

Contemporary Dynamics of Minority Mobility

The profound ethno-racial boundary changes that reshaped American society in the decades following World War II depended on a combination of forces that included large-scale non-zero-sum mobility as a critical ingredient. Its key role makes theoretical sense: ethno-racial boundaries are most likely to fade in relevance for those on the disadvantaged side when the perceived threat to the privileges of those on the advantaged side is reduced, and the latter are consequently less tempted to resort to the devices of ethno-racial exclusion. In the middle of the twentieth century, non-zero-sum mobility was largely the consequence of the economic preeminence of the United States, which produced massive economic changes of a type that increased the places available in higher institutions of learning and in the occupational strata to which their credentials are linked.

At first sight, the mid-twentieth-century formula for boundary change would seem impossible to replicate in the early twenty-first century. For one thing, the prospects for upward social mobility by African Americans and the children of immigrants are viewed pessimistically by many social scientists and other Americans.¹ The primary reasons lie in racism and economic structural change: in a common view, the latter is

following out the broad middle of the occupational structure while expanding its top and bottom. The emerging structure has been described as an "hour-glass" labor market, where the changes at the margins, produced by additions and deletions of positions, are adding to the extremes and reducing the middle. In addition, it is widely believed that many previously good jobs have deteriorated, as wages have stagnated and benefits have been shaved by employers; new forms of employment, such as independent contracting, have introduced precariousness where long-term stability once ruled.²

Such changes would seem to imply that in a racially stratified society, the children of nonwhite parents who are on the bottom rungs of the occupational structure—the Mexican-American second generation, say, whose parents are mainly engaged in low-wage labor in agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and service sectors—will have at best limited chances to move significantly upward, given the dearth of footholds in the middle.³ The force of this implication is strengthened by recent studies of income mobility that indicate that the children of poor parents are more likely to remain poor in the United States than in any other economically advanced society.⁴ And abundant research reveals the near-desperate situations of many nonwhite poor children, who are concentrated in distressed, heavily nonwhite communities that lack resources as well as ready access to the mainstream; white poor children on average are by no means as marginally situated.⁵ Within immigrant populations, socioeconomic stagnation might be subjectively experienced as "downward" mobility by young adults raised in the United States, who would evaluate their social position exclusively by U.S. standards, unlike their immigrant parents, who could employ a dual frame of reference, one of them derived from their expectations of what would have happened to them had they remained in their homelands. Youngsters faced with limited prospects for success and experiencing blockages due to prejudice and discrimination are likely to react by rejecting mainstream goals and embracing oppositional identities, which carry high risks of dropping out early from school and involvement in criminal

activity and other behaviors with negative consequences for their futures.⁶

This pessimistic account, however, overlooks the likelihood of mobility occurring as the number of European Americans available to take good jobs declines, relatively and even absolutely. The demography of young Americans is changing rapidly, with the birth cohorts coming to maturity and entering the labor market containing much larger shares of nonwhites and Hispanics than do the cohorts that are exiting. This demographic dynamic is likely to increase ethno-racial diversity throughout the labor force, including on its higher rungs. Moreover, during the next quarter century, some of the dominant demographic, economic, and social phenomena are certain to involve the retirement of the baby boomers, the cohorts of individuals born in the two decades following the end of World War II, specifically in the years 1946–1964.⁷ This huge group, born before the current era of immigration was initiated by 1965 changes to U.S. immigration law and made up disproportionately of non-Hispanic whites, occupies a massive portion of the U.S. labor market—more than 50 percent of prime-age, full-time workers as of 2005. Their retirement will open up a huge swath of positions, running from the bottom to the top of the workforce. Because of the disproportionate concentration of white baby boomers in the middle and upper ranges of the occupational structure, the potential for racial and ethnic shifts will be especially large there. The implications of their retirement for the non-zero-sum mobility of disadvantaged nonwhite groups, especially Americans of African and Latin-American ancestry, whether they are descended ultimately from slaves or from recent immigrants, calls out for examination.

Contemporary Evidence of Racial/Ethnic Socioeconomic Shifts

Minorities are already penetrating in greater numbers into the higher tiers of the socioeconomic hierarchy largely as a result of demographic

shifts—the gradient in the direction of larger proportions of nonwhites and Hispanics among younger birth cohorts—and, to a lesser extent, affirmative action. The demographic gradient is exemplified by the following comparison: in 2000, non-Hispanic whites, the cumbersome demographic term that encompasses the descendants of European immigrants, constituted 62 percent of the age group that was just beginning to enter the labor market, the 15- to 24-year-olds; however, they made up a substantially larger fraction, 78 percent, of the age group on the edge of retirement, the 55- to 64-year-olds. Such differences create a demographic dynamic that, in the absence of countervailing forces such as intensifying discrimination and other reinforcements of ethno-racial privilege, will lead to increased racial and ethnic diversity on the middle and upper rungs of the labor-force ladder.

Whatever the precise roles of simple demographic change and of affirmative action, shifts are increasingly visible in the recruitment of minorities into good jobs in the American economy. But what are “good jobs”? Here I equate jobs with occupations, which classify jobs according to the kind of work their incumbents typically do, and I take the average income that full-time workers⁸ earn in various occupations⁹ as a measure of the jobs’ “goodness.” One reason to measure position in the labor market using occupation rather than individual earnings is that the latter can fluctuate from year to year and, even worse, vary systematically with experience and hence age. But, more generally, the key problem in contriving a measure of labor-market position is to combine the systemic economic potential of jobs, including their prospects as careers, with what sociologists view as their social status, as reflected for instance in their “prestige.” Both aspects are critical when it comes to studying socioeconomic mobility’s link with potential ethno-racial shifts.

Occupations, as “the backbone of the reward structure” and the “elementary building blocks of modern and postmodern labor markets,”¹⁰ provide the best schema for solving the problem. As Kim Weeden and David Grusky have argued, occupations generally represent coherent job slots—they have recognized titles (for example, firefighter, lawyer) by

which the individuals who work in them identify themselves; they often have training and credentialing requirements, along with professional associations in some cases; and they mostly possess their own subcultures, into which those who would work in them must be initiated. Workers generally sport what Weeden and Grusky describe as the "social clothing" appropriate to their occupations, a term that refers to the relevant cultural traits and identities.¹¹ Sometimes, the actual clothing workers wear signals their occupations.

Using average earnings to measure the goodness of an occupation is suitable given the interest here in the ability of minority workers to convert socioeconomic advance into social proximity with the mainstream majority. That proximity is first of all reflected in residence, which is determined through market processes. Using occupations as the base for measurement also taps into the social-status dimension, which is crucial to the likelihood that mobile minorities will be treated as equals by middle-class whites. In social-status terms, a well-paid black electrician is not in the same position as a black financial analyst who has the same earnings; and this difference will be reflected in the social circles where they are welcomed and feel comfortable.¹² Ranking occupations on the basis of their systematic economic potential rather than ranking individuals on the basis of current earnings also does a reasonable job of reflecting this dimension.¹³ (To continue the example: financial analysts have median earnings of \$60,000, according to 2000 Census data, which places them on the boundary between the fourth and fifth percentiles on the U.S. earnings scale; the median earnings of electricians are just \$40,000, and their occupation is located at the seam between the thirty-second and thirty-third percentiles.)

I slice into the hierarchy of ranked occupations in ways that account for different tiers of the full-time labor force: for example, the best-paid occupations that encompass 10 percent of full-time workers constitute the top decile; the top quartile is defined equivalently. These tranches are then applied as a grid to birth cohorts in order to look for shifts in the

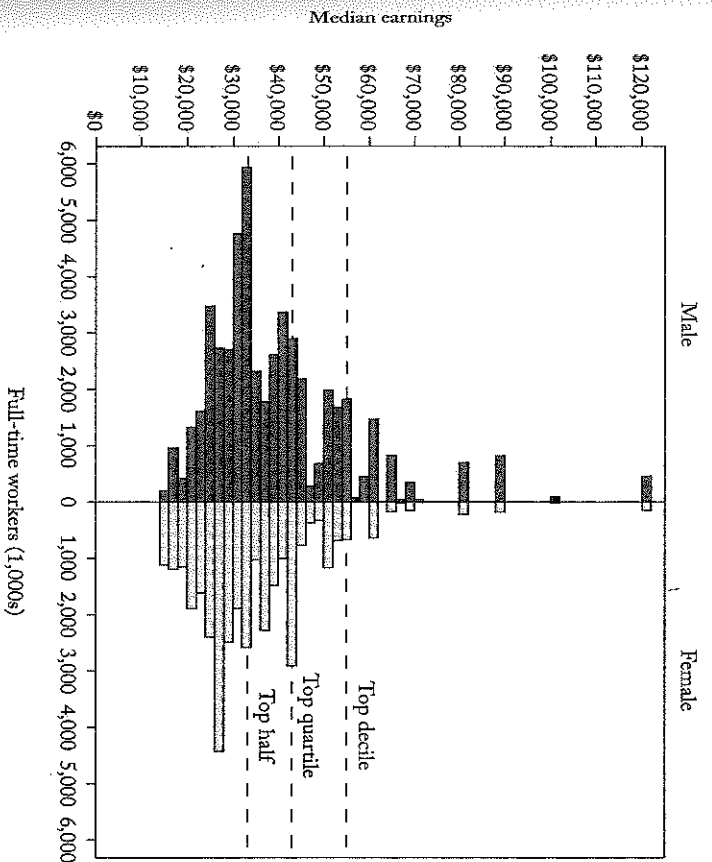


Figure 4.1. Full-time labor force (aged 25–64 in 1999) by median annual earnings of occupation. (2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent); see note 8 for definition of full-time worker.)

racial and ethnic composition of different tiers of the workforce. Figure 4.1 shows what this view of the workforce looks like on the basis of 1999 earnings (the earnings data collected by the 2000 Census); note that for the sake of visual coherence, the occupational codes have been classified within \$2,000-wide bands of earnings. Interestingly, except perhaps for the narrow indentation between \$46,000 and \$50,000, there is no resemblance here to an hour glass; rather, the labor force exhibits a large bulge in the lower middle, where the workers of the third quartile are concentrated, and then gradually narrows in numbers with increasing

remuneration—an incongruous combination, it would seem, of sliced pear and pyramid.

The division of the labor force into tiers based on the average pay of their occupations sharply stratifies workers according to their educational and ethno-racial and nativity characteristics, as shown in Table 4.1.¹⁴ The top decile includes many professional and highly technical occupations, such as dentists and engineers; some well-paid management and financial jobs are also located there. The median earnings of jobs in this tier were \$65,000 in 1999. Almost three-quarters of all its workers possessed a bachelor's degree, and virtually all the rest had at least some postsecondary education. The majority group still dominates this tier, though it increasingly is also occupied by immigrants who arrive with high levels of human capital: nearly 80 percent of the top-decile workers in 2000 were U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites, and foreign-born whites and Asians accounted for an additional 11 percent. While U.S.-born Asians made up only 1.3 percent of workers in this tier, this small percentage was in fact higher than the native-born Asian percentage of the total workforce. The numbers of second and later generations of Asian groups in adult ages were still modest in 2000, though growing; the sizable Asian percentage of the U.S. workforce was dominated by the foreign born who had come since the late 1960s. The representation of disadvantaged native minority populations, U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics, was quite small, at 6 percent, relative to their overall percentage in the full-time workforce, 13 percent.

This racial/ethnic stratification is modestly ameliorated further down the ladder within the top half of jobs. For the jobs in the remainder of the top quartile (the jobs between percentiles 11 and 25), the 1999 median earnings were on average substantially lower, at \$48,000, and the percentage of workers holding a baccalaureate degree was down to about half, though most of the remaining workers still had spent some time in college. The jobs in this tier exhibit a wide range in terms of their required training and preparation, from such professions as architect to

Table 4.1 Characteristics of occupational tiers of prime-age, full-time workers in 2000

Tier	N (1000s)	Median earnings	Postsecondary education		Race/ethnicity/nativity composition of tier ^a							
			% with some coll., no BA	% with BA or more	% U.S.- born non- Hispanic whites	% foreign- born non- Hispanic whites	% U.S.- born non- Hispanic blacks	% foreign- born non- Hispanic blacks	% U.S.- born Hispanics	% foreign- born Hispanics	% U.S.- born Asians	% foreign- born Asians
Top decile	8,600	\$65,000	20.2	72.7	78.4	4.8	3.8	0.7	2.2	1.7	1.3	6.1
Rest of top quartile	13,051	\$48,000	32.5	52.3	78.7	3.4	6.1	0.9	2.9	2.2	0.9	3.7
Second quartile	21,525	\$38,000	33.3	37.7	77.0	2.3	8.1	0.8	3.8	3.3	0.8	2.4
Third quartile	22,253	\$30,000	35.3	17.0	71.2	2.5	10.4	1.0	4.4	5.9	0.6	2.5
Fourth quartile	20,725	\$22,000	29.1	8.0	58.8	2.5	14.0	1.7	4.7	11.9	0.5	4.1

Source: 2000 Public Use Data Sample (5 percent).

a. Percentages of ethno-racial/nativity categories add to less than 100 because two residual (other) categories are not reported.

such unionized, well-paying blue-collar jobs as railroad brake operators and fire fighters. Yet nearly 80 percent of the jobs were still held by native-born non-Hispanic whites as of 2000. U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics had nevertheless increased their share to 9 percent, with most of the increase due to the rising share of jobs held by African Americans. Immigrants play a less prominent role here: the percentage of foreign-born whites and Asians was down to 7 percent. In the second quartile, the median earnings fell to \$38,000 in 1999, and only a third of workers had earned a four-year college degree and another third had some post-secondary training. Because the second quartile covers a wider spectrum than the two higher tranches just discussed, the range of job situations is correspondingly broader, from police officer, to clerical supervisor, to machinist, to sociologist. The role of U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics is again greater at this tier than higher up, and in 2000, they held 12 percent of these jobs, with the former outnumbering the latter by a 2-to-1 margin. U.S.-born whites still occupy the lion's share of these jobs—more than three-quarters in 2000—suggesting that the higher portion held by U.S.-born minorities comes mainly at the cost of immigrants. The proportions of foreign-born whites and Asians are indeed lower than in the higher tiers, but that of workers born in Latin America is higher.

