

QUICK READ SYNOPSIS

Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality in the U.S. Labor Market: Critical Issues in the New Millennium

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Social Closure and Processes of Race/Sex Employment Discrimination

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Background

While analyses of variations in levels of inequality provide understanding of macro-level sociological outcomes and relations with, for instance, racial competition across neighborhoods or gender segregation at work, they tend to offer less insight into micro-interactional processes that most assuredly play a role in social closure.

- Gaps in wages, organizational power, and employment opportunities have narrowed somewhat, but disparities remain.
- Traditionally, neoeconomic theorizing and status research identify differences in human capital as the principal cause of labor market disadvantages.
 - The assumption is that one's investments, such as education, can increase productive capability and, thus, worth and compensation.
 - A solitary focus on human capital simply overlooks the role of inequality in institutional processes generally, and closure enacted by institutional and dominant group actors that reifies existing stratification hierarchies.
- Sex and race segregation at occupational and workplace levels may be even more influential—the key may be that employers and coworkers may make arbitrary and subjective decisions in hiring, promotion, and firing.

- Social Closure* Social closure reflects the process by which collectivities seek to maximize advantage by restricting access and privileges to others.
- It often occurs through institutional exclusion and dominant group positioning.
 - It also exists in everyday interactions through language, supervisory acts, or force, and shows in differential treatment and harassment once employed.
 - Social closure directs us to an in-depth understanding of the processes through which stratification hierarchies are both defined and maintained.
- Racial Discrimination* Racial discrimination and closure processes have multiple costs and can include exclusion, inequalities in material rewards, or potential blocks to mobility.
- Three elements shape outcomes:
 - disparate policing of minority workers on the job,
 - managerial use of particularistic or “soft skill” criteria in employee or prospective employee evaluation, and
 - ongoing racial hierarchy maintenance in the course of everyday workplace interactions.
 - Harassment isolates minority employees in their workplaces, undermines their capacity to perform their jobs properly, and impacts their sense of dignity in quite meaningful ways.
 - It may take the form of general taunting, systematic isolation on the job, or neglect of employee needs.
- Sex Discrimination* Similar to racial patterns are the how and why women are not hired, are disparately fired, stagnate in terms of mobility, and are harassed with three themes:
- gender appropriateness: assumptions built into the organization of work contribute to women’s marginalization as well as sex segregation;
 - dependability, often tied to pregnancy and maternity or the belief that women will put family before work; and
 - harassment, including that which is explicitly sexual in character.
- Conclusion* Social stratification is more than simply a remnant of historical exclusion played out through slowly declining intergenerational disadvantages in, for instance, education, skills, job experience, or wealth.
- By virtue of the data that have been employed in this article, it is obvious that human action and agency are part and parcel of social closure and stratification maintenance, creation, and challenge. By default, this implicates organizations and institutions themselves in the inequalities.
 - As the qualitative materials suggest, human beings actively engage in reifying inequality within organizational environments, and victims of inequality are much more than mere recipients of differential treatment.
 - Victims, instead, often go through a series of steps to try to counter the inequality they are experiencing, including negotiation, avoidance, confrontation and politically and legally fighting what is unjust.
- NOTE: There is no reason to believe that the differential treatment we have uncovered does not apply equally to other institutional domains including,

for instance, education, politics, medical care, housing, and legal-judicial processes. The implication of this is that all social interaction—formal and informal, context-specific or not—has the potential to recreate status hierarchies whether or not the parties involved are aware of it.

Discrimination and Desegregation: Equal Opportunity Progress in U.S. Private Sector Workplaces since the Civil Rights Act

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- Background* This article seeks to evaluate the impact of the extension of the Civil Rights Act to equal opportunity in employment is the central goal:
- the enactment of the equal employment opportunity (EEO) law should not be expected to automatically produce EEO progress by design;
 - progress made within private sector employment since 1966; and
 - trends in race/ethnic segregation and access to quality employment to illustrate the unevenness of progress toward equal opportunity.
- NOTE: Eliminating discrimination will not simply follow from legal change. Organizations are conservative in the sense that they tend to reproduce past behaviors irrespective of the personalities or preferences of their employees.
- Employment Segregation* Employment segregation is the product of a series of micro-level mechanisms—prejudice, cognitive bias, statistical discrimination, social closure around desirable employment opportunities, and network-based recruitment.
- While some decisions may be explicitly bigoted in justification, many are the result of more subtle social psychological processes of cognitive bias, stereotyping, and in-group preferences.
 - Cultural prejudice as well as the more subtle processes of cognitive bias against minority group members and in favor of whites remain culturally widespread and active at the societal level.
- Statistical Discrimination* Statistical discrimination refers to employers using known average differences in competencies between groups to discriminate.
- The employer relies on stereotypes about status group productivity to justify making discriminatory hiring decisions against individuals.
- Social Closure* Social closure occurs when opportunities are closed to outsiders and reserved only for members of one's own group.
- Dominant groups keep their monopoly over the most desirable jobs.
 - Evidence shows that when women or minorities gain access to managerial jobs it is often supervising other women or minorities.
 - Status groups dynamically attempt to preserve their advantages by limiting access to others outside of the status group.

