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Author
Davis, Katrinell

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Stuck Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Explanations of Employment Change Among African American Women in the Postindustrial Era

by Katrinell Davis

Department of Sociology
University of California, Berkeley
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Katrinell Davis
Department of Sociology
University of California, Berkeley

mcclend1@berkeley.edu

Although the opportunity structure for African Americans has improved since the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, African American female workers still predominantly occupy jobs offering low wages with no job security. This paper begins to examine the reasons for this stagnation by offering a comprehensive review of scholarship on the employment histories of African American women in the postindustrial era. Using Census data and other historical evidence, I argue that mainstream research on the structure of employment opportunities open to African American women is inadequate. Social-cultural sociologists have spent too much time blaming workers for their employment outcomes, while ignoring the historical and institutional factors that shape these outcomes. At the same time, structural approaches in this literature only hint at the important roles firms play in creating inequality and reducing mobility, and they stop short of exploring how these trends develop over time. In an attempt to shift the emphasis away from individual level and ahistorical structural approaches to understanding African American women's employment progress, I propose a workplace centered approach that incorporates a consideration of historical and political factors in explanations of blocked opportunity among these workers in the postindustrial era.

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> "The wronged are always wrong, and so we blame the Negro. If we are fair, however, we must place the responsibility of a social effect upon those responsible for the cause."
>
> *The New Republic*, June 24, 1916

Introduction

Although the opportunity structure for African Americans has improved since the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, African American female workers still predominantly occupy jobs offering low wages with no job security. Since most researchers focus on the ways human capital and cultural factors have affected the employability of these workers, we know little about why African American women disproportionately work low-paying dead-end jobs, and how their structure of occupational opportunity has shifted over time. The literature on industrial restructuring since the 1970s does examine general occupational shifts among African American female workers, but attention is too narrowly focused on marginal groups such as welfare mothers and middle-class women working professional jobs. Meanwhile, very little effort has gone into exploring the employment prospects of working-class African American women (Edin and Lein 1997).

This paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by offering a comprehensive review of scholarship on African American women in the postindustrial era. I argue that mainstream research on the structure of opportunities available to African American women is inadequate because it is stuck between a rock and a hard place. Social-cultural explanations tend to overstate the role individual level factors play in shaping employment outcomes, while ignoring the historical and institutional factors that shape these outcomes. At the same time, structural approaches taken in this literature only hint at the important roles employers play in creating

inequality and reducing mobility, and they stop short of exploring how these trends develop over time.

In this review, I part ways with mainstream sociological research on black women's employment. I do this by challenging the key assumptions of this literature and by using Census data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) and other secondary resources to show where these assumptions fall short.[1] With this evidence, I illustrate the complexity of postindustrial inequality by documenting the extent to which workplace inequality is also deeply tied to cross group differences in regards to education, as well as cross group differences in job holding patterns over time. I also argue that explanations of occupational progress will remain inadequate until we make efforts to avoid the pitfalls of blaming workers for their bad choices and offering ahistorical descriptions of the jobs they predominantly work.

Mainstream theories of workplace inequality have little to no evidence to support their claims with respect to the relationship between moral turpitude and mobility. Consequently, what we are really confronted with is a classic case of circular reasoning where the relationship between a predictor and the outcome variable is not measured, but is inferred. I argue for a workplace centered approach that acknowledges intersections between public policy initiatives (such as the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit) and shifts in the organization of work in order to better understand how these factors influence opportunities available to African American workers. I conclude by attempting to redirect the dominant discussion among researchers by pointing to evidence that suggests workplace discrimination has not declined in significance, but has transformed over time. I argue that these shifts in the nature of workplace discrimination have

[1] I randomly selected a 1 percent sample from the IPUMS database that includes representative samples of the United States for years 1960 though 2000. Microdata drawn from this database, which provide information on individuals and households, allow researchers to use uniform record layouts, coding schemes, and documentation to explore change in outcomes such as educational differences, employment patterns, and wage gaps over time.

led to the rise of screening rituals and other administrative practices, such as the creation of involuntary part-time labor forces, that have made jobs increasingly dead-end in the postindustrial era.

The Employment Opportunity of African American Women Workers in the Post Industrial Era: An Overview

Employment Trends

By the early 1970s the "golden age" of employment sparked by post World War II economic expansion had come to an end. International economic competition intensified and stagflation began to cripple the advanced industrial world (Woody 1989, Bluestone and Harrison 1982). In response, firms took a number of steps. They restructured their operations by increasing their flexibility (Huber 2004, Harrison 1997) and by relocating their operations to other countries and to union-free regions of the United States (Kasarda 1995). They also adopted compensation schemes in order to reduce production costs (Appelbaum et al. 2003, Sokoloff 1992, Reskin and Roos 1990).

These changes in the labor process had a profound effect on male workers, particularly those with few or minimal skills. Scholars including Bernhardt, Morris, and Handcock (1995) have found that wages among low-skilled Caucasian men started to stagnate during the 1980s, and then began to decline more rapidly during the 1990s. This was mostly because white men lost access to manufacturing jobs and were unable to find sufficient replacements in the expanding service sector.[2] African American male workers faced a similar fate (Wilson 1987, Moss and Tilly 1991). Although the period of wage gain for African American men during the

[2] Thomas DiPrete and David Grusky (1990) claim that the decline in the occupational standing of Caucasian male workers was also affected negatively by the occupational upgrading of their female and minority counterparts.

1970s lasted longer and produced more overall gains, Bernhardt, Morris and Handcock (1995) show that the loss of well paying low-skilled jobs was just as devastating to these workers as it was to their white male counterparts. For instance, in 1973, 73 percent of African American male workers between the ages of 20 and 24 had jobs. By 1988, this number had dropped to 64 percent nationally, and it declined much more sharply in industrialized Midwestern states such as Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois where African Americans were heavily concentrated in manufacturing work. To make matters worse, the percentage of African American men aged 25 to 55 earning less than $10,000 increased from 25 to 40 percent between 1969 and 1984 (Bates 1995: 374).

Despite reports of an employment crisis among African American male workers (Wilson 1996, Juhn 1992, Wilson 1987), by many accounts, African American women workers, who predominantly worked as domestics throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Hunter 1997, Wallace 1980), made tremendous gains as a result of industrial restructuring (Fosu 1997, King 1995, Albelda 1986, Wallace 1980). Between 1960 and 1980 their highest gains were in male intensive service industries, such as transportation, communications, utilities, and public administration (Woody 1989). African American women also increased their visibility substantially in service sector jobs that predominantly hired women, such as retail trade, personal and business services, as well as professional services. By 1970, nearly four times as many African American women were working in clerical and sales work than in 1950 (King 1995, Sokoloff 1992).

By the mid 1980s the situation had changed. Sharp cutbacks in government and service employment seriously began to dampen the recent progress of women and minority workers (Sokoloff 1992). For example, although black women's level of educational attainment

improved between the 1980s and 1990s, their likelihood of being poor was higher in 1989 than it was in 1969 (Casserly 1998: 3). Moreover, between 1969 and 1983, the official unemployment rate for African American women had increased from 8 percent to 17 percent (Bose et al. 1987: 23).

Skills Mismatch versus Spatial Mismatch

Most of the mainstream literature that seeks to explain declines in African American women's economic progress has centered on debates between skills mismatch and spatial mismatch theorists. According to skills mismatch theorists, increases in the skill requirements of jobs have led to a reduction in the wages and number of job opportunities available to low-skill workers. For instance, analysts found that skill mismatches generated by an increased demand for interpersonal and "soft" skills in industries such as retailing have restricted low-skilled African American women's access to jobs (Moss and Tilly 2001, 1995; Wilson 1994; Juhn 1992; Bound and Freeman 1992). In *The Political Economy and Urban Racial Tensions*, William Julius Wilson (1994) suggests that African American women lack soft skills because they do not possess the right social and cultural capital they need to secure a good paying job. According to Wilson, their increasing social isolation over time has diminished their access to the type of social networks that would help improve their employment prospects. Wilson goes on to note that "although our research indicates that employers consider [black women] more desirable as workers than inner-city black men, their social isolation decreases their ability to develop language and other job related skills necessary in an economy that rewards employees who can work and communicate effectively with the public" (Wilson 1994: 11).