The jobs in the bottom half of the labor force are much less desirable. The median wages in 1999 were \$30,000 in the third quartile and \$22,000 in the fourth (but went as low as \$14,000 for full-time workers in the last-ranked occupation, dishwasher). Only a small minority of workers here have earned a baccalaureate degree, although roughly a third attended college and left without that credential. Below the halfway point on the job ladder, the concentration of whites starts to diminish noticeably, and that of minorities, both U.S. and foreign born, increases. Nearly two-thirds of U.S.-born black and Hispanic full-time workers are found in the bottom half of the workforce; in 2000 they made up 15 percent of the full-time workers in the third quartile and al-

most 20 percent of those in the fourth, where foreign-born Latinos were an additional 12 percent. Still, U.S.-born whites are the majority of these workers, even in the fourth quartile, where they were approximately 60 percent of the workers in 2000.

Some shifting of racial and ethnic groups among these tiers is already under way, as can be observed in Figure 4.2, which introduces the characteristics of birth cohorts and shows the changing ethno-racial and nativity composition of the top quartile. The changes are visible in the increasing representation of minorities, especially blacks and Hispanics, among younger workers. In looking for shifts, it is sensible to focus on the top strata because these are the locations where the advantages of whites are most evident, if changes are taking place there, they are also taking place at lower levels, where there is greater minority representation, in any event.¹⁵ The causes of the shifts lie, as we will shortly see,

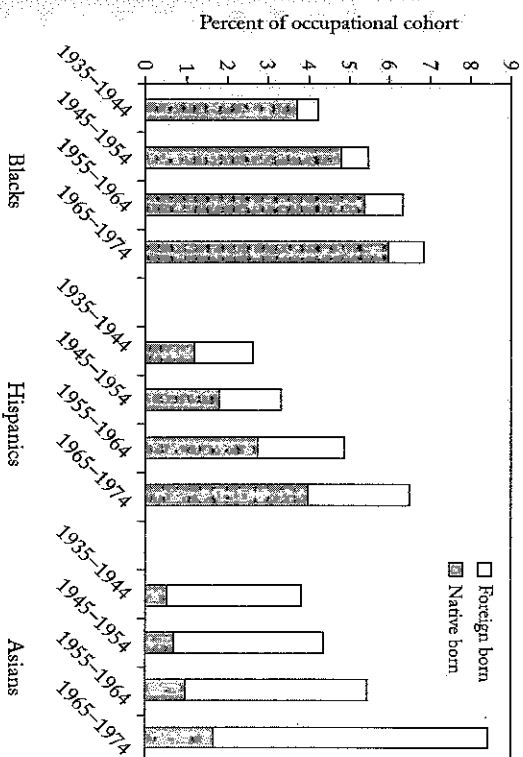


Figure 4.2. Full-time employment in top-quartile occupations for minorities by nativity and birth cohort, 2000. (2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent).)

mainly in demographic dynamics, that is, changes in ethno-racial composition across cohorts in the population, though it is plausible that affirmative action also plays a modest part.

The growing diversity in the top quartile implies that the majority group holds a decreasing share of the best jobs. (The figure does not show this because the bars for whites have been omitted; given their incommensurate size, they would dwarf those for the other groups and make the shifts for them difficult to see.) In the oldest birth cohort, that is, individuals born in the period 1935-1944 (who were aged 56-65 in 2000),¹⁶ 83 percent of the incumbents of the top quartile are native-born non-Hispanic whites. This fraction barely decreases in the next oldest birth cohort, 1945-1954 (aged 46-55 in 2000), but is lowered more noticeably with each younger group. Among those in the youngest cohort as of 2000, born in the period 1965-1974, the fraction of native-born white workers has slipped to 73 percent.

African Americans¹⁷ and U.S.-born Hispanics have been steadily expanding their representation in this occupational tier, but even in the youngest group of workers their share of good jobs falls well below their proportions among all workers or in the population of these ages. In the oldest group, they constitute 5 percent of full-time workers holding top-quartile jobs; in the youngest, their share has doubled, to 10 percent. The rise has been especially steep for U.S.-born Hispanics, who held just 1 percent of the jobs in this tier in the cohort born in 1935-1944 but 4 percent in the 1965-1974 cohort. The nonwhite and Hispanic foreign born are also contributing to the rise in the diversity in top jobs: The immigrants have gone from 5 percent of the oldest cohort to 10 percent of the youngest (white immigrants, mainly from Canada and Europe, add another 4-5 percent to these figures). The increasing immigrant presence is, above all, a story about Asians, who have taken nearly 7 percent of the top-quartile jobs in the youngest cohort. By a considerable margin, they outnumber U.S.-born Asians, whose share among the youngest workers falls out at almost 2 percent, though as low as this figure seems,

it represents a jump from the tiny fraction of jobs the American born hold in the oldest cohort, just 0.5 percent.

In the most elite sphere of the labor market, the top decile of jobs, U.S.-born minorities are also playing a substantially larger role. (See Figure 4.3.) The growth in their share has been steep across different cohorts of workers; however, it started from a lower base and has not achieved the same height as their representation in the rest of the top quartile. U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics held only 3 percent of these jobs in the oldest cohort of workers of 2000, but among the 26- to 35-year-olds, their fraction of these jobs had risen to 8 percent. In this tier, where many of the jobs are professional or technical and postsecondary educational credentials are often a requirement, the importance of Asian immigrants is remarkable. Even in the oldest cohort, they provide nearly 5 percent of the workers, and in the youngest cohort, this

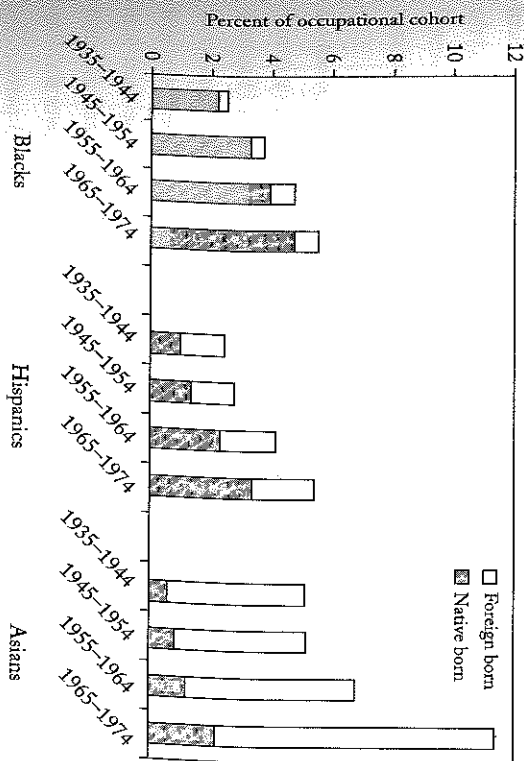


Figure 4.3. Full-time employment in top-decile occupations for minorities by nativity and birth cohort, 2000. (2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent).)

figure has shot up to 9 percent, far above their percentage of the working-age population.

Native-born minorities, African Americans and Latinos, are making some remarkable gains as they are penetrate more and more into unexpected occupations, contradicting stereotypes about minority achievements. Table 4.2 shows a selection of well-paid occupations where, on the left-hand side, the share of African or Hispanic Americans is rising and, on the right-hand side, it is stagnating. The increases are notable in engineering fields, for example: among the ranks of electrical and electronics engineers, an occupational category that ranks in the top 5 percent of the labor force according to the median earnings of its incumbents, African Americans tripled their representation between the oldest and youngest cohorts; and Hispanics are now much more numerous among engineering managers. Large increases have occurred in most other engineering occupations and in computer-related occupational titles (for example, computer hardware engineers and computer programmers). U.S.-born minorities are also progressing in a number of financial fields: for instance, among financial analysts, a job that is ranked at the fifth percentile on the basis of remuneration, African Americans were 7 percent of the youngest workers in 2000, more than triple their representation among the oldest ones.

Yet blacks and Hispanics are not advancing uniformly throughout the tiers of the labor force: there are some occupations in which they remain rare. For example, in 2000 African Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics combined were just 4 percent of the chief executives who were 45 or younger (it doesn't seem appropriate to consider only the very youngest group of chief executives, aged 26 to 35 at the time, because there is an almost inherent contradiction between such youthfulness and authority in an organization). This still represents an improvement over their representation among older chief executives, which was just 3 percent. But it indicates that minorities are rare in some positions that offer the potential for very high economic rewards. They are also infrequent in some

Table 4.2 Minority advance and stagnation in selected top-quartile occupations

		Greater-than-average advance			Lower-than-average advance or decline			
	Occup. title	Percentile rank (0 is top)	% of incumbents 1965-74 cohort	% of incumbents 1935-44 cohort	Occup. title	Percentile rank (0 is top)	% of incumbents 1965-74 cohort	% of incumbents 1935-44 cohort
African Americans	Lawyers	2.4	4.9	1.5	Chief executives	1.4	2.3	1.7
	Electrical engineers	4.8	5.7	1.8	Optometrists	2.9	0.6	1.7
	Financial analysts	5.0	7.4	2.1	Physical therapists	16.2	2.9	5.4
U.S.-born Latinos	Engineering managers	3.0	3.6	0.4	Optometrists	2.9	1.3	2.6
	Judges and judicial workers	3.8	9.2	1.9	Mathematicians	10.7	1.7	1.6
	Psychologists	13.8	4.2	0.5	Tool and die makers	22.3	1.4	1.6

Source: 2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent).

professional and technical occupations requiring prolonged training—in 2000, for example, together they made up 3 percent of the young chiropractors, 4 percent of the young actuaries, and 5 percent of the young astronomers, physicists, and aircraft pilots and flight engineers. In some cases, the absence of appropriate qualifications does not seem a possible explanation for the severity of minority underrepresentation: it is striking, for instance, that U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics made up less than 6 percent of young construction managers, a large and well-paid occupational category (located at the sixteenth percentile in average remuneration); the history of African-American exclusion from the construction trades must be taken into account here.¹⁸

Also true is that minority representation in well-paid occupations comes about partly through their incumbency in specific blue-collar jobs whose wages have been protected by unions. For example, locomotive engineers, railroad conductors, and yardmasters are categories with relatively high minority representation—U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics, the former especially, accounted together for about a quarter of the members of these categories at or under the age of 45 in 2000—and the relatively high earnings of their full-time workers place them near the boundary between the top decile and the rest of the top quartile. Nevertheless, these occupations are not growing, and they do not provide a base for future increases in well-paid minority employment. By the same token, they cannot account for the *increasing* numbers of blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities to be found on the higher rungs of the occupational ladder.

The diversification of the ethno-racial origins of the incumbents in the top tiers of the labor force has continued since 2000, as shown by the data in Table 4.3, which were compiled from the 2005 and 2006 American Community Surveys.¹⁹ The increasing penetration of nonwhites and Hispanics into these tiers is potentially consequential for boundaries as it brings middle-class whites and minorities into more frequent interaction as status equals, perhaps not only at work but also in less formal

settings.²⁰ The table presents, this time in numerical rather than in graphic form, the updated ethno-racial data for the same birth cohorts used before; to them I add the data for relatively new entrants to the labor force, who were born in 1975–1980 and were aged 26 to 31 in 2006. The data for the second quartile are also shown for the first time.