EEO

EEO change is likely to arise when there are significant coercive or normative pressures for change in the workplaces.

- Change can be driven by prominent firms changing, coercion by powerful actors, government support, and internal company pressures.
- It is fairly clear that EEO law has encouraged the adoption of formalized human resource practices to demonstrate compliance.

Minorities' Limited Gains

Minority employment has made strong gains in the regulated private sector but most of those gains came immediately after the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

- Today, more than 50 percent of workers would have to exchange jobs to produce workplaces in which white men were integrated with minority workers and white women.
- White women and black women are as segregated as they were in 1966.

NOTE: We see a substantial slowdown in the rate of integration of minority men with white men. Among males, Hispanic-white segregation essentially plateaued after 1973. Black-white workplace segregation among males continued to drop, although at a slower rate, through the early 1980s. Among males, Asians remained the most segregated from white males.

Occupational Trends

In occupation employment trends, craft production jobs stand out as highly rewarded, relatively autonomous, and clearly desirable positions.

- White males were far and away the most advantaged in access to the most desirable working-class jobs.
- White males' access to managerial jobs was uniformly high across the entire post-Civil Rights Act period and has not declined appreciably.
- Professional jobs are obvious targets for social closure attempts with black males and females making gains and Hispanic males not gaining, while Asians, especially Asian women, made good gains.

NOTE: With the exception of white men, all status groups are most likely to become managers in workplaces when a large population of similar people is employed among nonmanagers.

Findings

The general expectation is that EEO progress will be difficult and uneven.

- African American and Hispanic employees are still grossly underrepresented among managerial and professional workers.
- Hispanic and black men have achieved better representation among the most desirable blue-collar jobs.
- White male privilege still exists in access to desirable blue-collar jobs.
- Among professional jobs, we see the promise of the Civil Rights Act realized, with all groups making strong gains. The greatest gains have come in professional employment, in which white women are now overrepresented relative to their overall employment.
- White women have made uninterrupted progress except in access to craft production jobs, but white women have become increasingly segregated from black and Hispanic women in the private sector.

Racial Composition of Workgroups and Job Satisfaction among Whites

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- Background* Segregation is a pervasive feature of the labor market, yet more attention is paid to gender than racial segregation. Yet it is at the workplace where intergroup contact is likely to be highest, since whites and minorities are *unlikely* to interact in other settings like neighborhoods, churches, and schools. Furthermore, managing diversity will become increasingly challenging as the workforce becomes more diverse.
- Despite the importance of this relationship, there have been few studies directly testing the effect of workgroup integration on the job attitudes of whites. This study attempts to address this deficiency in the existing literature by using more recent data and estimating a model with a full set of controls.
- Organizational Demography* The organizational demography perspective posits that workgroup integration negatively affects individual job attitudes, either because whites are biased against minorities or whites perceive minorities to be a threat to their jobs. Some studies showed that attitudes toward coworkers mediate this relationship, however.
- Yet the existing literature relies on older and/or unique samples that may not characterize the typical white worker today, and existing studies often fail to control for important determinants of job attitudes.
- Status Composition* The status composition perspective also identifies bias as the mechanism by which workgroup heterogeneity affects individual job rewards, although here the bias is located in organizations rather than in individuals.
- When jobs are increasingly held by minorities, the organization *devalues* those jobs in its pay and promotion policies.
 - Studies showed that workers in jobs dominated by blacks were less likely to be promoted and had higher turnover rates. Thus, whites in integrated jobs may increasingly believe that they had been placed in jobs that were devalued by their employers, which could account for their dissatisfaction with their jobs.
- Controlled Variables* The authors make several observations on the effects of the control variables.
- Age and tenure have positive effects on job satisfaction.
 - More educated workers have higher standards in what they expect from a job; their current jobs often fail to meet those standards, producing lower levels of job satisfaction.
 - Men are less satisfied with their jobs than women.
 - Job satisfaction tends to be lower in larger, impersonal, bureaucratic firms.

