

Research Brief

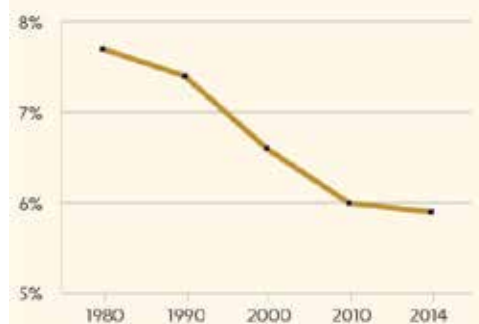
UCLA Labor Center | May 2017

Ready to Work, Uprooting Inequity: Black Workers in California

Introduction

This brief explores the experience of the Black community in California through a labor and employment lens. With a population of over 2.2 million, Black people are integral to the state of California. Yet, over the past few decades, the community is facing a steady decline. Today, they comprise just under 6% of the population. As a result of widening inequality and a glaring lack of economic opportunities, California is in the *throes of a Black jobs crisis*. This report is based on our analysis of current and historical census data. It is a follow up to our more in depth analysis of Black workers in Los Angeles. The findings argue for the need to stabilize Black families and communities by creating good-paying, quality jobs accessible to Black workers. This includes decent employment opportunities, livable wages, and fair workplace practices that are essential to develop an adequate and dignified standard of living.

Figure 1: Percent of Black Population in California, 1980-2014

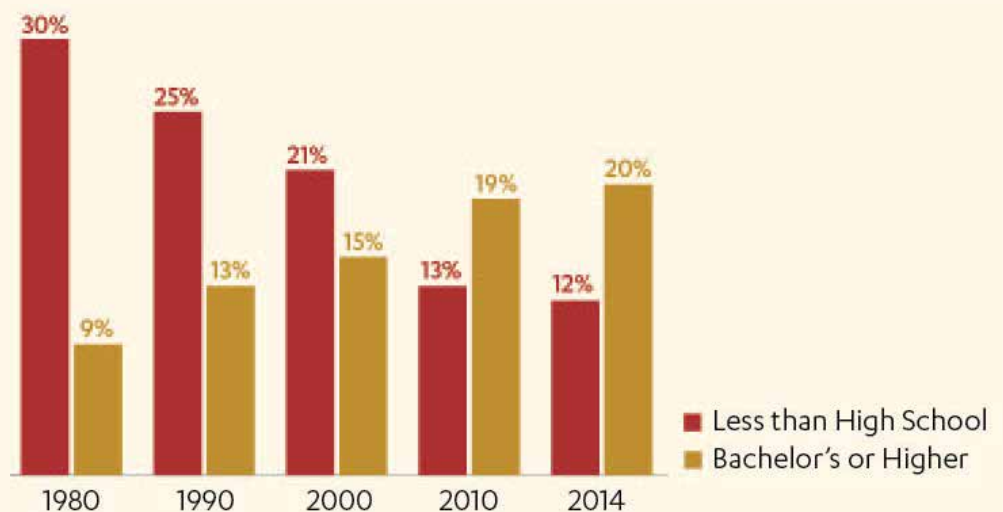


Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2014

Black people in California are presently significantly more educated than previous generations.

From 1980 to 2014, the number of those with less than a high school degree has shrunk by one-third to 12%. The number of those with a bachelor's degree or higher has doubled.

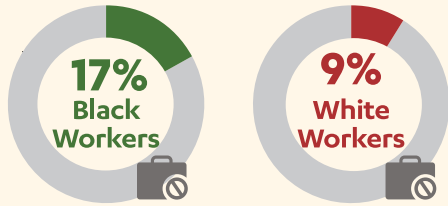
Figure 2: Percentage of Black Adults with Less than a High School Degree and Bachelor's Degree or Higher in California, 1980-2014



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2014

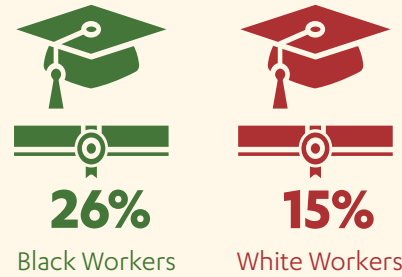
Even with the highest education attainment in the past 30 years, Black workers still experience barriers to employment. Across all levels of education, Black workers experience the highest rates of unemployment. In California, 17% of Black workers are unemployed, almost twice that of white workers. Black workers with a high school or less education have double the unemployment of white workers with the same educational attainment. One quarter of Black workers with a high school diploma face unemployment. Black college-educated workers around the country also experience unemployment and underemployment at above-average rates. Nearly 1 in 10 Black workers with a higher degree is unemployed.