The table strongly emphasizes the split between the older cohorts and the younger ones. While a shift in the direction of greater minority representation begins with the cohort born in 1955–1964, it becomes very pronounced in the two youngest cohorts, born in the 1965–1980 period. An unmistakable signal is being sent by the rapidly falling fraction of good jobs held by the ethno-racial majority, native-born non-Hispanic whites: while they are more than 80 percent of the occupants of top-decile and other top-quartile jobs in the two oldest cohorts, their grip on the best jobs loosens noticeably in the middle-aged cohort and then even more in the two youngest ones. Among the youngest workers, native whites hold less than two-thirds of the top-decile jobs and about 70 percent of those in the remainder of the top half of the workforce.

The representation of U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics in these tiers of good jobs is increasing in two ways. The first is the one already noted: the youngest cohort, whose members have generally entered the full-time labor market within the preceding decade and mostly since 2000, has an even higher share of minorities than do older ones. In the youngest cohort in 2005–2006, African and Hispanic Americans held almost 10 percent of the top-decile jobs, an improvement—it should be remembered—over the 8 percent held by them in the youngest cohort as of 2000. And they occupy 13 percent of the other top-quartile jobs in the youngest cohort, again a significant step beyond their position in 2000. Much of this improvement (but not all of it) is due to the rapidly rising share of good jobs held by U.S.-born Hispanics. For instance, they represented 3.3 percent of the top decile and 4.4 percent of other top-quartile jobs in the youngest cohort of 2000, but among the new labor-market entrants of 2005–2006, their shares are now 4.5 and 6.1 percent,

Table 4.3 The shifting race/ethnicity/nativity composition (%) of the best-paid occupations, 2005–2006

Birth cohort (age in 2006)	U.S.-born non- Hispanic whites	Foreign- born non- Hispanic whites	U.S.-born non- Hispanic blacks	Foreign- born non- Hispanic blacks	U.S.-born Hispanics	Foreign- born Hispanics	U.S.-born Asians	Foreign-born Asians
Top decile								
1975–80 (26–31)	64.9	4.3	5.0	0.8	4.5	2.5	4.2	12.6
1965–74 (32–41)	68.1	5.7	4.9	0.9	3.5	2.5	2.1	11.3
1955–64 (42–51)	77.3	5.3	4.0	0.8	2.5	1.9	1.3	6.1
1945–54 (52–61)	82.1	5.1	3.0	0.6	1.5	1.6	0.8	4.5
1935–44 (62–71)	81.7	5.6	2.2	0.5	1.1	1.9	0.8	5.5
Rest of top quartile								
1975–80 (26–31)	69.4	3.1	7.3	1.0	6.1	3.3	2.6	6.2
1965–74 (32–41)	70.5	3.9	7.3	1.1	4.8	3.5	1.4	6.5
1955–64 (42–51)	76.9	3.5	6.4	1.3	3.2	2.5	0.9	4.2
1945–54 (52–61)	81.8	3.5	5.2	0.8	2.2	1.7	0.7	3.1
1935–44 (62–71)	82.0	5.0	4.4	0.8	1.7	1.7	0.5	3.1
Second quartile								
1975–80 (26–31)	69.9	1.9	8.0	0.9	8.0	5.5	1.8	2.8
1965–74 (32–41)	69.8	2.3	9.0	1.0	6.2	5.7	1.1	3.6
1955–64 (42–51)	75.5	2.4	8.1	1.0	4.1	4.0	0.8	2.8
1945–54 (52–61)	79.4	2.8	7.1	0.7	2.9	2.7	0.7	2.6
1935–44 (62–71)	79.9	3.8	5.4	0.6	2.5	3.2	0.7	2.8

Source: 2005 and 2006 American Community Surveys.

Note: Rows total less than 100% because small categories containing workers of other races are not shown.

respectively. The second way that minority representation is increasing occurs over time for the same cohorts of workers. Comparing the 1965–1974 birth cohort in 2000, when it was the youngest group, with 2005–2006 shows, for instance, that the African-American share has climbed from 4.7 and 6.9 percent in the top decile and the rest of the top quartile, respectively, to 4.9 and 7.3 percent, respectively. The changes are not very large, granted, but they demonstrate a dynamic that is consistent in direction and favors growing diversity in the top tiers.²¹

The post-2000 data also indicate the increasingly powerful role of immigrants, especially from Asia, in these tiers, particularly in the top decile. Among the youngest workers, the Asian-immigrant share of top-decile jobs has soared to 13 percent. However, it falls to half this level in the remainder of the top quartile and is quite small in the second quartile (where, however, Latino immigrants hold a non-negligible fraction of jobs). Apparently, the labor-market role of immigrants from Asia is quite specialized, a fact that has implications for an immigration-based strategy to meet U.S. needs for workers in the near future. U.S.-born Asians, a group whose adult portion is now expanding rapidly a generation or so after the renewal of large-scale immigration from Asia in the late 1960s, are also increasing their share of top-tier jobs. They hold 4 percent of the top-decile jobs in the youngest cohort as of 2005–2006, a leap beyond the 2 percent held by their youngest cohort in 2000. Because they often possess high postsecondary educational credentials, Asian Americans achieve their greatest level of labor-market concentration in the top decile.

Limits to the Ethno-Racial Labor-Market Shifts

Impressive as the shifts in the ethno-racial composition of the higher tiers of the labor market are, they are largely due to underlying demographic change in the population rather than to an amelioration of structures of ethno-racial inequality. In other words, the potent role of de-

mography as the driver of these ethno-racial changes implies that at least so far, we have not moved much toward equality of opportunity for Americans of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in the labor market. We can observe this with hyperclarity if we focus specifically on U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics. By separating out the foreign born, we eliminate the possibility that any disadvantage we find is due to immigrant status. The key question then is whether the population-based probabilities for different groups to enter the ranks of good jobs have changed. Because these probabilities are based on a group's population size rather than on its number of workers, they take into account the extra risks to which members of ethno-racial minorities are exposed—un-der- or unemployment or even incarceration—that prevent them from appearing in the full-time workforce.²²

Figure 4.4 shows these probabilities in graphic terms. (The oldest cohort, born in 1935–1944, has been omitted because its probability of full-time employment has already dipped considerably as a result of retirements.) The inequalities between whites and Asians, on the one hand, and blacks and Hispanics, on the other, are marked. For instance, in the cohort born in 1945–1954 (aged 46–55 in 2000), the leading edge of the baby boom, just 2.1 percent of African Americans held down full-time top-decile jobs and 6.1 percent had jobs located elsewhere in the top quartile. By comparison, the equivalent probabilities for non-Hispanic whites were 7.2 percent and 11.8 percent, respectively. Stated in other terms, whites were more than three times as likely as African Americans to land a top-decile job and about twice as likely to obtain one in the rest of the top quartile. Their advantages over older native-born Hispanics were almost as large—the probability for the latter to enter the top decile was 2.9 percent, and for moving into the rest of the top quartile, 7.1 percent. Asians were slightly more advantaged than whites in these terms, so the comparisons are even more unfavorable for blacks and Hispanics when Asians are the reference point. Moreover, these inequalities are not counterbalanced by bringing in the second

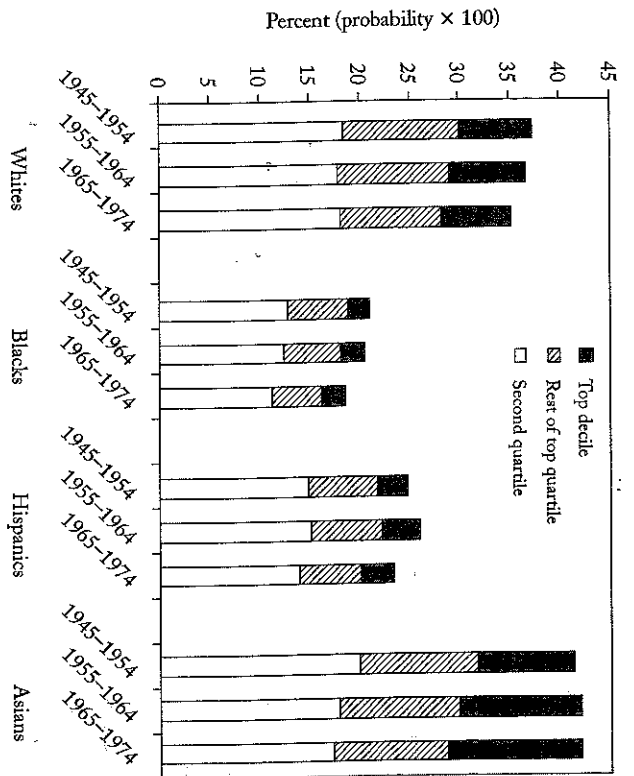


Figure 4.4. Probability of full-time job by tier, race/ethnicity and cohort for U.S. born, 2000 (2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent).)

quartile, where in the 1945-1954 cohort 18.4 percent of all whites had full-time jobs, but only 12.8 percent of African Americans and 14.8 percent of Hispanics did. These highly unequal chances, it should be underscored, are found in a cohort whose members came to maturity after the major legislative and moral victories of the civil-rights movement in the mid-1960s.

Inequality has improved—but only a bit—in the youngest cohort. The probability for African Americans to enter the top decile has risen to 2.4 percent; that for Hispanics, to 3.3 percent. Since the equivalent probability for whites has dropped slightly to 6.9 percent—the youthful ages of this cohort may limit its occupational attainments and, correspondingly, the white advantage—the relative inequality among these

groups has clearly been reduced with respect to the top tier. However, it remains just as powerful as before below the top decile. Minority probabilities of occupying other top-quartile positions are lower in the youngest cohort than in the middle-aged ones—4.9 percent for African Americans and 6.2 percent for Hispanics. The probability for whites is also somewhat smaller, at 10.1 percent, but the relative inequality among the groups is not any different. The one sharp change concerns U.S.-born Asians, whose probability of holding a job in the top tier has shot upward—to 13.2 percent in the youngest cohort, almost twice as large as that for whites.

If the underlying probabilities for different groups of entering the tiers of good jobs have not fundamentally changed, then the ethno-racial shifts we have observed in the composition of these tiers are a consequence of demographic changes taking place in the population—as more and more minorities appear in the cohorts entering the labor market, their greater numbers are also reflected in those hired to become attorneys, engineers, and computer programmers. Stating the dynamic that is driving change in this way does not deprive the compositional shifts of all significance—for they are still affecting the occupational worlds inhabited by whites and thereby having an impact on boundaries—but it does affect our understanding of them. It also implies that the shifts are likely to continue, for the cohorts still too young to enter the labor market contain even higher proportions of nonwhites and Hispanics. For example, among the children born in the United States in the late 1990s, the 0- to 5-year-olds of 2000, the fraction of non-Hispanic whites was down to 60 percent; among the U.S. born who had just entered the labor market, the 26- to 35-year-olds of that year, it was 75 percent; and among those on the edge of retirement, the 56- to 65-year-olds, it was 85 percent. Immigration will only increase the proportion of minorities in the youngest cohort by the time it reaches prime working age.

The demographic dynamic also implies, however, that the bottom half of the workforce will see even greater concentrations of minori-

ties in the future than today, unless the ethno-racial inequalities in the chances to escape into the realm of better jobs improve. Here, as well, the probabilities have not changed very much across U.S.-born cohorts, though the degree of ethno-racial inequality is not as marked as it is for entrance to the higher tiers. The probability for whites to take jobs in the bottom half varies between 28 and 31 percent for different cohorts, that for Hispanics between 32 and 34 percent, and that for blacks between 34 and 36 percent. Only Asians stand apart from the others: their probabilities of winding up in the bottom half of the workforce vary between 23 and 27 percent, with the lower figure characterizing the youngest cohort.

There are other important ways in which the occupational gains of African and Hispanic Americans are more limited than they seem at first sight. One is that minorities depend more than whites on government employment to advance into good jobs. (See the data in Figure 4.5.) This reliance has long been known for African Americans and explained on the grounds that affirmative action is more effective in government. Because, in addition, many government jobs are filled through civil-service rules and depend on examination scores, the scope for racial discrimination is reduced.²³ However, native-born Hispanics also depend more on government employment for access to good jobs than do whites. This dependency is evident when we look at minority representation in specific occupations: combined, blacks and Hispanics represented 9 percent of the young attorneys of 2000 (more than tripling their share of the profession by comparison with the oldest group), but they were almost a quarter of the young judges and magistrates. They also made up nearly a fifth of the young air traffic controllers, 15 percent of the young urban and regional planners, 19 percent of the young education administrators, 20 percent of the young detectives, and 23 percent of the young budget analysts (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than half of all budget analysts work for government).