NOTE: Those in jobs requiring creativity are more satisfied, as are those who exercise autonomy in deciding what tasks to perform and when to do them. Job satisfaction rises when respondents perceive that their jobs are secure and/or they have a chance to advance in their firms. Workers are less satisfied when they are in high-pressure jobs and/or ones that are physically demanding.

Findings

An important finding is that the size of the minority presence in the workgroup no longer significantly predicts job satisfaction when job characteristics are controlled.

- If whites are reluctant to work with minorities, this may not be because of overt racial prejudice, but rather reflects a concern that one is located in a job that is devalued in the eyes of one's employer.
- The number of problems with coworkers is the second strongest predictor (negative) of maximum job satisfaction.

Future Studies

One limitation of this study is that it takes into account the *number* of problems with coworkers, but not the *content* of those problems.

- It is entirely possible that as workgroups become more racially diverse, racial tensions and misunderstandings increase, which produces more conflict with coworkers.
- To fully investigate, it is necessary to inquire whether race-related conflict increases with minority representation in the workgroup and how this impacts on white attitudes and performance.
 - If this is the case, it suggests that white prejudice against minority coworkers is persistent and contradicts the notion of a declining significance of race.
 - If this is *not* the case, however, it suggests that employers need to pay attention to other factors that might affect coworker relations and, by extension, job satisfaction.
- A priority of future research should be to examine the determinants of managerial decisions to eschew an adversarial stance toward workers in favor of policies that treat them as valued partners in the production process.
 - Hodson (2004) found that when management treats all workers with dignity and respect, workers are more satisfied with their jobs irrespective of the racial composition of workgroups.

The Use of Field Experiments for Studies of Employment Discrimination: Contributions, Critiques, and Directions for the Future

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Background

Have we solved the problems of racial discrimination or have these acts become too subtle and covert for detection? In this article the author

- considers the arguments from recent debates over the contemporary relevance of labor market discrimination,

- provides an introduction to field methods for studying discrimination,
- addresses the primary critiques of the audit methodology and the potential threats to the validity of studies of this kind, and
- considers how we might reconcile evidence from field experiments with the different conclusions from analyses of large-scale survey data.

*Debates about
Discrimination*

The Civil Rights movement brought with it a wave of reform, spurring an unprecedented growth of black upward mobility. These improvements have led some to conclude that discrimination represents merely “the problem of an earlier era.” But:

- contemporary forms of discrimination may be subtle and covert, leading to less frequent detection and awareness by the general public;
- debates about the relevance of discrimination have been difficult to resolve, in part because of the challenges in identifying, measuring, and documenting its presence or absence in all but extreme cases; and
- field experiments offer the opportunity to observe discrimination directly.

*Conflicting
Research*

Audit studies, in which equally qualified pairs of job applicants apply to real job openings, provide an opportunity to observe employers’ hiring decisions directly.

- Across a range of audit studies, employers show a strong preference for whites over equally qualified minority applicants.
- These results stand in stark contrast to recent research, using statistical techniques, which finds that the majority of the black-white wage gap can be explained by skill differences or other individual deficiencies.

*Audit Method
Results*

How can we account for the substantial evidence of discrimination indicated by the audit results?

- First, the employment relationship is characterized by a number of discrete decisions: hiring, wage setting, promotion, and termination—discrimination may affect all, none, or some of these decisions.
- Discrimination is likely to be most pronounced at early stages of the employment relationship (hiring), when information about the applicant is at a minimum and when the chances of being caught are low.
- It is likewise important also to consider the interdependence between hiring discrimination and wage disparities:
 - Discrimination at the point of hire may lead blacks to spend more time unemployed (excluded from wage estimates).
 - Rejection and hostility in the job search process may lead to discouragement among all but the most motivated and able black workers.
 - If discrimination at the point of hire leads to higher rates of unemployment or nonparticipation among blacks, estimates of racial wage disparities will be biased by the more “select” sample of blacks included among wage earners.

The Future

The author considers several directions for future research.

- First, it would be useful for future research to develop a standardized audit framework that could be replicated across testing sites and over time, similar to the model pursued in recent housing audits.

