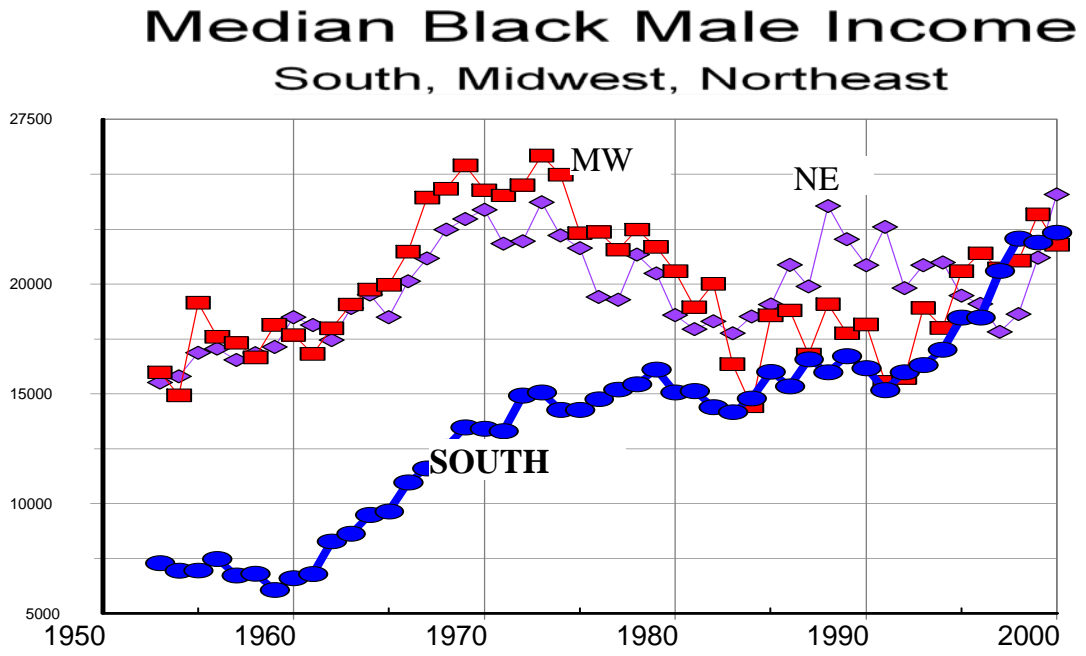
ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS

Figure 3. Manufacturing Employment by Race in South Carolina Industries Outside of Textiles, 1940-1980



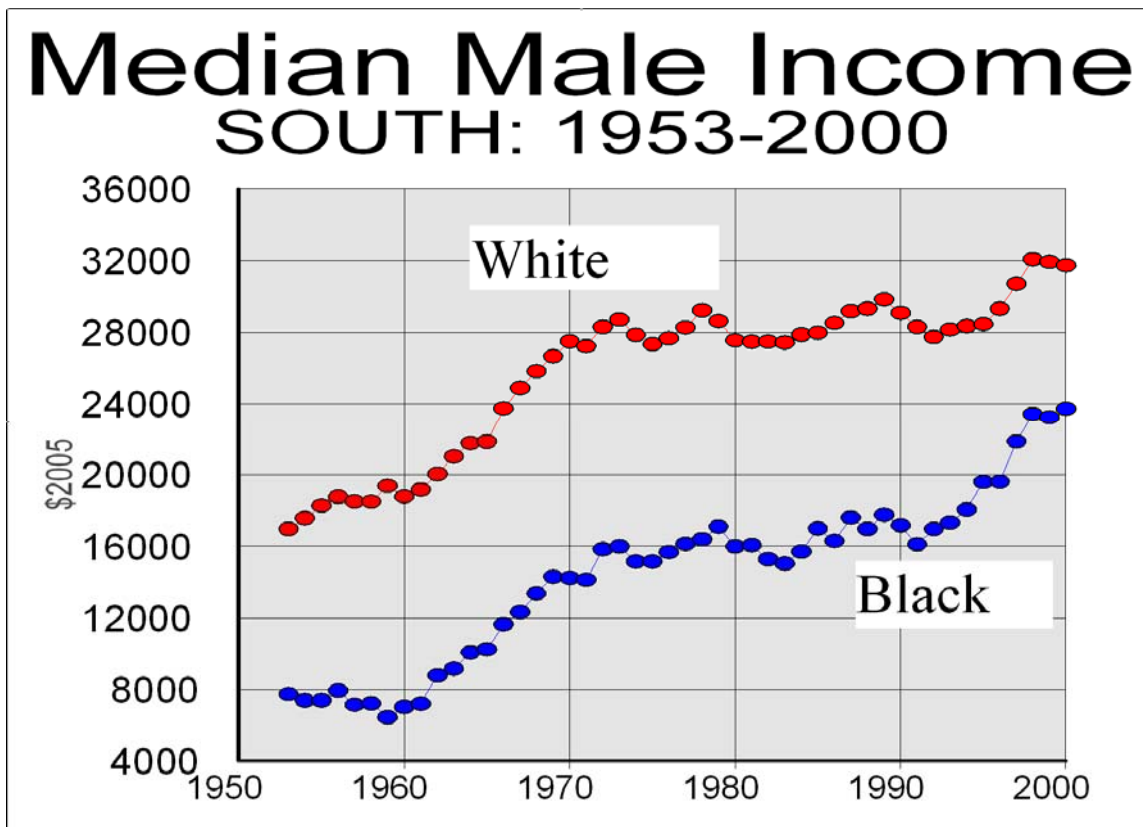
Source: South Carolina Department of Labor, *Annual Reports*