As Figure 4.5 reveals, the divergence in type of employment is consis-

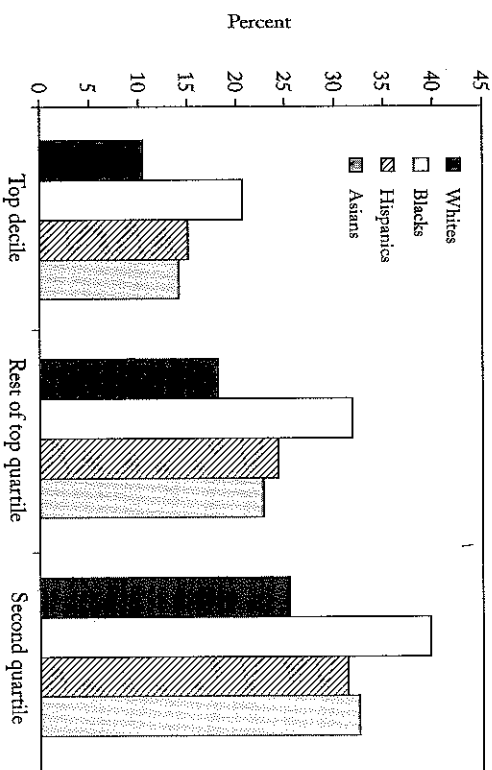


Figure 4.5. Government employment by tier for U.S.-born, full-time workers, aged 26-65, 2000. (2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent).)

tent throughout the top half of the labor force, even though the overall level of government employment dips higher up on the occupational ladder. Whites are always the most likely to be employed in the private sector, blacks the least; Hispanics and Asians are in between. Where overall the level of government employment is lowest, in the top decile, the ethno-racial differences are particularly striking and consequential, since many professional and management occupations allow workers in the private sector to earn very high salaries. Only 11 percent of the native whites with full-time jobs there are employed by government. The comparable figure for African Americans, 21 percent, is nearly twice as high, and that for Hispanics, 15 percent, nearly 50 percent higher. However, in the top decile, as elsewhere in the labor market, the dependence on government employment is lower in general in younger cohorts, where minority advance is greater. Apparently, the penetration of young blacks and Hispanics into higher labor-market tiers is less dependent on government employment than one would expect from the his-

torical record. Yet it is also possible that, as these cohorts age, they will move more into government employment, which seems overall to increase in likelihood with age.

Further, African Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics exhibit gender-inflected patterns of social ascent: that is to say, women play a critical role in their penetration into top tiers of the labor market. The salience of minority women has largely to do with their superior postsecondary educational record, or, perhaps better put, with the greater obstacles faced by minority men, beginning with those in the educational system. It implies that the advance of minorities in the labor market depends on affirmative action not only for minority groups but also for women. At the same time, the dependence of minority mobility on the attainments of women potentially imposes limitations on its significance for the economic well-being of minority families and communities: since women still average less pay in the labor market than do men, even when they perform the same work, the economic benefits of minority mobility may be less than they would be if minorities were represented in top-tier occupations in the same gender proportions as whites are.

The gender-inflected pattern is most pronounced among African Americans and at the highest levels of the labor market. (Figure 4.6 shows the pattern in terms of sex ratios by cohort and tier; by definition, a sex ratio is the number of men per 100 women, and thus gender parity is indicated by the horizontal line at 100 in the graph.) The changes occurring in the top decile bring the prominent role of women in minority occupational ascent into sharp relief. While this tier has been dominated by men, that dominance is gradually weakening. Overall, three-quarters of the full-time occupants of top-decile positions were men in 2000, but the hold of men on the best jobs was loosening with each new cohort. In the oldest cohort, the one born in 1935-1944, 86 percent of the incumbents were men, but in the youngest, born in 1965-1974, the percentage had fallen to 70 percent. Among African Americans, the gender imbalance in these jobs was never as lop-sided as it was among whites, and, in

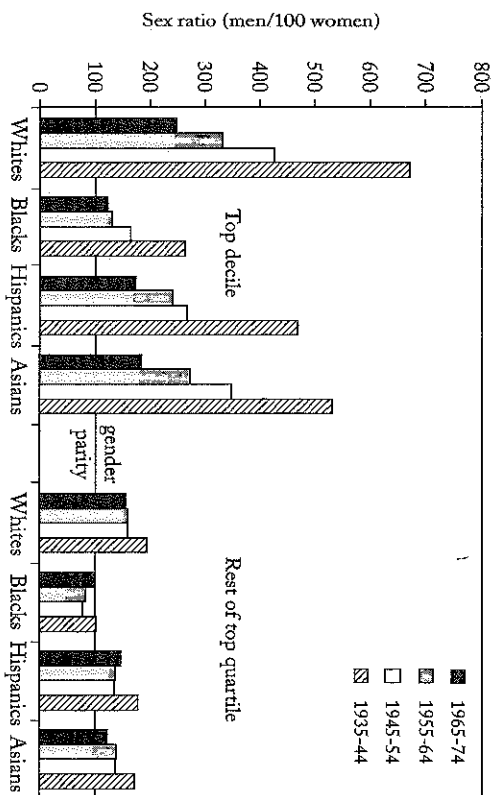


Figure 4.6. Sex-ratio changes in top tiers across U.S.-born cohorts, 2000. (2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent).)

the youngest cohort, there is near parity, as men make up 55 percent of the black contingent. (By comparison, among the native-born whites of this cohort, men are 72 percent.) Elsewhere in the top quartile, in contrast to the continuing dominance of men among whites, women outnumber men among black holders of these good jobs.

Women are also critical to Hispanic advance, but not to the same degree. Indeed, Hispanic men outnumber Hispanic women in the top tiers of the labor market, but not as much as is the case for native-born whites. In the youngest cohort of top-quartile workers, men are 61 percent of the Hispanics found there. This is, however, a reduction from the male dominance in the oldest cohort, where men outnumbered women among Hispanics by a more than 2-to-1 ratio.

These patterns—the more prominent role of women in occupational mobility and the dependence on government employment—suggest limits to the economic benefits of the socioeconomic advance of youthful minorities, since women typically earn less than men and, at higher lev-

els, government jobs pay less than their equivalents in the private sector. But the limits on minority advance are deeper and more systemic than just these two patterns. They are evident in two additional respects. One is in the relationship of occupational placement to educational credentials, for at the same level of educational attainment, whites enjoy a more favorable occupational placement than minorities generally do. The advantages of native-born whites are revealed by the results of regression analyses that rely on post-2000 data from the Census Bureau, the American Community Survey of 2005.²⁴ The dependent variable is the median earnings (logged) of an individual's occupation, and the independent variables include his or her educational attainment in years, plus the highest degree, along with other key control variables, such as whether employment is in government or private industry. Because of changes in occupational placement across birth cohorts and possibly different patterns of recruitment of men and women into occupations, the regressions are estimated separately by gender in different ten-year cohorts.

The numbers in Table 4.4 are informative about the occupational placement of minority and foreign-born categories relative to that of U.S.-born whites. Specifically, these numbers express the expected percentage differences in the median earnings of occupations between categories with other variables held constant.²⁵ The predominance of negative values indicates that native-born whites are generally the best placed, while African Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics are placed in jobs that pay distinctly less than one would predict from their educational credentials. Disadvantages of this sort are greater for African Americans: in most cohorts, the net disadvantage of African-American men is 10–12 percent in the median salary of their occupation. The gap is moderately reduced in the youngest cohort to about 7 percent. African-American women are also disadvantaged by comparison with native-born white women, but not to the same extent: in the older cohorts, they are 8–9 percent behind in occupational placement, and in the youngest, 6 percent. The Hispanic disadvantage, though lower, is still statistically mean-

Table 4.4 Race/ethnicity/nativity differences in occupational placement, by gender and birth cohort, net of education, 2005^a (numbers express percentage differences in median earnings of expected occupations relative to those of non-Hispanic whites)

Birth cohort (age)	U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites	Foreign-born non-Hispanic whites	U.S.-born non-Hispanic blacks	Foreign-born non-Hispanic blacks	U.S.-born Hispanics	Foreign-born Hispanics	U.S.-born Asians	Foreign-born Asians
Men								
1970–79 (26–35)	—	-3.1	-7.3	-12.6	-4.0	-15.4	+2.6	+3.7
1960–69 (36–45)	—	-2.5	-10.7	-15.0	-4.4	-16.0	+0.5	-5.4
1950–59 (46–55)	—	-1.9	-11.7	-16.3	-4.3	-14.3	-3.5	-10.0
1940–49 (56–65)	—	-0.5	-11.0	-15.8	-5.2	-12.3	-4.1	-9.8
Women								
1970–79 (26–35)	—	-3.9	-5.9	-8.8	-1.2	-13.7	+2.2	+0.9
1960–69 (36–45)	—	-5.0	-7.7	-9.3	-2.3	-16.6	-0.4	-6.3
1950–59 (46–55)	—	-8.0	-9.4	-12.7	-3.9	-15.0	-2.3	-10.1
1940–49 (56–65)	—	-5.8	-8.7	-12.7	-6.6	-12.9	-3.4	-8.6

Source: 2005 American Community Survey.

Note: Nonsignificant coefficients are indicated by shading.

a. The independent variables include education (in years of attainment) plus dummy variables to indicate highest postsecondary degree, employment in government (vs. private) sector and region, along with ethno-racial/nativity dummy variables. Percentage differences are calculated by the formula $100(e^b - 1)$, where b is the coefficient of an ethno-racial/nativity dummy variable in an equation with a logged dependent variable.

ingful. Among men, it is consistently on the order of 4–5 percent, while among women, it is very low in the youngest cohort, just 1 percent, but rises with age to attain 7 percent in the oldest group. The occupational placement of U.S.-born Asians is also worth noting in this context, because it can be helpful in deciphering how ethno-racial disadvantages arise. Among both men and women, native-born Asians are at least as well placed, net of education and degrees, as their white peers in the two youngest cohorts; however, in older cohorts, some degree of disadvantage, in the 2–4 percent range, is evident.

The difficult interpretive issues that arise from these findings concern how much of the ethno-racial disadvantage to attribute to discrimination and whether the reduction of disadvantage in the youngest cohort indicates the start of a possible trend of improvement in the occupational placement of minorities. An explanatory alternative to labor-market discrimination would hold that the disadvantages of blacks and Hispanics have to do with the quality of the educational institutions they have attended (unmeasured in Census data). A recent study of young people in New York City found that blacks and Hispanics attend lower-ranked colleges than do whites; there, they attend the less prestigious institutions of the City University of New York.²⁶ Presumably, the credentials they earn do not have the same labor-market value as those earned at more highly regarded institutions. Moreover, William Bowen and Derek Bok's examination of the black graduates of elite colleges reveals the sizable earnings premium that they obtain because of the imprimatur of an elite education.²⁷ The quality of credentials clearly matters at the top of the job ladder. However, it is hard to believe that this alternative is sufficient to explain the less favorable placement of blacks and Hispanics entirely. Asian Americans have a much higher rate of attendance at top-ranked colleges and universities than whites do, but their labor-market placement is only slightly better than that of whites in the youngest cohort and not at all better in the next oldest. Discrimination of one sort or another—perhaps, for example, a failure to promote qualified Asian

Americans at the same rate as whites are promoted—seems involved. The same conclusion carries over to the other ethno-racial differences, especially since abundant research on ethno-racial differentials in the labor market establishes that they cannot be fully explained by any plausible set of intervening variables.²⁸

The other issue, whether there is evidence of an improved labor-market position in the smaller disadvantages for blacks and Hispanics in the youngest cohort, is equally thorny to resolve. The differences across cohorts can be understood in two ways: in one, they express historical changes in life chances, which are reflected in the attainments of different birth cohorts because they reach maturity under varying conditions; in the other, they express variations across the life cycle, which each cohort experiences as its members age. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and it is quite possible that both apply here, though the mix of their influences remains unknown. It is certainly possible that the less disadvantaged position of the younger cohorts of nonwhites reflects true improvements in life chances, as might happen from a decline in labor-market discrimination (perhaps due to the rising numbers of nonwhites in positions to make employment decisions or to counsel nonwhite newcomers about career options and strategies). But it is just as plausible that the more disadvantaged positions of older cohorts reveal an accumulation of disadvantages over the life course, as the careers of minorities develop more slowly or stall because of discrimination that occurs after hiring. Indeed, much labor-market research demonstrates the cumulative nature of white advantage over the course of work lives.²⁹ Nevertheless, one should be cautious about inferring from the experiences of older cohorts as they age that the smaller ethno-racial differentials at young ages will necessarily grow as workers become older (the life-cycle interpretation). One cannot rule out the possibility that the experiences of currently younger cohorts will be different, that genuine improvements in life chances are now manifesting themselves as more and more minorities climb into the top tiers of the labor market.

But it is not just a matter of whether African Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics lose out to their white peers in terms of occupational placement: for even when that placement is held constant, it appears that minorities are paid less. The inequalities, which are shown in Table 4.5, are striking among men. Typically, black and Hispanic men earn about 10 percent less than whites, when all are U.S.-born and when occupational placement (in the form of median earnings per occupation), education, and private versus public sector employment are statistically controlled.³⁰ The analytic scheme is the same as in Table 4.4—in other words, the estimates of earnings disadvantages are for different birth cohorts (or age groups) in 2005 data and are expressed as net percentage differences from native-born non-Hispanic whites. By contrast with the previous findings, however, there is little patterned variation across the cohorts in the disadvantages of minority men. U.S.-born Asian men, too, appear to be disadvantaged by comparison with white men, though the disadvantage is less than for other nonwhites and in some cases is not statistically significant. The combination of ethno-racial minority status and being foreign born, that is, an immigrant, produces even larger earnings disadvantages, which rise to the level of 15–20 for black and Hispanic men.