- Second, the introduction of additional experimental variables (e.g., skill, education, criminal record, etc.) would allow researchers to calibrate the effects of race against other key labor market determinants.
- Finally, additional research should make efforts to empirically map the findings from audit studies onto population surveys of job search and employment patterns.

Conclusion

Research on discrimination poses numerous complications, with issues of measurement of central concern.

- Active comparisons across studies can help to shed light on the relative strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches.
- The audit design can provide strong and direct measures of discrimination at the point of hire, a powerful mechanism regulating the wider array of labor market opportunities.
- Future research should extend this focus to include a broader perspective on the employment process, from search decisions to hiring behavior to wages, tenure, and promotion, comparing findings across studies for a more complete picture of discrimination.

Family Background, Race, and Labor Market Inequality

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Background

African American siblings and white siblings look similar in terms of occupational prestige correlations, but African American siblings have much lower correlations in labor market earnings and family income.

- The effect of global family background on African Americans' labor market and socioeconomic outcomes is much weaker than the effect of global family background on whites' outcomes.
- The early stages of careers are characterized by volatility and chance events that suppress the "true" effect of family background on labor market and socioeconomic outcomes.
 - This dynamic is especially pronounced for African Americans, as they lack the necessary resources to insulate themselves from intervening chance events.
- Two questions remain relatively unexplored:
 - Do siblings converge or diverge in labor market and socioeconomic outcomes over the life course?
 - Do siblings from racial groups that putatively differ on the degree of opportunity they enjoy and the level of resources at their command vary with respect to how similar they turn out?

NOTE: The current study makes several important contributions to the literature, specifically by examining life course and race differences in the strength of global family background on socioeconomic outcomes. The study benefits from its use of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), in that

it both allows for the inclusion of sisters and avoids the limitations inherent in a sample that is not nationally representative or includes only young adults. And most important, with the nationally representative PSID, we can examine racial differences in stratification dynamics across the life course.

*Sibling
Correlations*

Given the apparent difficulty in modeling the true impact of family background, in light of shared environmental *and* genetic traits and intersibling effects, what are we to make of sibling correlations?

- We can read a sibling correlation as a global effect of family background—environmental and genetic factors—if we assume a model in which offspring are invested in equally (or at least that any favoritism is randomly distributed) and in which siblings have only a mean-regressive effect on each other.
 - We see that they tend to cause each other to be more alike than they would in each other's absence.

New Findings

Building on previous studies, this study reports three new findings.

- Family background affects different measures of socioeconomic status differently—siblings are most similar on educational outcomes and less similar on occupational prestige, labor market earnings, and family income.
- Siblings converge in outcomes that take longer to stabilize (income and earnings) and remain similar across the life course in outcomes that stabilize early on (education and occupational prestige).
- Individual parental investment behavior may shape dynamic stratification trajectories.

NOTE: The most important finding this analysis gives rise to is that African American siblings resemble each other less than white siblings, at least on earnings and income, but dramatically converge across the life course.

Other Effects

The authors propose that resource constrained parents may invest unequally in their children, or in a child with the greatest chance of survival and prosperity.

- This dynamic may serve as one explanation for the weaker effects of family background on African Americans' socioeconomic outcomes.
- The authors think, however, that much more of the reason for these weaker effects lies in institutional constraints: African Americans have fewer resources than whites and they have less means toward protection from negative events that may move individuals off course from their families.
- Coupled with recent findings of resource-disadvantaged and younger individuals experiencing greater fluctuations in earnings, this analysis provides some evidence in support of the contention that earlier segments of the life course are volatile and suppress an individual's "true" effect of family background.
- The descriptive findings cannot provide the last word on whether institutional or individual mechanisms—or a combination of both—explain life course racial stratification dynamics.
- The authors find it most likely that African Americans' socioeconomic outcomes are affected more than whites' across the life course because African Americans lack the resources to protect themselves from the volatility of earlier, intervening chance events.

What Happens to Potential Discouraged? Masculinity Norms and the Contrasting Institutional and Labor Market Experiences of Less Affluent Black and White Men

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Background

This article contrasts less affluent black and white men's educational, labor market, and criminal justice system experiences and elucidates the processes of differentiation that reproduce unequal patterns.