Figure 3: Unemployment Rates in California



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

Figure 4: California Adults with a High School Degree or Less that are Unemployed



Black workers experience significant wage inequalities. Even with unprecedented education attainment levels, Black workers are still earning considerably less than white workers. Whether working full or part time, Black workers earn only three-quarters of what white workers earn. Income inequality between Black and white workers eclipses even the gendered pay gap among white workers. While white women earn less than white men, the median wage of Black women is only 69% of what white men earn and about 85% of what white women earn.

Figure 5: Hourly Wages for Full and Part Time Workers in California

Part Time	Full Time	
12.98	21.80	Black
17.03	28.09	White

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

Figure 6: Full Time Workers Hourly Wage Earned as Percent of White Male Wages



Low wage is defined as two-thirds of the median hourly wage of an area. In California, over one-third of Black workers are low-wage workers, as opposed to 24% of white workers.

Figure 7: Black Workers and Low Wages

3 in 10 Black workers earn low wages.



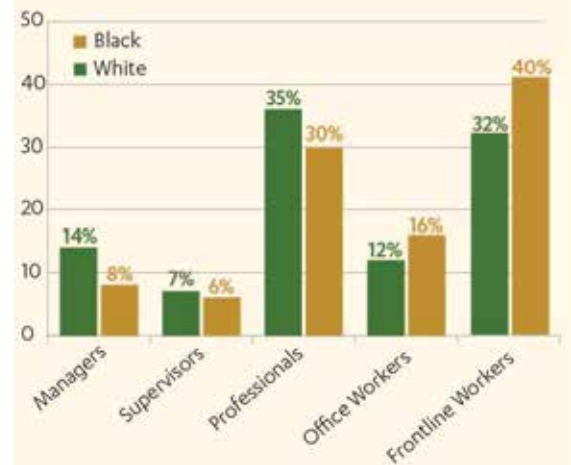
Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

Black workers are underrepresented in professional jobs and have lower rates in managerial and supervisory positions.

Frontline jobs are entry-level jobs such as floor positions and non-supervisory positions that are generally low wage, whereas office work generally indicates administrative or clerical positions in an office. Black workers have a higher rate of occupying frontline positions and office work than white workers; these are job positions with lower pay and less stability. Over half of Black workers are employed in these jobs.

Though 30% of Black workers are in professional positions, it is a lower rate than white workers. These positions offer much better pay and stability than frontline and office positions. In addition, Black workers are almost half as likely as white workers to be in management positions.

Figure 8: Occupations in California



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5 year sample 2010-2014

Black workers experience a myriad of negative health outcomes due to racial discrimination in employment.

A key social determinant of health is access to a safe and well-paying job. People who live in communities with high unemployment, pronounced poverty, and a generally low socioeconomic status are more likely to experience mental distress, crime, child maltreatment, childhood obesity, and higher levels of biological wear and tear from chronic stress.

Recommendations

The data shows the need for expanded economic opportunities and good-paying, quality jobs that are accessible to Black workers. Based on our research, we make these recommendations:

1. Support worker movements that improve working conditions.
2. Create policies and programs that create access to jobs for underrepresented workers
3. Empower agencies and communities to address discrimination and workplace issues
4. Support and ensure high road business practices

This brief was compiled by Saba Waheed and Reyna Orellana at the UCLA Labor Center. For more information about the methodology and further analysis of the issues and recommendations, please see *Ready to Work, Uprooting Inequity: Black Workers in Los Angeles*. The UCLA Labor Center offers a range of educational, research, and public service activities and is a vital resource to help create jobs that are good for workers and their communities, to improve the quality of existing jobs in the low-wage economy, and to strengthen the process of immigrant integration, especially among students and youth. This research was developed in collaboration with the Los Angeles Black Worker Center.

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