These disparities can mount up and loom large at their peaks. The gross earnings discrepancies in the top tier are in fact quite large: if we restrict ourselves to the 46- to 55-year-olds of 2000, on the grounds that the earnings trajectory associated with age and experience has likely reached its zenith for the members of this age group, then the annual median earnings of European-American males holding top-decile jobs exceeded those of their African-American peers by 32 percent (\$103,994 versus \$78,648 in 1999 earnings) and those of U.S.-born Hispanic peers (\$81,906) by 27 percent. The discrepancy is almost as large for the remainder of the top-quartile occupations, though the earnings are of course lower on average. The discrepancy is reduced in the second quartile, where the annual median of the middle-aged white males in

Table 4.5 Race/ethnicity/nativity differences in earnings net of occupational placement, 2005^a (numbers express percentage differences in expected individual earnings relative to those of similar U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites)

Birth cohort (age)	U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites	Foreign-born non-Hispanic whites	U.S.-born non-Hispanic blacks	Foreign-born non-Hispanic blacks	U.S.-born Hispanics	Foreign-born Hispanics	U.S.-born Asians	Foreign-born Asians
Men								
1970–79 (26–35)	—	-4.2	-10.4	-16.5	-7.7	-18.0	-3.1	-6.1
1960–69 (36–45)	—	+1.4	-12.4	-20.2	-10.6	-17.9	-2.6	-13.9
1950–59 (46–55)	—	-0.9	-13.3	-18.3	-9.5	-19.7	-4.1	-18.0
1940–49 (56–64)	—	+1.2	-8.2	-10.3	-12.2	-15.5	-2.9	-14.4
Women								
1970–79 (26–35)	—	+0.3	-3.1	-0.2	+0.3	-11.6	+10.7	+3.1
1960–69 (36–45)	—	-0.4	-0.9	-1.1	-3.3	-13.4	+2.3	-3.8
1950–59 (46–55)	—	+0.3	-1.5	+3.0	-4.2	-10.1	+4.6	-3.5
1940–49 (56–64)	—	+1.5	+0.8	+5.5	-8.4	-4.0	+8.9	-1.9

Source: 2005 American Community Survey.

Note: Nonsignificant coefficients are indicated by shading.

a. Regression analyses are estimated separately by gender and birth cohort (age); the independent variables include median earnings of occupation, education (in years of attainment) plus dummy variables to indicate highest postsecondary degree, employment in government (vs. private) sector and region, along with ethno-racial/nativity dummy variables. Percentage differences are calculated by the formula $100(e^b - 1)$, where b is the coefficient of an ethno-racial/nativity dummy variable in an equation with a logged dependent variable.

these jobs was greater than that of black males by 20 percent (\$52,137 versus \$43,475) and that of Hispanic males (\$44,406) by 17 percent. That ethno-racial earnings inequalities are greatest at the top of the occupational hierarchy has been shown in other research, and the paradoxical consequences of this pattern have been pointed out: namely, that improvements in the occupational placement of minority workers risk exacerbating earnings disparities.³¹

There is considerably less earnings inequality along ethno-racial lines among women, but of course women are paid less on average than men in the first place. White women are generally advantaged in comparison with black and Hispanic women, but their edge is small in percentage terms. In the four comparisons between U.S.-born white and black women in Table 4.5, two differences are not statistically significant; and in the others, black women trail by between 1 and 3 percent. U.S.-born Hispanic women are somewhat further behind—apart from the insignificant difference in the youngest cohort, their earnings lag 3–8 percent behind those of their white peers. In three cases, U.S.-born Asian women enjoy significant earnings advantages over their white counterparts. In the youngest cohort, this advantage rises to more than 10 percent.

One possible explanation of minority earnings disadvantages fails: it would be possible in principle that, through a combination of choice and selective recruitment, minorities might end up with jobs in lower-paying sectors of the economy. This could be true even for highly qualified minorities if they disproportionately took jobs in sectors like social services (in fact, African Americans do), since even the best jobs there do not pay as well as the best jobs in other sectors. However, the distribution of minorities across the major industrial sectors is too varied to support this explanation. Minorities are entering some well-paying sectors in substantial numbers, too. For example, in the youngest cohort of workers in 2000, U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics held 9 percent of top-decile jobs and 15 percent of those elsewhere in the top quartile in the well-paying

communications industries. Consequently, when the analyses in Table 4.5 are repeated with the industrial sector taken into account, the earnings disadvantages of U.S.-born minorities are not reduced, because differential entry into specific industries does not explain them.

The overall conclusion from these analyses has to be that white men remain the most advantaged group, profiting not just from more favorable occupational placement given their educational credentials but also from higher earnings than other workers in the same occupational category. While the ethno-racial order of inequality may be shifting somewhat, by this evidence the shifts have not eroded the privileged position of white men very much.

What Role for Equal-Opportunity Efforts?

Although the increasing penetration of disadvantaged minorities, African and Hispanic Americans, into the higher tiers of the labor market tracks closely the underlying changes in the population, that is, the growing ethno-racial diversity of youthful birth cohorts, it probably should not be regarded as simply a mechanical transmission of advancing demographic gears. That is to say, efforts by government and civil-society actors to promote equal opportunity, by pressuring educational institutions and employers to open their doors to underrepresented groups, including racial minorities, also seem implicated in these changes, even if their impacts are difficult to identify and measure.

Broadly, we can think of these efforts as divided into two overlapping classes: antidiscrimination and affirmative action. Antidiscrimination efforts have a basis in law, epitomized by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited all employers with more than a small number of employees from discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. The act also created specific mechanisms for reporting, investigating, and remedying discrimination. At the state level, antidiscrimination laws in fact predate the civil-rights period in much of

the United States, so their impacts date back in some places to the period just after World War II. Affirmative action originated in the early 1960s, in executive orders issued by presidents Kennedy and Johnson requiring federal contractors to take "affirmative action" to overcome the disadvantages faced by racial minorities because of past discrimination.³² The executive orders did not define "affirmative action," which remains hard to bound precisely. Barbara Reskin's expansive definition provides a good starting point: according to her, the term refers to "policies and procedures designed to combat ongoing job discrimination." She explains that affirmative action "represents a break with the strategy of ending discrimination by outlawing it." Because "much discrimination results from employers doing business as usual," affirmative action "requires employers to do more than refrain from actively discriminating—it entails proactive efforts to promote equal employment opportunities for groups traditionally subject to employment discrimination."³³ By crossing out such words as "employment" and "job," this definition can easily be extended to the sphere of education, where affirmative action has also played a potent role.

In the domain of education, both types of equal-opportunity efforts have been important, but in recent decades the role of affirmative action has loomed much larger, controversially so for some Americans. Studies indicate that admissions procedures at many selective colleges and universities effectively give preference to students coming from minority families, especially blacks and Hispanics, making entering classes more diverse than they would be if race were excluded from consideration. This form of affirmative action is relevant mainly to selective institutions, because less selective colleges and universities admit large portions of their applicants. A recent analysis by Sigal Alon and Marta Tienda shows that during the 1980s and 1990s affirmative action was coupled with the growing selectivity of admission to the top ranks of colleges and universities, which gave increasing weight to test scores in their admission decisions; without also increasing attention to the racial back-

grounds of their students, according to this analysis, the selective institutions would have failed to maintain the ethno-racial diversity of their student bodies. William Bowen and Derek Bok's study of minority students at some of the most highly selective colleges and universities appears to demonstrate that attendance at these schools has for the most part had a durable, positive influence on students' lives, revealed in subsequent professional success and civic participation.³⁴

The impacts of equal-opportunity efforts have also been demonstrated in the labor market, though direct effects on a broad scale (as opposed to those in specific cases) appear more tenuous there than in higher education. (The indirect effects resulting from race preferences in higher education, which lead to more diversity in the pool of highly qualified job applicants, have not been investigated, though they are clearly implied by Bowen and Bok's study.) In a systematic examination of workplace integration since the mid-1960s, Kevin Stainback, Corrie Robinson, and Donald Tomaskovic-Devey find an unsteady trajectory, affected by the political shifts in the federal government, which reflect to some degree the level of support in the population at large for equal opportunity but also color the entire atmosphere surrounding it, from rhetoric to enforcement intensity. These sociologists show that the workplace integration of African Americans advanced most during the fifteen years following the major enactments of civil-rights legislation and then more or less stalled, though there has been a weak drift in the direction of increased integration since 1980.³⁵ In a comprehensive review of the state of research on affirmative action as of 2000, Harry Holzer and David Neumark also note its modest effects.³⁶ They observe that detecting the effects depends on the distinction between federal contractors subject to affirmative-action requirements and other employers, who are not. Research generally reveals that the employment of minorities and women has outpaced that of white males among federal contractors; however, the impact is generally not large. A recent analysis of municipal police hiring that compares cities whose hiring practices were litigated

with other cities whose practices were not estimates the effect of court-ordered affirmative action as roughly a 14-point gain in the percentage of blacks among new recruits. Perhaps this formulation understates the impact, for as Barbara Reskin observes, "between 1970 and 1990, the numbers of minority and female police officers in the U.S. increased tenfold: from less than 10,000 to 97,000 minorities and from less than 2,000 to more than 20,000 women."³⁷

In the preceding analysis of shifts in the top tiers of the labor market, equal-opportunity efforts seem implicated in two respects. Affirmative action in higher education has expanded the pool of African and Hispanic Americans with the educational qualifications to take top-tier jobs, the great majority of which require some degree of postsecondary education. In addition, antidiscrimination pressures and affirmative action in employment likely play a role in the rising share of good jobs held by minorities, although in toto the impacts may not be great. At any rate, their influence is suggested by the increasing probabilities for young African and Hispanic Americans to land top-decile jobs, which were noted earlier. Since these probabilities have risen in the youngest cohort, whose occupational attainment is to some extent constrained by its youth, perhaps there is a signal here of a modest shift in the direction of greater parity between whites and minorities in the chances to obtain the best-paying jobs.

Yet one can doubt the future potential for equal-opportunity efforts to play a significant role. Stainback and his colleagues argue that workplace integration comes about through a "politically mediated process" that requires government to apply consistent pressure on employers. That consistency has been absent since the early 1980s, when political support for equal opportunity declined precipitously during the Reagan administration; hence, integration of blacks (but not of women) has stalled.³⁸ To be sure, antidiscrimination law is not going to disappear, but the regulatory environment in which claims of employer discrimination are made, investigated, and adjudicated is shaped by the larger political

atmosphere, and consequently the outcomes of antidiscrimination efforts are variable over time. Affirmative action has faced significant challenges in the recent past—the anti-affirmative action initiatives passed in several states, for example, Proposition 209 in California, which was approved by voters in 1996 and bars public institutions in the state from utilizing affirmative action on behalf of women or minorities; and Supreme Court decisions, for example, *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), in which the Court struck down the University of Michigan's use of a point system to increase minority admissions to its undergraduate programs. (However, in a simultaneous decision, *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the Court left in place the university's use of affirmative action in admissions to its law school. Michigan voters subsequently approved via a referendum a ban on affirmative action in university admissions.) But as Holzer and Neumark argue, affirmative action as currently implemented includes some policies and procedures that are likely to pass the strictest legal scrutiny, such as actions taken to encourage job applications from minority-group members (for example, advertising openings in media with large minority audiences). Even some stronger measures, such as the requirement imposed on federal contractors of a certain size (fifty or more employees) to file regular reports on any "underutilization" of women and minorities on their workforce and to take corrective steps if underrepresentation exists, are likely to continue.³⁹

In admissions decisions, it is possible to craft policies that pass legal muster while promoting more diverse student bodies. Race preferences in admissions decisions were legally challenged as early as the *Bakke* case of the 1970s, when the Supreme Court's decision ruled out preferences that take the form of quotas but at the same time, in Justice Lewis Powell's famous opinion, gave sanction to the use of race as one among multiple considerations in the admissions process. More recent court decisions and referenda have curbed the role of affirmative action in public higher education, but not so far in private colleges and universities. Since this is to some degree an artificial distinction, in the sense that virtually

all colleges and universities receive federal and state monies in some form, in principle the race preferences in the private sector could probably also be challenged. The analysis by Alon and Tienda suggests that alternative performance-based criteria, such as class rank, now implemented at the University of Texas in the form of a "top 10 percent" rule, could be used in place of racial preferences to achieve diversity.⁴⁰ Whether other selective colleges and universities would find such a rule an acceptable way to maintain the quality of its student body, given the high variability of academic achievements across U.S. high schools, is open to question.