- Less affluent black males pay a disproportionate price for enacting masculinity norms in comparison to white males.
- White boys and men are also presented with more desirable labor market options that are denied their black male counterparts.
- Some black men's angry, immature, and indifferent responses to public authorities earn black boys and men special scorn.
- Black boys' negative experiences in school may foreshadow their eventual labor market difficulties.
- This article suggests that only a complex strategy that requires less affluent black men to resist more constructively, while citizen groups hold institutions more publicly accountable, can enhance the labor market trajectories of black men.

NOTE: In this article, the author analyzes how less affluent black boys and men suffer more severe penalties for their performances of masculinity than white male peers and how contemporary institutional processes discourage less affluent black boys and men more than white male peers.

Institutional Patterns

Three institutional patterns differentiate the labor market prospects of less affluent black and white men:

- educational inequities that underprepare and stigmatize black boys and delay black men's transitions from school to work;
- persistent employer discrimination and black men's severe network disadvantages during job search, hiring, and early job-entry stages; and
- hypersurveillant police practices and unusually severe sentencing patterns that attach a criminal record (or the suspicion of such) to a disproportionately high number of less affluent black men.

NOTE: Preventing black boys and young men from becoming discouraged learners while in school would decrease their chances of becoming discouraged workers in the labor market. Holding employers and police accountable for black men's fair treatment is equally important.

Schooling, Networks, Stigma, and Employment

More successful schooling experiences for black boys and adolescents would help more black men to earn a solid living, but wage and employment rate gaps within each educational level mean that white men would remain ahead.

- Black male students are disproportionately punished in schools, resulting in their being labeled as "troublemakers" and becoming academically disengaged even before reaching high school.

- Even when black male high school students played by the rules, white male students were the beneficiaries of double or relaxed standards in at least three ways:
 - Their distinct hobbies, dress, and initiative in seeking work-study opportunities were not negatively scrutinized as were those of black males.
 - Work-study rules were bent so that they could pursue opportunities before they were officially allowed to do so.
 - Whites were more often offered employment and other meaningful assistance by white male teachers.
- White males are embedded in powerful networks of older white men who are still the primary gatekeepers in blue-collar trades.
- All black men seeking employment, but especially those who are less affluent and who have lower educational preparation, must contend with enduring stereotypes that mark them all as unskilled, nonproductive, and perhaps even dangerous employees.
- As the result of disproportionate surveillance and disparate sentencing patterns, many black men have criminal records, or are suspected of having them, thereby increasing black men's employment difficulties.

NOTE: Identifying and critiquing multiple cultural influences, including the cultures of powerful institutions and their agents, is critical to advancing a workable agenda for assisting black boys and men who experience a differential tolerance among some teachers and employers.

Conclusion

Given the high levels of poverty and institutional unfairness that less affluent black boys and adolescents witness and experience, they should resist institutional injustice, but resisting constructively requires guidance, discipline, and eschewing aspects of American masculinity that are incompatible with justice struggles.

- Black working men's culture provides a necessary alternative style of resistance and protest, predicated on a modulated masculinity norm, in which the vulnerable and the weak, rather than being denigrated and abused, are defended and valued.
- Socializing less affluent boys and men to eschew troubling masculinity norms and embrace constructive black resistance models will not work in the absence of a reinvigorated and widespread alternative justice framework that holds institutions accountable.
- Progressive citizen groups should hold local schools accountable for educating black children. (Black girls trail behind their female peers, too.) For parity, they must require schools to maintain data on raced and gendered patterns of achievement, but also patterns of enriched opportunity and punishment allocation.
- Monitoring selection mechanisms and occupancy patterns for the jobs young workers can attain without a college degree is another key site for institutional accountability.
- The figurative and literal deathblow for many less affluent black men is the American prison complex—at multiple levels, from surveillance patterns in neighborhoods to disproportionate numbers of death-penalty sentences, less affluent black men live constantly too close to the devastating threat of incarceration.

Black Underrepresentation in Management across U.S. Labor Markets

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Background The primary goal of this article was to investigate the long-standing finding of greater inequality in high-proportion-black labor markets.

- Black underrepresentation in management may be one mechanism underlying the findings.
- The investigation approach has the following features:
 - measuring access to managerial jobs within work establishments, using data from large establishments from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission;
 - situating establishments in the labor markets in which they operate, with data from the 2000 U.S. Census; and
 - examining whether the racial composition of local labor markets conditions the level of access to management for black workers.

Labor Pools The study explores large establishments' black managerial composition in the private sector workforce relative to four populations or labor pools.