Instead of focusing on disparities between the skills workers possess and industry specific demands for labor, spatial mismatch theorists claim that structural shifts since industrial

restructuring have contributed to declines in opportunity (Browne 2000, McLafferty and Preston 1992). Irene Browne (2000) illustrates this point in her article "Opportunities Lost," wherein she argues that spatial mismatch negatively affects the employment rates of young black mothers who reside in the central city. Browne shows that African American female household heads are becoming more concentrated in poor inner-city neighborhoods at the same time that low-skill jobs are moving to the suburbs.

Sociologists also argue that African American women workers are disadvantaged in the labor market due to the statistical discrimination (i.e., negative stereotyping) they encounter at work. For instance, Kennelly (1999) found that regardless of their actual parenting status, African American female workers are perceived negatively as single mothers, and in turn are viewed by employers as unprepared and weakly committed to paid labor due to the family responsibilities they take on as single parents.

Exploring the Broader Implications of How We Understand Employment Progress: Social-cultural versus Structural Approaches

Since most of these studies on African American women workers suggest that these women suffer from a skill and/or a spatial mismatch, they can be categorized as social-cultural or structural approaches to understanding this population's labor market outcomes. Social-cultural explanations contend that gaps in human, social, and cultural capital are the primary reasons why African American women encounter employment problems. Structural explanations usually point to how characteristics of jobs and the stereotypes that employers hold shape opportunity available to workers. The next section of this paper examines the presuppositions of these

explanations, and highlights the extent to which these explanations overstate individual level explanations of change, and understate the role of historical and institutional actions.

Social-Cultural Approaches

In general, social-cultural approaches contend that differences in employment opportunity are a function of what workers bring to the labor market. They assume that workers themselves primarily shape employment opportunities because it is their responsibility to acquire the "right" styles, skills, and cultural capital to help them get ahead (Burtless 1995). For instance, with the increased demand for skill in the labor market in the postindustrial era, many social-cultural analysts claim that the best thing African American women could do to improve their employment outcomes is upgrade their skill level and job training (Harris 1997, Dixon 1994, Jehl 1994).

Others within the social-cultural tradition go a step further to contend that African American women's circumstances would improve drastically if only they would release themselves from the "tangle of pathologies" (Moynihan 1965) that has kept them from sustaining a livelihood (Wilson 1994, Jencks 1991). Christopher Jencks (1991) makes this point in the edited volume *The Urban Underclass*, in which he concludes that relatively high rates of unwed parenthood within poor African American communities spawned a "reproductive underclass," whose history of limited opportunities preconditioned them to resent and resist mainstream cultural ideals. Echoing the most important finding presented in the Moynihan Report, Jencks joins Wilson (1987) in claiming that the stability of African American families is tied to economic conditions, and that when these conditions deteriorated, the stability of families declined. This process resulted in men leaving the home and women being left to raise the

children alone. In Jenck's framework, the "cultural conflicts" conjured up by single parenthood have led to economic problems for these families because they are disconnected from mainstream institutions and mainstream values. Hence, he argues that single mothers cannot get jobs that pay better than welfare because, on the whole, they lack the social and cultural skills they need to get ahead.

Social-cultural researchers fundamentally offer rational interpretations of blocked opportunities. Generally, based on the sociological tradition of prejudice (Blumer 1958), proponents of rational explanations of inequality tend to assume that blocked opportunities stem from the dominant group's efforts to maintain their group position by protecting their sense of entitlement, as well as the prestige of the position (Bobo et al. 1997, Tumin 1945). As a result, while some proponents of rational explanations such as skills mismatch theory and the culture of poverty thesis *acknowledge* structural shifts in opportunity, in the end these researchers contend that workers live in poverty because they lack the skills, social networks, and/or the cultural capital they need to get ahead. Therefore, instead of advocating for the adequate support of employed mothers and improvements in the jobs they predominantly work, these rational theorists of opportunity tend to imply that people live in poverty because they continue making lifestyle choices that keep them "disorganized" and poor.

Structural Approaches

Structural approaches, on the other hand, typically relate black women's employment opportunity to the organizational characteristics of the jobs they hold. These characteristics include terms of status of industrial sector (Woody 1989), location and size of firms (Browne 2000), and structure of internal labor markets within the jobs they predominantly work

(Kilbourne et al. 1994). In general, most structural theorists take a dual-market approach and suggest that the employment outcomes of African American women are confined by their function as marginal laborers in the secondary market as opposed to the primary market, which contains jobs with good working conditions, high wages and employment stability. Jobs in the secondary market are characterized as having low wages and fringe benefits, as well as fewer opportunities to move up in the job. Since jobs in secondary labor markets are thought to be in sync with the characteristics of those who work them (Doeringer and Piore 1971: 178-179), analysts claim that these jobs have high turnover and absentee rates because they were designed to accommodate the low skill levels and work habits of the individuals hired to perform the work (Kilbourne et al. 1994, Reskin and Roos 1990, Malveaux 1982, Chertos et al. 1982).

Structural approaches contend that blocked opportunities are shaped by moral or color-blind factors that utilize nonracial criteria as proxies for race or gender in determining social outcomes (Bonilla-Silva 2003, Kilbourne et al. 1994). The concept of color-blind racism is an example of a moral explanation of blocked opportunity. According to Bonilla-Silva (2003), color-blind racism serves as the ideological armor used to justify seemingly neutral institutional practices that reinforce the racial order in society. He contends that color-blind racism emerges in the workplace by way of stories people tell that function to help keep blacks and other minorities in their place. In the post-Civil Rights era, Bonilla-Silva maintains that people use storylines to help the dominant group justify their outcomes and their ideological stance on redistributive policies. For instance, he argues that the major storylines used to justify inequality or lack of support for efforts like affirmative action included: “I did not own slaves,” “If (other ethnic groups) have made it, how come blacks have not?” and “I did not get a (job or promotion) because of a black men” (Bonilla-Silva 2002: 77).

In a sense, these racial storylines are similar to Kilbourne et al.'s cultural feminist theory of gendered valuation, which also acknowledges the role moral judgments and social norms play in creating inequalities and justifying outcomes. Kilbourne et al.'s (1994) "cultural feminist theory of gendered valuation" explains why women are receiving low wages in occupations in which they are heavily concentrated. The authors demonstrate that a substantial portion of the gender gap in wages exists because women are paid less to perform nurturing work. Therefore, since these occupations are devalued primarily on ascriptive and moral grounds, Kilborne et al. conclude that the sex gap in pay can only be effectively addressed by policies mandating the employer to acknowledge the comparable worth of skills when setting wage scales.

"Where's the beef?": Missing Elements in Predominant Explanations of Occupational Progress

Now I will address the gaps in conventional explanations of blocked opportunity. On the whole, I argue that stratification sociologists have become very effective at describing poor populations and using analyses of this population's "bad decisions" to explain shifts in occupational progress. However, in reality, employment progress is not just bound by actors' decisions and unconscious business actions. It is also shaped profoundly by the institutional hurdles they encounter. In fact, I demonstrate in this section that the structure of opportunity is shaped by administrative shifts in the organization of work. These shifts have been especially influential in shaping the structure of opportunity in the jobs low-skill workers predominantly work.