The Geography of the Labor-Market Shift and Its Implications

The penetration of U.S.-born minorities into top labor-market tiers is not occurring to the same extent everywhere in the nation: it is in fact much further along in those regions where their population densities are highest. For African Americans, that means the South; for Hispanics, the West. (Figure 4.7 shows the regional variations in ethno-racial representation in top-quartile jobs for the youngest cohort of workers in 2000.) In the 1965-1974 birth cohort, the 26- to 35-year-olds of 2000, U.S.-born Hispanics account for 7 percent of the top-quartile jobs in the West, but nowhere else does their share exceed 4 percent. African Americans occupy nearly 10 percent of the top-quartile positions held by young people in the South, a fraction double that found in other regions. In the case of African Americans, the advance into the top quartile appears to be occurring predominantly in their region of concentration: between the oldest and youngest cohorts, the proportion they make up of this occupational tier has approximately doubled there; it has not increased as much anywhere else. The gains of U.S.-born Hispanics are somewhat more evenly spread, but the greater penetration into top jobs

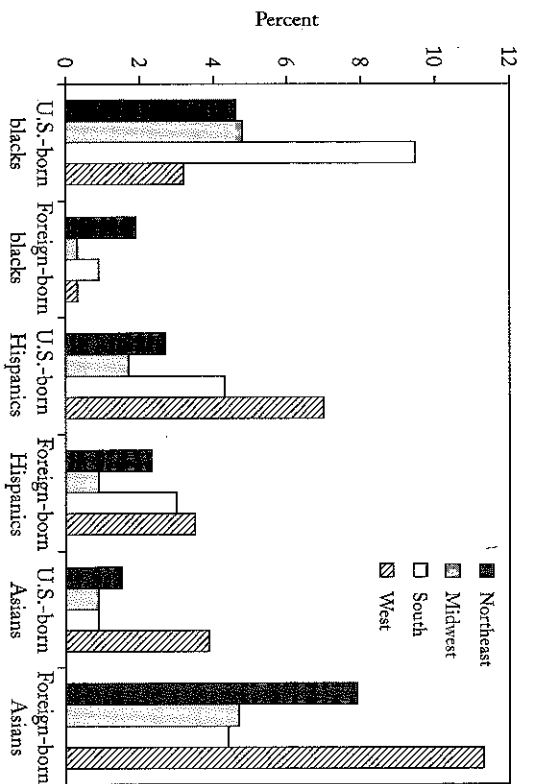


Figure 4.7. Percentage shares of top-quartile jobs by region for 26- to 35-year-old nonwhites and Hispanics, by nativity, 2000. (2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent).)

in the West builds upon the greater share of good jobs there that Hispanics hold even in older cohorts.

These regional variations bear on two opposing sociological principles. On the one hand, the socioeconomic advance of some minority workers could be expected to be erected upon a foundation of demographic concentration. This principle has already been borne out in the growing ethno-racial diversity evident among younger cohorts in the top labor-market tiers. Where groups are large in number, they are likely to dominate in some labor-market niches and therefore are able to give assistance to their younger members as they seek jobs.⁴¹ Moreover, where there are many workers from the same minority group, there will also be a demand for supervisors and managers of that background. Recent research establishes that black and Hispanic managers are mainly placed in

positions where they supervise workers with the same ethno-racial origins; rarely are they placed over white workers.⁴² Quite apparent, then, is that the demographic principle of minority advance is nevertheless consistent with disadvantage even for its beneficiaries. If black and Hispanic managers are largely confined to supervising minority employees, then their opportunities for advancement are blatantly constrained by race/ethnicity and they are losing out to whites in the competition for the places that are the best remunerated and carry the greatest authority; that is, those where white employees are under a manager's control.

On the other hand, another long-running strand of sociological theorizing posits that majorities respond to minority demographic concentrations with greater discrimination—reinforcement of ethno-racial boundaries, in other words—because increased minority numbers translate into greater threats to majority status and privileges.⁴³ This principle implies that there should be barriers raised to minority advance in those areas where their numbers are greatest, and considerable research backs this hypothesis up. For instance, racial segregation in residence is typically highest in cities with a high minority concentration, like Chicago.⁴⁴ This hypothesis is also borne out here, for the probabilities of minority workers climbing high up the occupational ladder are lowest in regions of minority concentration. Just 12 percent of young African-American workers in the South occupied top-quartile positions in 2000, a fraction lower than in any other region (in the West, where the African-American population concentration is the lowest, the equivalent percentage is 17 percent). The regional variation in this probability is much lower for U.S.-born Hispanics. In the West, their region of greatest concentration, 16 percent of their young workers are found in the top quartile, and this fraction is only slightly higher in other regions. In the Northeast, where young U.S.-born Hispanics fare best, 18 percent have entered the top quartile.

Another kind of geography, namely, metropolitan region, seems less consequential than region. One could expect that the best opportunities

for the advance of U.S.-born minorities would come in the largest metropolitan regions, where many big firms are found, since they are more likely to pay attention to affirmative-action principles (and also to fear antidiscrimination lawsuits and government scrutiny). To be sure, there is a potential counterargument here, too, for the globalism theorist Saskia Sassen has argued that ethno-racially segmented labor markets emerge strongly in a country's global cities—in this case, the United States' largest cities and their surrounding suburbs—which constitute key nodes in the intricate international web of finance and commerce.⁴⁵ Immigrant and minority workers are drawn to these places, according to her argument, by a labor market that requires many services for the huge numbers of professional and technical workers needed to keep globally plugged-in firms humming. Yet this ethno-racial dualism may not prove as rigid as the argument seems to suggest, because of the opportunities for mobility available in such places. A recent study of the second generation in the New York region, a global metropolis par excellence, has found that in general the children of immigrants are doing quite well, in part because they are able to take advantage of institutions and opportunities created in prior generations to assist minorities.⁴⁶

In any event, the highest African-American representation in the top quartile is found in the South, no matter what the size of the metropolitan region. I have grouped the regions for convenience according to three population sizes: 2 million or more; 500,000 to 1.99 million; and less than 500,000. In the largest southern metropolitan regions, African Americans are 12 percent of the young incumbents of top-quartile jobs, the highest penetration anywhere; this percentage is consistent with the view that middle-class prosperity is most concentrated among African Americans in places like Atlanta. In the mid-size and smaller regions of the South, African Americans occupy 9 percent of these good jobs in the youngest cohort, a percentage that is higher than can be found in metropolitan areas of any size outside the south. In the west, Hispanic representation in the top quartile exhibits less of a gradient across metropoli-

tan areas by size than is the case for African Americans. In the largest metropolitan regions, Hispanics hold nearly 8 percent of top-quartile jobs in the youngest cohort, and the equivalent figure is 6 percent in other parts of the west.

The regional variations in minority penetration into top labor-market tiers throw a revealing light on common suspicions that the benefits of minority advance are going mainly to select subgroups. For example, the disproportionate recruitment of second-generation Afro-Caribbeans by top Ivy League colleges could suggest that the children of black immigrants rather than the African Americans descended from slaves are largely the ones who are forging ahead.⁴⁷ But there are few Afro-Caribbeans in the South, yet that is where the largest group by far of U.S.-born blacks in good jobs is to be found: more than half of all African-American incumbents of top-quartile jobs live there. In the case of Hispanics, similar suspicions, though not quite to the same degree, could be expressed about Cubans and South Americans versus Mexicans, Central Americans, and Puerto Ricans. However, the Hispanic population of the West is dominated by individuals of Mexican ancestry, by far the largest nationality group among Hispanics, and one whose immigrant stratum is overwhelmingly constituted by low-wage workers with low levels of education compared with U.S. natives.

Conclusion

Greater ethno-racial diversity in the top tiers of the U.S. labor market is one of the safest bets for the future. Increasing penetration of America's most disadvantaged minority populations, namely, African and Hispanic Americans, into these tiers is already evident when we look across cohorts; and the representation there of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants is already so far advanced that, relative to their population base, it exceeds that of whites. The cohorts just now entering the labor market in full force show considerably higher percentages of U.S.-born blacks

and Hispanics in top-decile and top-quartile positions than do older ones. While equal-opportunity efforts are probably playing some role in effecting the entry of more minorities into good jobs, the driving force appears to be demographic: the changes in the labor market more or less track underlying demographic changes, that is, the changing racial and ethnic composition of youthful birth cohorts.

The role of demography does not necessarily detract from the significance of the changes. Privileged whites are not able to exclude minorities from the higher tiers of the labor market, though they are still able to monopolize the best-paying positions within them. Clearly diversity is increasing throughout the labor force, including near and at its pinnacle, and many whites located in high positions now interact with minorities who are their status equals, at least in the workplace. Diversity is certain to continue to increase as long as the recruitment into good jobs continues to reflect the racial and ethnic demography of birth cohorts, for the percentage of minorities is increasing. This is particularly true for immigrant-origin minorities, for given the resumption of large-scale immigration in the late 1960s, the numbers in the second (and third) generation entering adulthood are rising rapidly and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. This point holds especially for U.S.-born Asians, given their record of strong educational achievement.

But it also holds for Hispanic Americans. In most of the higher-tier occupations, the representation of African Americans among youthful job holders was substantially higher in 2000 than was that of U.S.-born Hispanics. Overall, among the youngest workers located in the top quartile in 2000, African Americans outnumbered U.S.-born Hispanics by 50 percent. This is in large part a straightforward matter of demography: because of immigration history, the number of U.S.-born Latinos is small in older cohorts, but rises steeply among younger ones. Even among the individuals born in the United States in the 1965-1974 period, the group that was between the ages of 26 and 35 in 2000, the population of African Americans was nearly two times as great as that of

Hispanics. In this age group, the numerical preponderance of African Americans in good jobs is less than is true for the population as a whole. Not only is the penetration of Hispanics into the top ranks of jobs increasing robustly, but as shown earlier the probability that a U.S.-born Hispanic worker can make it high up the ladder is somewhat greater than is true for an African American. One reason may be that Hispanics are able to enter some well-paying occupations where African Americans are rare (whether because of continuing exclusion or other reasons, it is hard to say). In the youngest cohort of 2000, U.S.-born Hispanics were at least as numerous as African Americans among pilots and construction managers, for instance. If these patterns continue, then Hispanics will outnumber African Americans among the new entrants to top jobs in a few decades because of their rapidly rising proportions in younger age groups.

The increasing penetration of minorities into the ranks of the most highly paid occupations is not a harbinger of full-fledged equality of life chances anytime soon. The potent role that demography is playing in these shifts is not altering fundamental ethno-racial inequalities. Thus the chances that young blacks and Hispanics will scale the heights of the labor market are hardly different from those of their elders. Moreover, the earnings of the minorities who enter these occupations are lower than those of their European-American counterparts. To some extent, this gap is a matter of differences in educational attainment and recruitment to the less remunerative occupations in the higher tiers. But it is more than this, since black and Hispanic men earn less than white men when these factors are taken into account. In addition, minority advance depends crucially on the educational and labor-market achievements of women, and of course women of all races earn less than white men as well. While there could be uncontrolled factors, such as the quality of educational credentials, which would reduce the gap further, given the history of minority exclusion from the best jobs some degree of "discrimination"—taking this term in its broadest sense, as the unequal treatment

of equals—is almost certainly involved. Whites, especially white men, remain very privileged: to be sure, the absence of a substantial dent in white privilege could be argued to be a feature of a non-zero-sum mobility situation, which entails little or no change to the perceptions whites have of the opportunities open to them and to their children.

Yet despite all these qualifications, the rising percentage of good jobs held by minorities is, quite possibly, a portentous change. Rises in the minority representation in the top tiers of the labor market are highly likely to continue as younger cohorts mature and enter the labor market. Among the 16- to 25-year-olds of 2000, the age group preparing to enter the labor market en masse during the first decade of the new century, the ratio among the U.S. born of non-Hispanic whites to blacks and Hispanics had dropped to 2.7 to 1. In the next youngest group, aged 6 to 15 in 2000, it was down again, to 2.1 to 1. By contrast, in the oldest working-age group, the 56- to 65-year-olds, who were mostly on the point of leaving the labor force in the 2000–2010 period, it was 6.5 to 1. The almost certain expansion of the minority penetration into the best-paying jobs virtually guarantees the increasing exposure of highly placed whites to racial and ethnic diversity at work and, potentially, in their living spaces, that is, in their neighborhoods. This scenario holds the promise of some change to the major ethno-racial boundaries as a consequence.

But, granted, this change is incremental in character and, so far at least, has not touched the foundations of ethno-racial inequality in life chances. The question that must be asked is whether more profound change is possible.