- It compares managerial representation to the composition of the *entire local workforce*.
- It compares managerial representation to the composition of *managers in the local workforce*.
- A third measure compares managerial representation to the composition of *managers in the same industry of the local workforce*.
- Finally, it compares managerial representation to the composition of *all workers within the establishment*.

Results Of particular interest is whether these outcomes vary across labor markets as a function of population racial composition. If establishments in labor markets with greater black concentration are more likely to exhibit black underrepresentation in management, that may help explain the persistent finding that racial wage disparities are greater in such labor markets.

- More than half (53 percent) of black workers are found in establishments with significantly lower proportion black managers than workers. About one-third of black workers work in establishments with fewer black managers than would be expected according to the composition of the total local workforce. Six percent of black workers work for establishments with black managerial underrepresentation relative to the pool of all local managers; 4 percent work for establishments with underrepresentation relative to managers in the local industry.
- Our central finding is that black workers are more likely to be underrepresented in management—according to all four measures of underrepresentation—in labor markets with greater proportion black populations.

Conclusion Taken together, the results are consistent with an interpretation of black-white wage inequality in which inequality results from the actions of managers, and

black managers are less likely to contribute to such inequality. Thus, black underrepresentation in management could be an important mechanism for the pattern of greater inequality found in places with larger black populations.

- Black workers are more likely to find themselves concentrated under the authority of nonrepresentative management structures in labor markets with larger black populations.
- Even though black workers may have a greater absolute presence in higher-status jobs in high-proportion-black areas, they may in fact be subject to increased discrimination in such a context, resulting in stronger race-based social closure processes, and overall lower odds of attaining managerial positions.

Demobilization of the Individualistic Bias: Housing Market Discrimination as a Contributor to Labor Market and Economic Inequality

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Background

Discrimination in the nation's housing markets and residential segregation have contributed to labor market inequalities and economic disparities.

- Housing values are suppressed in minority communities undercutting wealth accumulation by nonwhite families.
- Job growth in the suburbs coupled with the concentration of public housing in central city communities restricts minority access to jobs.
- A range of institutionalized practices by housing providers and public policies by government agencies at all levels have nurtured and exacerbated racial inequalities grounded in traditional stereotypes.
- Powerful interests convince themselves that their privileged positions reflect their own hard work, thus justifying their rewards.
- In this article, a number of policy options offer promise for reducing racial inequities in housing and related economic disparities.

Individualism

A cult of individualism has long dominated life in the United States.

- Successful people credit hard work, self reliance, and intelligence.
- Failures are explained in terms of the absence of these attributes.

NOTE: The individualistic bias pervades explanations of inequality in two mechanisms for the allocation of privilege—labor and housing markets.

Structural Factors

Several structural factors intervene to shape wages and other labor market outcomes.

- The quality and, consequently, prestige, of schooling institutions.
- Wages often depend more on whether jobs are in primary or secondary occupations and industries than employee qualifications.
- Government policies affect earnings as does the presence or absence of union representation.
- Racial stereotyping and intentional discrimination also persist.

NOTE: The housing patterns and practices noted here contribute to disparities in housing consumption and broader economic inequalities generally. Where different groups of people live, and the homes in which they live, profoundly influence the allocation of rewards in the United States.

House Values

Perhaps the most explicit signals of housing inequality are homeownership rates and the value of homes families own.

- The values of homes owned by different groups varies dramatically.
- Disparities are also reflected in who owns the highest-priced homes.
- More telling is the fact that appreciation in home values is undercut by the presence of other minorities, and particularly African Americans.
- Housing inequities are major contributors to general wealth inequalities.

Education

Educational resources reflect the same inequities.

- Public schools have become even more segregated in recent years.
- Given the reliance on property taxes to fund public education, residential segregation leads to large disparities in the resources for schools in white and nonwhite communities.

Employment

The most immediate determinant of the quality of life in the United States—economic and otherwise—is probably one’s location in the labor market.

- Racial minorities, and particularly African Americans, have long been concentrated in economically declining city neighborhoods while the fastest job growth has been in mostly white suburban communities.
- Consequently, minorities are less likely to hear about job openings, are far less likely to own cars. Public transportation does not serve urban to suburban commuters well for interviews and commuting.

Housing Segregation

Housing segregation limits opportunities for informal social interaction between whites and nonwhites—with relatively few white neighbors, minorities have fewer opportunities to demonstrate to potential employers and business partners the job-related skills neighbors often display to each other.