Gaps in Social-cultural Explanations

While social-cultural approaches vary in terms of scope and method, on the whole, these studies tend to lack historical specificity in their accounts of African American women's labor market experiences, especially those relating to black women's role within the labor process and the structural conditions they face as workers. For instance, although an individual's level of education plays a key role in determining their worth to the market, we know that workers with the same level of education experience different outcomes. Deirdre Royster (2003) makes this point in *Race and the Invisible Hand* when discussing interviews she had with black and white men who graduated from the same vocational school and sought jobs in the same blue-collar job market in the early 1990s. In this study, Royster finds that racial differences in employment outcomes emerged mostly from racially segregated social networks.

At the same time, analysts including Christopher Jencks (1991) and William J. Wilson (1987), who imply that African American women are struggling in the labor market because they are not married to a gainfully employed man, are also inaccurately assessing the determinants of employment opportunity. Single parent households do not in themselves create hurdles in employment opportunities. Families headed by single mothers are more disadvantaged because, on average, many single women were poor before they became mothers (Luker 1996, Ladner 1971) and as a result, they end up more limited in what they can offer both the workplace and their families (Edin and Lein 1997).

Single mothers also come up short because, as breadwinners, they have few lucrative employment opportunities available to them (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997, Corcoran 1995). Using PSID data, Kathleen Mullan Harris (1996) found that, on average, single mothers who exited welfare for work in the 1980s were paid only $6.11 an hour in 1991 dollars (Edin and

Lein 1997: 85). The main reason their hourly pay was so low was because of their dependence on dead-end jobs. Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein observe in *Making Ends Meet* that two-thirds of their study's wage reliant single mothers worked as stock clerks, certified nursing assistants (CNAs), cashiers, and childcare workers. The problem, as Edin and Lein argued, was not the work itself. Instead, the problem is what these workers received in return for their labor.

For instance, CNAs provide hands on care for those who are unable to care for themselves. While working primarily under the direction of a nurse, they are responsible for a variety of duties ranging from bathing, dressing, feeding, and toileting patients (Foner 1994). But, in the end, they do not get much in return. In 1997, the median hourly wage for a California nursing assistant was $7.12, compared to $7.48 per hour for animal caretakers, and $11.71 an hourly wage for garbage collectors (U.S. Census Bureau 1997). Meanwhile, the median turnover rate for CNAs in 1997 was 69 percent, with 25 percent of nursing homes reporting staff turnover rates of 100 percent or higher.

Despite the plight of undercompensated workers like CNAs, social-cultural researchers tend to oversimplify interpretations of their employment progress by limiting discussions of employment hurdles to individual level factors such as marital status, time orientation, and value systems. Researchers in this tradition have produced interesting arguments that shed light on the various individual level factors correlated with employability, but these explanations ultimately fall short in accounting for how institutional and social changes in the economy have made low-skill black women workers vulnerable to the ongoing transformation of the US economy.

Gaps in Structural Approaches

Structural explanations offer a clearer theory of labor market opportunity than social-cultural approaches in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the jobs African American women work. In fact, I join structural theorists, in part, because they understand that the jobs low-skilled workers work are undervalued and underpaid (Sokoloff 1992, Woody 1989). But, I part ways with this tradition because its proponents do not give sufficient attention to how these conditions of workplace restructuring emerged and how they have developed over time. Although management has consistently interceded in turf battles over jobs (Nakano-Glenn 2002, Weaver 1946, Du Bois 1934), structural researchers do not explore connections between the current configuration of workplace inequality and the business community's role in setting the stage for the unequal distribution of resources we observe. This oversight is problematic because history teaches us that occupational hurdles can result from a firm's desire to survive threats to its existence (Fligstein 2001).

For instance, during the World War II era many employers excluded African American women from war jobs because, as the manager of a local United States Employment Service noted in 1942, they feared upsetting the wives of important people, who depended on the cheap labor black women provided them as domestic servants in their homes (Weaver 1946: 17). As a result, although many African American women workers left domestic work for jobs as cooks, waitresses, hairdressers, and other jobs within the personal service sector, only a small number worked factory jobs because war plants were hesitant to hire them and delayed employing these workers until all other labor supplies were tapped out. So, while African American women were able to make some inroads during this time, many did not benefit from this expansion in employment opportunities because they were not able to escape domestic labor. In fact, more

African American women entered domestic service during this time of expansion than those who left it (Weaver 1946: 81).

Structural theorists also fall short because they are generally uncritical of the presuppositions made by social-cultural researchers, and they have allocated little to no attention to state actions and the workplace specific factors that shape the organization of work within firms. Their failure to challenge the paradigmatic assumptions within the social and cultural tradition has been particularly troubling. For instance, while Kilbourne et al.'s theory of cultural valuation is helpful in illustrating the relative worth of performing nurturing work, it does not directly address studies that contend that employment problems are the result of moral failures. Instead of directly addressing claims from the social and cultural tradition, structural theorists have substituted job characteristics for moral failures in their explanations of blocked opportunities.

Similarly, their efforts to "bring in the state" are underdeveloped. Despite their tendency to suggest public policy interventions at the end of their analyses, structural analysts have not paid much attention to the state's role in creating many of the consequences of structural change they observe. This oversight is troubling because the government has been slow to use the sanctions intended to control labor market discrimination that are at its disposal, including litigation and the cancellation of contracts, to enforce equal employment opportunity laws (Gould 1977). Another reason why the missing state link is so troubling in the structural story is because it has played a significant role in encouraging firms to create dead-end jobs in the postindustrial era (Howard 1997). Research suggests that the employment policies implemented in the 1980s through 2000 had a substantial affect on both the supply and demand for labor

(Howard 1997). The Targeted Jobs Tax Credit (TJTC) is an example of a policy that did more harm than good to the structure of opportunity available to low-skilled workers.

Although the idea of promoting employment through tax credits to business dates back to 1936 and reemerged in the 1960s, tax credits began receiving a lot of attention from a broad range of individuals and organizations[3] in the 1970s. This was due to the public's dissatisfaction with public employment efforts (Howard 1997). The TJTC was born out of the state's efforts to encourage the business community to hire low-skilled workers. As the story goes, members of the Ways and Means Committee seized the opportunity to fund a tax credit incentive for businesses that hired economically disadvantaged and displaced workers when they were amending the Revenue Act of 1978 (Howard 1997). But this tax cut only applied to certain populations. For instance, ex-convicts and individuals from poor families were added to the list of eligible populations, in addition to Vietnam veterans, youth in educational programs, welfare recipients who receive SSI and General Assistance.

In 1995, a new TJTC bill (S. 1568) passed, which changed the name of this intervention from the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit to the Work Opportunity Credit. With this measure, Congress amended the list of targeted groups to included individuals who receive assistance from AFDC (or now TANF), veterans, ex-felons, high-risk youth (defined as youth between the ages of 18 and 25 who live within an empowerment zone or enterprise community), vocational rehabilitation referral, summer youth employees, and food stamp recipients. In 1998, the 105th

[3] Over time, a variety of interest groups worked to keep the TJTC around. Interest groups working on behalf of the business community, especially those in low wage, low-skill industries, were extremely vocal. These organizations ranged from the Food Service and Lodging Institute and the National Council of Chain restaurants to the Association of General Merchandise chains and individual corporations such as K-Mart, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Dayton Hudson (Howard 1997: 164). Some organizations chose not to lobby directly, but worked through the "Targeted Jobs Tax Credit Coalition" which went from representing 12 organizations in the early 1980s to over 500 by the end of the 1980s (Howard 1997: 164-165).

Congress passed the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Extension Act (S. 2230), which extended the work opportunity tax credit for an additional three years.