An Extraordinary Opportunity: The Exit of the Baby Boomers

Incremental changes in favor of diversity seem virtually assured for the United States in the near future. Each new cohort reaching adulthood contains a larger proportion of nonwhites and Hispanics than the one before it, and this demographic shift is reflected throughout the labor market, including at its highest levels. This phenomenon does bring about ethno-racial change, as worlds of work and socializing that were previously all white or nearly so become more integrated, and more and more whites interact with minorities who are their peers. Yet because white males in particular remain very privileged, the change involved seems limited; and fundamental ethno-racial inequalities, such as the chance to land a good job in the first place, remain untouched. The question that must be addressed is whether the system can open up in a more profound way, to allow for a more thoroughgoing form of non-zero-sum mobility. The answer, in a word, is "yes," and the reason lies in what is sure to be one of the dominant phenomena of the next quarter century: the retirement of the baby boomers.

The baby boom refers to the huge group of Americans born in the two decades following World War II, in the years 1946 through 1964.

Simply by virtue of their numbers, the baby-boom cohorts have formed a socially and culturally dominant group in American life since the 1950s: indeed, the decade of the sixties is defined by their youthful experiences of it—the Vietnam War and the antiwar movement, rock music and Woodstock, and sexual liberation and experimentation with drugs. The metaphor often used to describe this outsized impact has been one of a large animal swallowed by a snake, resulting in a bulge that with time moves along the length of the snake's body. The bulge has now proceeded past the midway point. Economic forecasts for the future have been concerned with the financial impact of the retirement of the baby boom, which might tilt out of balance the ratio between those at work and those who depend on the work of others to survive. Crises have been envisioned for the Social Security and health-care systems. It will surely be the case that the treatment of diseases associated with old age will be of much greater urgency in coming decades because of the aging of the baby boomers. But our concerns—with the possibilities for ethno-racial change—are different. From this perspective, the salient fact about the baby boom during the next quarter century is that it will exit from the labor market—by the early 2030s, the youngest baby boomers will be in their late sixties. The retirement of this massive group will open up the labor market in a way that has not been true since the middle of the twentieth century.

Who Will Replace the Baby Boomers?

The baby boom accounts for a large share of American workers, numbering 48 million full-time workers in 2005, out of a full-time workforce in the prime ages between 26 and 65 that totaled 88 million. Combined with the workers who were born just before the baby boom, those who were in 2005 age 60 and older, this group accounted for nearly 60 percent of the prime-age workforce. Some members of the baby boom's leading edge retired soon thereafter, in their early sixties; but the retire-

ment of this huge population stratum is likely to stretch across three decades at least, as some workers delay retirement for the sake of income and health insurance. Nevertheless, by the early 2030s, when the youngest members of the baby boom are in their late sixties, the vast majority will have left the labor market. Since most of the jobs they will be leaving will have to be refilled, their departure plus that of workers born before the end of World War II could create, in gross numbers, 50 million or more openings.¹ To these jobs can be added those that will be created as a result of population growth. Projected at more than 30 percent between 2000 and 2030, population growth could add 15 million or more full-time jobs needing to be filled.²

The retirement of the baby boomers will have a disproportionate impact on the top tiers of the workforce, since this group is among the best educated in U.S. history—this is especially true for the young men who came of age during the 1960s, who often delayed leaving the educational system in order to avoid the Vietnam-era draft.³ Their sisters also attained an unusually high level of education for the time and made a large leap beyond the postsecondary record of their mothers and aunts. Consequently, the baby boomers account for very large fractions of some occupations, especially those where high remuneration is associated with prolonged training and experience and thus young workers are less likely to be found. For instance, in 2000, baby boomers were 70 percent or more of the chief executives, dentists, engineering managers, and supervisors of police. (See Table 5.1.) And they were 60 percent or more of a slew of other occupations, ranging from physicians and surgeons, to information systems managers, to judges, to electrical and electronics engineers, to veterinarians. The occupations in the bottom half of the labor force were less dependent on the baby boomers, but even there they typically made up at least half of the workers.

Some degree of ethno-racial change is virtually inevitable in the wake of the baby boomers' departure. In the ranks of the incumbents of well-paying jobs, the baby boomers are heavily white: almost 80 percent of

Table 5.1 The baby boom's share of selected occupations, 2000

Top decile	Baby boom %	Occupation N
Dentists	69.9	104,930
Chief executives	69.5	997,905
Engineering managers	70.9	153,684
Rest of top quartile		
Police supervisors	74.6	103,807
Construction managers	67.2	549,381
Education administrators	68.9	547,472
Registered nurses	67.2	1,485,208
Second quartile		
Supervisors of mechanics, installers, repairers	67.3	791,874
Stationary engineers/boiler operators	68.2	89,333
Mail carriers	73.8	303,748
Construction, building inspectors	68.5	63,913
Waste treatment plant operators	69.3	64,996

Source: 2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5 percent).

them in the top decile and elsewhere in the top quartile were native-born non-Hispanic whites in 2005, and the figure would go over 80 percent if foreign-born non-Hispanic whites were included. In the second quartile, the fraction is just a bit lower, but native-born whites account for more than three-quarters of the baby-boom job holders.

Who will replace them during the next quarter century? Unless the already broad access of whites to the highest occupational tiers expands markedly, there will not be enough of them to fill the places vacated by their elders. While it is impossible to say with certainty what the ethno-racial composition of younger cohorts will look like in 2030 because of the uncertainties associated with large-scale immigration from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, one can be reasonably sure of the size of the non-Hispanic white working-age population (counted here as individuals aged 26–65 for the sake of consistency with other tables) at that date. Apart from a small immigrant component, all of the

Table 5.2 Projection of non-Hispanic white working-age population (aged 26–65), 2000–2030

Age	2000		2010		2020		2030	
	N	N	% change from 2000	N	% change from 2000	N	% change from 2000	
26–35	26,110	24,633	-5.7	26,130	+0.1	23,753	-9.0	
36–45	32,060	26,154	-18.4	24,793	-22.7	26,347	-17.8	
46–55	27,744	31,319	+12.9	25,678	-7.5	24,456	-11.9	
56–65	18,605	26,114	+40.4	29,630	+59.3	24,445	+31.4	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 *National Population Projections*, <http://www.census.gov/population/projections/2008projections.html> (extracted 8/15/08).

Note: Both U.S.-born and foreign-born whites are included. Population numbers are in 1,000s.

individuals who will be part of this population have already been born in the United States and thus counted in data; the primary uncertainty about its size is associated with future mortality rates, which are very unlikely to make a large difference in this age range. (For convenience, I take advantage of the Census Bureau's 2008 projections of the non-Hispanic white population, and these include immigrants, who however make up only a small proportion of these whites.)⁴

Table 5.2 shows a projection of white working-age groups for the next decades, at 2010, 2020, and 2030. The decline in the number of working-age whites is particularly noticeable in the cohort that will take the place of the 36- to 45-year-olds of 2000. The white incumbents of top jobs in that age group were recruited from a population that, despite the mortality by early middle age, still numbered 32 million individuals. As the projection shows, by 2010 the white population in that age range will decline by nearly 20 percent, and it will remain at about that size through the next two decades. This decline is a consequence of the relatively small sizes of the birth cohorts that will mature and replace this middle-aged group during the coming decades. For instance, the 6- to

15-year-olds of 2000, who will replace it in 2030, amounted to 25.5 million (the projections envision this group growing slightly because of immigration, which is seen as sufficient to offset the mortality over three decades).

The only age group of non-Hispanic whites that is expected to grow in size by the beginning of the fourth decade of the twenty-first century is the 56- to 65-year-olds. This does not represent a gain for the pool of white workers, however, because this group, made up of the 26- to 35-year-olds of 2000, has already been counted in the working-age population and attained a high rate of labor-force participation (in 2000, 66 percent of its members worked full time, a figure only one-half of a percentage point lower than is found in the next higher age group). By 2030, all of the white workers in younger age groups will come from groups that were under the age of 26 in 2000, that is, born in 1975 or later; only a small proportion of whom (among the 16- to 25-year-olds) were already employed full time in 2000. Put a bit differently, those whites who will replace the retiring baby-boom workers will come mainly from these younger cohorts, which can be expected to have 13 percent fewer whites in 2030 than the cohorts from which the white workers they are replacing have issued.

Some back-of-the-envelope calculations demonstrate the opening up of the system this demographic mismatch could engender. I begin with a simple scenario. For this purpose, I will take the jobs represented by occupations ranked in the top half of the full-time workforce according to their average remuneration as "good" jobs. Let us assume that, by 2030, almost all of the workers in these jobs older than age 35 in 2000 will have exited the full-time workforce, for they will then be older than 65 (based on current patterns of mortality and retirement, a small portion of the 36- to 45-year-olds of 2000 is assumed to still hold full-time jobs in 2030). In addition, many of the workers who in 2000 were between the ages of 26 and 35 will also have left the labor market because of retirement or mortality (more than half, according to current patterns).⁵ All

told, that would mean a departure from the workforce of 35.2 million occupants of full-time good jobs, of whom 28.8 million (81.8 percent) are non-Hispanic whites. (Key numbers are reproduced in Table 5.3.) Another way of thinking about the problem is that, over the period 2000–2030, the departures from the top half of the workforce would average 1.17 million per year, of whom about 960,000 would be white workers. If we assume further that all of the job vacancies these departures create must be filled (in other words, no jobs disappear) and that the recruitment probabilities of whites into full-time positions remain as they were in 2000, then there would be about 900,000 new white workers available per year; in other words, there would not be enough whites to replace the retiring white workers, let alone the other retirees.

However, this estimate understates the magnitude of the problem, for the labor force, whose size tracks, if somewhat imperfectly, population size, is certain to expand during the next few decades.⁶ (For this reason, the assumption made a moment ago that jobs continue to exist after the retirement of their occupants is simply a convenience, not a necessity. The overall growth in the number of jobs in different tiers implies that any jobs that disappear are replaced somewhere else in the same tier and that the creation of jobs exceeds the number required to replace those that go out of existence.) The Census Bureau projections envision a 32.7 percent increase in the population between 2000 and 2030. It is, to be sure, just a projection, not a forecast; and projections, which are but the numerical consequences of their assumptions, are often off the mark. But it is consistent with the rate of growth in the population during the early years of the new century. According to Census Bureau population estimates, the population grew by 8.0 percent in the eight years after 2000—1 percent per year, in short.⁷

The growth in the labor force is expected to lag well behind that in the population. The Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts that labor-force growth will be slow for the foreseeable future and much lower than the growth experienced in the later decades of the twentieth century. But

Table 5.3 A back-of-the-envelope calculation of the deficit of white workers, 2000–2030

	Stock of jobs, 2030		Assumed departures by 2030				Jobs to fill by 2030	Jobs to fill/yr	White recruits/yr	Deficit/yr
	Full-time workers, 2000	New jobs (18.0% of 2000 base)	1935–44 birth cohort	1945–54 cohort	1955–64 cohort (92% depleted)	1965–74 cohort (55% depleted)				
First decile	8,600.1	1,548.0	886.4	2,275.2	2,798.5	1,047.7	8,555.8	285.2	184.7	100.5
Rest of first quartile	13,051.4	2,349.3	1,436.2	3,759.5	4,085.6	1,381.5	13,012.1	433.7	274.7	159.0
Second quartile	21,525.1	3,874.5	2,159.1	5,989.9	6,630.2	2,765.0	21,418.7	714.0	443.4	270.6
TOTALS	43,176.6	7,771.8	4,481.7	12,024.6	13,514.3	5,194.2	42,986.6	1,432.9	902.8	530.1

Note: All figures are in 1000s.

Assumptions: Full-time employment growth in each tier = 18.0% of the 2000 employment base (growth rate inferred from BLS projections of labor-force growth; see text and note 8).

All members of the two oldest cohorts are out of the full-time labor force by 2030; the departures from the full-time workforce of the two youngest cohorts reflect current patterns of mortality and retirement (see note 5).

The population-based probabilities for whites (U.S.- and foreign-born combined) to enter various tiers remain as they were in 2000.

growth in employment, closely associated with that of the number of workers, is still likely to add substantially to the number of positions to be filled. This is true even if we adopt a conservative projection of labor-force growth. The projection that I use here envisions 18 percent growth between 2000 and 2030. It follows from a Bureau of Labor Statistics scenario for the future in which labor-force growth is expected to slow in the early decades of this century, averaging 1 percent per year in the 2000–2015 period and 0.2 percent per year from 2015 to 2025 (and, I assume, afterward).⁸ Given the economic uncertainties that loom large because of the deep recession at the end of the first decade of the new century, this growth projection is appropriately conservative in a historical sense: in the thirty-year period leading up to 2000, employment grew by almost 75 percent, in other words, four times as much as the growth I assume.⁹ If we assume, again for the sake of simplicity, that this labor-force growth rate applies to the number of full-time jobs in the top half of the labor force, then another 7.8 million jobs might be added over the period, for an additional 260,000 positions per year to be filled. According to this calculation, then, the number of good jobs to be filled would average 1.4 million per year, but the number of whites, who have historically dominated such jobs, available to take them would average 900,000, enough to fill about 63 percent of the jobs, well below their current near monopoly of more than 80 percent.