- In many ways, racial discrimination and segregation in the nation’s housing markets undercut the ability of, and opportunity for, racial and ethnic minorities to compete in the labor market, accumulate economic and other assets, and access virtually all of the rewards presumably available to those individuals who “play by the rules.”

Policy Options

Below is a list of recommended policy options.

- A starting point is traditional law enforcement of Civil Rights Acts prohibiting discrimination in all housing related services.
- Government can use leverage provided by the Fair Housing Act.
- Mobility programs that have enabled poor black families to move to integrated settings have demonstrated positive results.
- If exclusionary zoning laws have been central for perpetuating racial segregation, inclusionary laws constitute a critical remedy.
- Financial literacy programs can turn residents of underserved communities into informed housing consumers, attractive employees, and citizens who can better serve their own economic interests.

Racialized Life-Chance Opportunities across the Class Structure: The Case of African Americans

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- Background* Considerations of how socioeconomic outcomes are racialized within discrete class categories have been neglected in assessing the race/class determinants of life-chance opportunities of African Americans.
- This article synthesizes findings from recent sociological research concerning how segregation in two institutional spheres, residence and employment, produce racialization at two class levels: among the impoverished and the middle class.
 - It shows that segregation plays a significant role in producing racial inequality at both class levels, though it exerts different influences across class categories that emerge as critical underpinnings of African Americans' inferior life-chance opportunities,
 - at the impoverished level, in residential segregation; and
 - at the middle-class level, in employment segregation.
 - Sociologists have marshaled considerable empirical support for the notion that in recent decades the effects of social class have increased in accounting for the life-chance opportunities of African Americans.
 - These findings, however, should not preclude documenting the multitude of ways in which life-chance opportunities are simultaneously "racialized."
 - We need to document the causes of racial inequality among incumbents who occupy similar positions—at least in title—in the American class structure.
- Two-Pronged* Overall, this examination produces a two-pronged thesis.
- Thesis*
- First, a common set of causal underpinnings accounts for racialization at both the impoverished and middle-class levels: segregation by race in the these spheres is a crucial source of the inferior life-chance opportunities of African Americans, relative to white class peers.
 - The manner in which segregation accounts for racialization of socioeconomic outcomes has implications regarding how to theorize about racial stratification.
- Class Structure* Variation in life-chance opportunities among African American and white class peers has, for at least two reasons, received far less attention.
- First, the sheer magnitude of positional differences between African Americans and whites has placed a premium on producing theories of racial stratification to explain it.
 - Second, prominent theories of social stratification have not provided an impetus for sociologists to explore the possibility of race-based differences among incumbents in a similar class position.

The Poor

A first body of research challenges the notion that African Americans and whites in poverty face a similar set of socioeconomic prospects.

- Research documents systematic variation in life-chance opportunities along racial lines at the low end of the American class structure.
- Relevant are studies that typically delineate poverty from nonimpoverished status on the basis of income or labor market status.

Middle Class

Sociological research has also documented race-based differences in life-chance opportunities at the relatively privileged middle-class level.

- African Americans have increased representation in occupationally based positions typically used to define the middle class, professionals, managers, and administrators, at a more rapid rate than whites.
- To combat discrimination in the private sector, the government has historically provided a “niche” for African Americans within the middle-class job structure.
- In predominantly white-owned and -managed firms in the private sector, African Americans perform work-based functions that are tied into satisfying the consumer needs of minority customers/clients.
- Restricted access to integrated job networks precludes African Americans from demonstrating to employers the informal criteria such as loyalty, trustworthiness, and leadership potential that are important in structuring employment evaluations.
- Segregation in the residential sphere also helps to account for racialization of socioeconomic outcomes at the middle class level.

Conclusion

A review of the dynamics of racialization in this article contributes to the debate about the relative effects of race and social class in explaining life-chance opportunities among African Americans in the post-civil rights era.

- Social class tends to play a crucial role in structuring the basic parameters of socioeconomic standing and trajectories.
- Race restricts attainments among African Americans, relative to whites, thereby establishing a link in life-chance opportunities with other African Americans, irrespective of class status.
- There is not a strong basis for concluding that the racialized outcomes at the impoverished and middle-class levels will be reduced soon.
- More research is needed to fill out our understanding of the extent to which patterns of segregation in both the residential and employment spheres explain racialization of socioeconomic outcomes across the American class structure.