Just because a policy has a long life does not mean that it was successful. On the contrary, since its implementation, there has been considerable opposition to this tax expenditure. As an AFL-CIO official put it, with the help of the work opportunity tax credit "wages are undercut and employers have an incentive to adopt a revolving door pattern of laying off subsidized workers…and displacing current workers for those that are subsidized" (Howard 1997: 165). The greatest opposition came from the U.S. Treasury Department, which was responsible for issuing regulations that determined eligibility criteria for the TJTC and processing the tax returns of the employers who used the credit. Treasury officials were critical of the program because they thought it was an insufficient way of motivating employers to hire low-skill workers. In fact, an audit of the TJTC in nine states in the late 1990s indicates that 92 percent of all certified TJTC workers would have been hired without the credit (Howard 1997: 171). The state had made hiring low-skilled workers for short stretches of time a much more attractive option.

While structural theorists offer valuable research on job opportunity, their research typically lacks historical depth. Researchers in this tradition also have neglected to offer studies that challenge the paradigm assumptions that shape the workplace characteristics they observe. Due to these and other limitations, both structural and social-cultural explanations fall short in attempts to explain the causes of blocked opportunities in the postindustrial era. As a result, it is my position that our knowledge concerning the economic progress of African American women is limited because we have been asking the wrong questions and using the wrong tools to interrogate those concerns. The next section of this paper is intended to help illustrate why we

need to expand our attempts to understand the structure of opportunity available to African American women between 1970 and 2000 with Census data. Two broad questions guide the investigation. First, how has the structure of occupational opportunity evolved within and between cohorts throughout the period of study? And second, to what degree have racial differences in occupational advancement shifted over time?

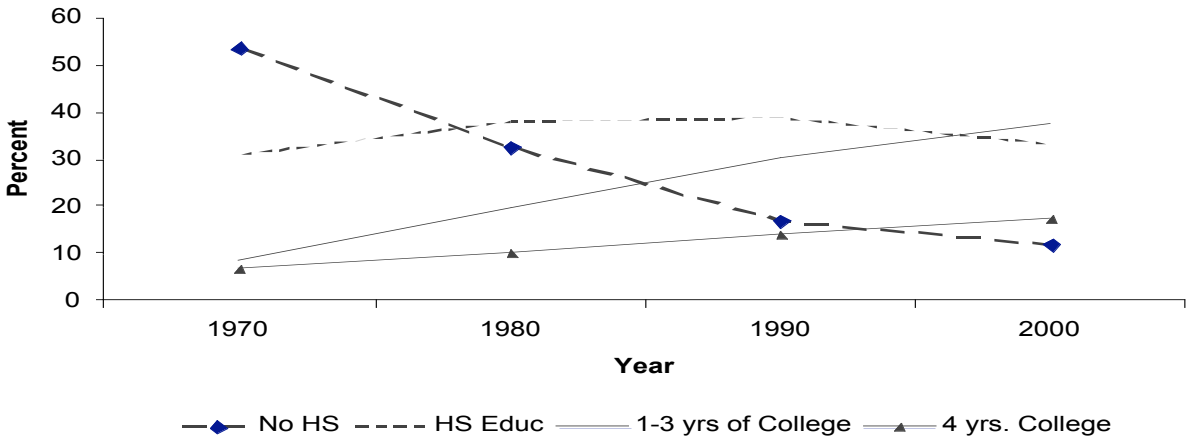
Why Jobs Matter: An Assessment of Occupational Opportunity Available to African American Women Workers

After the mid 1970s, the structure of employment opportunities was affected profoundly by changes in demand for workers across industrial sectors (Bluestone and Harrison 1982). At this time, most full-time American workers were employed within the service-producing sector, just as they had been since the end of World War II (Featherman and Hauser 1978). In fact, by 1986, service industries made up 75 percent of all non-farm wage and salary employment and 53 percent of real domestic output. But, while service employment expanded, the manufacturing industry declined significantly during this period. As a result of these patterns, just over 27 percent of full-time workers were employed by firms in the manufacturing industry in 1970, and by 2000, only 15 percent were employed by these firms (U.S. Department of Commerce 2004).

Many of these trends affected workers differently. For instance, while many low-skilled men lost ground during this time, the expansion of the service industry helped improve the traditional employment opportunities available to African American women workers. African American women workers were able to benefit from job shortages in industries that traditionally hire white women, which include retail sales, clerical work, as well as personal and human service occupations (Woody 1992, Wallace 1980).

African American women were able to take advantage of these opportunities because, on average, there was vast improvement in their educational attainment. For instance, although black women without high school diplomas once constituted a large segment of the working population, Figure 1 shows that between 1970 and 2000, the percentage of black women without a high school education declined substantially.

Figure 1: Distribution of Black women by Education group between 1970 and 2000, ages 20-64.



We also see in Figure 1 that there has been steady improvement in this population's level of educational attainment throughout the period of study. While the most robust change over time occurred among those choosing to pursue post-secondary training, Figure 1 illustrates that roughly a third of African American workers throughout the period of study operate in the labor market with only a high school education.

Notwithstanding these trends, there is no research that attempts to gain a real sense of the career mobility of high school educated African American women. Consequently, although high school educated workers have become a substantial segment of the population, they are invisible in the urban inequalities literature. Given the percentage of African American women with only a high school diploma, it is important to look at how shifts in the labor market have affected their structure of opportunity. Hence, the tables that follow document the occupational patterns of these African American women that I call "the missing middle" between 1960 and 2000.

Table 1: Mean Income of Women Workers[a] by Race, Education, and Year, 1960-2000 (in 2005 dollars)

	1960	1980	2000
All			
Black	$ 9,616.24	$ 17,788.74	$ 25,326.72
White	$ 15,060.85	$ 19,171.09	$ 30,111.59
Black % of White	64%	93%	84%
High School Educated			
Black	$ 12,710.42	$ 17,017.84	$ 17,982.45
White	$ 15,403.94	$ 18,315.58	$ 22,370.37
Black % of White	83%	93%	80%
1-3 Years of College			
Black	$ 23,604.97	$ 19,705.20	$ 24,324.89
White	$ 17,380.36	$ 20,417.62	$ 27,258.44
Black % of White	136%	97%	89%
4 Years of College			
Black	$ 19,198.30	$ 31,627.05	$ 45,934.33
White	$ 26,472.55	$ 28,142.02	$ 47,872.54
Black % of White	73%	112%	96%

Source: Author's Calculations of IPUMS data.
[a]Persons included in this table are between ages 25-69.

Table 1, which reports the mean income of women workers by race, year and educational attainment, illustrates that between 1960 and 2000, black women consistently earned less than similarly educated white women, particularly those with the least amount of education. With the exception of workers with one to three years of college, in 1960, most black women only

received a modest percentage of the wages earned by similarly educated white women. Their percentage of white female earnings in this year ranged from 64 percent among all workers to 83 percent among women workers with a high school education. For the most part, these gaps diminish in 1980, only to return in a modified form by 2000.

This table also shows how some educational groups experienced a greater lapse in their wage parity than others. For instance, between 1960 and 1980, workers with one to three years of college were the only educational subgroup that saw declines in their wage parity with similarly educated white women. Also, although black women who have at least four years of college seem to have reached parity with similarly educated white women, they experienced the largest decline in their relative standings between 1980 and 2000.

One of the reasons why relative earnings differentials declined is because low-skilled workers, such as high school educated black women, are more likely to work low wage jobs and are less likely than white women to hold onto their jobs over the course of their careers than similarly educated black women. Table 2 documents intracohort shifts in job holding patterns among high school educated black and white women workers by age between 1970 and 2000. To compensate for not using longitudinal data, I track the employment territory of these workers by documenting their occupational distribution across age cohorts in order to analyze intracohort trends throughout the period of study. Intracohort comparisons, which are thought to be influenced heavily by labor market factors and changes in internal labor market schema, derive from contrasts of occupational differences of workers within the same cohort (Johnson and Sell 1976). I trace intracohort shifts by creating synthetic cohorts with the Census data. I followed the 1936-1945 birth cohort in this analysis by tracking the job holding patterns of workers in this cohort between the ages of 25-34 in 1970, 35-44 in 1980, 45-54 in 1990, and 55-64 in 2000.