The mismatch appears to be just as acute high up the job ladder. Applying the same accounting to the jobs in the top decile in 2000 indicates that 7 million full-time workers could depart from this sector between 2000 and 2030, for an average of almost 235,000 per year; and labor-force growth could add another 50,000 new jobs per year. Eighty-four percent of the retiring workers, almost 200,000 per year, will be non-Hispanic whites, but if whites enjoy the same probabilities of entering this tier as they have in the recent past, only 185,000 whites per year are expected to be available to fill their shoes. By this calculation, whites

could fill 65 percent of the top-decile positions, a figure that suggests a considerable relaxation of their current stranglehold.

While the numbers in such highly simplified projections must not be taken as anything like forecasts, they are sufficient to demonstrate that the declining size of the white working-age population, combined with the huge number of good jobs that will open up as a consequence of the retirement of the baby boomers, will create the prospect of a large-scale non-zero-sum mobility, even under conditions of slow employment growth. This mobility, an ascent into higher tiers of the workforce by individuals whose family origins are situated further down the social ladder, is non-zero-sum in the sense that the labor-force needs that produce it cannot be fully satisfied by the individuals whose family histories would lead them to “expect” to be able to take such good jobs in the absence of some personal failure. Such non-zero-sum mobility in turn could allow a massive penetration of currently disadvantaged minorities into social arenas where their presence has been unusual, though other groups, such as working-class whites and new immigrants, could also benefit.

A “What If” Scenario

The potential ramifications of this non-zero-sum mobility for African Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics are suggested by a “what if” scenario—in particular, what if nearly all of this mobility was enjoyed by these groups? Such a scenario is not intended to be realistic, a prediction of what is likely to happen; rather, it establishes the outer limit of the possible, an outcome that might be approached under favorable circumstances, if, say, as a society we were willing to invest resources to maximize the degree of minority mobility. To implement the “what if” assumption, I assume that the availability of whites to take good jobs remains as it has been recently (some of the numbers are identified

above) and that the number of new nonwhite immigrants who can fill them stays at the level it was during the 1990s, when the volume of legal immigration was at an all-time high.¹⁰ (The number of legal immigrants has increased slightly during the first decade of the twenty-first century; undocumented immigrants do not need to be considered here since they are very unlikely to be able to fill good jobs in the U.S. economy.) For U.S.-born Asians, I assume that their availability triples in coming years compared with what it was among the 26- to 35-year-olds of 2000, a factor of increase that closely approximates the rapid growth of second and later generations in cohorts younger than prime working age at that time.

Consider what these assumptions imply for the supply of workers filling the jobs in the top decile during 2000–2030. The numbers of whites, Asians, and immigrants who would enter this tier would average 232,000 per year, but the number of jobs coming available in that tier would average 285,000. If all of the remaining jobs were taken by U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics, their share, 54,000, would represent just under a fifth of the jobs being filled. (Table 5.4 shows the calculations.) In 2000, these minorities accounted for only 6 percent of these jobs. Non-zero-sum mobility has the potential, in other words, to more than triple that fraction in the next few decades.

A very similar story holds for the other jobs in the top half of the labor force. Under the assumptions already sketched, the average number of jobs available per year in the remainder of the top quartile is 434,000, but the numbers of whites, Asians, and immigrants available to take them is 323,000 in an average year. If all of the remaining jobs go to U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics, then they will take 111,000 per year, or more than a quarter of them. Since they held down only 9 percent of them in 2000, non-zero-sum mobility could come close to tripling their share. In the second quartile, where African and Hispanic Americans were better established as workers in 2000—they occupied 12 percent of the jobs at that point—the gain is almost as large. During the coming

Table 5.4 A simple “what if” scenario: What if the open good jobs went disproportionately to U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics?

	First decile	Rest of first quartile	Second quartile	Total
Jobs to fill by 2030/yr (from Table 5.3)	285.2	433.7	714.0	1,432.9
White recruits/yr (from Table 5.3)	184.7	274.7	443.4	902.8
Foreign born/yr	31.3	34.4	56.9	122.6
U.S.-born Asians/yr	15.6	13.6	20.3	49.5
Remainder: U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics	53.6	111.0	193.4	358.0
% to U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics	18.8	25.6	27.1	25.0

Note: Population numbers are in 1000s.

Assumptions: The foreign-born line does not count foreign-born non-Hispanic whites (who are counted here among whites) but does include a small number of non-Hispanics of “other” races (that is, not white, black, or Asian), regardless of birthplace.

The foreign-born representation in tiers is assumed to remain at the level found for the youngest full-time workers (ages 26–35) in 2000.

U.S.-born Asians are assumed to attain three times their 2000 representation among the youngest full-time workers because of the rapid growth of this group during coming decades. All jobs that are not filled by whites, immigrants, or U.S.-born Asians are taken by U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics.

decades, they could take about 27 percent of the jobs coming free, more than double their 2000 share.¹¹ (See Figure 5.1.)

The “what if” scenario amounts to a sketch, not an in-depth analysis, which is not feasible when we are discussing an uncertain future, in any event. As such, it doesn’t give us any insight into how the inequalities within tiers, in occupational positioning and earnings, would be altered if the advance of U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics were of this magnitude. It seems plausible to think that these inequalities, which we saw in the last chapter are substantial, would be reduced, if only because more minorities would be moving into positions of authority; but we cannot be certain. Nevertheless, in one respect, it is clear that a transformation

of the ethno-racial order of life chances would be unleashed: younger African Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics would come much closer to parity with whites in the opportunities to enter the top tiers of the labor market.

This closing of the gap is most striking below the top decile of jobs. For instance, among the 26- to 55-year-olds of 2000, minority individuals had a 5.9 percent chance of gaining a full-time job elsewhere in the top quartile, while whites had a chance of 11.1. (These figures, it should be recalled, compare the numbers of full-time workers in the occupational tier to total population counts, and thus they indirectly take account of various ethno-racial disparities affecting participation in the full-time workforce, such as those arising from the underutilization of minority workers and their disproportionate confinement in penal institutions.) If the "what if" scenario held, then the chance of minority entry to this tier would shoot up to 9.8 percent, a little shy of the white probability (held constant, by assumption); for entry to the second quartile, the minority and white chances would be nearly identical. While the disparity in minority and white probabilities to enter the top decile does not narrow to the same degree, it is substantially reduced under the "what if" scenario. In 2000, the overall chance that a member of the minority populations would reach this elite tier of occupations was just 2.6 percent, compared with 7.4 percent among non-Hispanic whites. The white chance was almost three times better than that of native-born minorities. In the "what if" scenario, the chance that U.S.-born minorities will occupy full-time top-decile jobs rises to 4.8 percent, still lower than the equivalent figure for whites, but not by nearly as much as before.

Of course, the "what if" assumption that African Americans and U.S.-born Latinos enjoy almost all of the benefits brought about by non-zero-sum mobility is unrealistic. To begin with, one has to ask whether in the near future there will be a large enough pool of minority workers with the levels of education needed to take so many highly placed jobs. Nevertheless, the scenario drives home a critical point: there is an un-

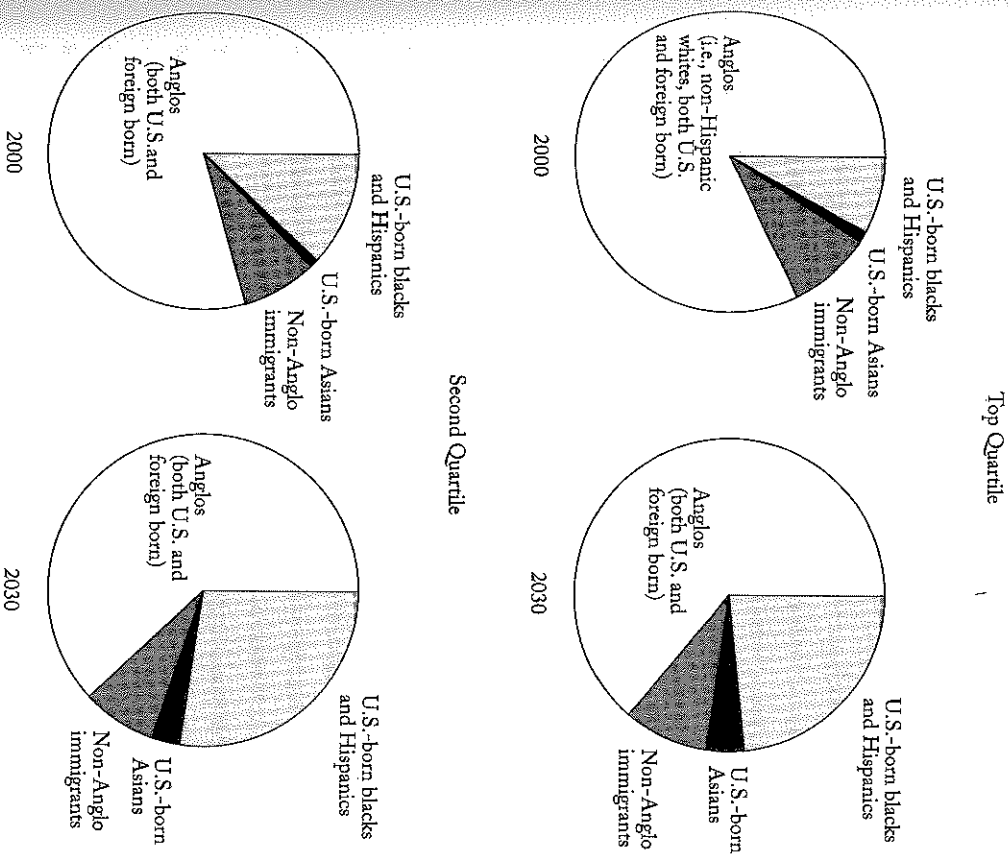


Figure 5.1. Changes between 2000 and 2030 in the composition of the 26- to 55-year-old workforce holding good jobs under the "what if" scenario.

usual opportunity to address ethno-racial inequalities that is beginning to unfold before our eyes. We should be asking what actions we can take to maximize the potential for change, not just what realistically is likely to happen if the "rules of the game" continue as they have been. I will consider both questions in greater depth in the next chapter, but now I want to consider some factors that might complicate the employment side of the scenario I have just sketched—factors, in other words, that might alter the availability of good jobs during the next quarter century.

Some Complications

How Many Good Jobs in the Future?

Complications arise, for one thing, because future economic structural change could impede the growth of, if not even reduce, the number of good jobs. The hour-glass metaphor for the workforce anticipates change of this sort because it envisions a hollowing out of the middle by a contraction, or at best a stagnation, in middle tiers of the labor market. The metaphor suggests that what expansion there is will take place mainly at the bottom and the top; and some analysts who employ it suggest that the job growth at the top will be out of the reach of many minority Americans because of high educational requirements. The metaphor has been lent empirical substance by the research of economists and sociologists. For example, Randy Ilg and Steven Haugen, reviewing labor-force changes during the 1990s, find patterns consistent with the metaphor. Their analysis views the labor force in terms of a grid defined by 10 broad industry groupings crossed by 9 occupational ones, or 90 categories in all. Clustering these categories into three roughly equal-sized sectors based on average earnings—top, middle, and bottom, in other words—Ilg and Haugen find that employment growth was concentrated at the top and bottom of the workforce, especially at the top.¹² The middle sector, by contrast, grew little during the 1990s, despite the

relatively prosperous period of economic expansion that occurred during most years of the Clinton administration.

Although the polarization featured in the hourglass metaphor has been the dominant characterization of changes in the U.S. labor market in recent years to emerge from careful research, a pessimist might go so far as to argue that there is no guarantee that the top tiers of the workforce will continue to expand at the same rate as the bottom ones. So far, though, there is no support for such pessimism. A comparison of the occupations of full-time workers in the 2000 Census with those found in the 2005 and 2006 American Community Surveys shows stability in the distribution of jobs across major tiers.¹³ Because of the uneven breaks created by discrete occupational categories, the bottom half of the workforce accounted for 49.9 percent of the full-time workers in 2000 (not 50.0 percent), and this is identical to its fraction in 2005–2006. A small amount of change appears to have taken place in the distribution of occupations in the top half, but it is not one that is consistent with a pessimistic view. The occupations in the eleventh through the twenty-fifth percentiles—in other words, the top quartile with the top decile removed—account for a slightly larger percentage of full-time workers in 2005–2006 than they did in 2000: the difference is 16.2 percent versus 15.2 percent, and this slight expansion comes at the expense of both the top-decile occupations and those in the second quartile.

Nevertheless, the pessimist might reply that the continuing migration of jobs outside the United States, to less-developed countries where labor is cheaper, could sap the potential of even the highest tiers of the labor market to provide good jobs. Alan Blinder, an economist at Princeton University and, under President Clinton, a member of the Council of Economic Advisers and vice chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, has attempted to measure the potential for occupations to be relocated off-shore.¹⁴ He estimates that about a quarter of all U.S. jobs are potentially mobile in this way, meaning that the work can be performed from a distance without degradation. This figure,