Figure 4



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Historical Income Data*, Table P-1.

Figure 5



**Table 1. Black Occupational Distribution, Atlanta GA
1950-2000**

	Professional		Managers		Clerical		Sales		Skilled Labor	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
1950	1995	15.8	934	7.9	1971	7.0	704	5.8	3056	19.4
1960	3275	16.6	696	4.3	3938	11.0	761	5.0	3315	18.8
1970	8610	32.0	2408	15.6	16596	36.1	2387	17.0	7808	38.5
1980	9285	37.6	5862	33.4	19290	60.6	6839	41.2	7992	60.5
1990	8463	30.1	7396	33.1	19280	67.9	8511	42.1	8185	68.3
2000	10217	25.7	7527	23.9	17360	68.4	8116	37.8	6544	59.4

**Table 2. Black Occupational Distribution, Charlotte NC
1950-2000**

	Professional		Managers		Clerical		Sales		Skilled Labor	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
1950	755	13.2	288	4.3	415	4.2	172	2.7	1291	18.8
1960	1115	12.9	343	4.0	700	5.2	212	2.5	1268	14.9
1970	1908	13.2	555	5.3	3299	14.2	535	4.9	3299	22.1
1980	3664	17.6	1788	8.8	6847	21.2	1990	9.5	3878	25.2
1990	5081	17.1	3855	11.9	11142	29.0	4888	15.0	5293	27.8
2000	10089	19.0	8314	16.2	17540	39.6	7805	20.0	5111	22.0

**Table 3. Black Occupational Distribution, Durham NC
1950-2000**

	Professional		Managers		Clerical		Sales		Skilled Labor	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
1950	562	17.5	261	10.8	387	11.6	100	4.6	693	20.6
1960	772	17.1	201	8.9	363	9.2	156	7.8	595	19.2
1970	1553	20.1	322	12.0	1867	25.9	342	14.3	1037	25.0
1980	2383	28.8	1061	25.4	3630	41.1	909	25.0	1384	36.1
1990	3541	22.6	2427	28.3	5888	48.6	2555	36.5	2439	45.8
2000	6937	24.9	4118	31.8	7412	55.1	3395	41.6	2064	28.4