Table 2: Occupational Distribution of high school educated women workers by age category and race, 1970-2000.

	Percentage of Employed Persons in group							
	25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
PROFESSIONAL AND MANAGERIAL WORKERS								
Executives and Administrators	2.5	*	7.1	2.9	11	6.6	12.5	1.8
Management-Related Occupations	1.3	0.9	2.4	0.6	2.9	0.9	3.3	0.5
Engineers and Natural Scientists	*	*	0.1	*	0.8	4.8	*	0.4
Doctors, Dentists, and Other Health Diagnostic Occupations	*	*	*	0.1	*	0.1	0.3	1
Lawyers and Judges	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Post-Secondary School Teachers	*	*	0.1	0.6	*	*	*	*
Elementary and Secondary School Teachers	1.6	3.5	1.4	1.8	1.5	4.2	0.8	*
Miscellaneous Professional Specialties (Ministers, Social workers and so on)	1.5	*	1.6	2.6	1.3	3.8	2.2	3.8
OTHER WHITE COLLAR WORKERS								
Technicians other than Health Technicians	1.4	0.9	1.2	0.9	1.1	0.5	2.6	2.1
Health Aides and Technicians	3.1	2.6	2.3	4.7	2.7	3.4	2.8	0.6
Sales-Related Occupations	5.3	2.6	7.6	2.4	6.2	1.5	8.4	7.4
Administrative Support Workers	35.1	19.1	32	29.2	27.8	14.2	24.5	12.4
Miscellaneous White Collar Jobs	17.6	9.6	13.6	8.3	13.8	7.8	12.5	13
BLUE COLLAR WORKERS								
Craftsmen and Precision Workers	1	*	0.9	0.1	1.7	0.6	0.4	0.7
Machine and Transport Operators	12.2	23.5	12.6	15.7	9.8	20.6	11.2	5.3
Handlers, Laborers, and so on	1.4	2.6	2.2	1.5	1.7	0.9	0.5	4.9
SERVICE WORKERS								
Protective Service Workers (Police, Fire, and so on)	*	*	0.1	0.3	0.1	*	*	*
Household Workers	1.3	11.3	0.6	2.2	*	0.8	*	*
Food Services, Building Services (Except Household), Childcare, Restaurant Service Workers	14.6	23.5	13.4	25.9	16.6	28.9	17.4	46.1
Farm-Related Occupations	*	*	0.6	*	0.4	0.5	0.6	*
ARMED FORCES	0.1	*	0.2	*	0.1	*	*	*

Source: Author's Calculations of IPUMS data.

Evidence in this table shows that while there are some occupations [4] in which black women gained slots, such as miscellaneous white-collar work, they began to develop a

[4] Many jobs are nested within each occupation group. For instance, the occupation group Machine and Transit operators includes workers from parking lot attendants to tool and die makers, sheet metal workers, truck drivers,

curvilinear relationship to the jobs that improved their employment circumstances after exiting private household employment at the start of their employment careers. Trends in food and building service occupations display the opposite pattern. In fact, Table 2 shows us that African American women's share of these jobs gradually increased throughout their working lives. For instance in the 1936-1945 birth cohort, the percentages of labor participation in food, building and personal service jobs at ages 25-34, 35-44, 45-54 and 55-64, were 23.5, 25.9, 28.9, and 46.1, respectively. Taken together, the aforementioned trends suggest that while black women seem to have a structure of opportunity that is similar to white women at the start of their careers, they generally are concentrated in low tier service jobs by the end of their employment careers.[5]

While there were improvements in the intercohort structure of occupational opportunities available to African American women on average, when we take into account the intracohort shifts in their occupational standing, we find that their progress in the labor market was modest at best. Intracohort shifts in administrative and sales work among African American women

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warehouse workers, plastic injection molders, and bus drivers. The occupational group Food Services, Building Services, Childcare and Restaurant work includes bartenders, fast food cooks, short order cooks, waiters and waitresses, dishwashers, and food servers who primarily work food preparation and serving related occupations. Other occupations included in this category are pest control workers, grounds keeping workers, tree trimmers, and janitors (except maids and housekeeping workers), in addition to personal care and service jobs which range from ushers, amusement and recreation attendants, barbers, hairdressers, makeup artists, flight attendants, child care workers, personal and home care aides, fitness trainers and dressing room attendants.

The jobs nested in the administrative support worker group are switchboard operators, bill collectors, payroll clerks, bank tellers, order clerks, telemarketers, ticket agents, postal service clerks, postal service mail carriers, shipping clerks, medical secretaries, typists, office clerks, secretaries, and data entry workers. Management related occupations include workers that are in management in such occupations as marketing, public relations, purchasing, health services, food service and education.

[5] In order to establish job placement as a measure of socioeconomic standing, occupations in this analysis were ranked across the following three socioeconomic indicators: the median occupational income score (calculated by IPUMS), the median Duncan socioeconomic score by occupation, and the median total income of jobholder. The Duncan Socioeconomic Index is an ordinal scale that designates a prestige score from zero to 96 to each occupational title. The occupational income score is a ranking scheme that assigns each occupation an average wage. And lastly, the median total income describes the average total income reported by jobholders within each occupation.

In this occupational classification, respondents in the professional and managerial as well as the other white-collar categories are in a higher occupational stratum than those in the blue-collar and service work categories. The occupations that ranked higher have more schooling, benefit from larger incomes, and have higher prestige scores than the occupation groups that ranked lower. Although the occupation groups do not line up perfectly with respect to the various ranking criteria, there is enough evidence to substantiate the ranking of occupation that is used in this analysis.

workers compared to Caucasian women best tell this story. Disproportionate intracohort shifts out of administrative and sales work among the African American female population in the middle of their career suggest that although these areas of work became frequent entry points into the labor market after the 1960s, African American women failed to develop careers in these positions. Hence, on the surface, when we look back at their gains in administrative support, miscellaneous white-collar work, and sales jobs at the start of their careers, it appears as if black women were starting to develop a niche in these occupations, which were previously dominated by white women. However, black women's hold on these jobs did not last, and we know this because they received large gains at the beginning and end of their employment careers, only to lose significant ground in these jobs by mid career.

Despite these trends in the occupational progress of black women workers and other well-documented declines in job quality, both social-cultural and structural approaches to blocked opportunity are incapable of addressing why workers are less likely to develop careers in the postindustrial workplace. However, strong evidence suggests that much of the mid career slip among black women workers could be related to the fact that they have different experiences than white women working the same jobs. In *Job Queues, Gender Queues*, Barbara Reskin and Patricia Roos (1990) argue that inequality in jobs previously dominated by men can be attributed to how these jobs were initially integrated and the extent to which true desegregation of the job occurred. According to Reskin and Roos (1990), changes in the composition of occupations occur because employers are forced to settle for lower-ranked workers that they normally would not hire. Reskin and Roos contend that women made progress in male occupations only when there were major changes in the economy or a reorganization of industries that changed the shape of labor queues. For instance, during the late 19th century and early 20th century, Reskin

and Roos contend that the expansion of opportunities for women in clerical jobs was in part caused by the increased bureaucratization, specialization, and mechanization of work. Developing bureaucracies drew educated men away from clerical jobs, while also expanding the need for clerical help. As a result, employers filled these positions with women, who were considered an inexpensive labor force.

Between 1970 and 1980, Reskin and Roos assert that the motivation behind shifts in the sex composition of nontraditional occupations was primarily dictated by capital's need for a cheaper labor supply. However, these authors contend that the sex integration of jobs between the 1970s and the 1980s did not accompany occupation-level desegregation, nor did the feminization of jobs significantly reduce the wage disparities between white men and white women working similar jobs. They further contend that women were overwhelmingly "ghettoized" in the workplace, meaning that they were confined to the less desirable jobs within occupations and made little progress relative to men.

It appears as though administrative support occupations were downgraded just as black women gained access to them because the administrative support jobs they entered were predominantly temporary (Woody 1995, 1992) and disproportionately low paying (Malveaux 1986). Julianne Malveaux's (1986) evidence presented in Table 3 shows that in the early 1980s, African American women began to be overrepresented in a cluster of administrative support jobs with low pay and few chances for advancement. Data from the State of Washington show that African American women were becoming overrepresented among the intermediate clerks, typists, telegraph operators, and data entry operators. At the same time, they were underrepresented among legal secretaries, librarians, bookkeepers, and word processors.

Table 3: African American Women's Pay When Overrepresented and Underrespresented in Occupations

Job Title	Actual Salary	Predicted Salary	Ratio	% Female Washington State	% Black Female National
Overrepresented Occupations:					
Intermediate Clerk	$ 921.00	$1,208.00	76.2	81%	17.9%
Intermediate Clerk/Typist	968	1269	76.3	96.7	16.3
Telegraph Operator	887	1239	71.6	95.7	15.5
Data Entry Operator	1017	1239	82.1	96.5	18.1
Licensed Practical Nurse	1030	1367	75.3	89.5	18.5
Average			76.3	91.9	17.3
Underrepresented Occupations					
Legal Secretary	$ 1,269.0	$ 1,401.0	90.6	99%	5%
Word Processor	1082	1301	83.2	98.3	5
Bookkeeper	1122	1269	88.4	87	5.2
Admnistrative Assistant	1334	1472	90.6	95.1	2.6
Intermediate Accountant	1585	1585	100	60.2	4.4
Lab Technician	1208	1401	86.2	84.1	5.2
Retail Sales Clerk	921	1239	74.3	100	4.9
Pharmacist	1980	1666	118.8	60	2.7
Librarian	1625	1794	90.6	84.6	5.1
Community Program Developer	1932	1750	110.4	60	4.7
Administative Services Manager	1839	1794	102.5	73..4	2.6
Average			94.1	81.9	4.3

Source: Julianne Malveaux 1986. "Comparable Worth and its Impact on Black Women." Table 1: pp. 55.

Malveaux's (1986) findings illustrate that African American women predominantly worked in administrative support jobs that typically paid just over 76 percent of what these women should have received based on their qualifications. Meanwhile, the jobs that they were slow to enter paid a little over 94 percent of the predicted salary (Malveaux, 1986: 55).

Towards a Workplace Centered Approach to Understanding Opportunity

The dominant interpretations of blocked opportunities among African American women workers offer opposing accounts of the causes and remedies for employment inequality. But, these accounts do not explain persistent inequalities among blacks and whites because they overlook how these outcomes emerged and the extent to which they have been shaped by institutional and political forces within society. In order to redirect this conversation, we have to start challenging within sociology the usefulness of arguments that only see moral failings and structural deficiencies as the cause of the barriers in opportunity experienced by African American women. My intervention begins with the view that barriers to opportunity are socially and politically constructed. I prefer to think of firms as social institutions whose structure of opportunity is shaped by the history of the workplace (Fligstein 2001), its position within the industry, in addition to how workers perceive their opportunities within this organization (Reskin and Roos 1990). With this framework, I think that the best way to conceptualize changes in the structure of opportunity is to view it as a dynamic process that is influenced by social and political factors, as well as institutional arrangements. Hence, instead of conceptualizing opportunity as a result of moral fabric or unconscious shifts in the location and quality of jobs, our attention needs to turn to the cultural geography of institutional actions that have played an influential role in limiting opportunities within jobs.

Drawing from Neil Fligstein's (2001) contention in the *Architecture of Markets,* I argue that jobs must be treated as fields containing systems of domination that exploit antagonisms within local cultures, in large part by institutionalizing rating systems and practices that define social relationships between actors within these social environments. Fligstein contends that exchanges within labor markets are not just motivated by price competition and the fear that

products will become obsolete. They are also influenced heavily by a firm's desire to survive internal threats to its existence, which can include strong alliances among management and workers within the firm, as well as work stoppages in opposition to company policy. Employment systems are not just neutral sites in which economic activity happens, but are social spaces that use cultural mandates and conceptions of control to stabilize social hierarchies and other political and economic relationships within the firm. In fact, Fligstein contends that "[m]arkets produce local cultures that define who is an incumbent and who is a challenger and why…They prescribe how competition will work in a given market. They also provide actors with cognitive frames to interpret the actions of other organizations" (Fligstein 2001: 18).

According to Fligstein, it was at the inception of industrialization that owners of capital in the dominant industries arrived at some baseline understandings about how the structure of employment opportunities should look. They also developed educational institutions that supported these missions and created worldviews that functioned to help workers make sense of their opportunities in the labor market. Fligstein's political-cultural approach is useful to this discussion because it provides a theory for testing assumptions regarding the nature of black female employment progress on these jobs. Within this model, patterns of employment progress are viewed as a function of a worker's ability to compel labor unions, educational organizations, and employers to change their hiring and training practices in ways that would expand their opportunities within these organizations. Fligstein's political-cultural approach also allows for comparisons of occupational progress to be made across employment systems by providing the theoretical scope needed to contrast the means by which female and racialized minority labor were initially excluded from these employment systems and the extent to which bounded

innovations (Weir 1992), such as human resource practices, are used to limit the employment prospects of low-skilled minority or female labor.

Therefore, my contribution to this literature extends beyond the critiques from the structural tradition because I assume that changes in the organization of work have played a crucial role in shaping workplace inequality. The corporation has been a stratifying institution from its inception, and I contend that it still operates in this manner, despite changes made to equal opportunity laws that frown upon differential assessments of talent in the workplace. Given the historical role that the organization of work has played in stratifying the American workforce, we must also consider the normative assumptions and the institutional practices of the business community that shape the workplace. If one removes these elements from the analysis, and neglects to interpret how workplace norms and practices adjust to social and political transformations in American society, the picture is incomplete. The actions of today's business community do not only play a large role in an individual worker's life, but they play a dominant role in determining the success of redistributive policies implemented by the state, which affects generations of workers.

While I am not denying the significance of being educated and having personal responsibility over one's own affairs, I am advocating a move towards the development of a workplace centered approach to studying blocked employment opportunities, because the mechanisms shaping labor market opportunity are not as "value-free" and benign as we have been led to believe. In my view, advancement in the labor market is also mitigated by an ongoing political struggle shaped by gender divisions and racial antagonisms that began long before any distinctions between primary and secondary markets became institutionalized (Fligstein 2001, Gordon, Edwards, and Reich 1982, Dubois 1934). We need to relate these

struggles to employment outcomes as well as to the ideologies that led to changes in the nature of work. In particular, attention needs to be focused on innovations in the social control of the workplace in the postindustrial era by paying close attention to the normative influences that shape these administrative practices, as well as actions by the state that have protected shifts in workplace relations over the past thirty years (Howard 1997, Weir 1992).

The reason we need to focus on the firm-level actions that affect the organization of work is because the real crisis facing these workers is their dependence on dead-end jobs that make it hard to support a family and to be protected from employer abuse. As contingent relationships within the labor market expand and job tenure continues to diminish, we need to know more about how job ladders are structured within the workplaces black women predominantly work, and we need to determine the likelihood that black women will find good jobs that pay decent wages and offer career mobility. Previous research suggests that, despite the fact that educational requirements in low wage industries such as financial services have increased over time (Brown et al. 2006: 30), internal labor markets have been dismantled. Many workers without a college degree, especially in large firms, have seen their route to advancement become narrower (Brown et al. 2006, Appelbaum et al. 2003). For instance, the job structure within low-skilled industries, such as retail, has become increasingly bottom heavy because there are large numbers of entry-level positions and few managerial positions available. Brown et al. (2006) note that over the past 20 years, a job in this industry, especially in supermarkets, has shifted from a "full-time, relatively well-paid position (often unionized) to a job with irregular and part time hours, low pay, and few chances for mobility" (Brown et al. 2006: 37).