**Table 4. Black Occupational Distribution, Memphis TN
1950-2000**

	Professional		Managers		Clerical		Sales		Skilled Labor	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
1950	1787	13.3	1040	6.6	1661	6.6	805	5.6	4229	19.4
1960	2544	14.5	770	4.7	2306	7.6	764	4.7	3858	18.0
1970	5727	19.1	1327	6.7	7764	16.3	1538	7.4	6626	23.6
1980	8432	26.7	4329	16.4	15762	29.9	5937	19.4	8505	30.6
1990	11553	32.8	7884	27.2	22248	45.1	10572	33.1	9182	39.2
2000	17364	38.0	11484	37.6	31556	60.5	13916	44.8	9219	41.6

**Table 5. Black Occupational Distribution, New Orleans LA
1950-2000**

	Professional		Managers		Clerical		Sales		Skilled Labor	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
1950	2271	10.6	1662	7.2	1971	7.0	1126	6.3	4634	18.0
1960	3461	13.6	1209	6.3	3938	11.0	1131	6.9	4642	20.4
1970	6423	20.8	1561	9.4	16596	36.1	2358	15.0	7163	32.2
1980	9444	29.6	5044	23.7	19290	60.6	6972	32.2	9544	45.2
1990	12349	34.3	7229	34.6	19280	67.9	8853	44.5	7221	55.7
2000	15012	36.7	8423	40.8	17360	68.4	10884	52.8	8603	65.6

Table 6. Relative Black Occupational Distributions, North vs. South 1950-2000										
(% of regional occupation/% black in population)										
	Professional		Managers		Clerical		Sales		Skilled Labor	
	North & West	South	North & West	South	North & West	South	North & West	South	North & West	South
1950	.41	.51	.26	.19	.50	.20	.26	.14	.50	.39
1960	.38	.49	.20	.13	.49	.19	.25	.13	.49	.39
1970	.49	.53	.34	.25	.82	.45	.41	.27	.57	.58
1980	.63	.62	.49	.38	.98	.68	.49	.42	.58	.63
1990	.66	.59	.57	.48	1.10	.81	.66	.60	.61	.67
2000	.67	.67	.62	.56	1.10	.96	.76	.76	.64	.71

Table 7. Net Migration into South, 1870-1880 to 2005-2010 (in thousands)		
Decade	White	Black
1870-1880	91	-68
1880-1890	-271	88
1890-1900	-30	-185
1900-1910	-69	-194
1910-1920	-663	-555
1920-1930	-704	-903
1930-1940	-558	-408
1940-1950	-866	-1581
1950-1960	-234	-1202
1960-1970	1807	-1380
1970-1980	3556	206
1980-1985	1808	83
1985-1990	971	325
1990-1995	1344 ^a	358
1995-2000	1127 ^a	347
2000-2005	1027 ^a	318
2005-2010	731 ^a	267

^aNon-Hispanic White

SOURCES: H.T. Eldridge and D.S. Thomas, *Population Redistribution and Economic Growth*, Volume III (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1964), p. 90; Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States to 1970* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1975), pp. 94-95; J.D. Kasaida, M.D. Irwin, and H.L. Hughes, "The South is Still Rising," and Isaac Robinson, "Blacks Move Back to the South," both in *American Demographics* (June 1986), pp. 35, 43; Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports: Geographic Mobility: Special Studies; Domestic Migration Across Regions, Divisions, and States, 1980 to 1985; Geographical Mobility: Special Studies, 1990 to 1995; Migration by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1995 to 2000; Current Population Survey: Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2005-2010*. Figures for 1985-90 are the sums of the annual figures for 1985-86 and 1986-87, plus those for 1987-90.

Table 8. Metropolitan Areas with Largest Black Gains 1985-1990 and 1995-2000			
1985-1990		1995-2000	
Atlanta	74,705	Atlanta	114,478
Washington-Baltimore	29,904	Dallas	39,360
Norfolk-Virginia Beach	27,645	Charlotte	23,313
Raleigh-Durham	17,611	Orlando	20,222
Dallas	16,097	Las Vegas	18,912
Orlando	13,368	Norfolk-Virginia Beach	16,660
Richmond	12,508	Raleigh-Durham	16,144
San Diego	12,482	Washington-Baltimore	16,139
Minneapolis-St. Paul	11,765	Memphis	12,507
Sacramento	10,848	Columbia	10,899

Source: Frey, "The New Great Migration," p. 94.

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