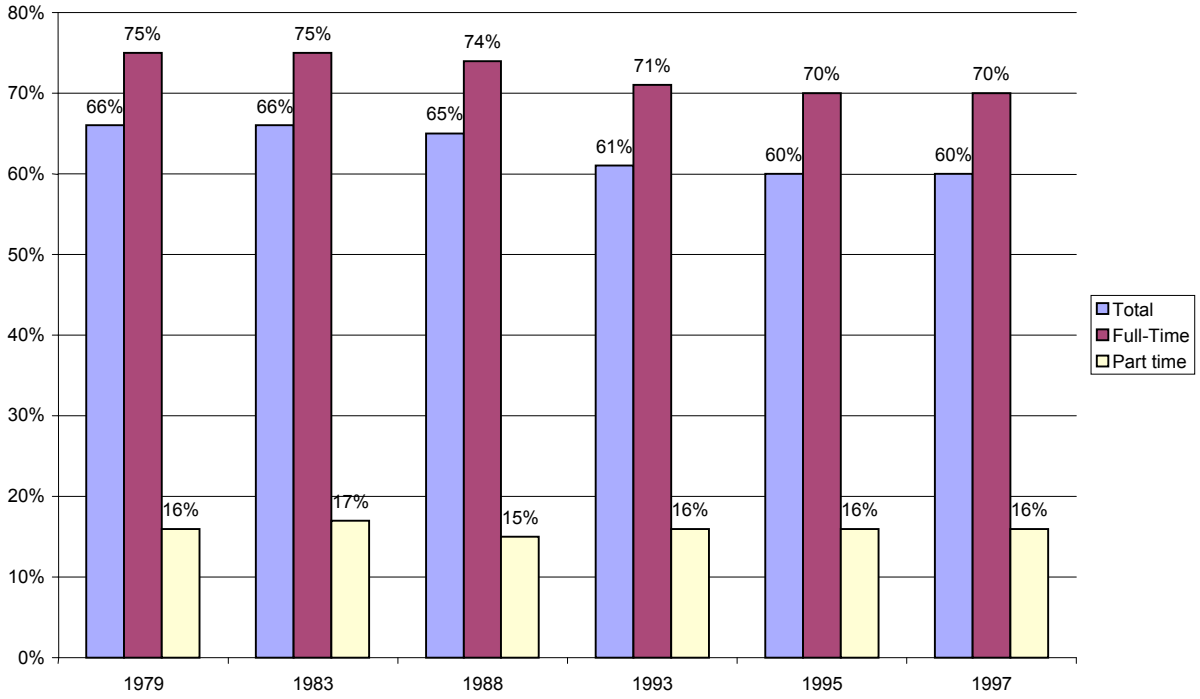
The increase in part-time and contingent work is noteworthy because this expansion does not just affect students, housewives, and retirees who want part-time work. Nor does it just

influence employers looking to staff workers for odd shifts and seasonal peaks in demand, mainly because the increasing contingency has become a cross that most workers are forced to bear. This increasing contingency of the workplace is a reason for concern because most of the increase that has occurred since the 1970s has been in involuntary part-time employment. As a result, workers end up with the short stick because, as Tilly (1996) puts it, they only have access to "half a job in the sense that it is only half the job the employee wants" (Tilly 1996: 3). Rates of involuntary part-time employment usually decrease during economic expansions (Tilly 1996), but, throughout the postindustrial era, both involuntary part-time employment and the economy expanded (Ichniowski and Preston 1985). Research suggests this expansion was due to the switch to a "contingent" workforce, which was very lucrative for employers. Classifying workers as part time allows businesses to sidestep payroll and unemployment insurance, while also reducing wages in addition to health and pension costs (Howard 1997).

The consequences of the rise in involuntary part-time employment are very real for workers in the postindustrial era. These workers are more vulnerable because their hours are capped at just a little over twenty hours a week, and, as a result, they typically earn far less than full-time workers (Tilly 1996: 5). As Figure 2 illustrates, they are also less likely to have health care coverage and access to management positions, and they are more likely to live in poverty. [6]

[6] To make matters worse, these workers appear to have a very thin safety net. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) does not cover part time workers or employees in firms with fewer than fifty workers (Shulman 2003:37). In addition, to qualify for twelve weeks of unpaid job protected leave, employees must have worked over 1250 hours in the previous year (Shulman 2003: 36).

Figure 2: Percentage of Workers Enrolled in Job-Based Health Care Coverage by Employment Status, 1979-97



Source: Diane E. Herz, Joseph R. Meisenheimer II, and Harriet B. Weinstein, *Health and Retirement benefits: Data from two BLS Surveys* (*Monthly Labor Review*, March 2000)

Beyond shifts in part-time work, there have been programmatic changes in the workplace that have resulted in changes in administrative functions. These administrative changes involve scheduling, developing elaborate record keeping systems, restructuring workloads and productivity standards, and adding evaluation criteria to compensate for changes in recruitment and promotion. Instead of using standardized employment practices, such as fixed rules and regulations, contemporary firms, under the guise of neutrality, have begun to use "scientific" barometers of morality when making distinctions between workers (Gilliom 1994, Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991). In the name of quality control and fairness, behavior tests and other deference rituals in the postindustrial era offer management unprecedented access to worker's

lives. Research suggests that drug tests, psychological tests, and background exams are only used to perpetuate the myth of neutrality.

The effect of the "crisis of control" on hiring procedures illustrates this point (Gilliom 1994, Bennett et al. 1994, Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991). Most Americans learned about this crisis from media coverage in the 1980s that, somewhat sensationally, reported on the consequences of the crack cocaine epidemic in the inner cities.[7] Katherine Neckerman and Joleen Kirschenman (1991) contend that this extensive publicity on the moral corruption brewing within urban America had profound effects on hiring decisions, particularly among employers who were convinced that tightening selection criteria could help them avoid job applicants who were poor candidates. Although previous research shows that employers have long used a variety of strategies to select the best applicants for available positions (Bielby and Baron 1986, Thurow 1975, Weaver 1946), these practices became especially dominant by the 1990s. In fact, Neckerman and Kirschenman report that employers increasingly began to use psychological profiles, integrity interviews, skill tests and drug tests as a way to selectively recruit potential

[7] For instance, in 1981 there were 538 stories in the *New York Times* that included the words marijuana or cocaine. In 1985, the number of these news stories in the *New York Times* increased to 905, and by 1986, which was the year of Reagan's executive order mandating drug testing in federal workplaces, 1,374 stories regarding cocaine or marijuana use were published in this paper (Gilliom 1994: 25).

employees. In addition, they show that this form of selective recruitment primarily occurred within jobs that predominantly hired low-skilled African Americans workers.[8]

On the whole, Neckerman and Kirschenman found that employers try to avoid hiring black workers because they expect them to be bad employees. As a result, some employers reported to Neckerman and Kirschenman that they designed selective recruitment strategies to screen out inner city blacks deliberately. One employer mentioned that the "blacks that are employed are just not as good [;] not that there aren't good blacks, but it's a smaller percent than it would be of whites, for whatever reasons" (440). About half of the 185 employers interviewed mentioned that they felt that African Americans were lazy, and nearly half were convinced that inner-city black workers have attitude problems. For instance, one respondent noted that "they want to be catered to…they want it handed to them, [and] they don't want to do anything" (440). Meanwhile, another employer made a slightly different point, contending that inner-city residents are from a "different world" and that they "don't realize that their rules are very different than ours" (442).

Philip Moss and Chris Tilly (2001) confirm Neckerman and Kirschenman's conclusions in their article, "Why Opportunity Isn't Knocking." They report findings that indicate an increase in recent years in the use of human management tools, such as criminal records queries,

[8] This is not the first time the business community decided that selective recruitment was the best way to hire black workers. Employment circumstances during the early years of World War II illustrate this point the best. At this time, despite labor shortages, employers refused to hire black workers for jobs that were normally the domain of white men and women. It was not until the local restrictions on the employment of minorities started to hinder manpower on a national level that the state stepped in to force management and labor unions to relax their race barriers to employment. In turn, due to the tremendous pressure that came from the state and local governments, the American Management Association (AMA) officially began to support the racial integration of employment positions that were originally the domain of white men. In a report summarizing their experiences and opinions on the integration of black workers into untraditional places of work, those in the AMA realized that "Negroes can and have been trained for occupations requiring all levels of skill, as the lists of jobs on which colored men and women are now working indicate" (Weaver 1946: 212). But, in order to introduce black labor successfully into firms that previously excluded them, AMA contended that "[t]he way has to be paved solidly for the introduction of the first colored recruits into the plant. Supervision must be 'sold' on the idea…With the first colored employees rests the greatest responsibility for setting the standards for the group…[Nevertheless], [s]uccessful integration of colored workers is predicated on a planned program of selection, induction, training and up-grading" (Weaver 1946: 213).

drug tests and checks of education, which are more likely to be used as sorting mechanisms in low-skill jobs that disproportionately employ African American workers (Moss and Tilly 2001: 473). Employers, according to Moss and Tilly, are acting on a set of preconceived signals that are not entirely profit related. They are deciding to relocate their businesses to suburbs and use screening methods such as integrity interviews and physical tests that exclude undesirable applicants from the potential labor pool. One example of employers using formal selection methods to screen out African Americans and other people of color came from a large manufacturing facility near Boston. The employer had never used testing when hiring people to fill the company's blue-collar jobs until the proportion of people of color increased in the surrounding area. While the increasing labor surplus and upgrades in skill requirements certainly contributed to changes in this business' recruitment strategy, Tilly and Moss suggest that racially charged sentiment also mattered. For instance, consider the following statement from a plant operations executive in this firm regarding the need for screening techniques in employment:

> I mean, these people come from a very different background. We have a strong welfare system. You know, coming into a factory every day and building and assembling things, they're not necessarily fun jobs all the time. And so, when people can maintain a certain standard of living, and they don't have to do that, then what kind of work ethic would people come here with? So, we have to be very careful in our screening to be sure that people are motivated (O'Connor 2001: 476).

Unfortunately, the plant operation officer is not alone in doubting the work ethic and talent of inner city workers. In fact, as Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan's (2004) study, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?" has shown, it turns out that the notion that inner-city workers should be avoided is widely held. By sending fabricated resumes to help-wanted ads in Chicago and Boston newspapers, Bertrand and Mullainathan found that employers actively use perceptions of race signaled by the names of job applicants in ways that negatively affect call back rates for African American applicants. Even when controlling for employer size, occupation, industry, and social class markers such as

neighborhood addresses and email addresses, these researchers found that indicators signaling a person's racial identity play a significant role in limiting their chances for getting called back for an interview.

Now that screening practices have become increasingly important to understanding opportunity shifts and workplace inequality, we must learn more about how these forms of social control in the labor process not only affect who gets hired, but also who advances in the postindustrial workplace. Much attention has been devoted to imbalances between demands for labor and the schooling level of the labor supply, but not much attention has been directed at understanding how the increasing use of surveillance methods, such as drug tests and background checks, have affected the employment careers of workers. Researchers have offered little insight into whether those employers that have upgraded the credentials for job openings are really interested in whether workers can read or write, or if their increased interest in training is just another way to exclude undesirable workers from the labor pool. Hence, it is important that we take into consideration not just the existence of structural changes such as the increase in part-time employment, but also reflect on the function of these shifts in the employment contract between workers and firms. Research also suggests that we need to begin to make sense of how the emergence of deference rituals[9], such as drug testing[10] and aptitude testing, have shaped the

[9] For a more in-depth discussion on deference rituals see Erwin Goffman (1956).

[10] The usefulness of drug testing has been challenged primarily because of its disproportionate use in the service sector industries, and because of the technological limitations associated with the Enzyme Multiplied Immunoassay Test (EMIT) – the primary method of testing for drug use during the period of study. O'Donnell shows that the use of this urinalysis test in the workplace has increased substantially due to the fact that these tests are the least expensive, easily administered, and less intrusive than other methods of drug testing. The EMIT test, nevertheless, has been under fire recently after several studies documented how these tests produce false positives for marijuana ranging from one to ninety-five percent. Given this degree of inaccuracy, several district courts have rejected the sole use of EMIT tests as the means of establishing drug use.

advancement potential of African American women workers, as well as other workers, throughout the postindustrial era.

Conclusion

Social scientists and policy advocates argue that the only people to blame for poverty and inequality in this country are the poor themselves. The main claim is that disorganized families, lack of work ethic, and a refusal to value education has made the poor vulnerable to the income disparities that they experience. While there are undoubtedly plenty of lazy people roaming the streets in search of their next handout, the "inconvenient truth" in this story is that the culture of poverty is not the root cause of poverty; rather, in most cases, it is only a symptom of poverty.

Due to this and other misleading assumptions in employment literature on black women, we lack explanations that account for the experiences of black women in the jobs they predominantly work, in addition to explanations for how the institutionalization of discrimination in the workplace has influenced employment outcomes. Research on postindustrial and post-Fordist workplace regimes (Vallas 1999, Smith 1998) suggests that workplace inequality did not disappear with industrial restructuring; instead, workplace inequality has become more intense and complex (McCall 2001). Descriptive statistics and multilevel models can identify important

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Others have claimed that drug testing is racially biased because false positives are produced at a higher rate for individuals with a higher melanin content in their skin. These claims have been met with mixed responses when made in the courts. In some instances, plaintiffs who have brought the claim that the EMIT is racially discriminatory before the court have had their claim dismissed because proper proof of this theory could not be presented. However, in another instance, when a similar allegation was made by a plaintiff who was denied a job because of a positive urine test, the employer settled out of court and paid the employee $5,826 (Fowler 1988). To learn more about the emergence of drug-testing in the workplace see the study by Bennett, Blum, and Roman (1994). To learn more about the legal concerns that wide-spread drug testing raises see, "Your Urine or Your Job: Is Private Employee Urinalysis Constitutional in California?" 19 Loy. L. A. L. Rev. 1451, 1452, n. 7 (1987). See also the following legal cases: Higgs v. Wilson, 616 F. Supp. 226, 230-32 (W.D. Ky. 1985); Smith v. State, 250 GA 438, 298 S. E. 2d 482 (1983); Spence v. Farrier, 807 F. 2d 753, 756 (8th Cir. 1986); Chaney v. Southern Ry., 847 F. 2d 718 (11th Cir. 1988); and Shield Club v. City of Cleveland, No. 86-4108.

factors affecting trends within the employment opportunity structure, but outcomes such as career mobility are also influenced by both the workers' perceptions of opportunity (Reskin and Roos 1990) and state sanctioned business actions (Appelbaum et al. 2003, Fligstein 2001, Howard 1997). Therefore, in our efforts to learn more about why workers in the "missing middle" disproportionately lose ground over time, we need to learn more about the jobs they predominantly work. We also need to investigate the state sanctioned business practices that have helped shape the opportunities available to African American women workers within these social institutions.

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INSTITUTE FOR
THE STUDY OF
SOCIAL CHANGE

2420 Bowditch Street #5670
Berkeley, CA 94720-5670

tel: 510-642-0813
fax: 510-642-8674

email: ISSC@berkeley.edu
web: http://issc.berkeley.edu